A Virtual ELL Community: Manual for Creating an ELL District Website

Brooke Norvish

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A Virtual ELL Community: Manual for Creating an ELL District Website

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in TESOL degree at SIT Graduate Institute

April 1, 2021

IPP Advisor: Dr. Leslie Turpin
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Acknowledgements

This materials development project would not have been possible without the support of many friends, loved ones, and teachers. When I began writing this manual, I intended to share something other educators could use. I had no idea that it would represent my life's work and journey of education. This manual connected my seemingly disconnected life's choices, studies, and journeys into one cohesive puzzle. In actuality, this manual took ten years to create and just three months to write. I want to begin by thanking the School for International Training for accepting me and allowing me to pursue my master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

I want to thank the many teachers in my life, including but not limited to Ms. Corazzari, Dr. Depasqua, Dr. Fernate, Dr. Tordeva, and Dr. Turpin. I'd also like to give a special thank you to my Poland host family, the Bujakowska's, and mentor Marta Bujakowska. And I’d like to thank Anna Zwolinska for allowing me the chance to co-teach her high school English language classes in Poland. In addition, I'd like to thank my master's cohort, the Constellation, for all of their support throughout this two-year degree. Particularly, I'd like to thank Mathew Peters and Cori Parks for being my constant support team and sounding board, as well as Emily Cyrier, Avery Lussier, and Kathryn Clark for their assistance with editing and providing feedback on this project.
Objective

To create a sustainable and user-friendly district website manual that supports and promotes learning and community among ELL students, families, and teachers.

Abstract

Every public school district has the responsibility to provide their English language learners (ELLs) with reliable and accessible resources. Many communities do this through various avenues, including in-person and online materials. Since the COVID-19 Pandemic, there is an even greater need to provide information online. Many schools are bouncing between hybrid and fully remote programs. Some families are opting to homeschool regardless if their district offers in-person classes or not. Supporting these families and keeping them up to date on how to navigate these challenging times is essential. This materials development project will seek to fill this need by designing an ELL district-wide website manual. This study will research what many public school's websites already offer in addition to presenting insight from ELL students, their families, and educators on what they would like to know and see on a website specially designed to support their needs.
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Chapter 1

The Importance of District Websites for the ELL Community

The Growing Need for ELL District Websites

Almost every public school across the United States has English language learners, commonly known as ELLs or ELL students. ELLs “are the fastest-growing student population group, according to the National Education Association. By 2025, an estimated 25 percent of public-school students will be ELLs” (Staff, 2021). This group is made up of a variety of cultures speaking a vast number of languages-- too many languages for a single ELL teacher to master. As a result, American classrooms are filled with multilevel and multilingual students being taught by teachers who may or may not be able to communicate to their students in their native languages. Certified ELL educators use their skills and resources to help navigate ELL students through mainstream academic content as well as help them confidently socialize. Many ELL teachers see themselves as advocates and bridges for their students to integrate them within the district. As educators of ELLs, it’s our duty to make education accessible with clear guidelines and resources for students, their families, and the many educators in their lives. All the key information can be provided in a user friendly and easily accessible way by creating a district website that caters to the ELL community’s specific needs.

My Stake & Inspiration for this Project

For the past 10 years I have learned and worked alongside ELL students. As an undergraduate I worked as a writing consultant with ELL students and went to weekly classes to learn how I could assist them with their writing. After graduating with a degree in English, I
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gone on to be a freelance teacher working with all age groups and teaching a variety of classes. Meanwhile, I traveled the world learning about different cultures and dabbling in a variety of languages. In 2019, I began my master’s in TESOL, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at SIT, the School for International Training. That’s when I started teaching in public schools. The year before starting my masters and continuing through the first two semesters, I substituted ELL and foreign language classes in RI, USA. At the start of the winter semester in 2020, I went to Poland to teach English as a second language at a public high school. While there, the COVID-19 Pandemic began, and I went into lockdown along with most of the world. Education came to a halt and people all over the world were at a loss.

From my personal experience and conversations with other educators, those in minority groups suffered the most. As public schools scrambled to implement remote learning opportunities, students in low-income communities, students with disabilities, and ELLs struggled to access new virtual education platforms. Many simply did not know where to begin or how to even sign-on even if they did have the technical resources such as reliable internet and digital devices. As the 2020-2021 school year began, I was hired for my first full-time ELL teaching position for a public school district in the United States. To my surprise, despite having the financial resources, these schools were still navigating how to provide educational opportunities to all of their students. As a first-year teacher who speaks English as my first language, I was confused and lost. It made me wonder just how much harder it must be for my ELL students, their families, and the classroom teachers attempting to support them. According to the faculty I spoke with, there was already a lot of confusion around ELL services and the pandemic only made everything even more seemingly difficult.
While free-lance teaching and owning my own small business, I became very skilled at website design and building. I’ve used these skills many times for myself and others, including to create a website for the SIT Graduate Institution’s first ever virtual Sandanona Conference in 2020. Realizing these skills could be applied to help my local ELL community, I began brainstorming ideas in my Refugee & Displaced Persons seminar as a plan for advocacy. Through long conversations, research, and the realization that my school district essential did not have an ELL website, I became motivated to create one.

What this Manual Provides

This manual provides insight into the ELL community, its potential needs, and how those needs can be implemented into a website. Suggestions for platforms, layouts, and functionality help narrow choices and point those new to web design in an approachable direction. Reading from cover to back is recommended for those new to website creation. However, as with most manuals, readers can use the table of contents to skip to sections relevant to their needs.

Theoretical Frameworks

There are many theoretical frameworks to implement into the creation and design of a district website, including the schoolwide community approach, participatory approach, and sociocultural theory.

Schoolwide Community Approach

Creating a schoolwide community can be a daunting task, especially as the United States becomes more diversified. However, with strong community leaders and platforms, like an ELL
district website, we can bridge the gaps that separate us. An ELL district website can help the
ELL community stay up to date on what’s going on as well as provide them with the information
and resources needed to succeed. The creation of the site can also foster opportunities for
collaboration between students, teachers, and administrators. Additionally, “a growing body of
research confirms the benefits of building a sense of community in school. Students in schools
with a strong sense of community are more likely to be academically motivated (Solomon,
Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000); to act ethically and altruistically (Schaps, Battistich,
& Solomon, 1997); to develop social and emotional competencies (Solomon et al., 2000); and to
avoid a number of problem behaviors, including drug use and violence (Resnick et al., 1997)”
(Schaps, 2003, p.31).

**Participatory Approach**

An individual could potentially create a simple website, but it would likely lack
complexity and character. Chapter 6 discusses the importance of getting many people involved
for a variety of input and how this can help with the sustainability of the website. In chapter two,
I discuss that having a variety of voices and talents involved such as students, teachers, and
families will potentially feel more inclined to use the site and its resources. Surveys, meetings,
and other types of research may be implemented to gather information on what kinds of
information needs to be provided on an ELL district website. Caution and critical thinking on
word choices will need to be used when creating any form of questionnaires to not accidentally
“exclude the subjects from making choices on the subject matter for the research.” The research
should also not “directly change the think- ing and behaviour of the practitioners involved”
(Gayford, 2003, p.130). The wording of questions can unintentionally direct readers to select
specific answers. Avoiding biased language and having enough multiple answer choices is one way to navigate this. Another option to help eliminate some of these possibilities is by using open-ended responses. The more community-led the responses are versus teacher-directed, the more likely the responses will be an accurate representation of their voices.

Sociocultural Theory

A collaborative website project not only provides a sense of unity among the creators, but it can give a sense of meaning and purpose. This could be achieved by having segments of the website created through student work. When students can see their assignments being published or used for purposes more than just a grade, they tend to be more invested. As for the teachers and administration, an ELL website serves as a bridge between sharing and communicating essential information. “Vygotsky's sociocultural theory views human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society” (McLeod, 2020). Designing and building a website takes strategy, planning, cooperation, and knowledge. The website would serve the ELL community by providing information and provide an opportunity for students, educators, and administrators to mentally grow and develop by engaging with one another through the design process.
Chapter 2

Gathering Ideas from Educators, ELLs & Their Families

Creating Surveys

It's essential to consider your context before embarking on the creation of surveys. Think about your district's demographics, literacy competence, what first languages your community has, and who will most likely engage and participate in completing these surveys. You will have to navigate how to provide translations of surveys, particularly for your ELL community's families. Additionally, translations may not be enough. If part of the district is made up by a pre-literate community, it will be important to offer in-person meetings, zoom calls, and/or home visits. It's also important to consider how you will notify participants about the survey and what platform you will use to provide and gather the data. Some options for informing participants about the survey include mass emails, mentions of it at the end of meetings, flyers, and newsletters. You will want to get as many participants involved to achieve a sample size that genuinely reflects a broad range of voices the website will impact. A decision about how long the survey should be open to responses will play a factor in the amount of data collected.

Survey Monkey and Google Forms are two popular platforms for creating surveys. They allow participants to remain anonymous if the survey creator selects that as an option while providing compiled feedback. My personal preference is to use Google Forms as it is very user friendly and has a clean layout. Both sites offer a variety of charts and diagrams for presenting the data collected. Also, both options allow for mobile and desktop creation and participation.
However, SurveyMonkey only provides a limited number of options for free. It limits how many questions you can ask and only allows up to 100 participants before requiring a payment option. Google forms offer a business option, but it is not necessary for a project like this, in my professional opinion. Google form allows you to create unlimited surveys, questions, and responses for absolutely nothing. For more comparisons between Survey Monkey and Google forms, consider reviewing the Zapier article titled, "Survey Maker Showdown: Google Forms vs. SurveyMonkey" (McPherson, 2019). Here is the link: https://zapier.com/blog/google-forms-vs-surveymonkey/

Below are some examples of what Google Forms looks like:
The ease of completing the survey is a crucial factor. When seeking respondents, you want to include how long the survey will take to complete. "Survey abandon rates increase for surveys that take more than 7-8 minutes to complete, with completion rates dropping anywhere from 5% to 20%. (However) the tolerance for lengthier surveys is greater for surveys that are work or school-related" (Chudoba, 2021). If participants need to answer too many questions, especially too many open response questions, they are likely not to answer all of the questions or skip them entirely. Creating questions that are simple to understand with a click choice option makes things easy and fast. Only ask open response questions if it is essential and there is no easy answer. You can always leave an additional comment and feedback section at the end for
anyone who wants to provide detailed feedback. A great way to check usability and duration of
time is to get a few volunteers to complete the survey using a timer. They can then let you know
how long it took them and give additional feedback before sharing it with your district.

When developing the surveys' specific questions, consider meeting with other ELL
teachers from the district to discuss ideas. Ask for their input on developing a survey for
educators that work with the ELL community and possibly a separate survey for ELLs and their
families. Some questions will be suited for everyone, while other inquiries are best directed
towards educators, ELLs and their families. Again, remember to consider your audience. Think
about who this website is for and what you wish to achieve with its creation. Some districts may
have different needs, including, but not limited to, finding resources for refugees, immigrants,
low-income housing, shelter, social workers, mental health, etc.

Below are sample questions used for my district's needs. Note that there are two different
surveys. One is specifically for educators working with ELLs and the second is for ELL students
and their families. Since some questions were universal, the first five questions are the same for
both surveys. The second set of five questions are for the specific groups. Each survey only has
ten questions, two of which are open responses for additional feedback.

**Survey Questions for Both Surveys**

1. Are you aware that our district currently has an ELL website?
2. Have you ever accessed or tried to access the current ELL website?
3. If yes to #3, please answer questions 4 & 5: (Make sure to include a NA option)
   On a scale of 1 being the easiest and 5 beginning the most difficult, how easy or difficult
   was it for you to find the website?
4. On a scale of 1 being the easiest and 5 beginning the most difficult, how easy or difficult was it for you to navigate the website?

5. What was the purpose of your visit to the website? ________________________ .

**Survey Questions for Educators**

6. Do you feel you have a good understanding of WIDA and its role in ELL education?
   (Scale of 1-5: 1 no understanding & 5 excellent understanding)

7. Would you like to see an outline of the ELL curriculum & WIDA standards?
   (Scale of 1 to 5: 1 no interest & 5 very interested)

8. Would information on the screening and testing processes be of interest to you? (Scale of 1 to 5: 1 no interest & 5 very interested)

9. Would you be interested in resources to help support your lessons when teaching ELLs?
   (Scale of 1 to 5: 1 no interest & 5 very interested)

10. What other information would you find most informative or helpful on the website?  
    ________________________ .

**Survey Questions for ELLs & Their Families**

1. Are you interested in knowing how students qualify for English language services? (Scale of 1 to 5: 1 no interest & 5 very interested)

2. Are you interested in learning what English language services are and how they work?  
   (Scale of 1 to 5: 1 no interest & 5 very interested)

3. What resources would you be interested in learning?  
   a. (Please check all that apply)
b. -Transportation to School

c. -Meal Plans

d. -School Supplies (Computers, books, paper, and other office supplies)

e. -COVID Safety

f. -Contacting & Communicating with Educators & Principals

g. -Translators/Interpreters for Parent-Teacher Conferences

h. -Navigating Remote Learning Platforms

i. -How to support their child’s academic progress

j. -Adult English language classes

k. -Food Pantries

l. -Assistance getting personal items: winter clothing, shoes, toiletries, etc

m. -Immigration & Refugee Rights to Education

4. Would how-to videos be of interest to learn more about remote education?

(Scale of 1 to 5: 1 not interested & 5 very interested)

5. What other information would you find most informative or helpful on the website?

______________________________________________ .

**Input from Meetings & Surveys**

At the end of the surveying period, it will be essential to evaluate the data. Holding meetings to discuss survey findings will give more objectivity to the decision-making process of what to consider, use, or leave out of the website. Below is a sample of the data collected from my district:
**Superintendents**

There is a need for an inclusive website that fits both educators and the ELL community's needs. How will you make it accessible in various languages? Who will maintain the website?

**Principals**

The principals had many ideas, including:

- School Year Snapshot/ ELL Calendar of Events:
- Academic Testing (Screening, ACCESS, MCAS)
- Testing Results
- Progress Reports & Report Cards
- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- School Holidays & Vacations

How Testing works:

- How a student qualifies for English language services
- Tracking English language proficiency
- Exiting English language services
- Opting out of English language services
- Special Education & Speech Pathology

What do English language services look like at various grade levels:

- General Overview
- Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
How will translations be made available on the website?

- Google Translate
- Translators (paid vs. volunteers)

**Educators**

The educators had many questions, including:

- How do English language services differ from SEI, Special Education, Reading Specialists & Paraprofessionals?
- What is WIDA?
- How does the English language curriculum look?
- What types of data are used to track student progress?

**ELL’s & Their Families**

Student Resources:

- Transportation to School
- Meal Plans
- School Supplies (Computers, books, paper, and other office supplies)
- COVID Safety

Parents & Guardians:

- Contacting & Communicating with Educators & Principals
- Translators/Interpreters for Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Navigating Remote Learning Platforms
- How to support their child’s academic progress
Community Resources:

- Adult English language classes
- Food Pantries
- Assistance getting personal items: winter clothing, shoes, toiletries, etc
- Immigration & Refugee Rights to Education
Chapter 3
Platforms & Layout for Website Production

Choosing a Platform

Those with experience coding can skim or likely skip over this chapter of the manual. If coding is something new, then pay attention. There is no need to study the intricate art of coding unless there is a desire to go into website design and development as a career path. “The definition of coding is the process of creating instructions for computers using programming languages. Computer code is used to program the websites, apps, and other technologies we interact with every day” (Weinstein, 2021). When coding, a programming language like C, Python, JavaScript, Ruby, or Perl will give specific commands and instructions for website design, layout, and functions.

Rest assured, though, even those with the limited computer skills of only knowing how to use Microsoft Word or Google Docs is all that’s needed to create a professional looking website. In addition, patience, a little creativity, and the right platform develop an ELL district website. Luckily, there are many website builder-sites out there that do all the coding. Some offer limited free versions, while others cost varying fees depending on the desired features. Some popular sites include Squarespace, WordPress, Wix, and Weebly. I have experience with many of these, and although all are great, some are best suited for particular types of sites. For example, I found Squarespace excellent for selling products, Wix for sharing photos and artwork, WordPress for blogging, and Weebly for all my basic needs.

Weebly was first introduced to me at Bridgewater State University, a college with a representation of producing great educators. Many of my teacher friends used it to create their
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classroom websites to share information with their students and families. Since that first introduction almost ten years ago, I have used Weebly to create countless professional websites for absolutely free. I’ve made every type from stores, blogs, events, business, and even academics. Weebly has become a platform I trust and recommend again and again. It is super user friendly and intuitive to anyone with basic computer skills. Simply choose a predesigned layout, click, and drop text boxes, photos, etc., and rearrange the layout as you please. When the site is ready to be shared, click publish.

Screenshot from https://www.weebly.com

Does this sound like too much work or beyond the capabilities of those looking to take on this project? Another option is to reach out to the district's IT team. They likely already have
staff dedicated to the school's current website management. However, it would not be appropriate to impose a project like this onto a teammate without proper compensation or an agreement of some sort. Despite being easy to build, the website will still be very time-consuming.

First and foremost, the information for the website will need production. This could be done on a word file and then copied and pasted into a predetermined location within the site. If a website builder like Weebly is used, then an IT team member will likely still be needed to connect the free domain name to the school's website if a link or tab from the main school's website is desired. If a decision is made to have the website freestanding, meaning not connected through the school's website, then a payment plan option that includes a personalized domain name is needed to search for the website. The free domain name will only bring viewers to the site if they have a copy of the link.

**Layouts & Visual Presentation**

Choosing your design and layout will be one of the first and most important decisions made when it comes to creating the website. It's better to air on the bland side than to have too much visual chaos. If there is too much to digest visually, it can make viewers feel overwhelmed and potentially even turn them away altogether. Too much visual clutter can result from large amounts of text, photos, and videos. Remember the purpose of the website. It's easy to get caught up in all the possibilities. Think of the layout as a piece of artwork. When an artist creates a piece, they often select each supply with careful thought. Now imagine they decided to use every art medium available on a single canvas. It might be hard to tell what is what by the time it's finished. Make sure to select each element with a sense of purpose.
When it comes to color themes, try using a predesigned template. Weebly offers a variety for free as well as some of the other previously mentioned platforms. Another option is to stick to soft pastels or choose no more than three bold colors. A great option is to start with a simple white background with black letters. After the information is added, then deciding where to place color, photos, and videos can be determined.

The font is also an important factor. Fancy cursive-like fonts may be beautiful to look at but are often challenging to read. Choose a font that is both large enough and stylistically legible. Titles may be larger, bold, or in a darker color than the body text. The text should also be direct and written in plain language. Remember that viewers typically go onto a website with a purpose.
to find something. If viewers have to shift through too much information to find what they are looking for, it may turn them away. Also, if there is too much academic jargon or advanced vocabulary, readers may find it challenging to comprehend.

**Navigation & Hyperlinking**

If people can't find your website or what they are looking for, no matter how much work put into creating the website, it won't matter. After selecting what information to provide, determine where it will go and how readers will get to it. A common rule of thumb among web designers is that it should take no more than three clicks to get to a source once the viewer is on the website. However, some designers may argue that this is not always possible. The IEEE brand experience suggests:

“While website designers/vendors are often directed to keep the number of clicks to a certain minimum, providing them with the following criteria can ensure that the usability of the website is not compromised:

- Create a task path that is progressive and intuitive (so users feel they are getting closer to the content they are seeking)
- Use well labeled links and buttons, error messages, or copy telling users where they are (instead of them having to guess what they might encounter upon clicking or reading further)
- Optimize site search tools to return relevant and accurate results (if site search is provided as a tool to find information on the site)
• Optimize website performance for various devices (i.e., desktop, laptop, mobile, or tablet) based on context of use (includes speed of loading as well as rendering layouts based on user’s screen size) “(Dave, 2017).

A great option to minimize clicking is by using hyperlinks to pages within the website or even outside sources. Aim to have only three to five header tabs. For example, an ELL website's header may include: Home, About, Educators, Students/Parents, Contact. Then each page tab can have its dropdown menu for specific information within that category. For example, if you go to the Wakefield public school's website, you can click on Students/parents and then choose from various next steps.

Screenshot from https://www.wakefieldpublicschools.org

Translations

One of the last steps is to determine how to make translations available to the ELL community. Does the community have just one or two dominant languages, or are there
countless? Would it be suitable to duplicate the website in each language with the initial tab menu being the language listed? Or would a select language tab with a dropdown menu of languages best suit your district's needs?

If there are multiple languages, you may want to consider inserting a Google Translate page button to the website footer. You will likely need the IT team to assist you with this part if you are unfamiliar with computer coding. The Google Translate button allows the largest number of languages to access the site's content. However, Google Translate does not always give a perfect translation and is known to be very formal.

A combination of these two ideas would work well for many district’s purposes. I suggest having the first link and language in English with a Google Translate button placed in the footer (as shown in the screenshot above) and duplications of the site in the two most common languages of your community (as shown in the screenshot below).
Chapter 4  
Key Features of a Successful ELL District Website

Including the Pre-Literate Community

Knowing the languages of the district's ELL community and understanding their abilities to comprehend information will affect the website's usability. It's likely safe to assume most educators are computer literate and able to navigate a combination of text written in academic and plain English. However, those within the ELL community may not have the same advantages. It will be important to offer a variety of ways to present information that would otherwise be unattainable. Delivering multimodal through text, audio, and visual materials is not only inclusive to the pre-literate and ELL community, but it is also engaging. When information can capture an audience's attention, they are more likely to stay on the website to learn more.

Not all the information will need to be presented in a non-text format. If this was done, then it might be frustrating for the English literate community. There are advantages to quickly skimming documents when searching for a specific piece of information. Only essential information or potentially over-the-top confusing data should be considered. Keeping a balance of text and other multimodal details will maintain the website's usability and visual layout. It's important to remember that not everyone who speaks a foreign language can also read and write in that language. Also, some language learners may be able to read in English more easily than others.

It would be impossible to accommodate every individual member. Instead, aim to provide for the majority while having ideas to support the others. For example, within a welcome video, the speaker may say, "please contact" or "reach out to ___ for questions and translations." The overall video may be spoken in plain English but have a few phrases like this added in the
district's ELL community's most common languages. If a decision is made to have the website duplicated into multiple languages, another option is to have a welcome video spoken in the native language on each homepage. These welcome videos could provide an overview of the key topics presented throughout the website or give a general message and where or how to get more information.

Other videos for consideration may include hyperlinks to YouTube to learn how to do something related to remote learning. The website creators or educators can also use a free platform called Screencast-O-Matic to record up to 15 minutes of their computer screen. This is a great option for sharing documents or step-by-step website navigation. Screen recording can be done with or without audio. If narration while showing the video is used, make sure to speak clearly, loud enough, and not too fast! Although music may seem nice, others may find it annoying. This will be up to the web designer's discretion. However, it is not recommended to speak over music as this can make listening challenging for many.

Community Resources

The community needs in each district will vary. Luckily, many of these needs may already be established locally. Some of the families within your district may need to be pointed in the right direction. For example, many districts have local food pantries, shelters, social and health workers, English classes, libraries, farmers markets, and other community events. However, other districts may not and discovering the gaps will create opportunities for community service projects. These projects can be a great way to bring people together and encourage students to get involved.
Some family's pride can be an issue for asking or willingness to receive support. It's important to remember not everyone feels comfortable receiving or requires support. It's crucial not to make assumptions or assume someone needs or wants help. In the article "The Dangers of Compassion…” Rodriguez (2015) addresses the implications of pedagogical action because it is too often approached through the lens of refugees and ELL students "like vulnerable problems to be fixed through education and other resources" (p.112). She goes on to discuss some of the reasons why educators may get to know their students. Some may feel it comes from genuine interest, while others may intentionally or unintentionally use their knowledge to govern and contribute to keeping the ELL population as a minority group. A project like this could easily fall into these same mistakes. Understanding the true need for a district ELL website needs to remain the primary focus throughout the entirety of its creation.

Although many towns may have these services, some families may be unwilling to partake in them. Some services may be located at churches and some may feel uncomfortable going there if they are of another denomination. Many factors can deter people from seeking out services they need, whether it be location, finances, ability to commute, or pride. A family's pride, inability, or willingness to receive support can be hard on their children. One public high school I worked at in RI, USA, resolved some of these issues by having a pantry room with an open-door policy. Students could go there to get both fresh foods for breakfast and lunch or choose to fill up a shopping bag with non-perishable items to take home. We also kept extra clothing, gloves, hats, and toiletry kits on hand. Students did not have to ask to go into the pantry room. The open-door policy attempted to remove embarrassment or shame some students may have otherwise experienced if they needed to make an appointment or sign their name. Local YMCA's and libraries also offer many services, including help applying for health insurance and
work. Both also typically offer classes and local events. They also may have or know where to find other resources and services.

**ELL Screening, Services & Testing**

Information on ELL screening, services, and testing should be presented in plain English. Suppose a link to the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, commonly known as WIDA, or a teacher jargon description is the only text provided. In that case, it can leave the ELL community in confusion and without an answer they can comprehend. External links may be a great additional resource for educators and those interested, but they should not be the only source of information. An ELL website should aim to make information available to the average ELL person, student, parent, or guardian.

In Massachusetts, WIDA sets the education standards for ELLs in K-12 public schools. WIDA instructs all ELL teachers to screen any student who fills out any language other than English on their Home Language Survey upon entering a public school. These students, plus any student who seems to be struggling in their classes due to a language barrier, are screened to see if they may need ELL services. The "WIDA Screener is an English language proficiency assessment given to new students in Grades K–12 to help educators identify whether they are English language learners (ELLs)." (WIDA, https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/screener) The process for screening varies depending on the grade level. Kindergarten is tested on listening, speaking, and reading in the sense of describing photos and the ability to retell oral studies using pictures to help guide them. Grades one through twelve test the four language domains of listening, reading, speaking, and writing at grade level context. The guardians of students have the
authority to accept or decline ELL services if their child qualifies. Luckily, the majority of guardians are compliant and happy for the additional support.

Servicing ELL students looks different in every district, depending on the ELL community's size and the district's needs. Some districts may offer bilingual education if their demographic is made up of primarily one-second language. Others may offer a new-comers classroom where ELL students from various cultures, or one shared language, learn all their core classes together until their English proficiency reaches a level in which they can successfully transition into the mainstream English classes. Other districts have a limited ELL population and offer SEI, Shelter English Immersion, classes where ELL students learn alongside native English-speaking children with a certified classroom teacher and know how to make modifications and accommodations to support ELL students. Some schools offer SEI and ELL services where a licensed ELL teacher will push-into or co-teach ELL students within their mainstream classes and pull-out ELL students to work with them either one-on-one or in small groups.

Regardless of the district's ELL services, all of Massachusetts and many other states within the USA are required to abide by the WIDA standards. WIDA states that all students must be taught academic language skills in listening, reading, speaking, and writing by grade level using the Can-Do Descriptors. The Can-Do Descriptors highlight what language learners can do at each level of language development. See figure on next page:
The stages or levels start at one, indicating an absolute beginner and six, indicating a native English speaker. To determine a student's proficiency level and track their progress, ELLs participate yearly in ACCESS testing. "ACCESS for ELLs (ACCESS) is the collective name for WIDA's suite of summative English language proficiency assessments." (WIDA, https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/access) These tests are administered to all ELL students receiving ELL services in grades K-12. Like screening, students will be tested within the four language domains on grade-level content. For a student to exit the need for ELL services at my current district, they must obtain an overall score of 4.2. Each district determines the exiting score.
Chapter 5
Remote Learning

Teaching ELLs Remotely

In March 2020, when the shutdowns began due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many schools were unprepared to switch to remote learning platforms. Districts with limited resources suffered the most. Many ELL families struggled to communicate with their schools and did not have the technology they needed to access learning. Fortunately for many districts over this past year, funding has been granted to supply students with technology needs such as tablets and chrome books for remote learning. Despite this distribution, there were still many other implications that made remote learning unattainable. The Internet was one of the most significant issues. Not every family could afford to pay for the monthly Internet rate or only use the Internet via their phone.

Depending on how tech-savvy families were, some could navigate using a hotspot on their phone and get access to the Internet on their children’s tablets and computers, while other families struggled just trying to figure out how to turn the computers on. Since the Pandemic was unexpected, it made navigating all these issues that much more challenging.

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, much of the navigation issues were solved, or we’re at least making significant headway. Though, it was still their first encounter with trying to go remote or hybrid for many families. Many schools opted for some form of a hybrid program, which allowed their children to go to school for either half the day or every other day while doing the remainder of the schoolwork remotely. Depending on their child’s grade and educational needs and the district, their access to education varied greatly. It was even more
challenging for the families that were new to areas to find out how to communicate and how to get help accessing remote learning. Just because they may have the physical technologies does not mean they knew how to use them. This was not only an issue for ELL families but many families across the world.

Despite many of these challenges, it’s still a good idea to have some information regarding remote learning and navigating it on the district website. This could be as simple as having a translator or a series of workshops available to families in need of step-by-step instruction. At the current district where I work, we offer Parent University, which is primarily geared toward English-speaking families and provides information for remote learning and many other topics. The same idea could be implemented specifically for EL families or something similar.

**Navigating Remote Learning**

Fortunately, many districts have some unity amongst each grade for standards and requirements of content learning. This structure made it somewhat easier for families to navigate and for teachers to communicate their academic goals for the Pandemic school year. Having the same platform was also a key to many district's success. Some schools opted to use Google Classroom, Moodle, Canvas, or Blackboard. Challenges Developed among districts that did not have this unity implemented, especially when it came to remote classrooms and teachers using various platforms from Google Meet to zoom to Skype. Having too many different platforms to navigate made it challenging for parents to know where, when, and what links to click to access education. It was also challenging for many parents to understand what was asynchronous versus synchronous classwork. Many families did not know when classes were in-person or when
guardians were responsible for teaching their children through content posted by teachers. Families became stressed and overwhelmed trying to manage their careers while suddenly needing to teach their children and be at home altogether.

Depending on state laws and family choices, some families remain completely remote while others opted to follow a hybrid schedule. This year it was a challenge for everyone involved, the students, the faculty, staff, teachers, and families. Whatever platforms determined to be used should be well explained on the district website with links and potential workshops and/or how-to videos. My district decided to use Google Classroom for all their asynchronous and information needs. Additionally, they chose to use zoom for their virtual classes. By having just two platforms to navigate, it alleviated a lot of stress for everyone involved. However, there was still a need to educate everyone involved on using these platforms, and translations for using these platforms were also a significant challenge to navigate.

Fortunately, since this was a worldwide pandemic, the blessings of many people working together to find ways to make education possible during this time were prevalent throughout YouTube channels and blogs. Various channels made step-by-step tutorials on how to navigate these multiple platforms in many languages. For example, here is one YouTube Channel that explains the basic of using Google Classroom in multiple languages:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLON_Ndz-asFTvNS3ODimsVtFom_nywSJR&fbclid=IwAR1I0yYqGVePO3MXhzGrUCUsaHCEFp5UEGom0dm54ly1v5NKcJibmOmD-4

Inserting links into a district ELL website from channels like these or making your own videos using screen recording websites like Screencast-O-Matic can be very supportive.
Chapter 6

Future Steps - The Key to Sustainability

Getting Others Involved

Careers change and people move. To have a successful district website, it will be essential to have stakeholders and various people involved in keeping things going regardless of who comes and goes. The ESL district team would likely be the most appropriate group to take on the leadership role of creating an ELL district website. However, other members of the school can organize. My most significant caution is to not give all the power or decision-making to just one person. Schools have crashed due to losing their top supporters and activists. For a district website to survive, it needs to be the work and creation of many humans and not just one or two. By having people emotionally, professionally, and passionately invested, the chances for the website's survival are greater.

Input from each Academic Level

Depending on the district's ELL community's size, there may be a need to create more than one website. It's possible to create one site which covers the majority of universal information. Still, when it comes to specific grade-level details, the website creators may opt to have links or additional sites for each academic level. The surveys from chapter two of this manual and input from administration, teachers, ELLs, and their families will all serve useful when determining the site's complexity and needs.

In addition to the primary stakeholders, volunteers can offer a ton of additional support and be a fun way to get the community involved. On the homepage, social nights and student
artwork could be featured. Tech-savvy ELL students could assist with layout and design as well as art students. Advanced ELL students could help with translations. Those with a passion for writing could create a blog. Students involved in media classes could make videos and music for the site. Additionally, students needing to fulfill volunteer hours could obtain them through a project like this.

**Promoting & Sharing the Site**

There is no point in having an ELL District Website if no one knows it exists. Promoting and sharing the website once it's published will be crucial if it's going to help anyone. One simple idea to share the link and a short description is adding it to the school newsletter. Another option is to include it on notification letters sent home to ELL students and families throughout the academic year. The best current idea I can think of is to have the link in my email signature. If all the ESL or ELL teachers in the district did that, it would be a constant promotion to everyone involved with them.

Additionally, the link to the website needs to be featured within the school's primary website/s. Many ELLs and the community connect to the main website/s of their schools at some point, potentially looking for answers provided on the ELL specific site. If the link to the ELL site is buried within other sub-links, it will be challenging to find. It should be listed under academics and/or additional services for easy accessibility.
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