

MOVING MANY NEEDLES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Claude Goldenberg, Moderator

AGENDA

- Introduce speakers and session focus (~7mins)
- Each speaker presents 6-7 minutes (~20mins)
- Follow-up questions (~10mins)
- Audience comments, Q&A (~10mins)



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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "FAR MORE EFFECTIVE LITERACY PRACTICES"?

- Practices well-supported by the best evidence we have--"structured literacy."
 - Promote oral language development and *build on* oral language.
 - Provide systematic instruction in foundational literacy skills to connect the sounds of the language to print.
 - Connect *that* connection to robust oral language.
- “Effective practices” are generally effective for all.
- For ELs, “effective literacy practices” also include oral English instruction and support.
- Each speaker will address how “structured literacy” provides a base for all learners then ask:
- **“What needles must be moved to address the needs of students learning English as they learn to read and write it?”**

Esther Quintero

Albert Shanker Institute



Improving Literacy Legislation to Support English Learners

Background & Context



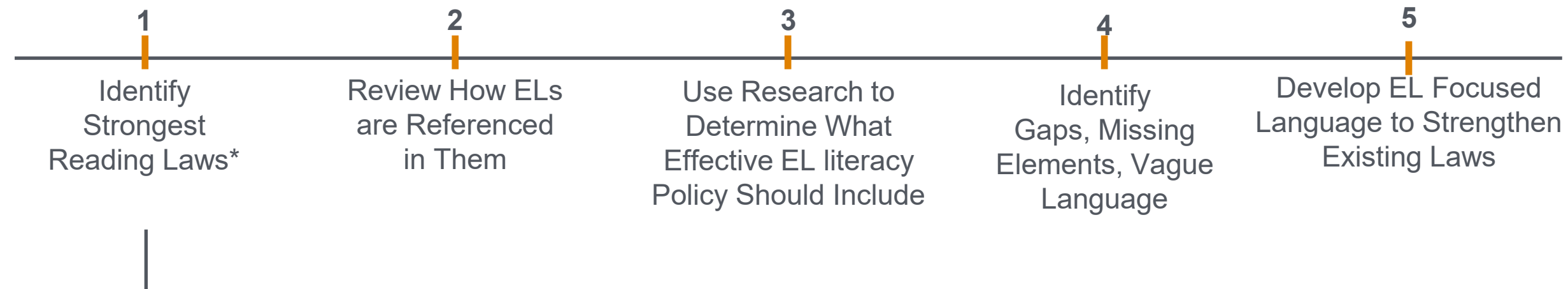
- ***Reading Reform Across America*** - Since 2019, our team has examined every state's reading legislation to create a clear, systematic description of how reading policy is evolving nationwide.
- ***Focus on English Learners*** - Shanker, NCEL, CAL and other groups have documented the limited attention English Learners receive in state reading legislation.
- ***ASI Legislative Database*** - contains ~438 reading laws enacted between 2019 and 2024. Of these, about 125 mention ELs, the vast majority in passing. In terms of states, **only 14 states** have enacted legislation where these learners receive some substantive attention.

While reporting these findings matters, they can obscure an equally important idea:

Strong reading legislation can benefit ALL students, including ELs

Developing EL Focused Legislative Language

Rationale & Process



- 72 laws meet criteria, half reference ELs.
- Legislation in 13 states include a passing reference to ELs.
- Only 7 states passed reading laws with more substantive EL references.

* Laws that define reading more comprehensively - encompassing the five pillars, oral language, and writing - and that call for a shift toward research- or evidence-based practices, programs, and materials. These laws attend to many of the core conditions needed to support ELs effectively.

2. What These Laws Say (I)

Passing Mentions of English Learners

	Retention	Screener/ Assessment	Teacher Capacity	Student Supports
Alabama	✓	-	-	-
Arizona	✓	-	-	-
Colorado	-	-	-	✓
Florida	✓	-	-	-
Georgia	-	-	✓	-
Indiana	-	-	✓	-
Kentucky	-	-	-	✓
North Carolina	✓	-	-	-
Oklahoma	✓	✓	✓	-
Pennsylvania	-	-	✓	-
South Carolina	✓	-	-	-
Utah	-	✓	-	-
West Virginia	✓	-	-	-
	7 states	2 states	4 states	2 states

2. What These Laws Say (II)

Substantive Mentions of English Learners

Alaska HB 114	Annual panels with EL experts to review effectiveness of programs for these populations. Reading specialists required to support students whose primary language is not English. EL status is considered in retention decisions.
California SB 114	SB 114 requires <u>literacy screening tools</u> to be valid, reliable, and <u>linguistically and culturally appropriate</u> , ensuring they are <u>normed on a representative sample</u> of California's students, including ELs. For students who cannot yet be screened in English, the <u>assessments in primary language</u> when possible or alternative process to assess risk for reading difficulties . Law tasks the California DoE and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence with selecting professional-learning providers who can <u>prepare teachers in English language acquisition, ELD, multilingual assessment, and bilingual instruction</u> .
Connecticut SB 1202	Director of reading initiatives responsible over EL instruction. Curricula must address EL achievement gaps. The law requires disaggregated EL data and permits the use of native-language assessments. ELs are part of accountability systems. Reading plans must address EL gaps. No retention flexibility. Connecticut requires improvement plans to include strategies for strengthening bilingual education and EL services.
Delaware HB 250	EL funding is recurring, formula-based, multi-year, legally mandated. Based on per-pupil weights. The only bill that structurally builds EL support into the funding architecture of the system. Funds reading interventionists, mental health, wraparound services. Eligibility triggered by EL % thresholds (e.g., ≥20% ELs)
Illinois SB 2243 HB 4844	SB 2243 Defines <u>multilingualism as an asset</u> . Emphasizes <u>oral language</u> , encourages home language and English connections, and <u>biliteracy</u> . Licensure requires coursework in <u>EL instructional strategies</u> . Requires teacher knowledge of cultural practices and linguistic systems. Only bill that <u>directly ties licensure requirements to EL instructional expertise</u> . HB4844 references culturally and linguistically sustaining instruction; multilingual support. Screening guidance for ELs
Michigan SB 567	Screens developing ELs with native-language phonemic awareness, spelling, oral reading fluency. Provides guidance to distinguish dyslexia from second-language acquisition. Strongest safeguard against misidentification and over-retention. Intervention teams must include ESL/bilingual-endorsed teacher. ELD, decoding, native language, vocabulary, feedback. Native-language instruction: ESL staff required. Literacy coaches to K–3 schools with high percentages of ELs.
Minnesota HB 2497 SB 3567	Requires every district to adopt a <u>literacy plan that explicitly includes multilingual learners</u> . Districts must annually report screening results to the state. Screeners must be culturally responsive. <u>ELs are explicitly included in all screening + reporting requirements</u> . Example of <u>state-level oversight + data transparency for ELs</u> .

3. What the Research Supports

Example: Oral Language Development

For all Students		
Support families in providing home environments that encourage language and literacy development. The particular language matters less than opportunities to engage in ample verbal interactions from birth on.	Starting in preschool and on into kindergarten and beyond, provide intentional opportunities to develop vocabulary, syntax, knowledge, and extended discourse.	Foster language-rich interactions throughout the school day in the language of instruction. Engage students in discussions, and academic talk that extend beyond focused literacy activities.
Additional for English Learners		
Schools should make ELD instruction a clear priority for English learners at every level of proficiency so that these students develop strong English skills. ELD instruction should begin as soon as students enter school, be substantial and ongoing, and — ideally —take place in a dedicated block where students are grouped by English proficiency, while ensuring they remain integrated with peers for the rest of the day.		

4. Missing/Vague Elements

Example: English Language Development Instruction (ELD)

- We did not find any piece of legislation explicitly mandating ELD instruction. These provisions may exist in regulations and other policy guidance, as well as in laws that are not specific to reading.
- However, integrating ELD instruction provisions into literacy laws is essential for coherence. In Arizona a statute, unrelated to reading, mandates a four-hour ELD block for newcomers, which may inadvertently limit access to Tier I reading instruction.

Take Aways

Moving the Legislation Needle for English Learners

- ***Include ELs explicitly***: Directly referencing ELs and addressing their additional needs is a must and long overdue in reading legislation.
- ***Don't start from scratch***: Strong reading laws provide a foundation for all learners, whether specific subgroups are explicitly named or not.
- ***Refine, don't replace***: Offer a constructive policy path — targeted amendments that enhance, rather than overhaul, existing laws. This is what we hope our work/report helps with.

Stay tuned for full report in 2026

www.shankerinstitute.org

Maya Valencia Goodall

CORE Learning





Structured Literacy OR Second Language Acquisition

You don't have to choose



Structured Literacy and Second Language Acquisition: The Bridge, Not the Divide



- Too often treated as separate conversations
- CORE sees Structured Literacy as the unifying framework
- Structured Literacy is both *the how* and *the why* of language growth

Structured Literacy: An Approach Grounded in the Science of Reading

Students and Instructors

The “WHO”

Tier 1:
General Education
Classroom Teacher

Tier 2:
General or Special Education Teacher,
Reading Specialist, Intervention Personnel

Tier 3:
Dyslexia Specialist,
Special Education Teacher*

Structured Literacy

The “WHAT”

Instructional content integrates the domains of language as they pertain to reading (word recognition and comprehension) and written expression (handwriting, spelling, and composition).

Word Recognition/ Handwriting & Spelling

Phonemes ↔ Graphemes

Morphemes

Syllable & Stress Patterns

Orthographic Conventions

Comprehension/ Composition

Vocabulary/Background Knowledge

Sentence Structure/Grammar

Text Structure

Critical Thinking

Integrated Language, Reading & Writing Instruction
Supporting Automaticity, Fluency & Reading Proficiency

The “HOW”

Essential principles of instruction guide how content is taught for both reading and written expression. These principles are beneficial for all students and necessary for struggling students.

Direct & Systematic

Explicit

Sequential

Cumulative

Multimodal

Mastery Oriented

Data Driven

Targeted Prompt Feedback

Highly Interactive

Scaffolded

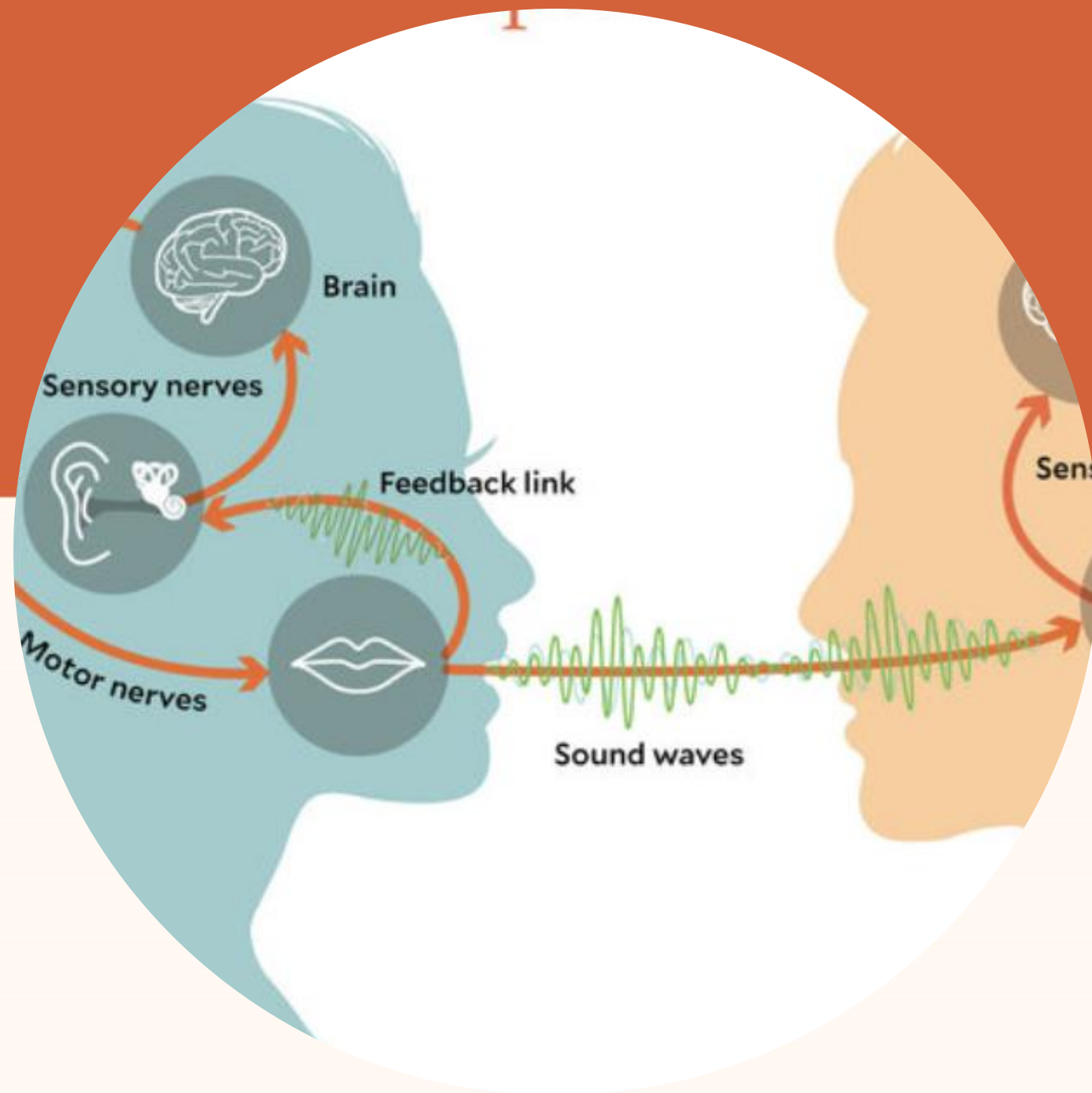
Planned, Purposeful Instructional Decisions
for Tasks and Text

Science of Reading

The “WHY”

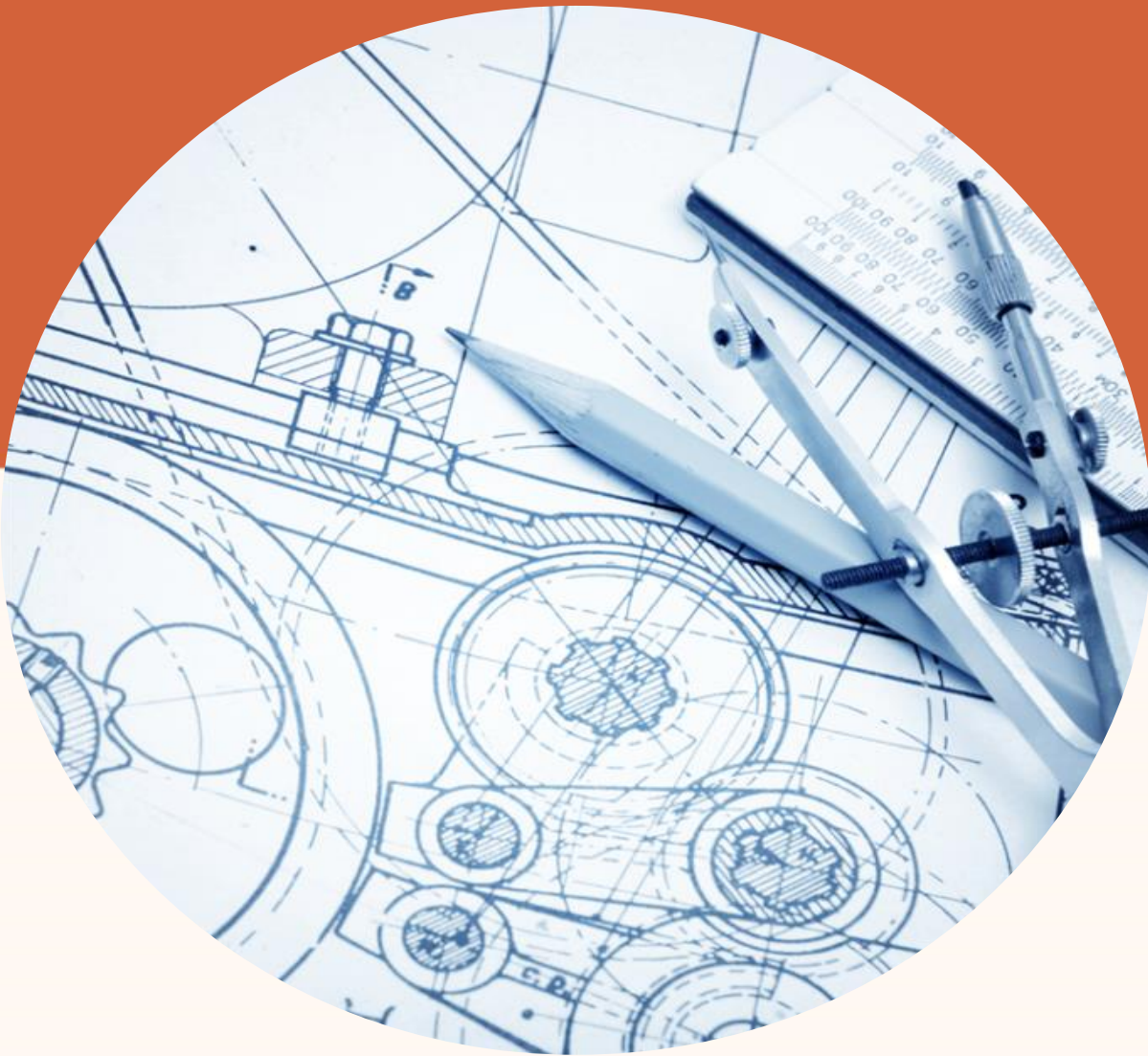
Scientific evidence from accumulated research on reading/writing acquisition provides the underlying basis for the content and principles of Structured Literacy.

What Structured Literacy Really is



- **Integrated Language, Reading, Writing instruction:**
 - Builds oral and written language together
 - Makes language *visible, teachable, transferable*

How districts operationalize



- Align Systems and Funding to a Unified Vision
- Partner with Providers Who Understand Both Language and Literacy



**Structured Literacy gives us the *why* and the *how* of
language and literacy growth.**

**When we apply it through a multilingual lens, we stop
choosing between Structured Literacy and language
development — we realize they are the same work.**

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Lennox School District





Moving Needles for English Learners: In-district Evidence-Based Literacy

Dr. Lisbeth Samaniego
English Learner Specialist,
Lennox School District



English Learners' Reading Proficiency

- Only **10% of English Learners** reach reading proficiency by Grade 4 (NAEP)
- Local challenge: Reclassification rates reflect progress (6.9% → 17.5% → 16%)
- Goal: Align ELD standards + Common Core with the Science of Reading
- Why this work matters: Closing equity gaps and ensuring access and aligned systems. (EL Roadmap, 2017).





Research Foundations and Implications for Practice

RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

Goldenberg (2020): oral language and literacy integration are essential

Kovelman (2015): Neuroscience confirms cognitive benefits of biliteracy

Cárdenas-Hagan (2020): Structured literacy systematically builds skills

Scarborough's Rope (2001): Word recognition + language comprehension

DISTRICT APPLICATIONS

Designated ELD: K–5 Scope and sequence aligned to CCSS and ELD standards

LETRS Year Two: Strengthening decoding and language comprehension

Dual Language 90/10 model: LMU partnership supporting biliteracy expansion

Newcomer Supports: Entry screeners, Lexia English, Toro College tutors

Family Engagement: Bilingual liaisons, college classes, annual summits, and parent workshops





Results & Call to Action

- **Reclassification growth:** From 6.9% to 17.5%
- **Improved outcomes:** Teacher knowledge of SoR + ELD alignment
- **Consistent progress:** Data-driven practices and intervention cycles
- **Commitment to equity:** Sustained focus on multilingual learner achievement



How do we move many needles at once?

- Grounding our work in the **Science of Reading** research
- Sustaining **alignment between standards and evidence-based practice**
- Collaborating with **all** educational partners
- Ensuring **every** multilingual learner thrives





“Evidence-based literacy isn’t just about filling gaps—it’s about opening doors.”

– DR. LISBETH SAMANIEGO

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Follow-up
questions



**Audience
comments,
Q&A**



Thank you!
You will get
a link to
this file.