



# English Language Acquisition in Action

**How Moore Public Schools' English Learners Improved Their ACCESS Scores and Speaking and Writing Confidence — During the Most Challenging School Year**

## Laying the Groundwork for Success

With all the disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic, the 2020–21 school year made its mark on history. In Moore Public Schools (OK), it will also be remembered as the year the district's growing population of English learners (ELs) made strong gains in their language proficiency. Moore implemented Ballard & Tighe's *Hands-On-English* language development program for grades K–2 (newcomers and beginners) during the tumultuous 2020-21 school year, but rather than adding to teacher's stress, the program actually made life easier.

*Hands-On English* was created by teachers, for teachers and is easily adaptable for different teaching styles and classroom situations. In Moore elementary schools, most ELs participate in grade-specific instruction, though there are some multi-grade student groups. Moore ELL Coordinator Karen Cisneros pointed out that one reason the district selected *Hands-On English* over other programs is its short prep time, "priceless in the world of teaching." But saving time was just the beginning of *Hands-On English*'s many advantages.

***Hands-On English* appeals to visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and social learners.**

~ Elvina Peak  
Moore Public Schools Teacher

## Meeting Goals with Sentence Frames

Moore went in search of a new English development program with the goal of helping their 1,400 ELs improve their scores on the ACCESS English language proficiency test. *Hands-On English's* focus on speaking and writing has made a noticeable improvement in both lower- and higher-level students' speaking abilities. Why are they seeing a difference across levels? Teachers praise the program's sentence frames component. These easy-to-use cards work well for pairs, small groups, and whole-class activities, guiding students in how to phrase sentences and use pronouns clearly and correctly.

For Catherine (Yajie) Li, teaching young ELs often feels like being a train engineer, and the sentence frames are simply the train tracks she's laid down for them to follow. "I hung up one sentence frame and asked the students to complete the sentence with the new words they just learned," she explains. "With the sentence frames and the new words hung up on the wall, there were no obstacles for the students to write out a complete sentence." To Li, her students are more than a group of young kids she has to keep engaged. "I call them my scholars," Li says, and sentence frames help these scholars develop sophistication using English. Teacher Paige Johnson echoed these sentiments: "The sentence frames gave them confidence in writing a complete sentence."



**Sentence Frames support learning new functions and forms and are coded for quick reference in an easy to grab box. Sentence Frames are also available in digital format for remote learning or projecting on a whiteboard in a classroom.**

## Engaging Students & Supporting Teachers

With learning alternating between in-person instruction, hybrid instruction, and fully remote instruction, keeping Moore's young scholars engaged and motivated was particularly critical for their language acquisition. "Since I started using *Hands-On English* and *Frames for Fluency*, I have noticed that my students are never bored with the techniques and activities," said teacher Patty Pedraza. "Students are always enthusiastic and excited to learn. They show it in every lesson."

During the pandemic, teachers were tasked with developing, adapting, and learning new instructional tools and apps with just a moment's notice, making the ready-to-use tools within *Hands-On English* a life-saver. Teacher Elvina Peak shared, "Before using this program I had always made my own sentence frames. Now I don't have to do it. It saves time, it provides planning and materials."

For many teachers, the convenient ready-to-teach tools saved the year. "In retrospect, *Hands-on-English* helped me survive ... through both virtual teaching and classroom teaching," Li said.

**Students are always enthusiastic and excited to learn. They show it in every lesson.**

~ Patty Pedraza  
Moore Public Schools Teacher

## Using Real-Life Experiences to Spark Conversations

*Hands-On English* is doing more than meeting learning goals: students are also having fun and creating connections. Teacher Kori Ottman shared that her students had a great time on the unit with wild animals and habitats because they were able to hold real chicks and talk about real animals and their habitats.

Pedraza's students like relating topics and pictures to their own experiences. For example, a theme picture of girls playing soccer sparked student conversation about their own love of soccer. "... there are no students who say 'it's boring' at all! Students often like to see new things and especially when it comes to something fun and colorful. They are always very engaged in the lessons."

Angela Sanders' students also like asking each other questions about real-world experiences prompted by the themes. And although she mentioned her students need more practice with phonics, sight words, and small readers, they are fully engaged and really enjoy the chants and activities. "I have a solid curriculum that is easy to implement," she said. "It is an excellent newcomer program."

**I have a solid curriculum that is easy to implement. I am a more confident teacher when it comes to teaching my newcomers.**

~ Angela Sanders  
Moore Public Schools Teacher

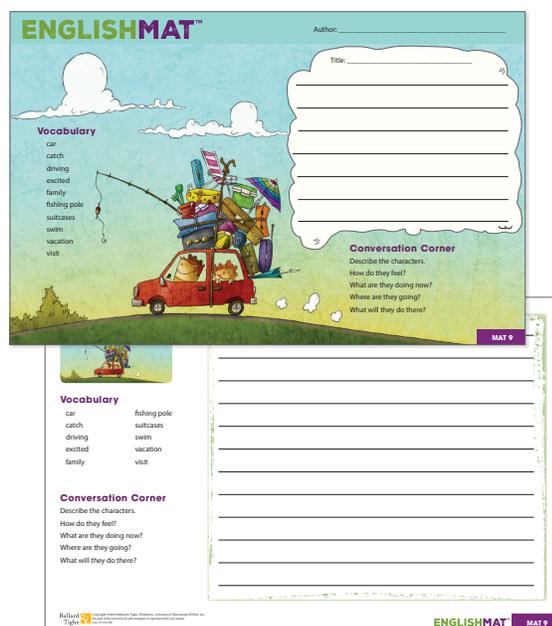


**Grade-appropriate informational and fictional texts work well for in-school read-alouds and for sharing with remote learners.**

## Supporting Beginning to Advanced Learners

Moore staff has also found academic success and engagement across levels. Kathy Haynes is a fan of the EnglishMats found in each chapter, pointing out that they're good for all levels. These large, colorful pages include a vocabulary list, conversation questions, and plenty of space for students to organize and write their ideas. EnglishMats provide great opportunities for students to practice their writing and storytelling skills. "The students were genuinely excited when I used the mats for writing," she explained. "It sparked their imaginations. They liked sharing their stories and taking the mats home to share with their parents. I felt my students were more engaged and found it easier to write when using the mats."

Older students who may not have liked to write in the past come up with imaginative stories based on the picture prompts. And because the materials are easily adaptable, Peak chooses the material to match the level. With beginning students, she concentrates on vocabulary and simple sentences while higher-level students can do more reading. "Children learn in different ways," she described. "*Hands-On English* appeals to visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and social learners." When asked if *Hands-On English* meets the needs of students of varying English abilities, the Moore staff agreed that *Hands-On English* provides a variety of materials, making the program adaptable and fun for all students.



**EnglishMats give students prompts and space to develop their creative writing and storytelling skills.**

## Encouraging Active Vocabulary Learning

Making the program her own, Ottman has adapted *Hands-On English* to both her active teaching style and her students' learning styles. Once she recognized that her students like the opportunity to move, she started using the vocabulary cards to keep them active and engaged. "I've saved a lot of planning time since all my picture vocabulary is organized and easy to grab and go," Ottman said. "Our lessons are more active now and students enjoy the extra movement." These cards include 224 vocabulary words and corresponding images, so a teacher can easily integrate learning new vocabulary into a game or stand-up, sit-down activity.

Ottman even convinced her school's Deaf Education Program to adapt *Hands-On English*, noting: "They have been thrilled with the organized vocabulary and sentence frames for teaching grammar. Since their students use American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate, English truly is their second language as well, and her students and mine have a lot in common with how they acquire language," she said.

## Learning Bigger Words, Writing Better Sentences

Cisneros and Peak both shared the same success story of a second-grade remote student who was sent a writing assignment. He used big words that surprised his teacher, Peak: "The baby turtle scampered to the ocean floor." A few other staff members recalled the story and agreed that since implementing *Hands-On English*, students are using bigger words, expanding their vocabularies, putting words into sentences, and expressing themselves more.

"I used the sentence frames to help with sentence construction, as well as speaking," Haynes noted. "I like the themed units and the ideas offered."

Li described how her read-alouds of the Big Books created an active and engaging learning environment for all her students, including those with learning disabilities. Johnson agreed, and mentioned that having a new set of words to learn each week and expand upon has been extremely helpful. "The pictures are current and relevant and really help the students comprehend the use and meaning of the words," she said.

## Making Gains Even in a Challenging Year

140 of Moore's ELs received instruction using *Hands-On English* during the 2020–21 school year. It was a challenging school year for many students and their families yet 82% of first graders and 76% of second graders increased their language proficiency scores. Growth was flatter for the nine third graders with 33% making gains and 67% not seeing a change in their scores. Students in fourth through sixth grade also saw improvement with 67% of the nine students increasing their scores.

Students took the WIDA placement test at the start of the school year and then the ACCESS test in February 2021.

### ACCESS Score Summary (Percentages)

	KN–1st Grades (N=60)	*2nd Grade (N=45)	*3rd Grade (N=9)	*4th–6th Grades (N=9)
<b>Number of increased scores (%)</b>	49 (82%)	34 (76%)	3 (33%)	6 (67%)
<b>Number of unchanged scores (%)</b>	8 (13%)	6 (13%)	6 (67%)	3 (33%)
<b>Number of decreased scores (%)</b>	3 (5%)	5 (11%)	0	0

\*While *Hands-On English* is designed for young learners grades K–1, Moore Schools also used the ELD program for newcomers in grades 2–6 who had limited English skills.

Overall, very few students' ACCESS test scores decreased from initial to spring testing. In spite of the exceptional year, the students were successful in learning, the teachers were successful in teaching, and *Hands-On English* helped them make gains.

## Moving Forward with Confidence

The Moore staff agree that *Hands-On English* was helpful in accelerating language acquisition for their young ELs in the 2020–21 school year. They appreciated the fact that it was easy for both teachers and students to engage with. The short prep time, flexible Teacher's Guide, and the opportunities for students to take part in participatory learning are all attractive features of the program. "I like to call *Hands-On English*, 'handy English,'" Li expressed. "The curriculum materials are very handy indeed."

"I am a more confident teacher when it comes to teaching my newcomers," said Sanders. "I would recommend *Hands-On English*."

# Take a Closer Look at *Hands-On English* An English Language Development Program

*Hands-On English* is an English language development program for grades K–1 (newcomers and beginners) that delivers age-appropriate content grounded in state and national English language development (ELD) and subject-matter standards, including English language arts, math, and science.

With an emphasis on engagement, the program immerses students in interesting, meaningful tasks that contextualize and promote language learning.

- Focus on language
- Build oral competency
- Engage students with peers
- Introduce academic skills
- Teach essential content



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## Components

The program consists of components that teachers can use flexibly according to their students' needs. All materials are available in print as well as digitally through the Teacher e-Port. *Hands On English* is easy to use in remote, hybrid, and in-person settings.

**PROGRAM GUIDE**

**TEACHER GUIDES**

**PRINTABLES**

**PHONICS**

**BIG BOOKS**

**ENGLISHMATS**

**SENTENCE FRAMES**

**STUDENT CARDS**

**VOCABULARY CARDS**

**SLIDES**

**TEACHER'S E-PORT**