

Understanding Language 2014-2018 Strategic Plan – Executive Summary

*Written in Collaboration with
Understanding Language*



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Executive Summary

Understanding Language's vision is to increase college, career, and community readiness for all students – especially English language learners (ELLs) – by transforming the quality of their educational experiences. When language and content instruction are successfully intertwined, they work synergistically and powerfully to improve student learning. Accordingly, the organization's mission is to support educators and policymakers in transforming systems to advance equity for ELLs by illuminating the symbiotic ways students learn language and academic content.

Housed at Stanford University and led by the nation's leading English language learning and content area experts, Understanding Language (UL) is uniquely positioned with the research expertise, knowledge, relationships and partnerships to help educators successfully teach language and content together. Founded in 2011, the organization has built a strong national reputation by co-creating a rich and unique pool of instructional resource materials, webinars, foundational papers, MOOCs and model curriculum units across the core disciplines, and successfully bringing attention to the language and literacy practices that underpin each of these disciplines. In particular, it has focused on tools and advice that help educators use the stronger focus on literacy in new Common Core English/language arts and mathematics and Next Generation Science Standards to improve teaching and learning for ELLs.

To build on these initial successes and extend the effort's impact, Understanding Language's leaders initiated a strategic planning process in early 2014 to guide the organization for the next three years. By reviewing and fine-tuning its strategies, Understanding Language aims to sustain its success past its early support from a few key donors, broaden its reach to more school districts and states, and create a more sustainable operating model to serve it well over the coming years. Understanding Language engaged Education First, a national policy research and strategy development firm with unique expertise in education issues, to provide research, advice and a critical eye during this planning process.

The planning team engaged in a rigorous process before setting the new strategic direction. The team took stock of initial accomplishments, interviewed a range of experts and analyzed the evolving needs of the field to identify where the organization could best contribute. These analyses informed a series of strategy meetings to define the organization's direction, including the mission, goals, strategies, outputs, outcomes and the ultimate impact that UL hopes to accomplish by 2018.

As part of its new strategic direction, Understanding Language will focus on accomplishing two primary goals that will help lead to the ultimate impact of increasing ELL achievement and access to postsecondary opportunities:

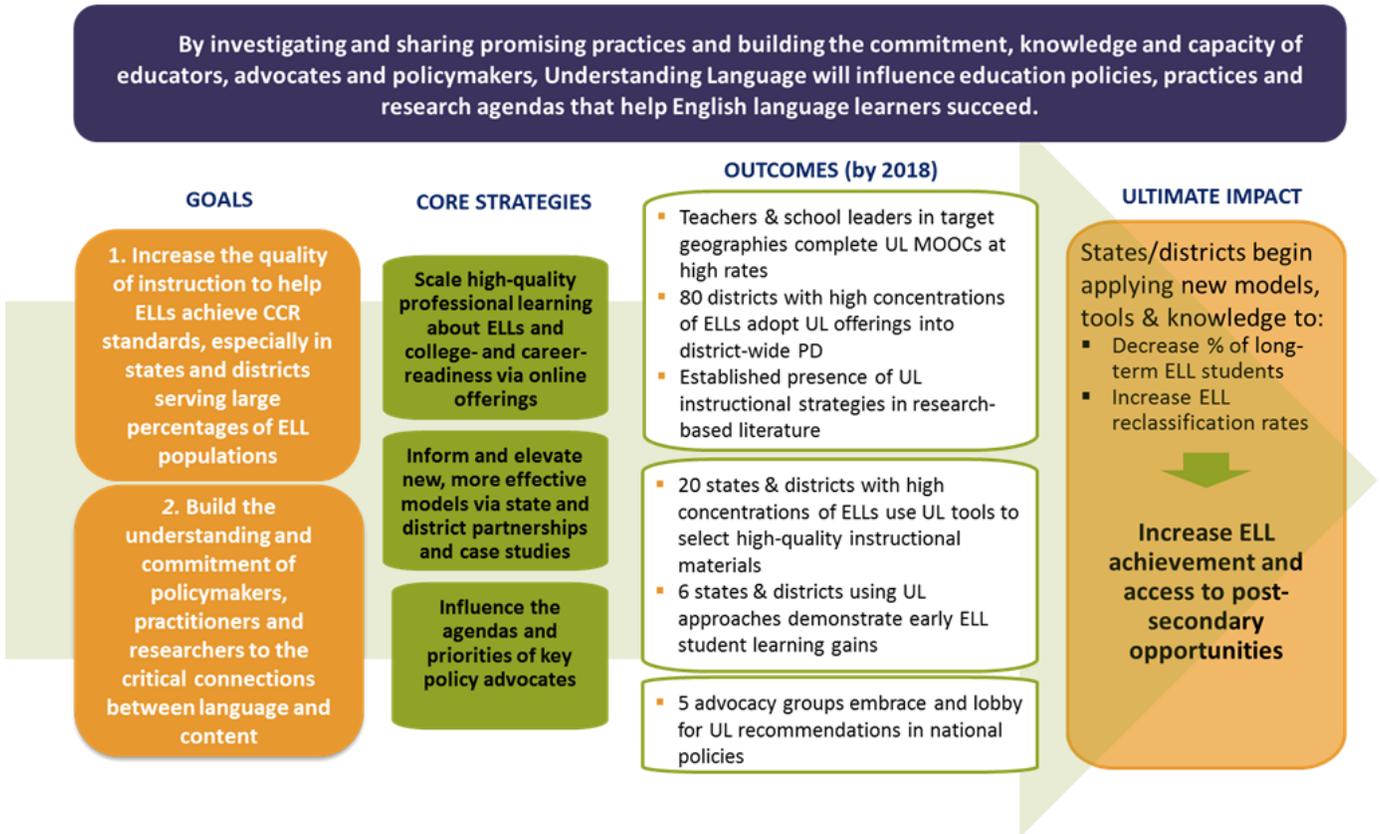
1. Increase the quality of instruction to help ELLs achieve college and career readiness standards, especially in states and districts serving large percentages of ELL populations; and
2. Build the understanding and commitment of policymakers, practitioners and researchers to the critical connections between language and content.

Over the next three years, three areas of strategic emphasis—chosen to leverage Understanding Language's unique expertise, strengths and relationships—will help it accomplish these goals:

1. Scale high-quality professional learning about ELLs and college and career readiness standards via online offerings;
2. Inform and elevate new, more effective models via state and district partnerships and case studies; and

- Influence the agendas and priorities of key policy advocates working to increase college and career readiness for ELLs.

The illustration below further depicts how Understanding Language intends to accomplish its goals and intended impact.



In addition, Understanding Language’s new strategic plan—the product of eight months of deliberation, study and decision-making—clarifies and directs the organization’s intentions in these ways:

- Creates a theory of action that links the organization’s resources to results.
- Sets clear metrics to guide and measure the work for the next three years.
- Establishes the foundation for a sustainable organization with the resources, leadership and staff required to be successful.