Engaging and Supporting English Learners in Illinois CTE

Career and Technical (CTE) educators have an important opportunity to support and engage students who are English Learners (ELs). Among the largest and fastest-growing special population groups, they often face barriers to full participation and success in CTE courses. These barriers range from the easily recognizable, such as language challenges, to less apparent obstacles, like cultural differences, logistical complications, and difficulties learning about CTE opportunities available to them.

CTE opportunities can be a meaningful way to engage English learners and help them stay on a path to success in high school and beyond. Not only does CTE contribute to improved high school completion and postsecondary attainment rates, but it also enables EL students to prepare for success in growth and high-demand occupations and industries. EL learners might not otherwise have these opportunities without the structure and support of CTE programs and educators.

SECTION 1

Creating the conditions for EL learner engagement and success

Provide culturally and linguistically relevant and inclusive information sessions.
Learning about and accessing CTE opportunities can be one of the biggest challenges ELs face. Information sessions that are inclusive, understandable, and targeted to ELs (in their home languages, if possible) can be an essential first step toward meaningful engagement.

Coordinate with school-based EL instructors and leverage their instructional resources and materials.
CTE educators often do not have training in EL instruction. Establishing co-planning and shared teaching practices or agreements with EL teachers can help provide continuity for ELs and provide CTE educators with the kinds of expert support they need to ensure their courses respond to the needs of ELs.

Engaging and supporting EL learners

Ensure course policies facilitate full participation and support EL learners.
Strategies as straightforward as allowing more time for ELs to complete assignments or exams or establishing clear rules for using specific technology (like AI) can make a big difference in both the learning experience and student performance.

Create course materials and learning opportunities designed explicitly for EL learners to scaffold CTE instruction.
Accounting for the needs of ELs from the outset by ensuring course materials and learning experiences support language acquisition and subject matter learning is a powerful way to engage ELs and advance their learning. This approach can range from providing vocabulary development and micro lessons to teach relevant language skills and writing support to peer learning and dedicated opportunities to practice English.

Leverage and encourage students to use technologies that reduce language barriers to CTE learning.
From Google Translate to AI chatbots, many tools and technologies available to EL learners can help them learn and understand CTE course subject matter while also building their English skills. Encouraging the use of these tools can empower ELs and enhance their learning experience pertaining to CTE and English acquisition.

Additional Resources for CTE Practitioners

- General Guidance for Schools and Practitioners from the U.S. Department of Education

- Systemic Strategies for Supporting ELs

- Key Strategies for Effective Scaffolding