



**San Mateo Union High School District**  
Secondary Constructing Meaning Initiative  
*Propelling our English Learners Forward*

The overarching goal of E.L. Achieve is to provide teachers and administrators with knowledge, skills, and tools to, in the words of a colleague, "equip English learners with the language they need to express the sophistication of their thinking for real life and academic purposes."

**Why Secondary Constructing Meaning (CM)?**

Our district has over 1,000 English Learners at our 7 sites, and 80% of those are English Learners who are not in ELD. In fact, the vast majority have been educated in this country for most of their lives. The CM approach is rooted in the pedagogy of academic optimism and providing all students opportunities to access rigorous and relevant curriculum. We know that we can do better to meet the language needs of our English Learners, as well as all of our students. Since CM is designed as a gradual release model, it is built to differentiate for all students. District academic achievement data reveals that our ELs are behind their peers in achievement on the ELA CAASP, earn lower grades in core content classes, and do not complete A-G requirements or take advanced placement classes at the same rate of their peers as well as have lower graduation rates. **We believe when we internalize a systematic approach to explicit language instruction our English Learners will have greater academic success.**

**What is Secondary Constructing Meaning (CM)?**

Constructing Meaning provides teachers with the process and tools for weaving explicit language instruction into content area teaching. Lesson planning is driven by the content and academic language demands of discipline-specific learning. Based on backward design and a gradual release of responsibility model, the Constructing Meaning process prompts teachers to:

- ☐ understand the role language plays in content learning
- ☐ decide what language knowledge students need to access content and express understanding
- ☐ provide appropriate, explicit oral and written language instruction and practice

The work of the Common Core and other content standards assume native English proficiency. Constructing Meaning offers an accelerated approach to instruction that emphasizes both academic English and critical literacy skills, thereby supporting English learners in acquiring the analytical language necessary to meet the demands of the Common Core. As students move through their academic careers, they must continually build their content knowledge and academic language foundation to be prepared to meet the increasing demands of each grade level.

Achieving a skillful command of English depends on a number of factors, but quality of instruction is most important. Educators need a clear and confident approach to support language development throughout the instructional day. The approach needs to be understood and actively supported at all levels of the system: classroom, site, and district.

**Our Vision, Goals & Expectations**

- ☐ English Learners will meet high academic expectations and be successful.
- ☐ There will be a clear and systematic approach to support both content and language development throughout the school day.
- ☐ This approach will be well understood and actively supported at all levels of our system: district, site and classroom levels.
- ☐ Over the course of the next two years, all district teachers will participate in at least one 3-5 day CM training and begin to implement CM strategies in their classes. We hope this leads to all trained teachers regularly infusing Constructing Meaning strategies in their lesson, emphasizing structured student talk and scholarly academic writing.
- ☐ District and site administrators will support teachers' use of CM by providing support and time to plan CM based lessons, in addition to conducting walk throughs of classrooms to gather evidence of its use.

**Professional Development Opportunities** Our district is committed to training and supporting all newly hired teachers and cohorts of current teachers in variety of ways which include: district professional development days, curriculum council work, after-school and summer institute opportunities, and in-classroom coaching.