

How to Use the ESOL for Parents and Caregivers Curriculum

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Overview

This curriculum, publicly available from [English for New Bostonians](#), gives ESOL teachers background materials, lessons and activities designed to help immigrant parents learn English and become more effectively involved in their children’s education. It is a contextualized, school related curriculum which teaches speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in the context of schools, education, and parenting, contexts which are absent in many of the standard ESOL texts teachers use. There are three topics: Navigating BPS, School Involvement, and Supporting Children’s Learning. Each topic consists of five to ten units and each unit contains multiple activities complete with handouts. Each unit is an active link. Once opened, the cover page to the unit lists the activities the unit contains. Teachers can browse through the activities on-line or they can print out the unit. Each activity is presented in the same format. The activity includes a rationale which gives background information to the teacher, objectives, materials included or referenced for downloading, clearly delineated steps for carrying out the lesson, and possible follow-up activities. The activities do not include grammar lessons, although many can be used to practice grammar structures previously taught.

Teachers can use this curriculum in a variety of ways. It could be the basic text for a class, with a sequenced grammar text book used as a supplement. Or it could be used to supplement whatever standard text a teacher is using. It is assumed that teachers will pick and choose among topics and units. They can be used in any order. Within the units however, the activities are sequenced. While teachers may choose not to use all the activities in, for example, the Report Card unit, they will want to look at all the activities to make sure they do teach key content and vocabulary.

The curriculum is written mainly for intermediate level students. However, there are activities within each unit that can be used or adapted for beginning level students. In the Topic, Unit and Activity list, those activities more appropriate for beginning level students have been designated with a (b). Within each unit, these activities are clearly labeled. Underneath the activity name it says, “Can be used/adapted for use with beginning level students.”

Time Sensitive Topics

While teachers can use the topics and units in any order they so choose, it makes sense to be aware of the school calendar and rhythm of the school year in deciding which units to teach when. For example, if a teacher wants to do the Parent-Teacher Conferences unit, or the Report Card unit, it makes sense to use those units before the first round of parent-teacher conferences, or just before report cards get distributed.

Here is a listing of the units which are time sensitive and when they should be taught for maximum effect. More specific information is best obtained assigning parents the real life task of gathering the information from their children's schools.

Topic/Unit	Month	Rationale
School Involvement/Unit 1: Parent Involvement: Expectations and Opportunities	September-October	This sets the stage for the emphasis on parent engagement that permeates many of the other units.
Supporting Children's Learning/Unit 3: Reading with your Children	September-October	Reading at home is the most important thing parents can do to support their children's success in school
Supporting Children's Learning/Unit 5: Homework	September-January	Homework is an important activity which parents need to carefully monitor and understand ways to resolve problems should they arise.
School Involvement/Unit 2: Parent- Teacher Conferences	November	Most school systems hold Parent-Teacher conferences to coincide with the first report card
Navigating BPS/Unit 2: School Choice	December	In Boston, the first round to choose schools begins in January. Registering during January gives parents the best chance of getting into a school of their choice.
Navigating BPS/Unit 4: MCAS	March	MCAS testing occurs state-wide during April and May.
Supporting Children's Learning/Unit 7: Enrichment Programs	May	Encourages parents to think and plan ahead re summer programs for their children

Resources to Gather Ahead of Time

- **Guide to the Boston Public Schools For Families and Students.** This guide is referred to frequently in the curriculum. Parents receive copies of the guide at the beginning of the school year, often in their first language, but because it is so text heavy, it typically sits unread. It is available on line on the BPS website, but it is recommended that teachers get multiple copies of the guide in English to use selectively as a text with their classes and to use as a reference for themselves. It contains among other things the school calendar (used in many activities), the report card schedule, and useful descriptions of many BPS policies and programs. Multiple copies of the guides are available for free at the BPS Welcome Centers. Those addresses can be found on the BPS website. If teaching the curriculum in a different school district, try to obtain copies of any guides for families produced by that district.
- **From Home to School,** New Readers Press, Student Book 1 and 2. This is a unique ESOL text book which focuses, as this curriculum does, on the connection between parents and their children's schools. Both Books 1 and 2 are for beginning level students and thus they are useful for teachers to have in order to use a related lesson if the one in this curriculum is too difficult.
- **Assorted children's books, in multiple copies.** Children's books make wonderful texts for ESOL students. The pictures, the humor, the repetition and the simpler vocabulary make them very accessible. When teachers read children's books with their students, they can model how parents can engage their children in meaningful conversations about books and help their children learn to love to read. Scholastic is a good place to order inexpensive children's book for classes, ideally in sufficient quantity that students have their own copies which they can then take home and read with their children. If the budget doesn't allow this, buy single books and make copies, project the book, or type out a transcript of the texts for students to have and read along with. No particular books are recommended here, because there are so many wonderful ones that can be used. But think classics and ordering some mixture of genres. Go to Topic 3, Unit 4, Activity #3 for bibliographies of good children's books. And Topic 3, Unit 3, Activity #7 details a variety of approaches for using children's books in the classroom.

Use in Parent ESOL Classes Outside of Boston

While some of the ESOL for Parents and Caregivers Curriculum activities are specific to BPS, much of the curriculum can be used with parents of children in other school systems. For example, **all** ten units in Topic 3, *Supporting Children's Learning*, can be used with parent ESOL classes anywhere because the focus is on what parents can do at home to support their children's learning. Many of the units in Topic 2, *School Involvement*, are also general enough to be used outside of BPS.

The first Topic is *Navigating BPS*, and as the name implies, most of the units in this topic are specific to the Boston Public Schools. However, teachers can adapt the materials by using the same approach suggested, but with different school district specific materials. For example, the first unit of *Navigating BPS* is called Overview to Schools. The BPS calendar is used in that unit in a number of related activities. Teachers can substitute a calendar from their school districts and do the activities with only slight modifications. The same is true for the Report Card unit. While all the activities refer to the specific report card BPS uses, teachers can adapt the approach, by using their districts report cards as a text to study.

Over half of the activities in the curriculum can be used in any school district, and only a handful cannot be easily adapted. Thus of the 97 activities in the curriculum, 63 can be used as is, 27 can be adapted with some amount of lesson planning, and only 5 would be unusable.

Use in General Adult ESOL Classes

Various parts of the curriculum can be used in general adult ESOL classes as well as in parent only ESOL classes. Many students in general ESOL classes are in fact parents. Others are grandparents or aunts and uncles, or older sisters and brothers, and often live within extended family groupings. Others will be parents in the future. Schools and schooling are such important institutions in American society that all immigrant adults will be interested in learning something about how schools work and what helps children learn. A better education for their families is a primary reason immigrants come to the USA in the first place. The unit on Going to College (Topic 3, Unit 10), for example, is equally applicable to the adult learner as to the teen in that learner's family.

It is recommended that teachers of general adult ESOL classes survey their classes to determine how many students are parents or have close relatives with children, or who do childcare as a job. With that information, teachers can then tailor which units they teach, and which activities within those units they use, staying away from those deemed too specifically targeted to being a parent to be relevant to a particular class. As units are being taught, teachers can encourage the non-parents in the class to think of particular children in their lives and how some of the information they are learning might relate to those children or could be imparted to their parents. Most of the units open with an overview to the topic and usually include a vocabulary lesson of the key vocabulary. The overview and the vocabulary lessons would be valuable for all students, parents or not. Many activities begin by asking students to reflect on their own childhoods, or schools in their country, or their personal school experiences. They then compare this to what they are learning about American schools. Again, if teachers leave out steps which involve comparisons with specific children and specific American school experiences, these activities will resonate with all adult students. Another option is to pull parents from several general classes to have a weekly

or biweekly class focusing on curriculum units that are specifically tied to being parents and involve activities parents are to do with their children.

Children's books make wonderful, lively texts to read in any adult ESOL class, where reading longer fiction is too difficult. The unit Reading with Children contains many approaches to using children's books in classes which will help all adults become better and more thoughtful readers. At the same time, students will become aware of the importance of reading with children at home and can be encouraged to read with children in their lives, or to give them books as birthday or holiday gifts.

Contact ENB

Feedback of any kind is welcomed. Are you using the curriculum? In what kind of a setting? What units have worked in your classes? Do you have anecdotes to share? Do you have specific suggestions about revisions that should be made? ENB may also be able to provide training on using the curriculum. All feedback and training requests should go to Lee Haller, ENB Program Manager, at lhaller@englishfornewbostonians.org.