

The Benefits of SLDS

By: Alma Fraire

It is the beginning of a new school year, and you are excited to get your rosters thinking, “Who will be in my classroom this year?” To your surprise, another teacher walks into your room notifying you she will be working with your students because they are ELLs, but what does that mean? The truth is that many teachers do not have a clear understanding of this term means or how to work with ELL students. ELL refers to English Language Learners; therefore, we assume they do not know how to speak English. Although this may be true for many, it is not true for everyone. An ELL student may be new to the country, or he may come from a home where English is not the primary language. It is imperative to look at all the data provided to us in order to have a clearer picture of the academic abilities of the students. “But how!” Teachers think as they look at the pile of work laying around on their desk. There is no time to go digging everywhere for such information. Do not worry; there is no need to digging everywhere because all that information is located in one platform. The Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) is a tool that gives teacher all the information they need to know about a student or a class at a glance. SLDS has helped to simplify the process of data analysis for each one of my students because it has all the students’ records since they enrolled in school.

My name is Alma Fraire. I am an ESOL teacher at Dalton Middle School in Dalton, GA where I have been working with ELL students for 3 years. Each year has been completely different. The first year, I wished there were ways where I could have known my students’ academic career to know where to begin since I started working with them mid-way through the school year. The second year, I spent a lot of time gathering resources and assessing the students to have a clearer picture of the things they needed in order to drive my instruction, yet I did not have everything I needed. This year, I started looking at their ACCESS scores closely in order to close their learning gaps, but to my surprise, there were many students who had been in ESOL since Kindergarten. I could not believe I had missed that in the past! This year, one of my colleagues and I have spent numerous hours digging through the SLDS platform in order to understand the academic progress and struggles of each one of those students. We have been able to track the gaps since Kindergarten and have discovered that many times, it is not a language deficiency, but something more that has been missed along the way. We have been able to refer students for testing in hopes of providing the help and services they need.

Another beneficial component this site has provided for me is insight into their GA Milestones scores. I have been able to analyze the gaps the students have had in the past. By knowing this information, I have been able to tailor my plans to cover the content they have struggled with in the past. For example, one of the major weaknesses of almost all the ELL students is the speaking component; therefore, I am creating activities where the students have to practice their speaking abilities in order to gain confidence and be able to succeed in the test. I also noticed students are scoring very low in vocabulary; therefore, I am teaching them strategies they can implement during class work and tests in order to have a better understanding of those words.

Overall, I am very pleased with all the information I have access to because it is helping to drive my instruction and support the students in the areas they need help with. I believe having all the data and discussing it with the students is helping me to become a better teacher, and since the students are aware of their needs, it is helping them become better students.