# Reading Across the Content Areas: An Overview

**:REL PACIFIC**
Regional Educational Laboratory

## Why Focus on Reading Across the Content Areas?

→ Educators need to know how to support students and promote literacy skills across content areas in later grades.[1]

→ While most improvement efforts focus on building literacy skills from K−3, after grade 4, students' learning begins to rely more heavily on comprehension and content area specific knowledge.[2]

→ A sustained drop in reading scores suggests a need for more consistent reading instruction as students age.[3]

→ While some common comprehension strategies can be used for all content areas, there are specific literacy skills required to understand math content versus biology content, for example.[4]

→ To effectively engage with different subjects, students need support in developing subject-specific strategies.[5,6]

## In the Pacific Region:

Reading proficiency from late elementary through high school is a need and priority for stakeholders across the Pacific region:

**17%** In American Samoa, according to the 2014/15 SAT−10 test scores, about 17 percent of high school students scored in the basic or proficient ranges in reading.[7]

**50%** In the CNMI, 50 percent of grade 8 students scored in the "ready" or "exceeding" ranges for reading proficiency on the 2019 ACT Aspire reading assessment.[8]

**19%** In the Republic of the Marshall Islands, 19 percent of grade 6 students scored proficient or higher in English reading and 39 percent scored proficient or higher in Marshallese reading on the country's 2016/17 MISAT exam.[9]

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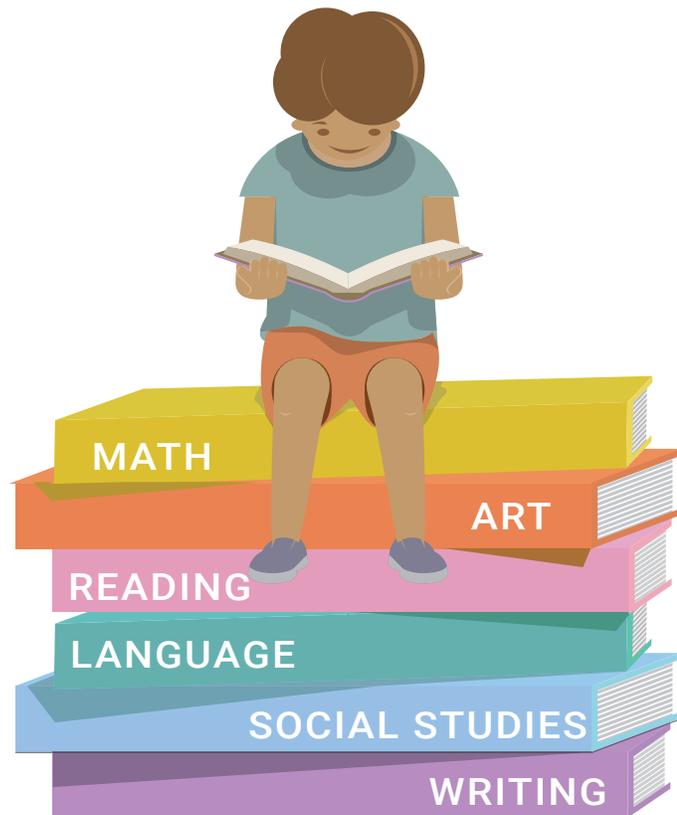
## General Teaching Strategies for Supporting Students in Reading Across the Content Areas

Teach academic language in all content areas in both English and in the students' first language to provide consistency throughout the school day.[10]

Use a variety of instructional resources to increase student interest and motivation.[11]

Allow for student choice to increase motivation and to help match students to their preferred learning styles and ability levels.[12]

Provide strategies for students to use when faced with unfamiliar text such as using narrative to create personal connections to the reading.[13]

Provide strategies to approach texts from different content areas with varying lenses; for example, teaching students to "read like historians" when reading in history class.[14]

Use interdisciplinary teaming for consistent strategy implementation throughout the school day.[15]

Use summaries to reinforce connections and provide a more concise understanding of large texts.[16]

# Reading Across the Content Areas for English Learner Students*

*Also commonly referred to as English language learners.

SOCIAL STUDIES

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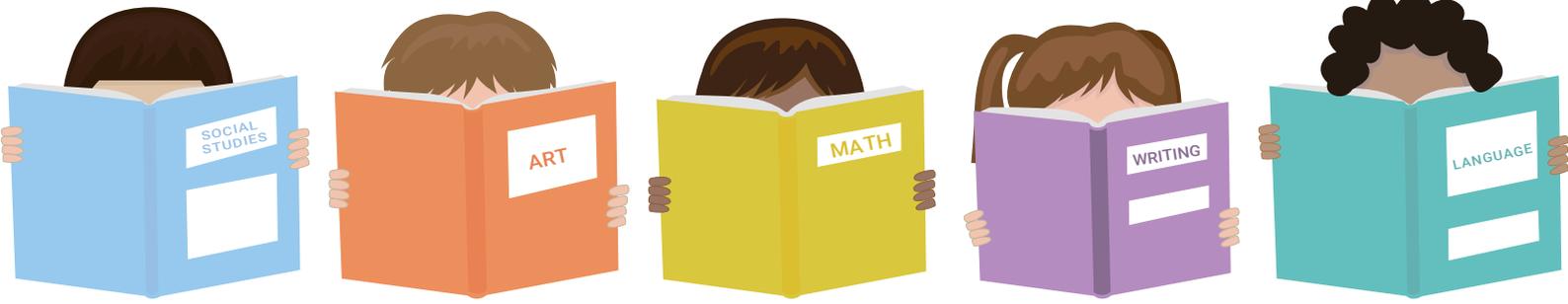
LANGUAGE

The Pacific region comprises a diverse range of English learners, as the school systems may often be organized to transition students from indigenous languages to English very early into their schooling.

When instruction occurs in students' second or third language (typically English), the type of language supports students receive inside and outside school in both their first language and English will greatly influence their success in content area classes. Teachers can leverage their students' first language skills and strengths to support building literacy skills in the content areas.[17, 18]
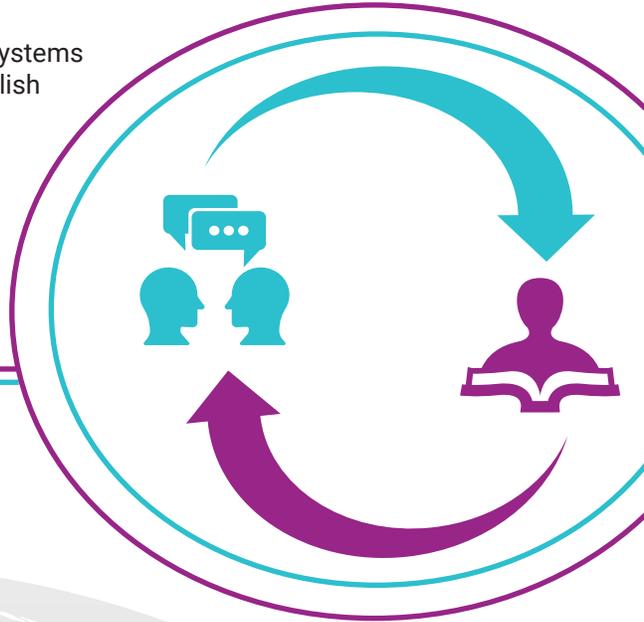
## Teaching Strategies for Supporting English Learners in Reading Across the Content Areas

Include English language development into instruction to support students as they navigate the intersection of language and learning tasks.[19]

Apply multidimensional instruction that covers all dimensions of language learning, including word level, sentence level, and discourse level.[20]

Use materials that are relevant and motivating, and implement the use of graphic organizers to facilitate comprehension.[21, 22]

Use "backfilling," in which teachers fill in gaps in students' basic reading skills in their second language.[23]

Use "frontloading," in which teachers prepare students for upcoming content by pre-teaching key concepts to increase confidence in understanding and engagement in class discussions.[24]

Apply cooperative learning to encourage students of different linguistic backgrounds to communicate, share insights, and jointly construct knowledge.[25]

# Reading Across the Content Areas for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities (SWDs) may require additional instructional support to build their decoding and comprehension skills.[26] In the Pacific region, early intervention and inclusive education have been identified as key factors for supporting SWDs.[27] Given the size of the Pacific region and the diversity within the jurisdictions, there is a need to apply local context when providing reading and language arts support for SWDs. Therefore, it is important that schools in the region not only have an awareness of the specific needs for their diverse student populations, but also are able to support teachers in developing effective classroom strategies to address content-area reading.
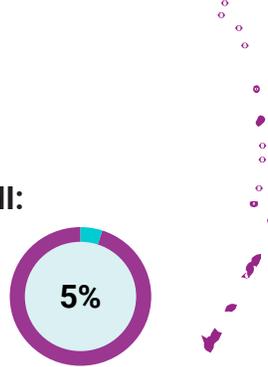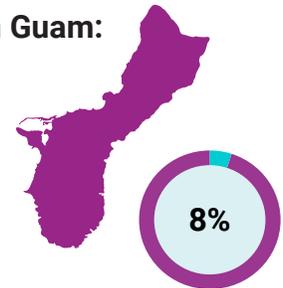
## In the Pacific Region

**In Hawai'i:**

**21%**
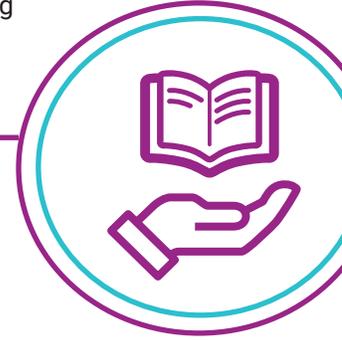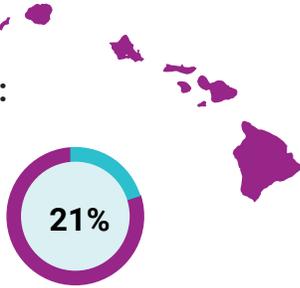
of grade 8 SWDs scored at or above basic level in reading on the 2011 NAEP versus 74 percent of students without disabilities.[28]

**In the CNMI:**

**5%**

of children with IEPs received a proficient score on the 2015 CNMI jurisdiction-wide reading assessment.[29]

**In Guam:**

**8%**

of grade 9 students with IEPs received a "ready" or "close" score on their 2017/18 ACT Aspire reading results.[30]

## Teaching Strategies for Supporting Students with Disabilities in Reading Across the Content Areas

Implement inclusive peer-mediated/ small-group formats.[31]

Design early interventions that focus on what students need to learn in that grade.[33]

Ensure that reading strategies are embedded into instruction.[35]

Read aloud directions and written materials.[32]

Provide extended time to complete assignments.[34]

Allow for frequent breaks.[36]

# Resources

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