

Getting a Strong Start with Hands-On ENGLISH



A Language Development Program for Newcomers and Beginner English Learners

West End Elementary and West Central Elementary are two schools that serve K–6 English learners (ELs) inside the Rome City Public School District (GA). West End serves 114 ELs, while West Central serves 215 ELs, and both predominantly serve ELs of Hispanic descent. The school district has been using Ballard & Tighe's *Hands-On English* Language Development Program for grades K–1 (newcomers and beginners) since 2018, and have found it to be successful for their push-in model of instruction. Teachers at both elementary schools shared their experiences using both the print and online versions of *Hands-On English*.

From Survival to Excitement

West End ESOL teacher Hannah Regennitter graduated college two years ago and says she was lucky enough to land a job in a great district, right out of the gate. Getting comfortable with her new career and the road bumps created by COVID, Regennitter's first years of teaching have been nothing short of an unexpected journey, yet she wasn't alone. *Hands-On English* provided Regennitter, and all the teachers in Rome City Schools, with invaluable support. "A lot of COVID-era teaching felt like survival," Regennitter said. "Using the topics and activities in *Hands-On English* allowed a starting point to guide instruction, and led us to find other online resources to utilize in lessons. It was definitely new for all of us."

Moving through the uncertain time of quarantines, school closures, and remote instruction proved challenging for educators and students across the country. Online learning for newcomers and beginner ELs was even more so. K–1 ELs may not have had opportunities to practice language development skills in their homes and might have lacked access to the needed technology. These hurdles presented themselves as an opportunity for enthusiastic teachers like Regennitter, who found creative ways to push ahead. According to her, *Hands-On English* assisted in the journey. "We got through it," she said. "Hopefully, next year will be better."

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~ Hannah Regennitter,
ESOL teacher

Back in the classroom, teachers are looking forward to regaining normalcy next school year and districts like Rome City Schools will continue utilizing *Hands-On English* to help them get back on track. "I like how it's laid out. I like how it tells me what the vocabulary is, what the target functions we'll be working on are, so I can keep that in mind and scaffold it for the students based on level," Regennitter said.

West Central Elementary ESOL teacher Allison Skeen has been an ESOL teacher for five of the 22 years she's been a teacher in the district and has used *Hands-On English* since it was hot off the press in 2018. While she is a veteran with regards to teaching experience compared to Regennitter, Skeen's sentiment for the program and the challenges of online instruction echoed Regennitter's. They both had difficulty teaching remotely to younger ELs, saying that first grade was a little easier than kindergarten.

"Before COVID, I had my cart that I wheeled all over the school with the big *Hands-On English* picture books. Students get so excited when I showed up with the cart and they saw new words or pictures," Skeen said, adding that she's looking forward to being back in the classroom with the big books full-time next year.



Capturing Interest and Ease of Use

So what is it that makes *Hands-On English* so unique? Skeen wasn't impressed with other EL language development tools she's used or seen in years prior, noting that they seemed to be "repetitive and boring."

Unlike *Hands-On English*, other language development programs miss the mark when it comes to engaging student interest through culturally relevant topics, fun presentations, and a multitude of components that work together within a unit. "*Hands-On English* engages students with a much higher level of interest," Skeen said. "The units are well-organized and capture the kids' attention." Both Skeen and Regennitter agree that student engagement is a key component for beginner and newcomer ELs' academic success.

"I love having something to go off of," Regennitter exclaimed. "I particularly like the stories it comes with and the vocabulary that is aligned to the lesson." She continued to talk about how *Hands-On English* helps teachers stay organized while also creating connecting points for student growth. "When I have students read the unit story with me, they already know most of the words because we've practiced them," she said. "They feel confident and successful because they are able to read 80–90% of the book."

Skeen added that she enjoys combining the *Hands-On English* curriculum and activities with *Frames for Fluency*, another Ballard & Tighe language development program developed for grades K–12. "I like being able to use both of them with my kinders at the same time. I use the sentence frames, along with the pictures and big books from *Hands-On English* – I don't have to go searching for all the supplies," she said. "I absolutely love the ease of use."

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~ Hannah Regennitter,
ESOL teacher

Flexibility and Results

Many elementary ESOL teachers in Rome City Schools serve more than one grade level, or switch grades every few years, making versatility in curriculum planning a must-have. The flexibility of *Hands-On English*, when paired with *Frames for Fluency*, allows teachers to easily scaffold or adjust as needed. Add in the assessments following each section, and teachers can really get a sense of how to guide learning forward.



"Another thing I really like about *Hands-On English* is that I can pick and choose relevant topics or activities for my kinders, but then expand upon it for my first graders," Skeen said. "I can do this using the same unit and can alter and adjust accordingly based on the grades I'm working with."

And the students, of course, have their favorite elements too. Skeen's students really enjoyed the "Day and Night" and "Weather" lessons this year, while Regennitter mentioned her first-graders favor the vocabulary card portion of all the units. "We use the vocabulary cards every day, and then play a matching game with them at the end of the week," she said. "The vocabulary cards really help with their ability to read."



Recently, Regennitter read the *Hands-On English* story "Carlos' Community" with her first graders, and she could see how the prior vocabulary lessons of the week tied it all together. "My students were able to read it without me," she exclaimed. "I was able to sit back and let them lead. It's that feeling 'Oh my gosh, you're reading!' And, as a teacher, it makes you feel successful. The vocab prep ahead of time made such a big difference."

Both Skeen and Regennitter use the end of unit assessments as needed for their K-1 ELs. Skeen mentioned that she'll rely on the assessments more next year to provide data for their summer learning camp. "Data shows that students' definitely picked up and learned the vocabulary," she said.

Beyond the scores, the real proof is in the development of everyday language skills — one of the reasons Regennitter said she loves her job as an ESOL teacher. "The kids really have my heart," she said. "It feels good for the students to be able to read and do well. They feel proud of themselves, which I love." The language improvements she witnesses in her students are a boost of confidence for them, paving the path to future social and academic success.

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~ Allison Skeen,
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What's Next?

ESOL teachers in Rome City Schools agree that *Hands-On English* guides their K-1 ELs to successful language development. With its resources, choices, easy layout, and teacher-friendly planning tools, educators can save time while working more efficiently towards addressing the unique needs of their ELs. The core and flex lessons allow for flexibility in classroom planning so that teachers with limited time can use the activity or unit that's most appropriate. "I like that *Hands-On English* is built in a way that I can pick and choose based on the time I have, and the level," Skeen said.

As districts work to move learning forward next school year and beyond, arming teachers with high-quality resources and tools will make all the difference. So much so, that even when students fall behind, there's a path to catch up. "I had a student who missed kindergarten," Regennitter explains. "So he had a harder time with the assessments initially. But after using *Hands-On English* throughout the year, he was showing improvement and hitting that 80% success rate goal. He's there now, and doing really well."

Take a Closer Look at *Hands-On English* An English Language Development Program

Hands-On English is an English language development program for grades K-1 (newcomers and beginners) that delivers age-appropriate content grounded in state and national English language development (ELD) and subject-matter standards, including English language arts, math, and science.

With an emphasis on engagement, the program immerses students in interesting, meaningful tasks that contextualize and promote language learning.

- Focus on language
- Build oral competency
- Engage students with peers
- Introduce academic skills
- Teach essential content

ELD Standards

Content Standards

CA
ELPA 21
TX ELPS
WIDA

CCSS ELA
CCSS Math
NGSS
National Social Studies

**Contact Us
for a Demo &
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(800) 321-4332
www.Hands-OnEnglish.com

Components

The program consists of components that teachers can use flexibly according to their students' needs. All materials are available in print as well as digitally through the Teacher e-Port. *Hands On English* is easy to use in remote, hybrid, and in-person settings.

