

From Confusion to Conversation: Improving Home Language Survey Practices

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Purpose of This Activity

The Home Language Survey is often the first message families receive about how we value their language.

Group Task

In your group:

- Read the scenario
- Identify the family's underlying concern
- Rewrite the response so it is:
 - Asset-based
 - Clear and accurate
 - Culturally responsive
- Be ready to share your revised response

Scenario 1: "I don't want my child labeled."

Scenario:

A parent is completing the Home Language Survey during enrollment. When staff explain that their child may qualify for language support services, the parent becomes hesitant and says:

"I don't want my child labeled. I don't want them treated differently."

What might be underneath this?

Fear of stigma

Concern about tracking or segregation

Desire to protect their child

Typical response (what often happens):

"It's just a program and it's required."

Your revised response:

Scenario 2: “I’m worried about immigration.”

Scenario:

While completing the Home Language Survey, a parent lowers their voice and asks:

“Is this information going to be shared with immigration? I don’t feel comfortable answering these questions.”

What might be underneath this?

Fear of deportation or legal consequences

Lack of trust in systems

Need for reassurance and safety

Typical response (what often happens):

“No, it’s just for school records.”

Your revised response:

Scenario 3: “My child already speaks English.”

Scenario:

A parent confidently states during enrollment:

“My child already speaks English at home and with friends. I don’t think they need any extra services.”

What might be underneath this?

Misunderstanding of academic vs. social language

Desire for independence or normalization

Concern about unnecessary services

Typical response (what often happens):

“We still have to test them.”

Your revised response:

Key Moves to Remember

- Start with affirmation and empathy
- Listen before explaining
- Address concerns with clear, accurate information
- Reframe services as support for success
- Consistently honor and value home language

Reflection

What is one shift you will make in how your district talks about home language?

Closing Thought

The way we talk about language matters.
The Home Language Survey isn't just a form—it's a moment of trust-building.
And that moment can either open a door... or close one.