

Effective Literacy Design for Multilingual Learners: From Comprehensible Input to Academic Output Through Successful Family Engagement

WABE Conference 2026

Yakima Convention Center

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OSPI



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Tribal Land Acknowledgement



We would like to acknowledge the indigenous people who have stewarded this land since time immemorial and who still inhabit these areas today.

We are meeting today on the ancestral lands of the [Yakama Nation](#) and honor with gratitude the land itself and these tribes.

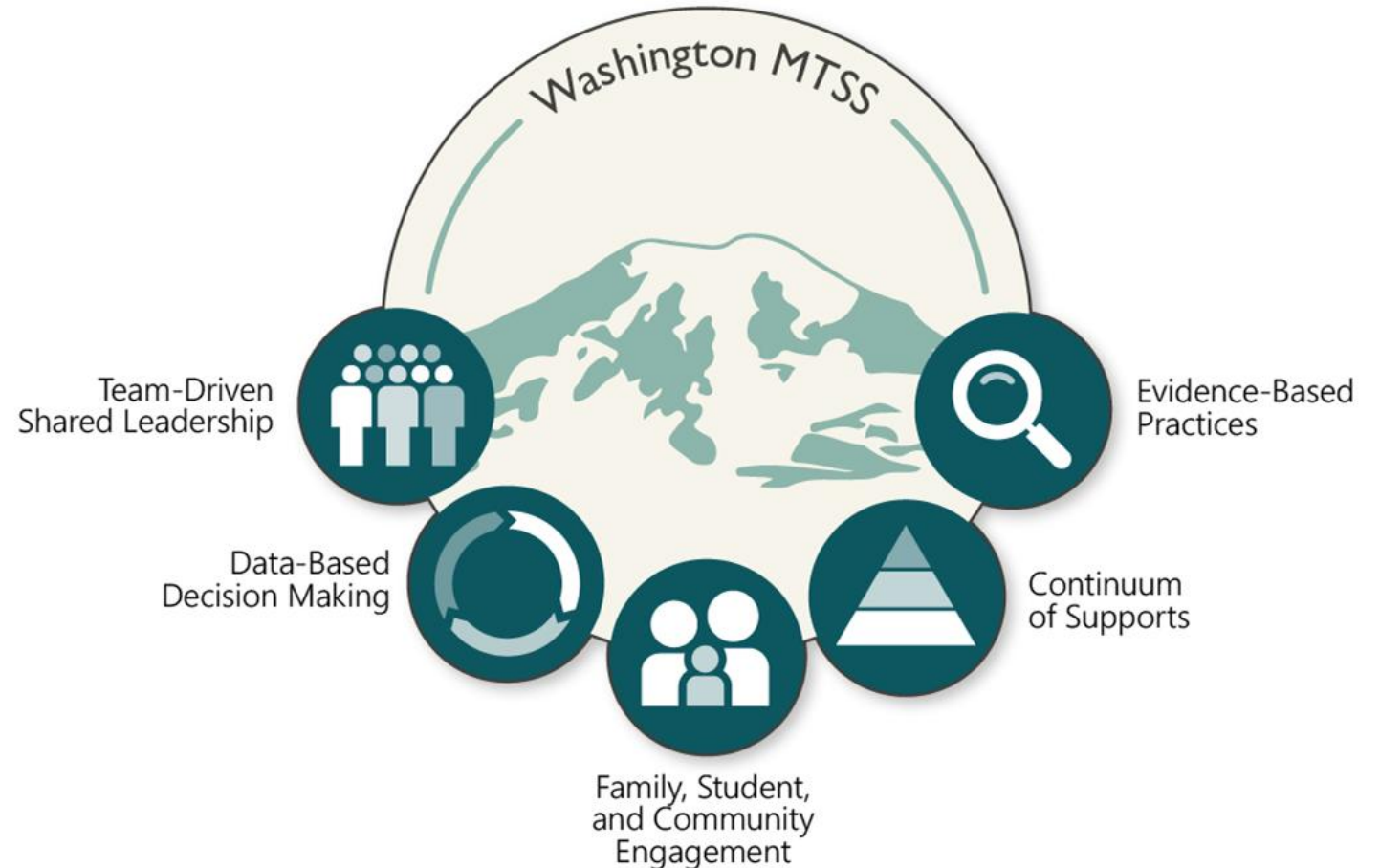


Multi-Tiered System of Supports

The Washington MTSS Framework is an evidence-based organizational approach for districts and schools to create **equitable, consistent, and flexible systems** and supports that empower educators, students, families, and communities to ensure benefit for every student.

Learn More:

<https://www.k12.wa.us/mtss>



Continuum of Supports for Multilingual Learners

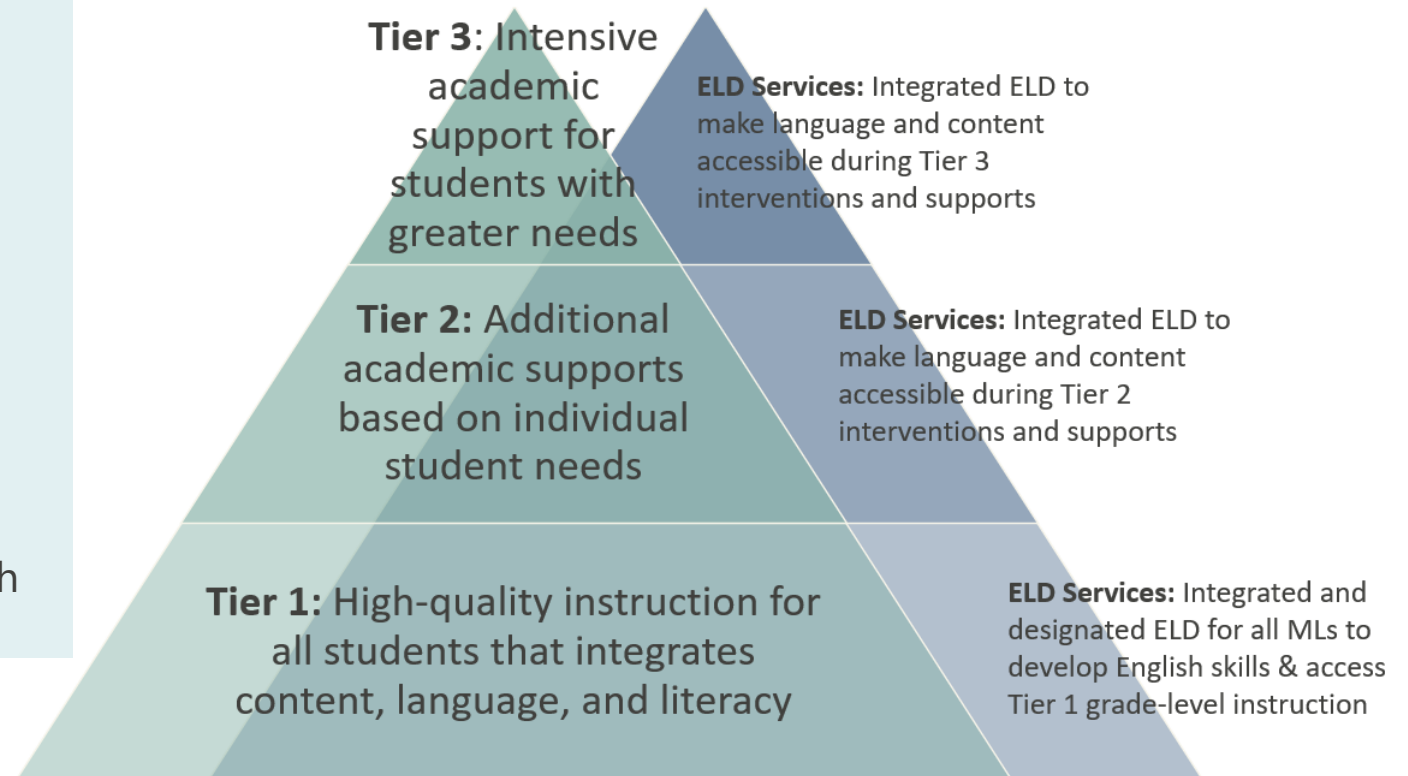
Although MTSS is well supported for monolingual English speakers, limited research on its implementation with English Learners highlights the importance of intentionally addressing language development, culture, and assessment validity.

Multilingual learners instructional services should include the following in all Tiers depending on students':

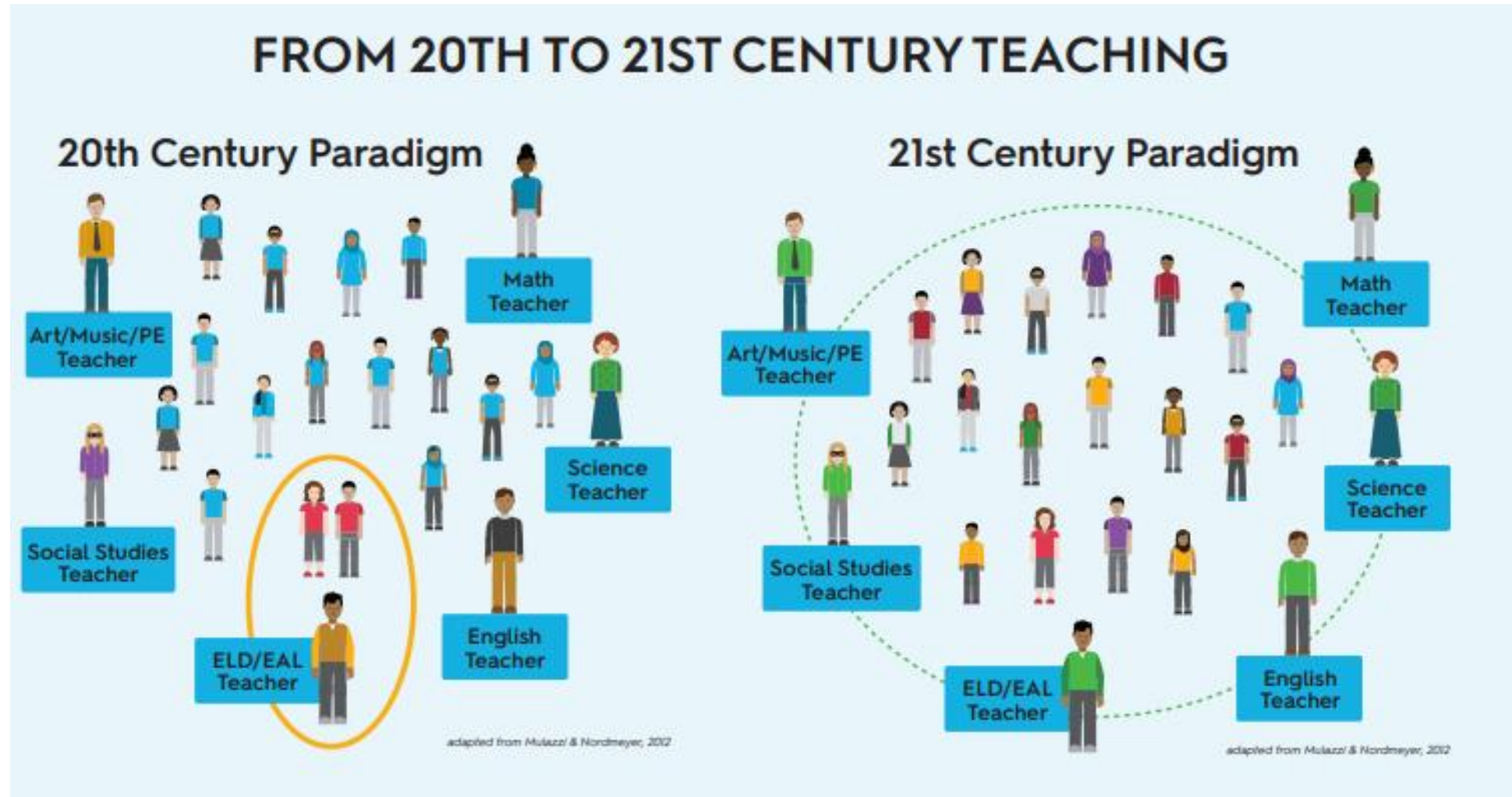
- Current academic skills
- Previous schooling in their first language
- Possible weaknesses associated with dyslexia
- Other disabilities or special needs

Integrated ELD services need to be provided at ALL TIERS to support:

- English language development
- Access to academic content instruction in each tier



Shift to 21st Century Teaching



High-quality, evidence-based language and literacy instruction in all tiers that addresses the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)

Linguistically aligned and culturally relevant assessment practices and regular review of student data that captures the full range of a student's linguistic abilities in both English and their native language

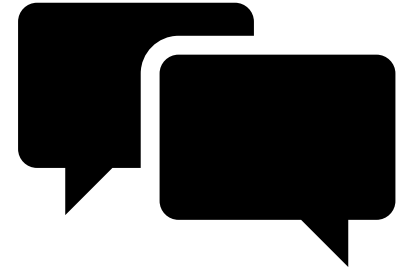
Core Components of MTSS for
MLs

Culturally and linguistically responsive instruction that leverages students' linguistic assets, including home-language supports, alongside professional development and coaching aligned to native-language development and second-language acquisition.

Family and parent engagement is embedded as a core MTSS practice, positioning families as essential partners whose cultural and linguistic assets guide equitable, data-informed decision-making across all tiers.



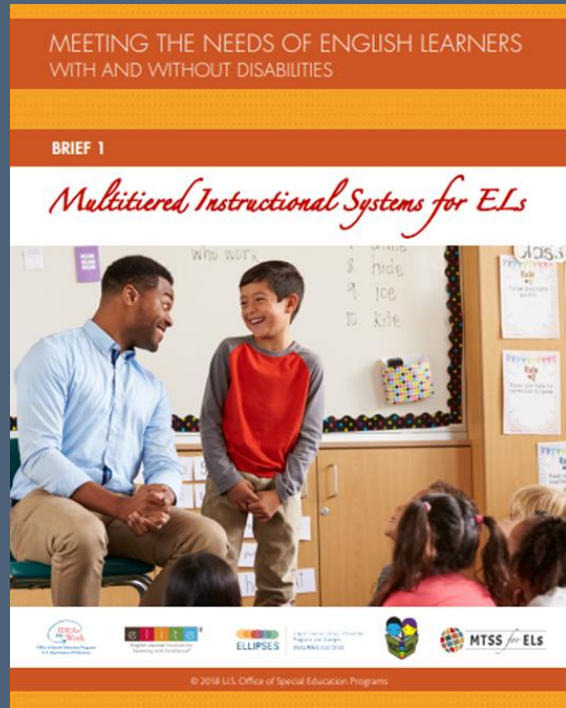
Turn & Talk



- How is your school addressing the needs of Multilingual Learners through the essential components of MTSS?
 - Team Driven Leadership
 - Data-Based Decision-Making
 - Family, Student, and Community Engagement
 - Continuum of Supports
 - Evidence-Based Practices
- In what ways does your school establish strong Tier 1 literacy instruction to bolster language development and academic achievement?



Meeting the Needs of English Learners With and Without Disabilities



Brief 1 – Multitiered Instruction Systems for ELs



Brief 2 – Evidence Based Tier 2 Practices for ELs



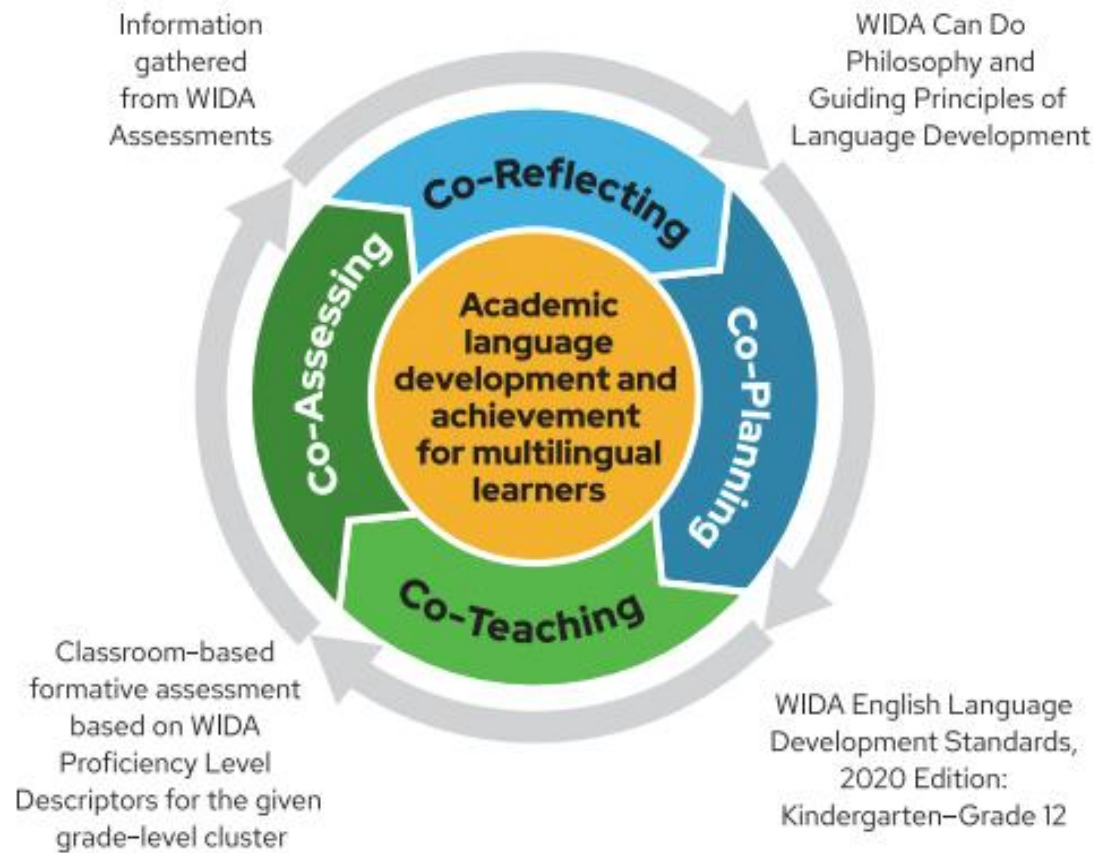
Literacy and Language Assessments

Communicating with Families of MLs

When should you communicate about screening with families of multilingual learners?

- **Multilingual Learner, Risk Unknown** – Providing information about student results may be helpful but there is no need to communicate “weaknesses associated with dyslexia” if language is clearly affecting results
- **At Risk** – If the student has a WIDA level of 4+ or the team has determined, based on time in US schools, oral language level, and rate of progress, that the student may be at risk, the family should be notified of possible risk (see sample letter in the Implementation Guide)





[Collaboration: Working Together to Serve Multilingual Learners](#)
[| WIDA](#)

Why Home-Language Academic Assessment Matters

It can capture students' true academic abilities

It honors and leverages students' linguistic assets

It supports culturally and linguistically responsive instruction

Assessments in *multiple languages*

Comprehending content

Students access the content using resources found in the home language



Conferencing

Provide feedback to students using the home language



Collaborating

Encourage students to work with others in the home language



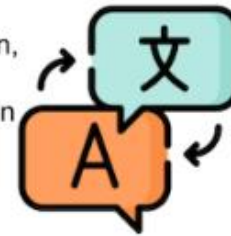
Note-taking

Have students gather information and take notes in the home language



Drafting

Organize, plan, brainstorm, & outline ideas in the home language



Self-assessing

Students reflect and self-evaluate the final product in the home language



Reflect

- What assessments are appropriate for MLs? Do your school's current assessments capture students' oral language skills in English and their native language?
- How might you be able to incorporate your students home languages into your classroom and your assessment practices?





Foundation of High-Quality Core Literacy Instruction for Multilingual Learners

What does good literacy instruction look like and sound like for multilingual learners?



Photo from Highline Public Schools




Photo by Allison Shelley for EDUimages





Benchmarks of Quality – ELA

The Benchmarks of Quality name the critical design features in instructional materials that attend to the assets and needs of English learners (EL). This tool is for state, district, and school-based reviewers of materials to determine if there are effective supports and to identify areas where materials need to be adapted to meet the needs of ELs.



BENCHMARK 1
 **Language & Content Integration**
Language and content learning are interdependent.

BENCHMARK 2
 **Scaffolding Language & Learning**
Scaffolding and entry points are responsive to ELs in the moment and shift responsibility to students over time.

BENCHMARK 3
 **Metacognition & Metalinguistic Awareness**
ELs are positioned as active and reflective participants in developing academic language and literacy.

BENCHMARK 4
 **Asset & Strengths-based Learning**
The assets and strengths of ELs are resources for teaching and learning.

BENCHMARK 5
 **Assessment of Content & Language**
Assessments inform the teaching of content, language, and literacy.

[English Learners Success Forum](#)

Literacy Program Design

High-quality, evidence-based language and literacy instruction in all tiers that addresses the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)

Assessment

Linguistically aligned and culturally relevant assessment practices and regular review of student data that captures the full range of a student's linguistic abilities in both English and their native language

Structured Literacy Design for Multilingual Learners

Instructional Practices

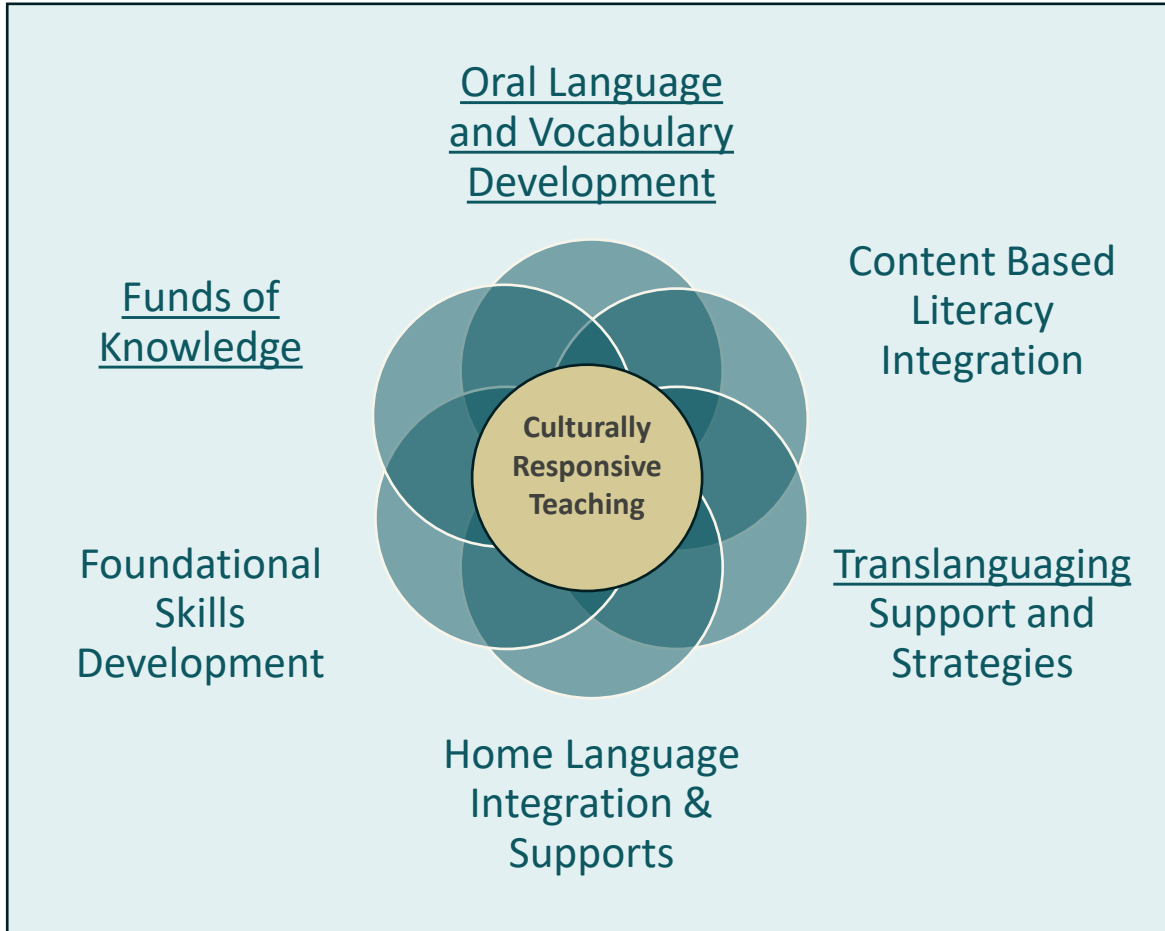
Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices and principles, including language supports in students' first language when possible.

Professional Development

Professional development and strategic coaching for teachers on native-language development and second-language acquisition



Critical Components for Literacy Instruction for MLs



Continuous focus on comprehension & meaning-making through language and content rich materials

Explicit focus on oral language, communication, and affirmation of home language and bilingualism

Use of culturally responsive pedagogy and engaging practices tied to students' funds of knowledge

Safe and affirming asset-based relationships and classroom/school cultures



Comprehensive Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners

A comprehensive approach to literacy instruction involves:

- Six precursors to literacy,
- Twelve essential elements of literacy instruction,
- Six essential contexts of literacy development, and
- Additional elements of literacy development specifically for bilingual and dual language program contexts.

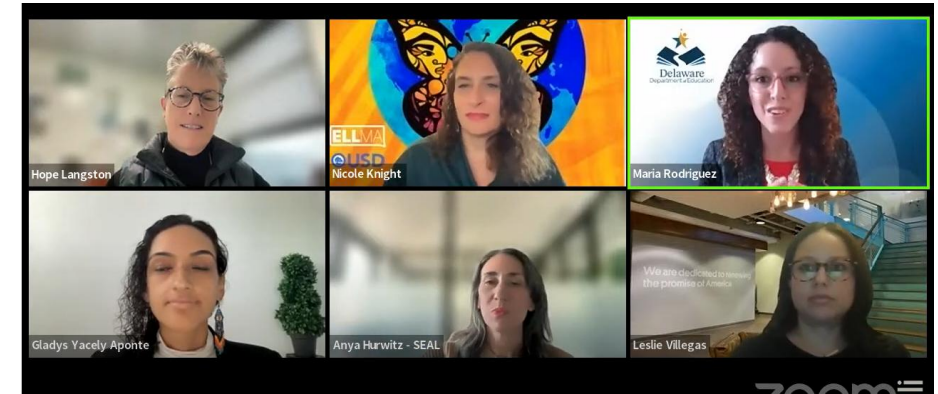


[Comprehensive Literacy Model](#)

Aligning Science of Reading Policies with the Needs of English Learners



Aligning Science of Reading Policies with the Needs of English Learners



<https://www.youtube.com/live/pAP2xd-Sy-0?si=WIWMYjrTEAoloM7Y>

Reading League Summit Statement

Understanding the Difference: The Science of Reading and Implementation for English Learners/Emergent Bilinguals



Joint Statement
Understanding the Difference: The Science of Reading and Implementation for English Learners/Emergent Bilinguals (ELs/EBs)

Members from The Reading League (TRL) and the National Committee for Effective Literacy (NCEL) convened in March 2023 for an in-person summit in Las Vegas discussing the early literacy needs of English learner/emergent bilingual (EL/EB) students. This summit sought to highlight the areas of alignment between experts in the fields of reading science and English learner/emergent bilingual (EL/EB) education.

One universal truth that emerged was that the science of reading has become a buzzword and lightning rod in the greater field of education. Our collective objective is to unite as a community of experts who understand the science of reading as a comprehensive body of knowledge. This knowledge should be embraced and applied to inform instruction, complemented by understanding and addressing the social, linguistic, and cultural factors that impact students. Furthermore, it is important to identify practices that are implemented in schools under the name of the science of reading that do not align with the scientific evidence of how English learner/emergent bilingual students (ELs/EBs) learn to read.

As a nation, we have engaged in a broken game of telephone, observing frequent miscommunications or misinterpretations of the term "the science of reading" that vary depending on the individual spin or schema of the users. So, what is the science of reading? [The Science of Reading: Defining Guide](#) (TRL 2022) defines it as:

...a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands

“Our collective objective is to unite as a community of experts who understand the science of reading as a comprehensive body of knowledge. This knowledge should be embraced and applied to inform instruction, complemented by understanding and addressing the social, linguistic, and cultural factors that impact students. Furthermore, it is important to identify practices that are implemented in schools under the name of the science of reading that do not align with the scientific evidence of how English learner/emergent bilingual students (ELs/EBs) learn to read.”

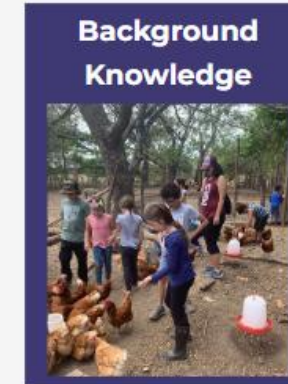
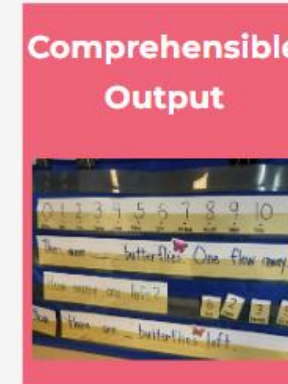
The Reading League Summit, Joint Statement



Common Roots & Soil of Effective Instruction for Multilingual Learners

Strategies for Success by Liz Howard and Shera Simpson

THE COMMON ROOTS AND SOIL OF Effective Dual Language Instruction



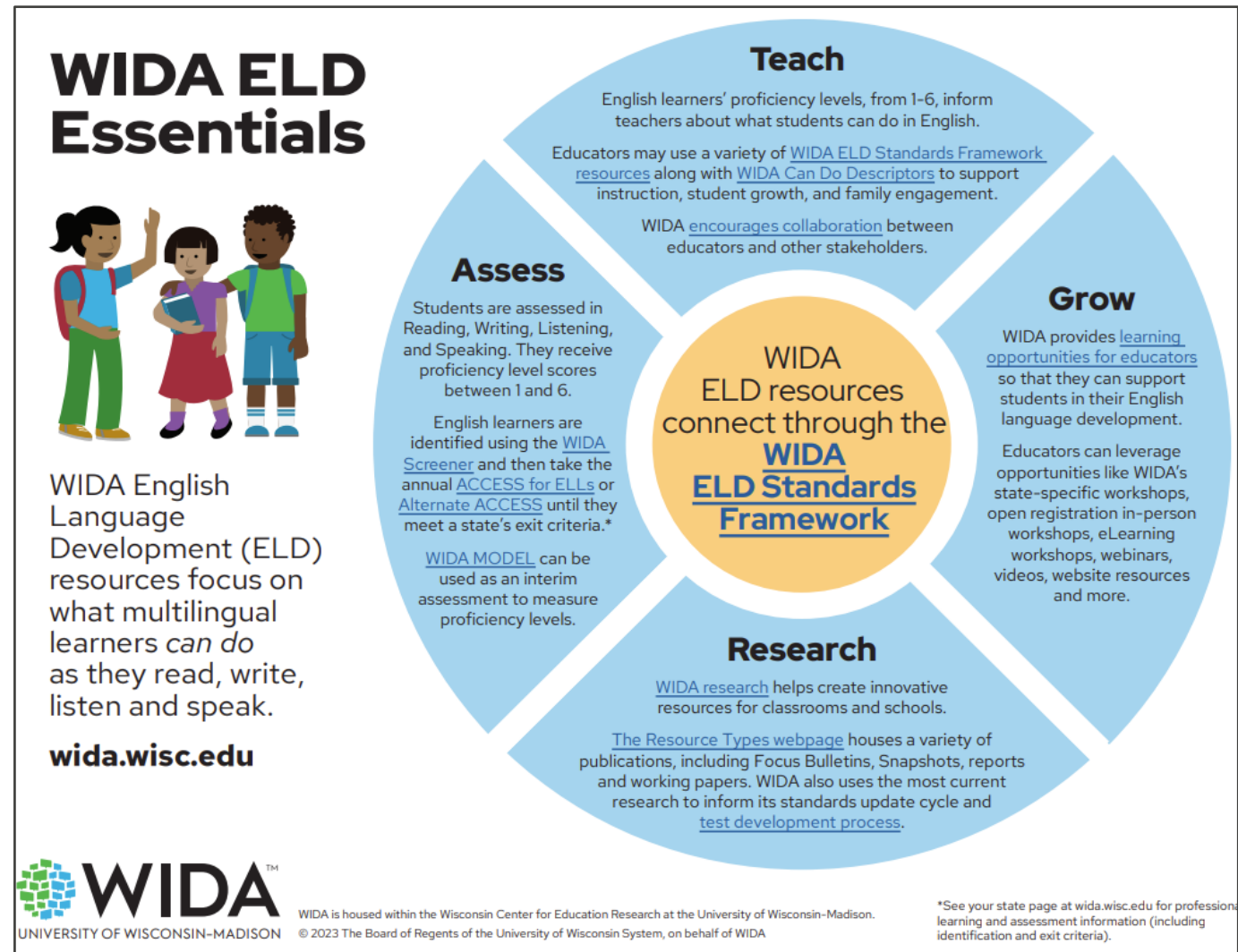
culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy

To promote equity and social justice, these roots need to be planted in the soil of culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017): welcoming and affirming environment, high expectations and rigorous instruction, and inclusive curriculum and assessment (nysed.gov)

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MTSS and WIDA ELD Essentials for English Learners

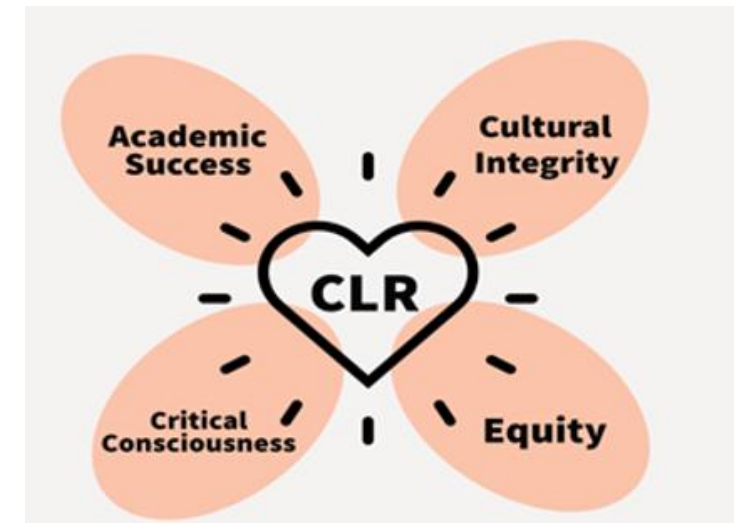
- Proficiency level descriptors (levels 1–6)
- Can Do Descriptors to guide instruction
- Collaborative practices among educators and stakeholders
- Assessment tools like the WIDA Screener and ACCESS for ELLs
- And professional learning resources to build capacity in language development





Culturally Responsive Teaching as a Foundation

Culturally Responsive Teaching & Learning



VALIDATE

AFFIRM

BUILD

BRIDGE

Surface Culture
vs
Deep Culture



Surface Culture

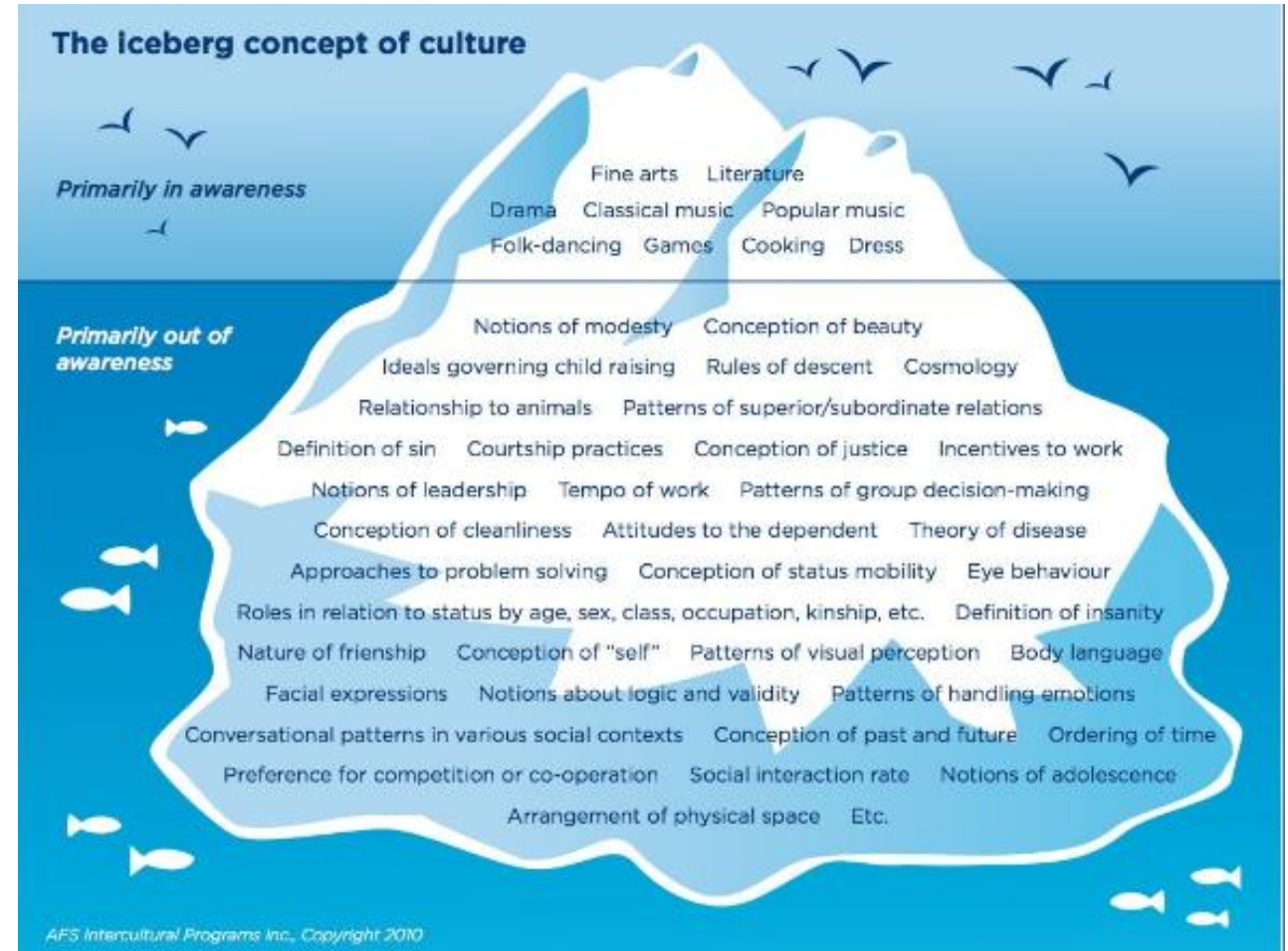
VS

Deep Culture



Partner Chat:

How do you relate your own surface and/or deep culture to your teaching/profession in your classroom/school/district?



Culturally Responsive Practices

The validation and affirmation of the home cultural and linguistic behaviors of students through selected instructional practices for the purposes of building and bridging the student to increased success in the cultural and linguistic demands of academia (school) and mainstream society. (Hollie, 2011, p.2)

VALIDATE

AFFIRM

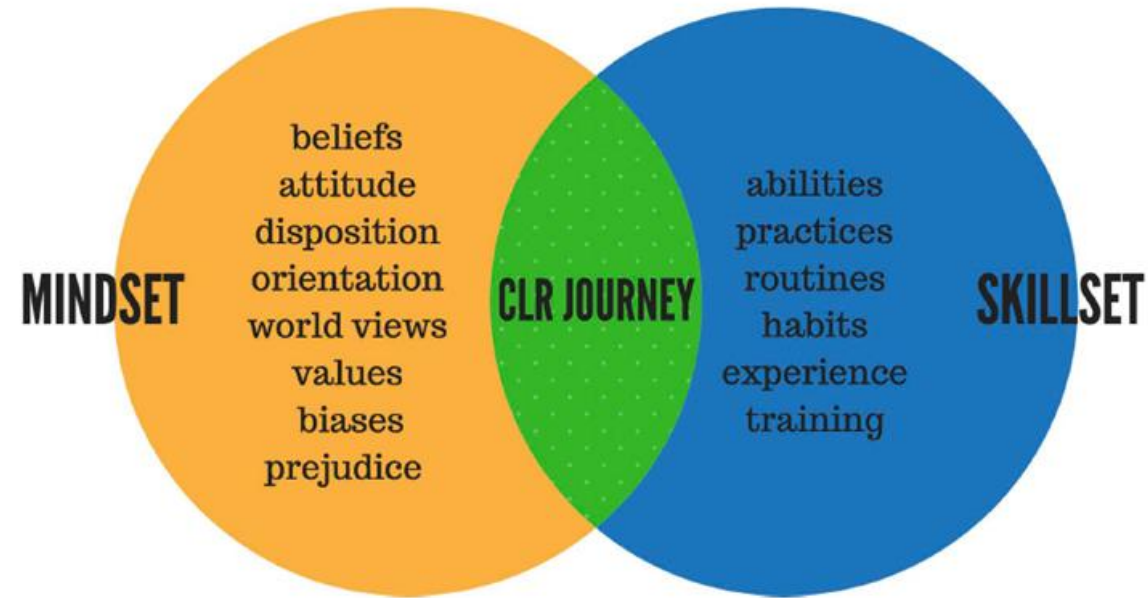
BUILD

BRIDGE



Draw on ALL Students' Culture to Shape Curriculum and Instruction

“Adopting CLR goes beyond celebrating students’ cultural traditions once a year. Educators who practice CLR set rigorous learning objectives for all of their students, and they continually build helpful bridges between what students need to learn and their heritage, lived realities, and the issues they care about.” (Muniz, 2019)



WIDA Guiding Principles & Validate, Affirm, Build, and Bridge

Validate & Affirm:

The principles highlight the importance of recognizing and celebrating the unique identities, languages, and experiences that multilingual learners bring to the classroom. Educators are encouraged to engage families and communities in conversations that honor these assets.

Build:

WIDA provides tools and resources—like the illustrated booklet and 2020 ELD Standards Edition—to help educators design instruction that builds on students' existing knowledge and skills, supporting their academic growth.

Bridge:

The resources aim to connect students' home cultures and languages with rigorous academic content, helping them succeed in both online and hybrid learning environments. Webinars and bulletins offer strategies for making these connections meaningful and effective.

Illustrated WIDA Guiding Principles of Language Development

The Guiding Principles of Language Development exemplify the overarching foundational beliefs of WIDA and ever-present Can Do Philosophy.

Now, this illustrated booklet brings each of the guiding principles to life!



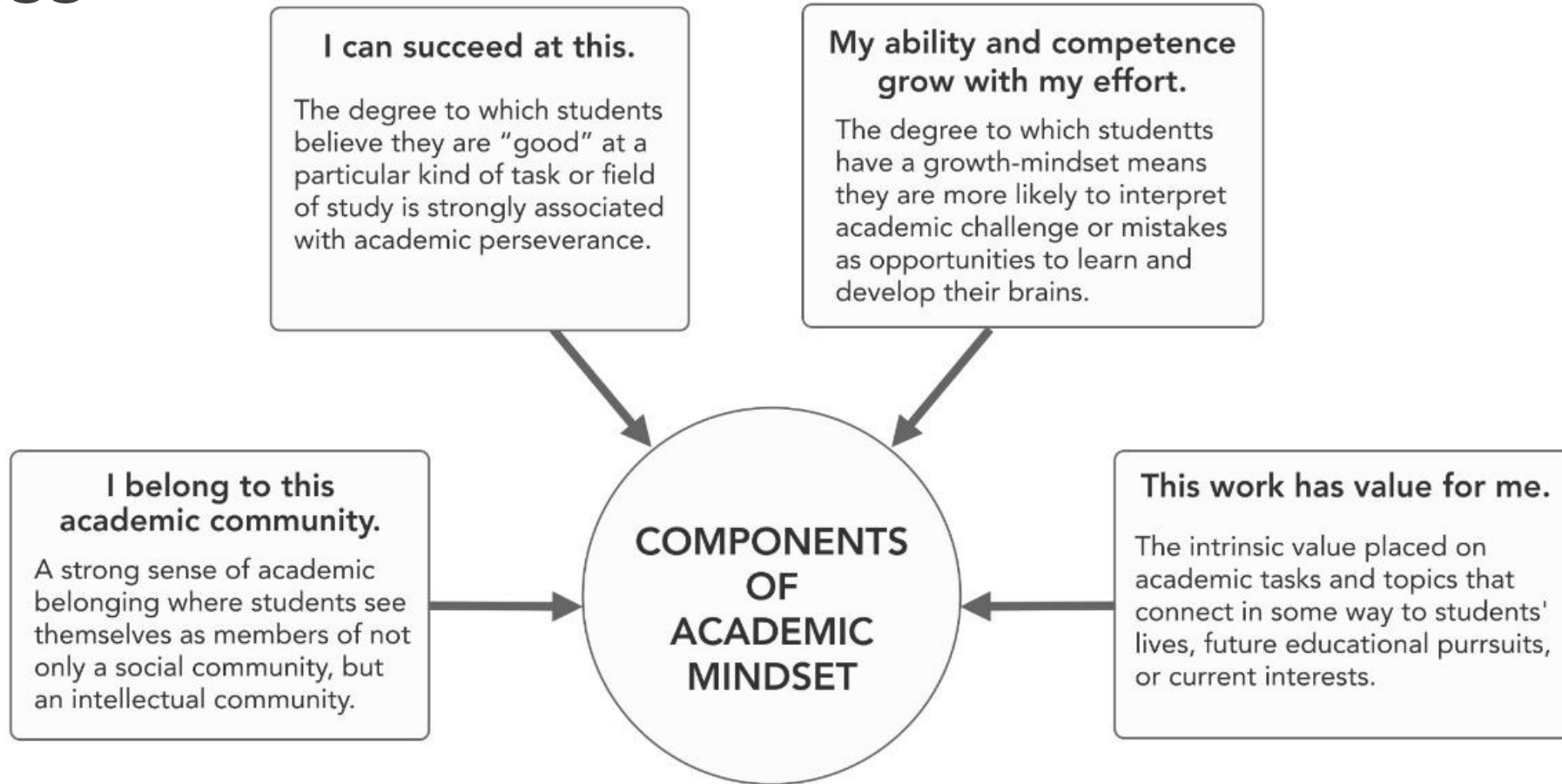
Use this resource with parents, families, and community members to guide conversations about the following ideas:

- Honoring and amplifying the importance of home languages and cultures
- Understanding multilingual learners' language development and learning
- Advocating for the unique opportunities and perspectives that multilingual learners bring to our K-12 schools
- Leveraging multilingual learners' diverse backgrounds to enrich educational programs, classrooms, communities, and beyond

[WIDA Guiding Principles of Language Development](#)

[WIDA Illustration Guiding Principles](#)

Culturally Responsive Practices for Student Success



Using the Literacy Implementation Rubric to Evaluate Culturally Responsive Practices

• Instructional Practices

- Are teaching strategies differentiated and scaffolded for MLs?
- Do lessons integrate students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds?

• Assessment and Progress Monitoring

- Are assessments valid for MLs and used to inform instruction?
- Is language development considered when interpreting data?

• Leadership and Collaboration

- Are school leaders and staff trained in culturally responsive practices?
- Is there collaboration between general education, ML, and special education teams?

• Family and Community Engagement

- Are families engaged in culturally respectful ways?
- Are communication and resources accessible in families' home languages?

**MULTITIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS:
LITERACY IMPLEMENTATION RUBRIC**

Adapted from Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports. (2021). *Multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) fidelity of implementation rubric*. American Institutes for Research.

Preferred Citation
Project LEE, Project ELLIPSES, & Project ELITE². (2021). *Multitiered system of supports for English learners: Literacy implementation rubric*. U.S. Office of Special Education Programs.

Overview

This rubric is intended to be used by individuals or teams who are responsible for monitoring school-level fidelity of a multitiered system of supports (MTSS) for English learners, including MTSS, bilingual, literacy, and English language development specialists or coaches; school principals; and teacher leaders. The rubric is aligned with the essential components of MTSS for literacy and the infrastructure that is necessary for successful implementation. It is accompanied by a worksheet and action planning document with guiding questions. The worksheet can be used to record ratings and notes for each section, and the action planning document can be used to summarize strengths, areas of need, and goals, and to track progress. Use of each tool is described below.

Definition of "English learners (ELs)": Prekindergarten to grade 12 students who come from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on their English proficiency and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may prevent them from successfully achieving in classrooms where the language of instruction is English (ESEA Section 8101(20))

Using the Tools

Rubric: Teams rate the level of current implementation for each MTSS component on a scale from 1 to 5. Descriptors are provided for the 1, 3, and 5 anchor points. Practitioners read each statement and the anchor point criteria and highlight the features in place, partially in place, or not in place. Teams assign a rating from 1 to 5 for each component and note which features need to be addressed on the scoring worksheet and action planning document.

Scoring worksheet: Based on review of the rubric, teams choose the whole number rating, 1–5, that best represents their school's level of implementation, record that rating, and provide documentation of evidence for choosing the rating.

Action plan: Teams use their highlighting and ratings on the rubric and worksheet to identify and note strengths, areas of need, and goals. Teams complete all sections and ensure that actions are observable and measurable with timelines assigned. Practitioners use the action plan for regular check-ins (at least quarterly) to assess progress, ensure follow through on action items, and make adjustments as needed based on student data.

[Lit-Imp-Rubric 2021.pdf](#)



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Culturally Responsive Strategies for MLs

Build on Students' Cultural and Linguistic Assets

- Recognize and integrate students' home languages and cultural practices into instruction.
- Use **community literacy mapping** and **oral histories** to learn about students' backgrounds
- Choose texts and topics that reflect students' lived experiences to enhance engagement and comprehension.

Validate and Affirm Identities

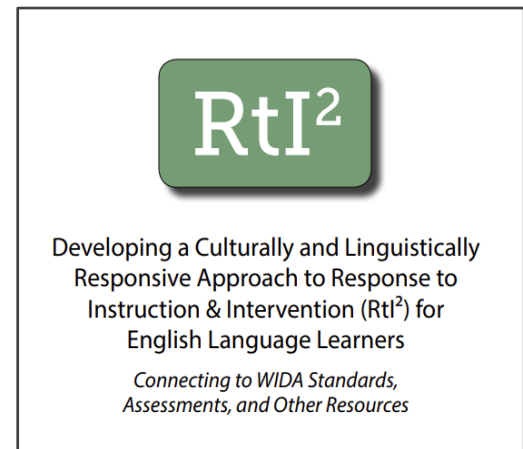
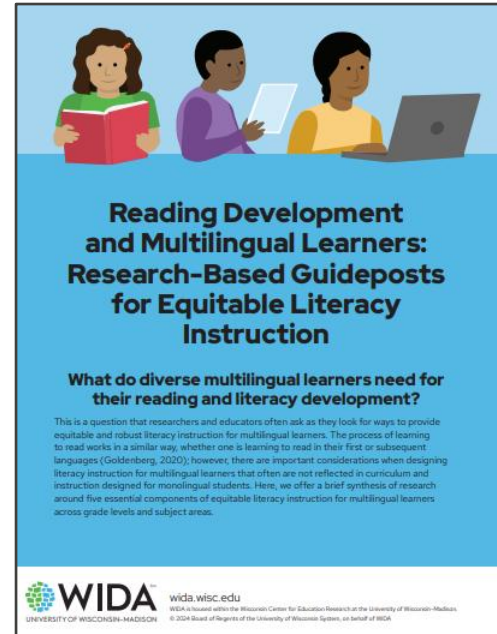
- Create classroom environments where students' identities are seen as strengths.
- Engage families in culturally responsive ways to build trust and shared responsibility for learning
- Use **translanguaging** practices to allow students to draw on all their linguistic resources

Design Responsive Instruction

- Use **scaffolded instruction** that connects to students' prior knowledge and cultural frames of reference.
- Incorporate **diverse texts** and **multiple perspectives** to reflect the multicultural nature of the classroom
- Apply **formative assessments** that are linguistically appropriate and culturally relevant

Foster Equitable Literacy Development

- Support oral language development as a foundation for reading and academic language
- Teach reading as a **social and cultural practice**, not just a technical skill.
- Promote **critical literacy** by encouraging students to analyze texts through their own cultural lenses



[RtI2-for-ELLs.pdf](#)

[WIDA: Reading Development and Multilingual Learners](#)

[Building on Students' Cultural and Linguistic Assets](#)

Reflect & Share

Find an elbow partner.

Take 2–3 minutes to reflect silently.

Think about the following questions based on today's presentation:



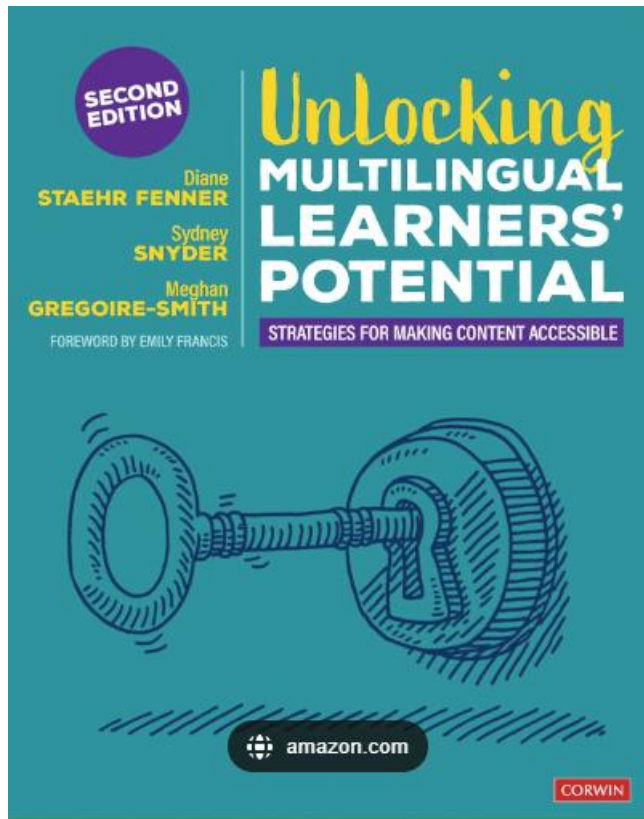
How do you currently implement culturally responsive teaching and learning within your Tier 1 to ensure multilingual learners have equitable access to instruction, support, and opportunities to succeed?

Share & Listen (2 Minutes for each partner)

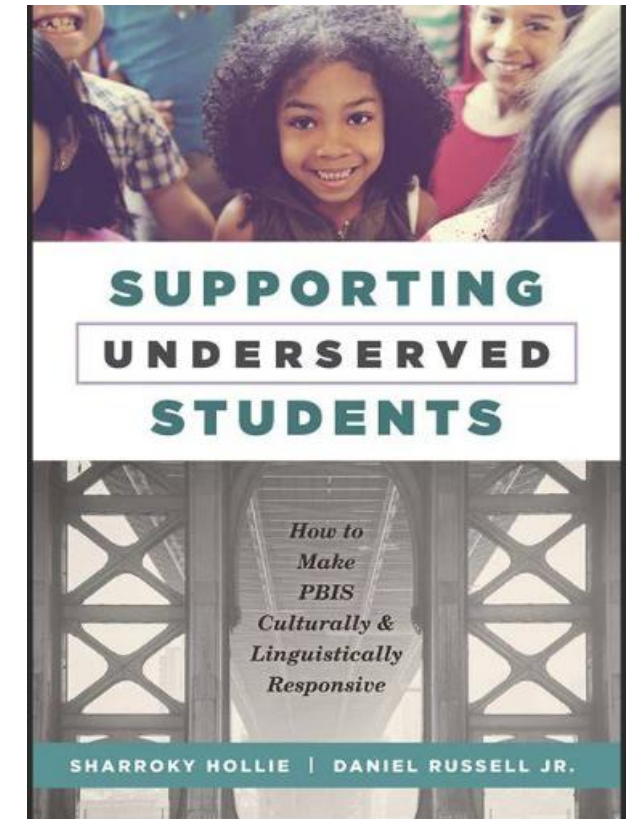
1. Each partner takes turns sharing their reflections.
2. Listen actively and jot down one idea or strategy you'd like to try or explore further.



Resources to Support MLs through MTSS



The screenshot shows the ELITE Texas website. The header has the 'elite' logo in a colorful bar. Navigation tabs include 'About', 'Projects', 'Professional Learning Model', and 'Resources'. A breadcrumb trail reads 'Home / Resources for School Leaders / MTSS for ELs: Practice Guides'. The main heading is 'MTSS for ELs: Practice Guides'. Underneath, there are two sections: 'MTSS in the Early-Elementary Grades (K-2), Practice Guides' and 'MTSS in the Upper-Elementary Grades (Grades 3-5), Practice Guides'. Each section contains a list of bullet points detailing various practices and frameworks.



[Resources](#) | [ELITE Texas](#)



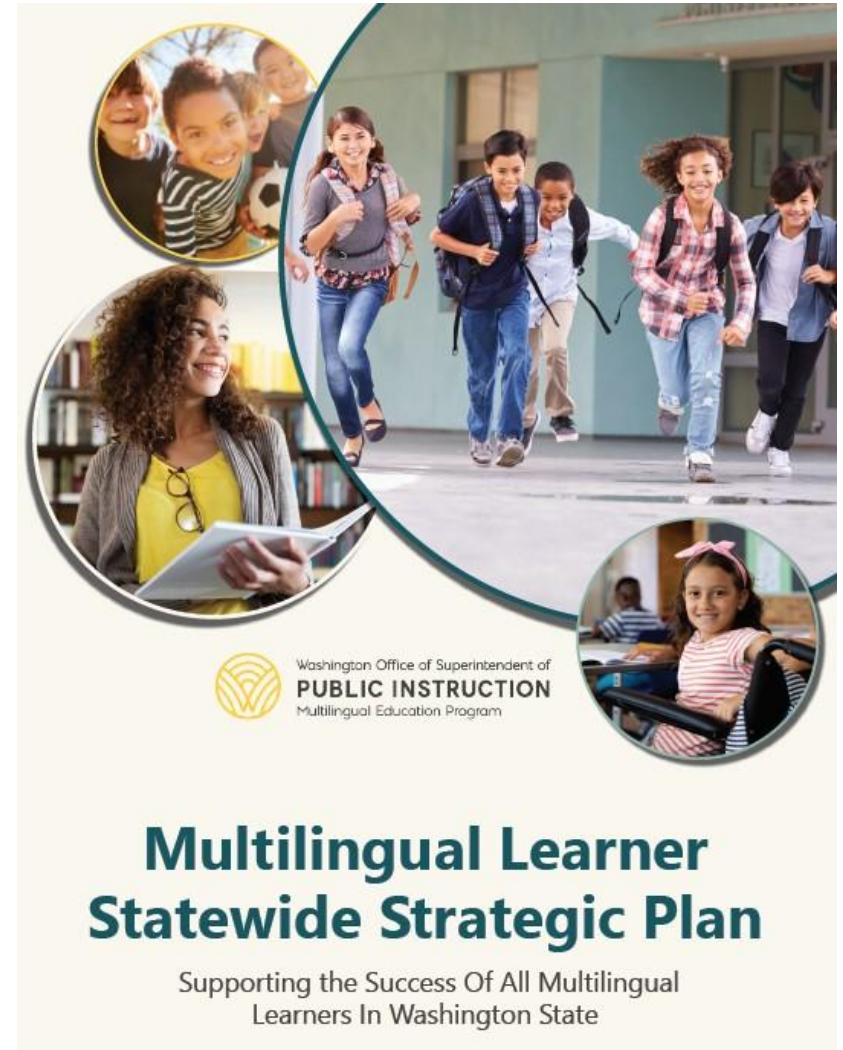
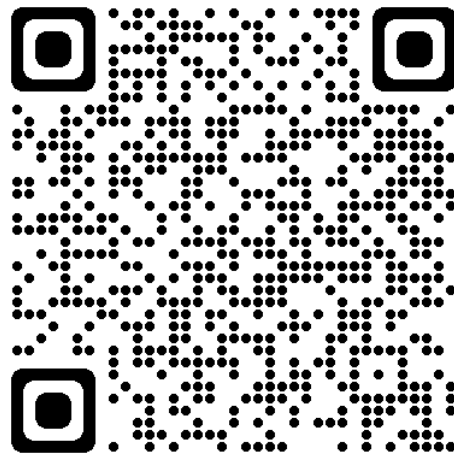
Family & Parent Connection

Multilingual Learner Statewide Strategic Plan

Core Principles:

- Promote Asset-Based Mindsets
- Strengthen Instructional Practices
- Provide Support for Educators
- Engage Students and Families

[Download the Plan](#)



Principles and Goals

- Goal 10: Engage and communicate effectively with multilingual learners and their families.
- Goal 11: Elevate the voices of multilingual learners and families.
- Goal 12: Partner with community organizations to support multilingual learners and families.

4 Principles and Goals

These four core principles and twelve goals will support the success of all multilingual learners in Washington state.

- Promote Asset-Based Mindsets**
 1. Demonstrate a belief that all multilingual learners can learn and excel in school.
 2. Ensure safe and supportive learning environments for multilingual learners.
 3. Expand dual, heritage, and tribal language programs.
- Strengthen Instructional Practices**
 4. Provide high-quality instruction and assessment for all multilingual learners.
 5. Implement inclusionary practices for all multilingual learners.
 6. Increase high school graduation rates of current and former multilingual learners.
- Provide Support For Educators**
 7. Provide professional learning on strategies to support multilingual learners.
 8. Use funding and resources to support inclusive service models for multilingual learners.
 9. Require all educators to have the knowledge and skills to support multilingual learners.
- Engage Students And Families**
 10. Engage and communicate effectively with multilingual learners and their families.
 11. Elevate the voices of multilingual learners and their families.
 12. Partner with community organizations to support multilingual learners and families.

OSPI – Parent and Family Engagement Guides and Resources

Jumpstart your Whole Child initiative with the *Family & Community Engagement Modules* and the *Powerless to Powerful leadership framework*. Build a solid foundation for whole-child programming by strengthening relationships between staff, students, and families.

- [Introduction Module: Authentic Family & Community Engagement](#)
- [School Leader Toolkit](#)
- [Learning Module Playlist](#)



WIDA Resources & Big Ideas



Assess ▾

Teach ▾

Grow ▾

Research ▾

About ▾

News

Resources

[Learning Language Every Day: Activities for Families \(English\) | WIDA](#)

[WIDA Early Years: Aprendiendo lenguaje todos los días](#)

[WIDA recognizes incredible efforts by educators to support students, families | WIDA](#)

[Gathering Community Information: Reflecting On and Using What You Learn](#)



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WIDA ABC's Family Engagement

Awareness

Engaging in ongoing reflection on the unique identities and experiences of the multilingual families in your context; having a critical understanding of historical and current systems-level issues



Advocacy

Promoting multilingual learners' and families' right to access language, learning, and other opportunities



Building Trust

Developing and sustaining trusting relationships with multilingual learners and their families and communities



Collaboration

Working with multilingual learners, families, communities, and educators in ongoing reciprocal collaboration



Breaking Barriers

Addressing systemic issues, impacting multilingual families and communities; developing or nurturing responsive systems and practices



Connect to Learning

Connecting with multilingual families' and learners' goals and dreams for language development and learning; incorporating common interests, experiences, and cultural and language practices into learning



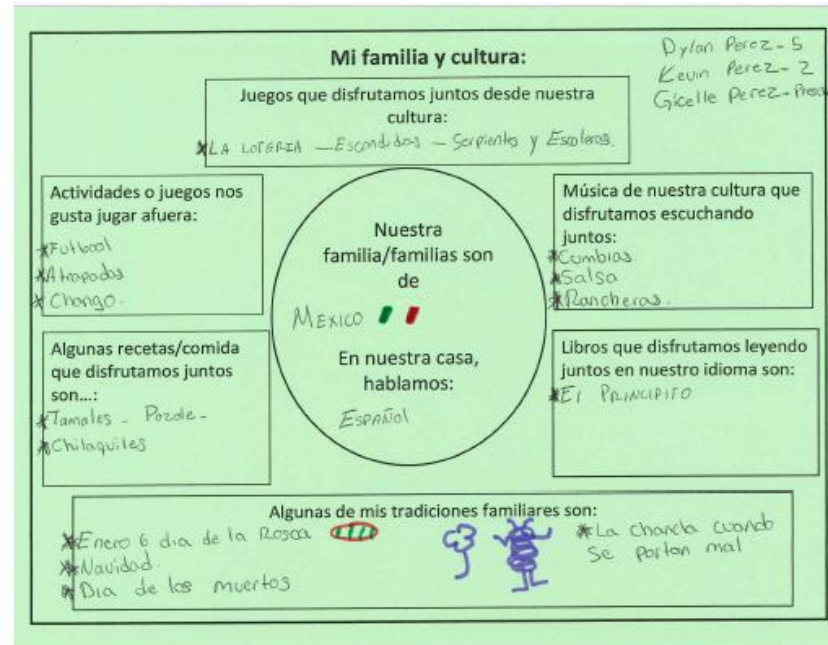
[Infographic and Look-Fors: ABCs of Family and Community Engagement](#)

[Literature Synopsis: ABCs of Family and Community Engagement](#)

How it looks in practice



Hopes & Dreams



We wanted to change the story, change the narrative of our multilingual families and schools. We decided to start the coffee chats to say, "Come talk to us, share your thoughts, connect with us and other families." Many families said this was their first time being asked what they wanted instead of being told what they should learn. —Pushpanjali Sengupta




[WIDA: Monthly Coffee Chats](#)

[Amplifying Family Voice: Pushpanjali's Advice | WIDA](#)

Language and Culture Work

How it looks in practice

What makes a mammal



Fur (नेवों)
 Warm blooded (गरम रक्त वाला)
 Vertebrae (back bone) (पीठ की हड्डी)
 Produces milk (दूध पैदा करता है)
 Gives birth to young ones. (जन्म देता है)

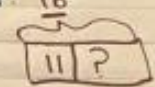
Mammals

Rita has Tennis Balls

* Types of Story Problems *

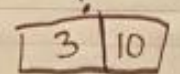
Adding to

Rita had 11 tennis balls. Then, she found some more. Now she has 16 balls. How many balls did Rita find?

$$11 + ? = 16$$


Take From?

Rita had some tennis balls. She lost 3. She now has 10 tennis balls. How many balls did she start with?

$$? - 3 = 10$$


Animal Characteristics Chart

Animals, animals big and small.

With special characteristics, they can do it all!

Claws for climbing, strong and sharp.

Eyes that are special and can see in the dark!

Feathers that flutter, colorful and bright, Help birds take flight, oh what a sight!

Animals, animals big and small, With special characteristics, they can do it all!

Scales on fish for swimming, they are slippery and smooth.

It protects and keeps them safe and cool.

Is warm in the cold and chill, survive, it is a great skill!

s, big and small, characteristics, they can do it all!

far across the land.

ones, and survive

izes each one special,

ay to live in nature

als big and small,

characteristics, they can do it all!

r for animals near and far

r wonders, they're car shining stars!



How it looks in practice...

Guiding Principle #3

Multilingual learners' language development and learning occur over time through meaningful engagement in activities that are valued in their homes, schools, and communities.

(Engeström, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2018; van Lier, 2008; Wen, 2008)

தலைகீழ் Library / Native Language Class
 - Do see some books in native language
 - Mostly English
 - Sunday language school - literacy/culture

பூங்கா/விளையாட்டு Park/playground
 - Kids talk to each other English
 - Signs in English
 - Celebrations in Summer/parties potluck

இடம் Home
 - Native language with grand parents
 - Movies/program in native language

இடம் Place of worship
 Church - Reading - Listening - Singing
 temple - Singing
 (Chants/mantras) Sanskrit

இடம் Festivals
 - Meet and interact with others (grandparents) - use their native language & gestures
 - We do not feel alone - cultural outfit

இடம் Shopping
 Use native language
 Indian stores

இடம் Hobbies / Playdates
 Swimming
 art arts
 sports
 Singing/dancing

இடம் Satisfactions
 - Satisfaction when we hear our language in English
 - Once kids go to school they talk in English
 - Have storytimes in different languages
 - Motivation for our children
 - What languages can be added - May be a poll

We will create our community literacy mapping

- What are some important places in your community?
- What do you do there?
- What can you see or hear there?
- How do you use literacy there?
- Which languages do you use?



Family Feedback....

I appreciate YOU did to us its very nice for our children to know their culture and languages I know its a little bit hard for them b/c we speak at home our languages Authentic Some times they are confused the way they speak but I think they get it through this its a nice opportunity you gave us they are lucky to get in this school keep it up the good work! thank you so much.

Hacer una fiesta de Bailables Tradicionales de El Pais,

Have a dance party traditional el Pais.

How to hold a reading event at Stevenson, where people will read in their home language for others. I think it's important to represent the language through literature, and to make a language visible.

Authentic feedback comes from relationships not just surveys

Conference

**-Superstar Wednesdays
-Empathy interviews
-Curriculum adoption**

- Include story books from the Caribbean, South ~~America~~ Africa and South America
- Help highlight West Indies Culture and traditions.
- Help highlight West Indian Contributions to the world.
- Celebrate different Foods from various cultures



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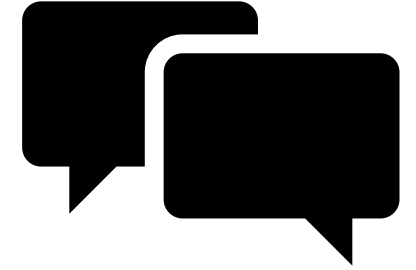
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Conference



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Turn & Talk



- In my role, what impact do I have on engaging families in the literacy development of multilingual learners (MLs) in my school or district?
- How can I help ensure that my school or district moves beyond basic compliance requirements for family engagement and instead fosters authentic, meaningful partnerships with families to support the literacy development of multilingual learners?





Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



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