

ABCs of Family and Community Engagement

The ABCs are six key considerations for strengthening family and community engagement practices with multilingual learners. How can you identify these ABCs in your practice? Use the infographic and look-fors below to identify evidence of the ABCs in your context and discover ideas for future action.

The ABCs are interconnected. The threads that weave throughout the ABCs are an ongoing commitment to building linguistically and culturally responsive and sustaining systems, while promoting holistic practices and policies that are grounded in reciprocal partnerships and integrated into your context.

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



Awareness

Awareness looks like

- Staff participating in ongoing reflection activities that explore assumptions about family and community engagement (for example, creating a list of practices and policies that reflect these assumptions and how they have or haven't changed towards more responsive or deficit approaches and why)
- Educators connecting with every multilingual family and their communities (through home visits, phone calls, focus groups, storytelling, etc.) to get to know families as individuals and listen to their experiences and needs
- Ongoing professional learning sessions or communities of practice that explore the following:
 - How education systems have historically granted or withheld opportunities to multilingual learners and their families and communities (for example, limited access to responsive, quality instruction; punishment, ridicule, or exclusion for speaking languages other than English; and perception that multilingual learners' English language use is incorrect or less than even if speaking a standardized form)
 - How these policies and practices still impact educational experiences today at a national or state level, and in your district or school



Advocacy

Advocacy looks like

- Providing spaces for families to be seen, share their stories, and voice their needs, ideas, and concerns
- Educators, families, and community members advocating culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining programming, curricula, and pedagogy through the following:
 - Sharing and learning about the benefits of multilingualism and the positive impacts of maintaining the languages spoken at home and in the community and of incorporating these language practices into school (through translanguaging spaces, dual language programs, etc.)



- Recommending culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining programs and/or pedagogies that best fits your context and advocating for and co-creating related opportunities (for example, a dual language program, a heritage language program, and/or a curriculum that incorporates translanguaging)
- Educators sharing practical and accessible guidance with families on navigating school systems with opportunities for dialogue, questions, and changes (for example, enrollment processes; language programming options; special education procedures; and curriculum, grading system, and assessments used)
- Implementing or providing a variety of spaces and roles for multilingual family advocacy (for example, multilingual parent organization and/or networking sessions, co-created letters to the board, or collaboration with a community organization that advocates with multilingual families)
- Learning about and promoting opportunities for advocacy through individual avenues (a family advocating for their child's needs and strengths) and systemic avenues (families advocating changes in policies, curricula, or other school- or district-wide practices)

Building Trust

Building Trust looks like

- Educators learning about and incorporating what multilingual learners and their families say is special to them about their families and communities (in classroom and school displays, lessons, other materials, etc.)
- Families sharing their perspectives and experiences with the school. Educators listening to families' feedback with visible changes made in response, including learning about and responding to the following:
 - What makes families feel that they belong to the school community; what makes them feel welcomed, respected, and heard
 - What makes them feel unwelcome or that they do not belong
- Responding to family input and ideas and scheduling ongoing opportunities to develop and sustain relationships with multilingual families and communities (through regular check-ins with families, storytelling circles, multilingual social gatherings, etc.)



Breaking Barriers

Breaking Barriers looks like

- Staff regularly reflecting on whether practices and policies are inclusive of all families, not just the majority language and cultural groups
- Implementing clear, visible school processes for reporting, discussing, and resolving family concerns about the practices and systems that are and are not meeting the needs, strengths, and interests of their children
- Staff dialogue and practices shifting from deficit narratives (for example, statements like, “Families don’t show up”) toward assets-based, systems thinking (for example, “We need to change how we invite, communicate, and engage”)
- Listening to families’ feedback about the practices or systems that limit multilingual family and community engagement and collaborating to create accessible, culturally and linguistically affirming alternatives (for example, scheduling meetings and events during preferred times and at preferred locations; welcoming new multilingual families by learning about them and sharing about the school/classroom; and hiring bilingual administrators, teachers, and support staff)



Collaboration

Collaboration looks like

- Multilingual families and educators co-creating or revising school mission and vision statements, as well as policies and practices, related to family and community engagement
- Responding to family feedback and insights to review current policies and practices around communication, including translation and interpretation, and shaping more responsive and inclusive approaches to communication, events, and supports
- Offering opportunities for multilingual families to connect with one another to identify interests, needs, and ideas
- Promoting and including shared leadership roles for multilingual families (through curriculum review committees, district or school improvement planning teams, co-designing events, etc.)
- Building partnerships among school/district, multilingual families, and community organizations that families trust and frequent



Connect to Learning

Connect to Learning looks like

- Incorporating multilingual families' language and cultural goals into learning plans
- Offering ongoing professional learning that includes practical ways to connect with multilingual families about their backgrounds and experiences and incorporate their dynamic language practices, cultural practices, and other experiences and ideas into curriculum and instruction
- Encouraging families to support learning at home in their preferred language(s)
- Engaging in two-way conversations with multilingual families about the curriculum and instruction used in the district, school, or classroom; language programming offered; and how instruction and assessments incorporate students' assets and do not unfairly penalize students as multilingual learners who are developing two or more languages
- Providing school environments and classrooms that are reflective of the individual multilingual learners and families in your setting and are not stereotypical (for example, books, displays, and student work)
- Collaborating with multilingual families on reviews of language programming, literacy, curriculum, instructional materials, and assessments
- Co-creating collaborative inquiry projects with multilingual learners that explore issues within their communities identified by the students and their families

