

A Story of Collaboration and Transitions for Multilingual Children



Introduction

The water tower high in the sky tells you you're in Plano, IL. From its downtown, you can walk to the post office, library, city hall, and train station. Plano is known for the invention of the mechanical reaper, a farm tool that cuts and gathers crops at harvest. And if you've heard of Smallville, Superman's fictitious hometown, check out the film *Man of Steel*—that's Plano too!

In Plano, you will also find some exemplary early childhood education (ECE) initiatives, many of which support transitions for multilingual children and their families. Transitions in this context refers to shifts from one school, classroom, and/or learning space to another (e.g., Pre-K to K, K to 1, etc.). A great example is [P.H. Miller School/Plano Early Learning](#), which serves children in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade. It has a traditional school and Pre-K classes in the local YMCA. There is also a family resource center where P.H. Miller family support specialists host three weekly playgroups, including a Spanish-English bilingual one. Other days of the week, staff from another organization, [Family Focus](#), are there to offer a variety of programs that aim to nurture children through family support.

Transitions in this context refers to shifts from one school, classroom, and/or learning space to another (i.e., Pre-K to K, K to 1, etc.). [Explore this video to see the Plano locations featured in this Focus Bulletin.](#)



The town of Plano, IL and three locations are featured in this Focus Bulletin: P.H. Miller Elementary School, the Plano Family Resource Center, and the P.H. Miller Preschool at the Fox Valley Family YMCA.

Unfortunately, the concept of school readiness oftentimes positions multilingual children and their families as lacking by discounting their experiences and languages (Ansari & Crosnoe, 2018). Also, as a recent survey by WIDA shows, only about 51% of educators believe that their transition practices, policies, and procedures are meeting the needs of multilingual children and their families. For these reasons, it is important to frame school readiness in a way that considers how educators and systems are ready to meet the needs of multilingual children and their families as they move through their first few years of early education and school (Bornfreund et al., 2022; NAEYC, 2009; NASEM, 2017). Also, there is a need to consider how to integrate components of ECE programs and home, family, and community care into PreK–3. For example, linguistically and culturally sustaining practices, play-based joyful learning, social-emotional development, and observational assessment can and are being incorporated into early elementary schools (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020; Durkin et al., 2022; Graue et al., 2017; Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018).

This Focus Bulletin centers on P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning (with about 438 students in PreK-1) to show how educators, families, and community members reflect and collaborate to promote equitable transitions for multilingual children. In recent years, they have adapted to a growing multilingual student population due to sprawl from Chicago. Over 25% of children at P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning are

identified as English learners and over 50% are Latine. Although they have had children from a variety of language backgrounds in the past, currently all the multilingual children they serve are Spanish speaking. P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning has a Spanish-English bilingual Pre-K class, a dual language program starting in kindergarten, and multilingual children in their English medium classrooms.

Self-Reflection on Transitions

Engaging in self-reflection helps promote equitable transitions for multilingual children and families. The way you experience and engage with the world impacts how you teach, lead, and collaborate. An ongoing look at your beliefs, identities, and practices helps unpack how power dynamics during transitions affect children, families, and colleagues. Plano educators and administrators show a commitment to ongoing listening and learning. This translates into more effective advocacy during transitions and fewer assumptions about multilingual children's and families' strengths, interests, and needs.

Eduardo Pérez, a kindergarten teacher at P.H. Miller, can see himself in all the children in his kindergarten dual language classroom. This helps him create a welcoming classroom community. He also reflects on his own prejudices, fears, pathways, and goals. Through this reflection, he can challenge his assumptions, connect personally with each child, and bring their identities and interests into the classroom. You can tell by the way he talks in the "we." He says, "Podemos mostrar empatía y podemos mostrar que tenemos un ambiente libre para expresar nuestras ideas." (We can show kindness and empathy and we can show that we have a free environment to express our ideas.)

[Explore this video to hear Eduardo's reflection.](#)

Ruth Olguin also reflects on her background and the children's identities in her class. Ruth is a bilingual assistant teacher in the P.H. Miller bilingual Pre-K classroom. For Ruth, readiness includes recognizing and uplifting everyone's cultural practices and languages. Language expression does not have to look one way. When children from a different background than her told her the way she said orange in Spanish was incorrect, she validated all languages and used it as an opportunity to show how you can expand and embrace all the different ways people speak.



Kindergarten dual language teacher, Eduardo Pérez, with his students.

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Laurel Mateyka is the P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning principal. She has a clear vision and mission for family and community engagement that is centered around family and community empowerment and connecting with them as their children’s “first and forever teachers.” Laurel believes in saying, “yes now!” to opportunities if they are mission-aligned. Since she comes from a monolingual English-speaking background, she sees the importance of self-reflection. Laurel’s experiences helped shift her perspectives on serving multilingual children and their families. She grew from understanding the need for translators and interpreters to believing in the power of partnering with multilingual families to strengthen the school community. [This video of Laurel explores how her perspectives shifted over time.](#)

The way that Eduardo, Ruth, and Laurel reflect on their own identities and experiences is important for promoting equitable transitions for multilingual children. Self-reflection helps you check your own assumptions and beliefs about which resources, environments, and practices will be most beneficial for multilingual children and their families as they enter your space. Self-reflection is not a one-time thing. It is an ongoing practice that can illuminate shifts in your beliefs. Ultimately, shifts in beliefs inform shifts in practice, which can lead to equitable opportunities for multilingual children and their families. For example, shifting your beliefs about school readiness can help you be ready for multilingual children that enter your space by embracing their language repertoire in contrast to expecting children to be ready to use only English. Explore this [shifting mindsets tool](#) to reflect on your transition beliefs and practices for multilingual children.

Collaborating with Multilingual Children, Families, and Communities During Transitions

Providing equitable transitions for multilingual children includes establishing and sustaining relationships with the families and community members of the multilingual children you serve. Educators and administrators from Plano promote responsive transitions in a few different ways. They listen intentionally, respond to feedback, incorporate families’ interests and needs, and build leadership opportunities that incorporate family and community strengths—including their linguistic and cultural resources.



Bilingual playgroup at the Plano Family Resource Center.

Angelica Nicola and Sherri Rachford, family support specialists, have a plan. The community-based playgroups for families and their children ages birth to five are carefully cultivated. Families can come to a playgroup in the morning (bilingual or English) and connect with their little ones before they pick up their older children from school at P.H. Miller. Everything they see is available for them to check out. There's also a sign outside making it clear that this is a community center that's part of the P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning system of support. Small details and systemic needs that can make or break a community partnership are considered.

Laura Lopez, a mom in the bilingual playgroup, has an 18-month-old that happily wriggles into and out of her arms to explore. For Laura, the playgroup is a space to know that she is "not alone." Relationships are formed among adults and children that extend beyond the room. She also has two other children—a freshman in high school and a first grader. Her first grader came to the playgroup before he enrolled in



Laura Lopez and her child, Sebastián, playing with the Bilingual Family Support Specialist, Angelica Nicola, at the bilingual playgroup.

the dual language program at P.H. Miller. The playgroup is helping Laura's children transition to school because they can play and socialize with other children in Spanish and practice routines. [Learn more about the bilingual playgroup in this video.](#)

When Angelica and Sherri were running playgroups last year, parents asked about other programs in the community—but they were all in English. Angelica jumped into action, "The library said, well, we could help... but we have no one to speak Spanish. And I'm like, no worries. We might know somebody... We went to the [Parent Mentor Program](#) at P.H. Miller and Maribel [the program coordinator] said, I will do it. So, we did the introductions."

Maribel Ceceñas, who is now the program's director, started out as a mom in the playgroups and then participated in the Parent Mentor Program, a program that offers opportunities for mainly Black and Brown mothers to be mentors in a classroom. With deep experience in the community and school, the parent mentors are often the first people Laurel, the P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning principal, considers for paraprofessional or other jobs. These intentional and ongoing family, community, and school connections have all helped build a strong foundation for transitions in Plano. [Explore this video of Maribel and Laurel talking about the Parent Mentor Program.](#)

Over time, the offerings at the Family Resource Center have grown. There is now a community collaborative, the [Plano Area Alliance Supporting Student Success \(PAASSS\)](#). PAASSS implements programming that, among other things, creates cohesion and connection across multilingual families, their communities, and school. In addition to the playgroups and the Parent Mentor



Melissa Vargas (right), Healthy Families/Doula Supervisor at Family Focus, sharing about their programming at the Plano Family Resource Center.

Program, [Family Focus](#) has also put down roots at the Plano Family Resource Center. Family Focus is an organization with a focus on early childhood and empowering families. Their offerings include a home visiting program for young families, advocacy training, doula services, immigration services, and more.

Driving four minutes down the road in Plano, you'll see that family and community engagement is also embedded at the PreK-1 school, P.H. Miller, and at the preschool classes at the local YMCA. As the board of education saw the value of early childhood education, they decided to locally fund an additional 92 spots for Pre-K. The school did not have enough space, but the Plano YMCA did. Since the 22-23 school year, the YMCA has offered half-day and full-day Pre-K. With this expansion, transitions have been on administrators' minds. Laurel and other P.H. Miller staff are now planning a workshop. They want to gather feedback from families on transitions to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Dinner and childcare will be provided. There will be different ways for families to brainstorm and share their ideas. Laurel noted that they're interested in knowing from families, "How can we improve, how can we reassure that you can trust us, that our building is safe, that your child will be happy and cared for?" [Through this video with Laurel, you can learn more about seeking feedback from families.](#)

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Eduardo offered the following ways in which he helps ensure that children and families are cared for as they come into his class, "No quiero simplificarlo demasiado, pero me parece que el hecho de sonreír y de hacerle saber que estás contento de trabajar en donde estás trabajando puede ser una manera tan sencilla de hacerlos sentir bienvenidos. Y de allí podemos elevar el conocimiento de experiencia que ya tienen en vez de verlo como un déficit. Ya aprendiste en otro lugar, que es importante para nosotros y queremos aprender de ti." (I don't want to simplify it too much, but it seems to me that smiling and letting them know that you are happy to work where you are working can be such a simple way to make them feel welcome. And from there we can elevate the knowledge and experience that they already have, instead of seeing it as a deficit. You learned in another place, which is important for us and we want to learn from you.)

Eduardo knows that relationship building with multilingual children and families is crucial during transitions. He says that the specifics may look different for each child or family, but what's important is to look for the connection. When a child who recently arrived in the U.S. saw that Eduardo put an image of Estonia on the screen, the child exclaimed, "That is my city! That's where I lived when I was little!" This wise five-year-old isn't treated as "little" by Eduardo. He is listened to. Yes, children are learning how to read, how to write, and are doing math, but for Eduardo, that's the surface. He's thinking about his bigger mission, "Quiero que las futuras generaciones sean prósperas en un mundo lleno de bondad, en donde las personas puedan compartir ideas y conocimientos y así construir comunidades fuertes y seguras, utilizando sus recursos sabiamente." (I want future generations to prosper in a world that is kind, in which people can share ideas and knowledge to build strong and safe communities while using their resources wisely.) [Explore this video of Eduardo talking about how he prepares to welcome children and families during transitions.](#)

Multilingual children, families, and communities collaborate with educators at P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning to meet a variety of needs and empower families. The strength of these partnerships is especially important for transitions. As children enter more traditional learning spaces, school, community, and home feel like three connected places that have shared values and practices. Then, there is an ongoing reciprocal relationship so that multilingual families and communities feel a sense of belonging and feel like they have power as decision-makers across the various settings that they and their children navigate. [Use this tool](#) to inform your ongoing family and community engagement practices.

Collaborating with Educators and Administrators During Transitions

Collaboration is at the heart of the work in Plano. A systems-level approach to collaboration provides a foundation for equitable transitions for multilingual children. This includes aligning responsive practices across grade levels and across home, community, and school. Specifically, it includes providing time and resources for collaboration around language development and learning, social emotional development, observation and documentation, and collaboration with families and with community partners.



A planning meeting with kindergarten and first-grade dual language teachers, Eduardo Pérez, Tania Alcalá, and instructional coach Melissa Crisci.

Digging through buckets of materials. Identifying connections to standards and to students. Understanding how things change and progress across grade levels. Collaborating with colleagues can be

informative and joyful but can also be time-consuming. One way that Plano tries to make collaboration more manageable is through weekly meetings with small groups of teachers—or pods. One of these pods is with the kindergarten and first-grade dual language teachers, Eduardo Pérez and Tania Alcalá, and instructional coach, Melissa Crisci. They collaborate on many things to support alignment across kindergarten and first grade. They talk with each other about how they are integrating essential questions, connections to standards, play, WIDA Key Language Uses, and other aspects of teaching and learning into their units and lessons. [This short video explores how educators collaborate across grade levels during a planning meeting.](#)

Another way to collaborate with colleagues and with families during transitions is through sharing observations. And as Ruth Olguin often says, “Technology is our friend here!” That’s because Ruth, the assistant teacher, and the classroom teacher have developed a strong collaborative relationship with each other and with families. Tablets that were provided during the pandemic are now used for documenting observations, communicating with families, and much more. Ruth notes that she collaborates with the classroom teacher around observation and reflection, “Ok, que visitas en esta estudiante? Yo vi esto, le dije. Okay hay que poner y detallar de qué pudo hacer, no pudo hacer, lo pudo hacer solo, qué pudo identificar, qué pudo expresar, qué pudo entender.” (Okay, what did you notice about this student today? I saw this, I tell her. Okay, we must record what they could do, what they couldn’t do, what they can identify, what they can express, and what they can understand.) This helps them grasp, promote, and communicate about children’s language development and learning over time and across settings. [In this video, learn about how Ruth collaborates with a classroom teacher to support multilingual children.](#)

Ruth is also in a teacher training program for current assistant teachers sponsored by the district. The district partners with a local university for this training. When Ruth becomes a teacher, administrators like Laurel will look to the parent mentor program participants for a new assistant teacher. In this way, Plano has built-in opportunities for professional growth and collaboration with their bilingual community members and educators. This in turn fosters consistency and familiarity for multilingual children as they transition to and from various ECE settings.

Potluck lunches, play-based materials, educator appreciations, collaborative planning time, and more. There are so many ways that the Plano administration makes time and space for adults to work together. Laurel notes that they ask themselves questions like, “Do I have a healthy workforce? Is my staff feeling appreciated? Are they coming to work ready to support kids and do their best showing up as their best selves? If they are, okay, well then now do they have an environment that’s conducive to learning for our students? ... And so, then if the environment is solid and the workforce is solid, okay, how are the relationships between the adults?”

A high five, a wave, a hello! Feeling happy? Feeling frustrated? P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning has program-wide resources to support children and adults as they greet each other, identify their feelings, and find solutions to issues that come up. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is woven through all spaces at P.H. Miller and encourages smooth transitions across grade levels (Plano’s SEL curriculum is grounded in [The Pyramid Model for Promoting Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children](#)). Brittany Pezold, an instructional coach and lead teacher for their Preschool for All grant program, leads the SEL efforts across all early learning sites in Plano. She collaborates with other educators and with families to ensure that program-wide resources are responsive and flexible based on the children and families

they serve. They focus on the languages they see in their program and work to ensure that, as much as possible, everyone has access to resources in the languages they use and everyone feels supported and included. This focus on SEL at a systems level helps to support transitions. However, they didn't try to tackle everything at once. Brittany shared that, "We started SEL lessons in classrooms where we were seeing the most challenging behaviors. Once we saw that those classrooms were being successful, kindergarten and first-grade teachers were like, can we get in on that? Our teachers didn't need one more thing on their plate. I volunteered to facilitate the lessons so that they could have the lesson from me, but then the teachers could practice the skill throughout the week."

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Instructional coach, Brittany Pezold, finding solutions with children in a Pre-K class at the YMCA.



[Brittany talks about creating school-wide SEL resources in this video.](#)

[Brittany shares examples of how they align SEL across the grade levels in this video.](#)

Educators and administrators in Plano frequently collaborate with each other to promote equitable transitions for multilingual children. In fact, their approach to collaboration spans to families and communities as well, so that multilingual families and community members have opportunities to become educators in the district and participate in collaborative efforts from the educator perspective. Furthermore, collaboration in Plano focuses on systems-wide approaches to aligning curriculum, instruction, materials, and resources across programs and grade levels. This alignment helps ensure a smooth transition as children move through their early years in school. The tool below can help you consider how you collaborate to promote transitions for multilingual children at a systems level.

Essential Actions Implementation Collaboration Tool to Support Transitions

Directions: Collaborate with your colleagues to look at the list of the WIDA PreK–3 Essential Actions below. Choose two or three you would like to focus on most. Write those actions in the table boxes on the left. Then, using a rating scale of 0 to 4, rate how often you implement the actions to promote equitable transitions for the multilingual children you serve. Over time, choose additional Essential Actions to rate and focus on, until you have considered all eight Essential Actions.

WIDA PreK–3 Essential Actions

1. Engage in self-reflection to examine personal experiences, beliefs, attitudes, identities, and practices connected to promoting and providing equitable opportunities for the multilingual children you serve.
2. Know and affirm the multilingual children you serve, reflecting on their individual histories and lived experiences, interacting identities, language development, dynamic language and cultural practices, and learning.
3. Engage in reflection and collaboration to challenge bias and discrimination in your environment, resources, policies, and practices connected to promoting and providing equitable opportunities for multilingual children.
4. Establish and sustain equitable relationships with the families and community members of the multilingual children you serve that are collaborative, informative, and reciprocal.
5. Collaborate with others across PreK–3 settings to promote and support multilingual children’s language development, dynamic language and cultural practices, and learning.
6. Establish and sustain environments that invite, welcome, and promote multilingual children’s language development, dynamic language and cultural practices, and learning.
7. Design and deliver curriculum and instruction that is developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically sustaining for multilingual children.
8. Design, select, and use a variety of equitable tools, in different contexts and over time, to observe, document, and assess multilingual children’s language development, dynamic language and cultural practices, and learning.

0 = Unsure 1 = Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Most of the time 4 = Always

Essential Action #	How do you promote equitable transitions through this action?	Level of Implementation (Rate from 0-4)

Review your ratings. Of the Essential Actions rated 0-2, what are your top priorities for collaboration? What are your next steps with these actions?

Review your ratings. Of the Essential Actions rated 3-4, how can you learn from and apply these successes? What are your next steps?

Conclusion

As you leave Plano, you might be thinking about connectivity—of people, of places, of communities. Transitions are an opportunity to get to know multilingual children and families individually and make community connections that are important to them. Transitions are also an opportunity for you to connect with other educators and to connect aspects of your curriculum in ways that promote equitable opportunities for multilingual children and families. P.H. Miller/Plano Early Learning educators offer the following recommendations as you facilitate equitable transitions for multilingual children:

Brittany Pezold: Start small and connect to what your specific site needs so that it doesn't feel like you'd be adding another thing to your plate. Reach out to other school districts. It's always nice to visit another school, get a fresh perspective on what they're doing, and how it's working.

Angelica Nicola: Start by reaching out to your network and reach out to family members. Encourage families—don't let go of your culture, don't let go of your heritage, and don't let go of your language. Show how you embrace children's languages and cultures at school.

Laurel Mateyka: Keep a clear vision in your head, get to know where kids and families are, and start to work with those agencies or those people. Listen and tell your story to build relationships and make connections.

Ruth Olquin: No hay una manera mala o una manera que es un error porque la verdad es que cada estudiante aprende diferente, cada estudiante se expresa diferente y cada estudiante lo hace de manera diferente, y no lo tienen que hacer igual que yo o la maestra. Es una manera de ellos. (There isn't a bad way or a wrong way because the truth is that each student learns differently, each student expresses themselves differently, and each student does things differently, and their way doesn't have to be the same as mine or the teacher. It's their way.)

Eduardo Pérez: Tenga conversaciones en las que hable sobre las cosas que ya está haciendo y cómo puede mejorar. (Have conversations where you talk about the things you are already doing and how you can improve.)

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