

Avenues for Advocacy: Individual, Local, State/National

Advocacy is a powerful way to challenge unfair policies and practices and drive change that benefits multilingual learners and their families and communities. This tool introduces three avenues for advocacy—individual, local, and state/national—with example actions in each.

Directions: Reflect on how you are partnering with multilingual learners and their families, community members, and colleagues to advocate for fair practices and policies. While you review the example actions and short vignettes, consider the following questions:

- What advocacy avenues am I currently using?
- Which advocacy avenues do I want to explore further?
- How can my advocacy efforts extend across individual, local, and state or national avenues?
- How am I centering student and family voices, ideas, and experiences in my advocacy?
- How am I ensuring that I take an asset-based, culturally and linguistically responsive approach to my advocacy work?

Following this reflection, identify one idea you would like to put into action.

Individual: Advocating for Specific Student(s) and Family(ies)

- Take action to ensure consistent, frequent reciprocal communication to share your classroom or program processes, procedures, student progress, and so forth in clear, family-friendly formats (e.g., family preferred language, preferred platforms); include a process for families to ask questions or express concerns.
- In response to family input, advocate for meeting schedules and platforms that work for families; ensure all information is shared, even with non-attendees, and opportunities for ongoing feedback are included.
- Advocate for what you need (time, professional learning) to scaffold assignments, texts, and tasks based on language needs and development of the multilingual learners you serve; collaborate with colleagues who share the students to ensure a unified approach.
- Regularly listen to and gather feedback from families—through surveys, conversations, or meetings—on classroom climate, resources, and their sense of belonging; respond to the information gathered and make changes as necessary.

Educator Vignette

"Our team surveyed our students' home languages and gathered input from family and community members; we are beginning to implement translanguaging pedagogy."

- Advocate for the implementation of translanguage pedagogy with colleagues and administration; create space for students to use their home languages in class assignments, tasks, and assessments; engage families in collaborative and informative conversations around translanguage pedagogy and your teaching practices.
- Support multilingual families in developing their advocacy skills—sharing the way school currently works and encouraging them to advocate in a variety of ways (storytelling, networking, visioning, organizing) for their individual and collective needs and community partnerships and for their cultural and linguistic practices and histories to be visible and incorporated into learning and environments.
- Support multilingual learners in developing their own advocacy skills—encouraging them to voice their ideas, needs, and identities through class projects, student-led conferences, or leadership roles.

Local: Advocating for School and District Policies and Practices

- Advocate for a shift in school–family partnership structures to ensure engagement is two-way and multilingual families have opportunities to share their stories and have their needs and preferences addressed and incorporated.
- Use accessible communication tools to gather input, involve families in planning, and work to remove barriers that prevent full participation in their child’s learning.
- Request and advocate for dedicated time to collaborate with colleagues, multilingual families, and community members to explore policies and practices that create barriers for families and promote more culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining opportunities (e.g., translanguage).
- Request and advocate for time to consistently review and edit curriculum and school-wide events and activities to ensure multilingual learners and their families feel welcomed and included and families have opportunities to collaborate, co-create, and lead.
- Collaborate with families to form a multilingual family action committee to advocate for ongoing partnerships and responsive policies, instruction, and engagement (such as access to enrichment programming, offering the Seal of Biliteracy in your district, or starting dual-language or heritage language programs).
- Participate in school board meetings or policy discussions impacting multilingual learners.
- Advocate for culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining practices for students and families during IEP or 504 meetings, counseling sessions, or intervention processes; ensure a collaborative process is in place that includes student and family voice.
- Build or strengthen partnerships with local organizations that advocate for and with multilingual communities to offer additional support, programming, or resources for students and families.
- Collaborate with families to review school or district-level enrollment, discipline, and/or course placement data and to identify patterns affecting multilingual learners; use that data to advocate for change.

Educator Vignette

“In response to family inquiry, we created a family-educator action team to research dual language programs and move toward a board proposal.”

State and National: Advocating for State and National Policies

- Advocate for the inclusion of minoritized languages in your state's Seal of Biliteracy program, and elevate student and family voices throughout the policy development and implementation process.
- Amplify immigrant and multilingual families' voices at the state level by encouraging multilingual students, families, and community members to participate in state advisory groups or state education boards and commissions.
- Support and vote for candidates who advocate for multilingual education; when appropriate, share your perspectives with colleagues and families to build awareness and engagement.
- Advocate for inclusive policies around standardized testing, school funding, programs, and curriculum that recognize and address the needs and strengths of multilingual learners.
- Share student, family, and community stories and outcomes with state leadership or media to promote change.
- Acknowledge April as Bi/Multilingual Learner Advocacy Month; share ways to advocate and collaborate to engage in an advocacy initiative.
- Participate in, and invite families and students to participate in, National Advocacy Day events in your state or in Washington, DC.
- Stay informed about proposed legislation affecting multilingual learners, and provide public comment or written testimony when relevant; help families navigate how to engage in these processes.

Educator Vignette

"I wrote a letter with multilingual students and families to our state representative about how recent policy changes are impacting their access to quality education."

Vignette of Advocacy Across Avenues →

Individual (Advocating for specific student(s) and family(ies))	Local (Advocating for school and district policies and practices)	State and National (Advocating for state and national policies)
<p>A multilingual child's family thinks an assessment that labeled their multilingual child as developmentally delayed was not culturally or linguistically responsive. They expressed their concern and advocated for other assessments to be used to understand their child's development and learning.</p>	<p>This prompted school and district educators to advocate for a change in the decision-making process used at the district level to be more expansive and offer more observational assessments in addition to the required formal, standardized assessments.</p>	<p>Together with families, district leaders advocated at the state level for more detailed guidance around culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment practices for multilingual children.</p>
<p>My Action</p>	<p>My Action</p>	<p>My Action</p>