

Navigating and Responding to Change With Students

Judy McGrath, a bilingual school therapist in Missouri, has collaborated with students, families, community organizations, and other educators to navigate and respond to changing contexts and needs within her school and district. Explore the considerations for practice below. They offer a starting place for reflection, exploration, and learning.

What questions or comments do your students share? How do you respond? What would support you as you navigate these conversations?

If I notice changes and have concerns about a multilingual learner, like absences or changes in behavior, I can . . .

- Prioritize empathy, trust, and relationship-building. Check in with the student from this lens.
- Check in with other educators who work with the student.
- Reach out to family members.
- Ask a colleague that the family knows and trusts to reach out to the student.
- Connect the family with trusted community resources.
- Document changes to understand patterns and offer continued support.

If a multilingual learner mentions something happening with them or their family, I can . . .

- Validate their experiences and feelings.
- Ask what the student thinks or feels about what is happening (the answer may be different than what we might assume).
- Reach out to home to offer support. When possible, it is ideal if the person reaching out has an established relationship with the family.
- Loop in the school counselor or social worker.
- Respect the family's privacy. Limit conversations with other staff (only discuss the topic with those who need to know).
- Focus on providing consistency and stability. Routine is helpful.

If classmates bring up issues affecting other students or their communities in class, I can . . .

- Clarify and guide students' understanding of issues impacting their community. Students often encounter information through media or conversations they may have heard. It's normal for students to have questions or be curious about what they have heard.
- Consider the comments made. If they seem to be made out of curiosity or concern, I will
 - Validate their curiosity.
 - Ask what part(s) they are curious about.
 - Respond with unbiased, factual information.
 - Encourage students to speak with adults they trust outside of school.

- Consider the comments made. If they are intentionally (or even unintentionally) harmful, I will
 - Speak individually with the student who made the comment with the intention to understand.
 - Offer unbiased, simple, factual information when appropriate.
 - Inform a school counselor or social worker.
 - Revisit classroom agreements.
 - Engage in restorative practices when indicated.

Notes

Record your ideas for navigating and responding to change with students.