

Monthly Coffee Chats

Building Trust With Multilingual Families

This resource offers guidance for starting and sustaining monthly coffee chats with families of multilingual learners. Educators can use the information to get started with coffee chats in their context or to reflect on similar activities they already do.

This resource was created in collaboration with Pushpanjali Sengupta, Multilingual Facilitator and WIDA Fellow, who has developed and implemented coffee chats in her district. These coffee chats have been instrumental for building trust with multilingual families in her context.

Purpose of Monthly Coffee Chats

Monthly coffee chats provide ongoing opportunities to engage in the following:

- Have open dialogue and center multilingual families' voices, including their questions, ideas, and needs.
- Build relationships across multilingual families, school staff, and community organizations; listen to multilingual families' needs and ideas.
- Identify ways to respond to families' needs and ideas at individual and systems levels.
- Provide opportunities for multilingual families to network with one another and advocate.

Getting Started

Consider the following steps before the first coffee chat:

- Form a small planning team.
- Identify the purposes for your ongoing coffee chats (see suggestions above).
- Create an agenda: For your first meeting(s), start with an open space for families to connect with each other and with school staff. Then choose topics that continue to center families' voices, needs, and ideas.
- Identify logistics:
 - Reserve a space at a time that's convenient for your multilingual families (and offer options, knowing that not all times are convenient for everyone).
 - Identify facilitators.
 - Plan for interpreters (people, apps, etc.).
 - Plan for translation of any written materials (for example, there are apps that will support families across language groups in connecting with each other).
 - Arrange for food and childcare.

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



- Create flyers in the languages your families prefer. Reach people through your connections with other educators, families, and community organizations. Ask families you already have a relationship with to share with other families they know.

During the Coffee Chat

- Begin with facilitators sharing their own stories briefly.
- Provide opportunities for families to engage with one another, within and across language groups.
- Offer a variety of ways for families to share, such as drawing, small-group conversations, 1:1 conversations, writing, and so on.

Sample Agenda

- 10 min: Introductions and agenda
- 30 min: Focus topic
- 10 min: Question and answer
- 10 min: Closing. Exit slip. Share plan for follow-up.

Sample Topics

- Families share their hopes and dreams for their children.
- Families create descriptions of the assets and experiences they bring to their families, school, and community. Record short videos of families sharing about their strengths.
- Families create cards for their children and their children's teachers/school that include answers to the following questions: What does culture mean to you? How does your language help you? Why is it important to sustain your language and culture?
- Families identify resources available in their communities in a variety of areas, such as health and wellness, basic needs, learning opportunities, and policy advocacy opportunities.
- Educators provide resources to promote families' understanding of the ACCESS test and MLL identification and programming.
- Educators explain their methods for teaching reading and writing and how families' knowledge and experience can be incorporated. Families complete community literacy mapping (documenting the multilingual literacy activities occurring in their homes and communities).

Following Up and Sustaining the Work

- Identify both themes and unique ideas that families shared. Share a summary with families, community organizations, and school/district administration and staff.
- Consider ways to display at school things that families create.
- Follow-up on any questions or needs (for example, support for a particular family; project to map community assets; policy changes to explore; family engagement initiatives to enhance; implications for classroom instruction to promote children's and families' interests, experiences, and dynamic language and cultural practices).
- Connect with people who wanted to attend but weren't there, and ask if they have feedback or ideas to share.
- Use ideas and needs families shared to plan the next coffee chat session.

Tips

- **Begin with building relationships:** If you are just beginning a more collaborative relationship with families, consider starting with an open session for families to connect with each other and school staff and to share their thoughts and ideas.
- **Co-plan and co-facilitate with families:** Always consider how families can be and are leaders in the initiative. Invite families into the planning and facilitation process in ways that they prefer. Encourage families who may be hesitant that their voices matter.
- **Get the word out: Identify the connections you already have.** Talk with families who could spread the word. Get together and think about which families you might be missing. Connect with community organizations that multilingual families visit. Personalize flyers or other communications for different groups.
- **Connect with administration and other colleagues:** Invite colleagues from a variety of roles to the planning team and to the coffee chats (classroom teachers, administrators, multilingual teachers, counselors, etc.). Communicate with administrators and other colleagues by sharing common questions, concerns, and ideas that they can follow-up on or act on given their role.
- **Set up the space to position families as experts:** During introductions, share your own stories too; not to take up space but to humanize your background and highlight one thing that worked for you about school and one struggle. Walk around when talking to the whole group (not up front). Share what you are interested in learning more about from and with families. Give families space to share what they are comfortable with about themselves, their families, and communities. When you are not presenting, sit down with families.