

Connecting to Curriculum: Engaging Families in Student Writing

How can educators engage families to support their multilingual learners' language development and learning? One way is to connect families to the curriculum. Samhita Basuthakur, multilingual educator and WIDA Fellow, and her seventh- and eighth-grade multilingual learners did just that. Throughout their writing units, students interviewed and collaborated with their families. Explore Samhita and her students' story to consider how you might connect families to your curriculum.

Connecting to Curriculum and Content Standards

Samhita's writing instruction is grounded in a standards-based curriculum organized into four genre units: narrative, informative, research, and argumentative. In her classroom, she

- Provides students with meaningful choices in topics and prompts that reflect and build on their experiences as multilingual learners
- Creates opportunities for students to engage with their families across writing units
- Uses the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards Framework and accompanying resources to integrate content and language development in lesson planning

This resource highlights strategies Samhita used to engage families during the narrative, informative, and research units.

Narrative Unit

- Students chose their own narrative topics.
- Samhita checked in with families and students on sensitive topics.
- Students relied on families to share special details and facts.
- Students collaborated with their families to write their Coming to America stories.
- Language Expectation ELD-SI.4-12.Narrate was an important standard focus for this unit.



"Building positive relationships with our students and their families is the most important thing. Once we establish that 'Sacred Circle of Trust,' our classroom becomes family and the catalyst for academic success and social-emotional growth." – Samhita Basuthakur

Informative Unit

- In connection with a larger curriculum unit, students collaborated with their families to research and write about a meaningful tradition or holiday celebrated in their culture.
- Students co-edited their stories with family and peer support.

Research Unit

- Students interviewed their families about a favorite family dish and researched the history of the dish.
 - What is your one special family food tradition?
 - Why is it important to your family?
 - Who did you get the recipe from? How did you learn it?
 - Who started this family tradition? How long has your family been practicing this tradition and how old is it?
 - Where in the world did this recipe originate?
 - What are the main ingredients in the recipe?
 - In the past, how were the ingredients obtained for the recipe? (Did they grow it, harvest it, trade it, fish or hunt it?)
 - What artifacts support your family tradition? How do they support your tradition?
- Students collaborated with their family to create a recipe.
- Students added fun anecdotes to the recipe.

Culminating Publications and Activity

- Students edited writing pieces to be included in class publications and added family dedications and acknowledgements to their work.
- Students, families, and educators participated in an end-of-year multilingual and multicultural family and community engagement event that showcased students' research and writing.

Tips to Get Started

- Review your curriculum for opportunities to engage families in their children's learning.
- Check in with students' families to gather their input and ideas.
- Collaborate with colleagues to plan and implement family engagement practices throughout the teaching and learning cycle.
- Get to know students and their families and begin building relationships before the school year starts. Building trust early on is essential to fostering strong partnerships.
- Explore and utilize resources to incorporate culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining practices into your instruction.

Thank you to Samhita Basuthakur, her multilingual students, and their families for their contributions to the development of this tool. View a [curated list of students' writing samples](#).