ELLEVATION

Exploring the intersection of multilingual learners and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)

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About Ellevation

Ellevation is a mission-driven company dedicated to helping English Learners (ELs) achieve their highest aspirations. We are an indispensable partner to school district administrators, teachers, and students across the United States, who use our products to manage complex program requirements, build the capacity of teachers to serve multilingual learners, and empower students with the academic language necessary for success in school. Ellevation is the only EL program management solution that goes beyond compliance and impacts instruction in every classroom.

Note: We aim to use language that is not only easily recognizable by our readers but also aligns with our inclusive values. That's why both of the following terms are used in this white paper: English learner (EL) and multilingual learner (MLL).

Each student in our schools brings unique interests, background knowledge, learning perspectives, social-emotional assets, and differences to our communities. Multilingual learners bring their own individual assets to contribute to learning that can help them make cross-linguistic and cross-cultural connections; this includes bringing diverse perspectives based on their lived experience. As educators strive to create welcoming, affirming, and engaging classrooms, it's critical that we develop systems to identify and support the broad linguistic, learning, and behavioral dimensions of each student, thus educating the whole child.

Educating the Whole Child

ACADEMIC · · · · · · · · · · · · LINGUISTIC
SOCIAL
EMOTIONAL
PHYSICAL · · · · · · · · · · · · CULTURAL

What is MTSS?

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) provide a data-rich system for supporting learning and social-emotional dimensions that all students bring to our schools. MTSS systems are built around a three-tier system:
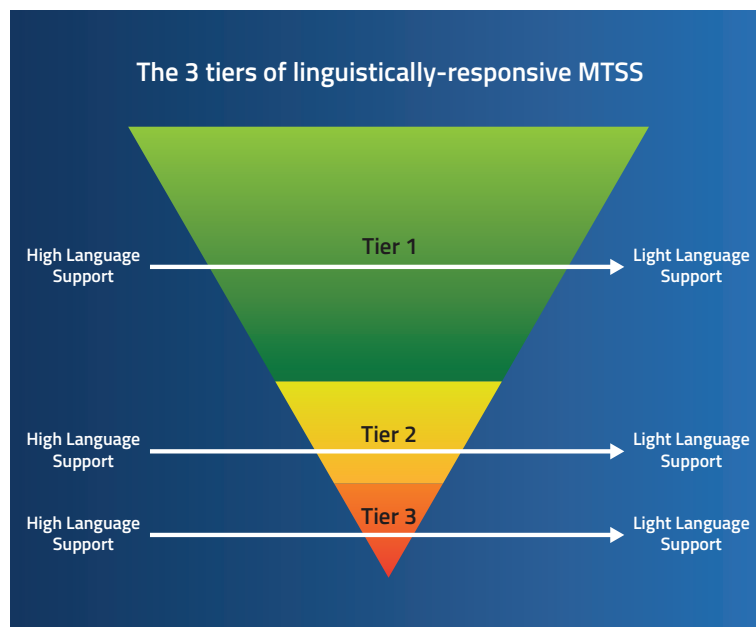
Tier 1: Universal for all students
100%
ELD is always Tier 1

Tier 2: Targeted

**Tier 3:
Intensive**
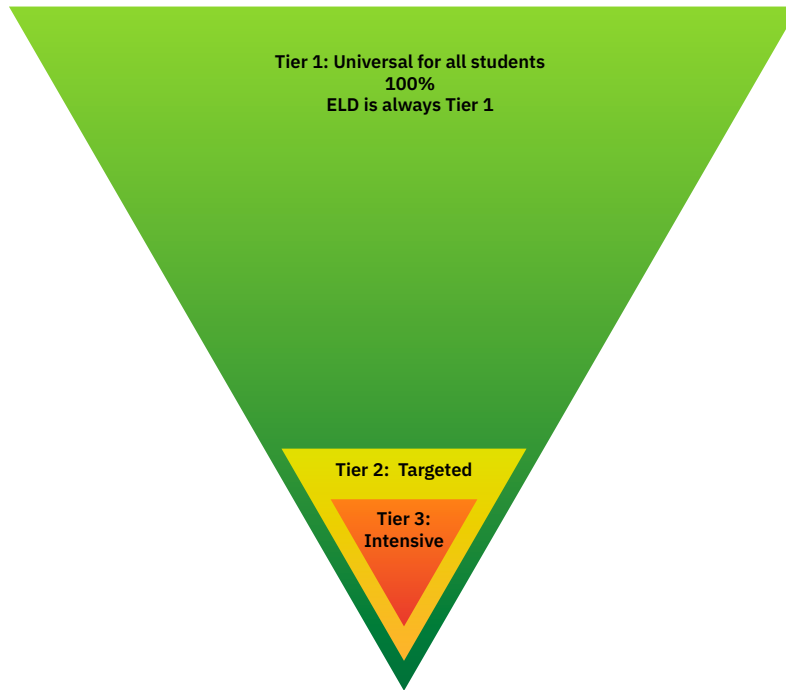
Tier 1 instruction is strong core instruction that focuses on grade-level standards and includes linguistic supports to ensure all learners can access content and build language. Tier 1 assessments and instructional supports must be carefully selected to accurately help data review teams identify possible needs for intervention.

Tier 2 interventions are designed to be shared with individuals or small groups who need to develop specific skills beyond those acquired in Tier 1. These could be instructional, linguistic, and/or social-emotional. Interventions include regular progress monitoring to ensure effectiveness.

Tier 3 interventions address the smallest percentage of students who require intensive intervention. Tier 3 includes frequent progress monitoring and data-based individualization.

At each tier, MTSS includes assessments to identify challenge areas and progress, materials to support high-quality instruction, and varied resources for targeted and intensive interventions.[6]

The 3 tiers of linguistically-responsive MTSS

High Language Support → Tier 1 → Light Language Support

High Language Support → Tier 2 → Light Language Support

High Language Support → Tier 3 → Light Language Support

Adapted from Project Lee[10]

All tiers must include:

☐ Assessment

  ☐ Content assessments that are linguistically accessible at all proficiency levels

  ☐ Language monitoring to discern whether a learner's needs involve content, language, social-emotional behavior, or a combination of those

☐ Instruction and intervention

  ☐ A strong emphasis on ensuring Tier 1 instruction is designed to build both language and content growth

  ☐ High-quality, culturally responsive materials to ensure instruction and intervention address cultural and linguistic assets and opportunities

☐ Supports

  ☐ Linguistic supports and modifications for varied levels of language proficiency; increasing supports in Tier 1 and Tier 3 to reduce cognitive load

  ☐ Understanding how different language backgrounds will influence the types of supports

  ☐ Consideration of students' unique cultural and social-emotional assets and experiences

  ☐ Supports must be strategically employed and gradually diminished to promote independence

☐ Capacity and collaboration

  ☐ Sustained professional learning to develop general education teachers' understanding and skills

  ☐ Time, resources, and tools that are needed to enable co-planning with subject matter experts

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Making MTSS tiers culturally and linguistically responsive

Multilingual learners have been misidentified for Special Education programs for decades, which was first noted in the 1960s and continues on today. Around 13% of general education students are identified for special education. For MLLs, the nationwide average is 16% and some states classify over 25%.[8] This may be occurring due to unfamiliarity with the uniqueness of multilingual learners or a lack of understanding of how language acquisition could lead to overidentification. These same factors may also affect MTSS systems. Some problematic factors to consider are:

- Over-reliance on assessments that often misdiagnose language challenges as learning or literacy challenges since cut scores are not measured against "true peers"

   Note: A true peer shares the same language background, number of years in the U.S., and other key attributes[11]

- Inconsistent use of progress monitoring assessments for language learning
- Lack of high-quality, culturally-responsive resources for instruction and intervention that integrate content and language learning
- Appropriate linguistic and cultural supports to address the diverse needs and assets that characterize English learners (ELs) in U.S. classrooms
- Lack of educator knowledge in the unique aspects of language development and how to assess and support language growth
- Challenges in bringing multiple measures and experts together for efficient and collaborative analysis of content, language, and behavioral factors

MTSS includes assessments, instruction, and supports at every tier. Each of these key elements has cultural and linguistic considerations that are key in planning and delivering instruction and intervention.

Assessment

Progress monitoring is a key ingredient in all three tiers of MTSS. Assessments that are used to identify strengths and needs must be linguistically accessible at all language proficiency levels. Linguistic barriers may create false positives on literacy or content assessments that could result in misidentification of where learning supports and interventions are needed and where additional language supports should be provided.

To prevent misdiagnosis, it's important to include strong systems to monitor language growth. All states include clear definitions of language proficiency levels that describe what students can do and help educators set goals for language growth. MTSS assessment systems should incorporate these measures so that they can be interpreted alongside content or social-emotional assessments. As teams engage in analyzing assessment results, it's also critical that comparisons are made with true peers.

Progress Monitoring

Student Name	Overall Level	i-Ready Diagnostic ELA Lexile	SBAC ELA Achievement Level	Course Grades ELA Level Gr
Adrien, Gilbert	3 - Moderately Developed · ELPAC Summative · 2/23/2020	875 3/10/2021 · 590 3/17/2019 · 640 7/8/2018	2 - Standard Nearly Met 5/9/2020 · 2 - Standard Nearly Met	D 2018/2019 · Q
Aguilar, Gerda	3 - Moderately Developed · ELPAC Summative · 2/4/2021	400 3/10/2021	1 - Standard Not Met 5/10/2020 · 1 - Standard Not Met 5/8/	D 2018/2019 · Q
Albarafi, Karishma	2 - Somewhat Developed · ELPAC Summative · 2/26/2020	1155 3/10/2021 · 375 3/16/2019 · 420 2/4/2018	2 - Standard Nearly Met 5/8/2020 · 2 - Standard Nearly Met	A 2018/2019 · Q
Allman, Erold	2 - Somewhat Developed · ELPAC Summative · 2/27/2020	445 3/10/2021 · 595 3/10/2016	1 - Standard Not Met 5/9/2020 · 2 - Standard Nearly Met 5	B- 2018/2019 · Q
Alvarenque-Zuniga, Ana	4 - Well Developed · ELPAC Summative · 2/28/2020	770 3/10/2021 · 815 3/16/2019 · 550 9/11/2016	2 - Standard Nearly Met 5/9/2020 · 2 - Standard Nearly Met	A- 2018/2019 · Q
Alzime, Theodoro	1 - Minimally Developed · ELPAC Summative · 2/26/2020	965 3/10/2021	2 - Standard Nearly Met 5/10/2020 · 1 - Standard Not Met 5	F 2018/2019 · Q
Amerson, Ketna	3 - Moderately Developed · ELPAC Summative · 2/26/2020	790 3/10/2021	1 - Standard Not Met 5/5/2020 · 1 - Standard Not Met 5/9/2	D 2018/2019 · Q
Apraez, Jenny	3 - Moderately Developed · ELPAC Summative · 3/1/2020	390 3/10/2021 · 690 4/4/2019	2 - Standard Nearly Met 5/11/2020 · 2 - Standard Nearly Me	C 2018/2019 · Q
Araujo Rodriguez, Madjina	2 - Intermediate EL (Expanding/Bridging) · ELPAC Initial · 9/1/2	1010 3/10/2021	1 - Standard Not Met 5/5/2020 · 2 - Standard Nearly Met 5	C- 2018/2019 · Q

« First « Previous **1** 2 3 4 5 Next » Last » 25 ▾

Instruction and Intervention

Teaching and intervention at all three tiers must also address the unique needs and varied levels of language development. Language and learning are interdependent and develop simultaneously. Listening, reading, writing, and speaking should be included when planning learning experiences at all MTSS levels. Instruction and intervention plans must include intentional and rigorous language objectives in addition to content or social-emotional objectives.

All students bring diverse background knowledge and experiences to the classroom. For classrooms with a rich diversity of multilingual students, there are more opportunities for building background knowledge and supporting intercultural connections. With a focus on culturally responsive instruction, you'll be able to validate and nurture your MLLs' authentic ways of being and also help them recognize that cultural differences are strengths everyone can learn from.[5]

Supports

The content or social-emotional interventions that are part of an MTSS must support linguistically diverse learners at varied points in their journey toward biliteracy and biculturalism. ELs vary in terms of language proficiency levels, home language assets, and cultural assets, so a one-size-fits-all approach is not an option. Supports should be strategically planned, amplified to address cognitive load at certain points in the intervention cycle, and diminished to support independence as students grow.

Language and literacy

Students come to learn with a wide range of literacy levels not only in their home language, but also in English. Students who are beginning to develop a new language will need more support than those who are nearing proficiency. Supports must be differentiated according to language proficiency level.[4&12] While coordination is key and there may be common patterns of needs and opportunities, it's important that **MTSS** and **language development** supports are treated as separate systems and given equal attention.
Note: Language development classes are always considered Tier 1 instruction.

Linguistic diversity

Diverse MLL home languages bring varied assets and opportunities for Tier 1 instruction and intervention. Some students have language backgrounds with similar letters or sounds and directionality. Others have broadly different alphabetic and text systems. The rich linguistic assets students bring from their home language should be strategically employed to support content and social-emotional instruction and intervention. When possible, enable students to engage in learning while leveraging their home language. In addition, attend to specific opportunities to leverage skills and knowledge that transfer. For every language there are sounds, spellings, grammatical structures, usage patterns, or other linguistic attributes that do not transfer. By equipping educators with information about these linguistic differences, supports can be strategically adjusted to efficiently address unique language needs.
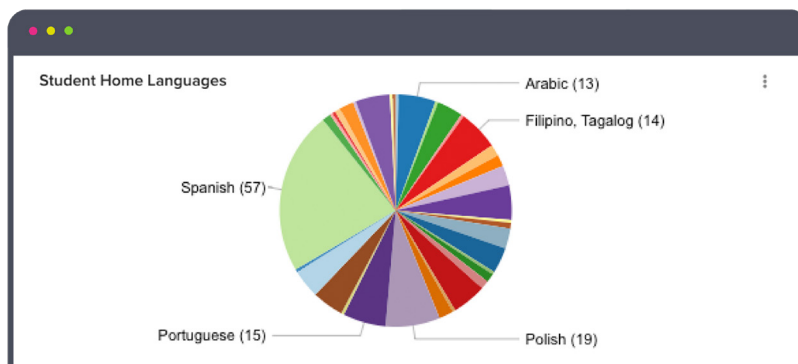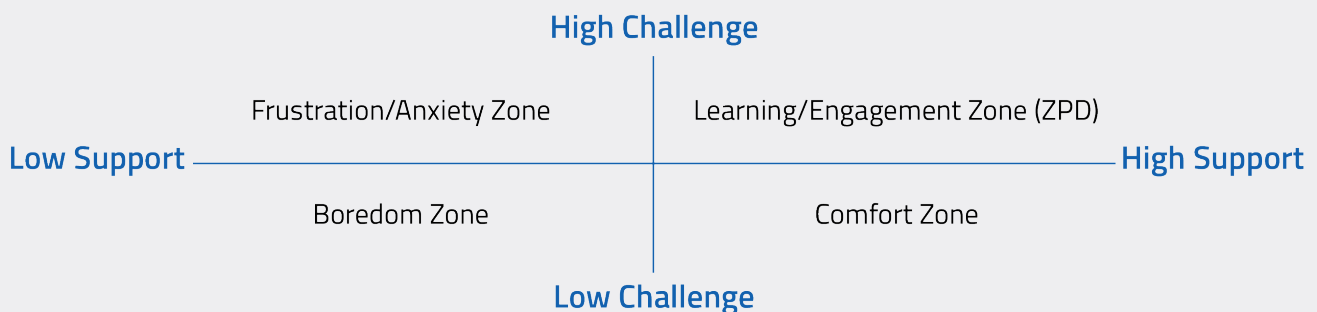
Social-emotional

Social-emotional supports and interventions must also consider the broad variety of multilingual learners. Cultural norms vary widely, and each unique family and individual within a culture will have their own approach to those broader norms. Students with interrupted schooling or who have experienced trauma will have unique needs and assets. Some newcomers may need high linguistic support but little content or behavior intervention and support. Other newcomers, especially those with interrupted schooling and histories of trauma, may need support and intervention in all three dimensions: language, content, and social-emotional needs. Differentiating all aspects of teaching and assessing must consider the cultural and experiential attributes that students bring.

It's also important to remember that multilingual learners are often doing double the work of their monolingual peers,[12] as they must learn both content and language simultaneously. This is a significant factor in cognitive load - the amount of working memory a person can bring to a task. As educators, interventionists, and language development staff collaborate on meeting the diverse needs of MLLs, plans must consider where to free up cognitive capacity to engage with content learning or social-emotional development; this could mean deciding where to strategically leverage content and assessments in a student's home language or whether to add additional or more intensive language supports.

Supports are critical to provide equitable access to learning, especially when the content language challenge is high. As students develop knowledge in content and language, supports should be reduced to support increased student independence.

Optimizing scaffolding for English learners engaged in academic tasks
(Gibbons 2009, adapted from Mariani 1997)

High Challenge

| Frustration/Anxiety Zone | Learning/Engagement Zone (ZPD) |

Low Support ——————————————————————————————————— **High Support**

| Boredom Zone | Comfort Zone |

Low Challenge

Adapted from The California English Language Development Standards[2]

Educator capacity and collaboration

Assessment systems, supports, and instruction and intervention solutions are tools that need to be wielded by a community of professionals who can collaborate to enhance student outcomes. Recent data from the Migration Policy Institute indicates that fewer than 50% of pre-service teachers have taken courses focused on ELs.[7] There are similar gaps in expertise across content specialization, the needs of students in special education, and addressing social-emotional needs. To address the needs of the whole child, systems are needed to support sustained professional learning and maximize opportunities for co-planning.

MLLs spend the majority of their days in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, the general education teacher has the potential to have an outsized impact on EL language and content outcomes. The use of research-based teaching strategies in mainstream classroom instruction, when delivered by a prepared, highly qualified teacher, can prevent students from falling behind or needing remediation materials.[1] **Therefore, the opportunity for impacting outcomes requires building teacher capacity to accelerate language and content learning within culturally sustaining environments.** These practices enable MLLs to equitably access high-quality, rigorous, grade-level learning. When schools are able to build teacher capacity and effectively put research into practice, there is ample evidence of student success.[1]

Ellevation Strategies is an ESSA-aligned professional learning solution. The modules are set up in a Learn-Teach-Reflect model to help educators deepen knowledge and improve instructional practice.

Classroom teachers need ongoing, regularly-scheduled opportunities to co-plan with experts in special populations to ensure they are applying resources and techniques effectively for both Tier 1 instruction and intervention.[3] Teams connecting in meetings and equipped with qualitative and quantitative data can effectively and efficiently address the broad array of opportunities and challenges for a whole child. Having systems and structures to capture data, record decisions, and communicate goals and plans ensures these rich collaboration sessions have meaningful application in all tiers of instruction and intervention.

Managing MTSS through MLL instruction and assessment

Pairing a language learning program management and evaluation tool, like Ellevation Platform, with MTSS evaluation, analysis, and implementation resources can be vital for multilingual learners. For both MTSS and EL Program Management, systems must include:

- **Consolidated data** that enables instructional teams to consider multiple measures of content and language learning
- Systems to **set goals** and **identify strengths and needs**
- Collaborative planning, learning processes, and systems to **personalize instruction**
- Ways to **monitor progress** in language, social-emotional development, and content learning
- Collaborative processes and systems to evaluate progress data and **adjust supports and interventions**

While Ellevation Platform is not an MTSS solution, it brings program history, assessment data, and observational assessments together to support a range of instructional decision-making. With Ellevation, leaders can ensure assessments, linguistic supports, and instruction and intervention are integrated into MTSS, which can enhance social-emotional, content, and language outcomes. Our Forms product streamlines data management from multiple sources and individuals, allowing educators to get a clearer picture and plan next steps. It also provides the ability to drill down on the collected data to create more precise instructional impact.

Ellevation Platform facilitates decision making to improve outcomes for all students.

Brings together EL data and input from multiple sources and individuals in one convenient place.

Drives progress monitoring to facilitate ongoing adjustments to instruction.

Enables goal setting based on identified strengths and needs.

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