

A Guide to Effective Professional Development for Teachers of Multilingual Learners

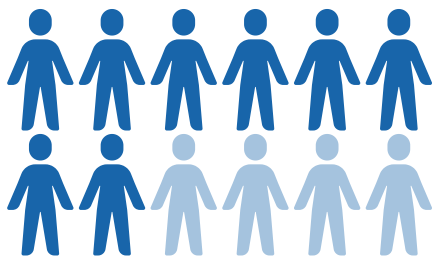


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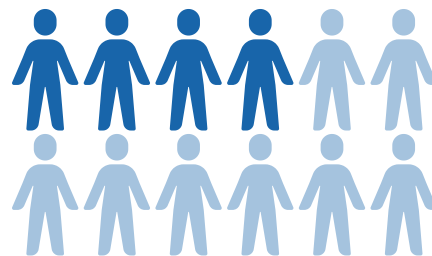
The Challenge

Educational outcomes for multilingual learners (MLLs) are impacted by a number of factors. State and national educational policy play a significant role, as do curriculum and other learning materials and resources. But one of the biggest factors in driving outcomes is the quality and preparedness of teachers.

Although teacher capacity is critical, our systems for building capacity are insufficient. Recent data from the Migration Policy Institute indicated that fewer than 50 percent of pre-service teachers had taken courses focused on MLLs (Lazarin, 2021). Once they join the profession, teachers are often not given the support they need to continue learning. A 2005 study in California found that 43 percent of teachers whose classes consist of a majority of English learners had only one or fewer professional learning experiences in the past five years on how to meet the needs of MLLs. This leaves the overwhelming majority of teachers in U.S. schools unprepared to effectively teach multilingual learners. This is particularly concerning given that MLLs, commonly known as English language learners or emergent bilingual students, are the fastest growing population in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).



2/3 of all teachers have at least one ML in their classroom



fewer than half of those have taken any courses on instructing MLs

“Research shows that providing students with qualified, fully-prepared teachers is a critical component for raising student achievement.”

-Poldusky et al., 2019

Despite a clear need for additional teacher capacity to meet the needs of MLLs, the challenge of building teacher capacity to serve MLLs has proved difficult to overcome. As a result, student outcomes have plateaued. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tracks the difference between test scores for hispanic and non-hispanic students over time. They found that there was no meaningful improvement between 1992 and 2009 (Hemphill, 2010). Due to minimal time, limited materials, and a shortage of in-district facilitators, it can be difficult for districts to engage teachers in effective professional development (PD) that addresses the needs of MLLs.

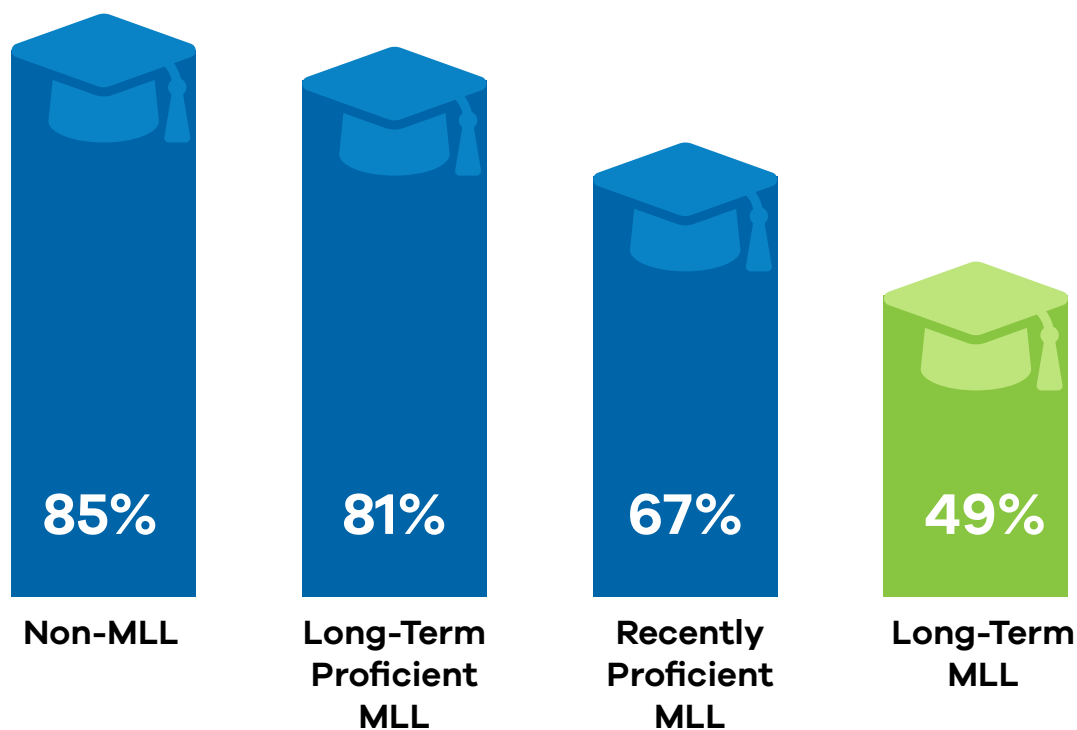
Building capacity for general education teachers to better serve their MLLs has the potential to make a lasting impact for individuals and communities. If all teachers become teachers of language and content, we can significantly accelerate outcomes for MLLs and other students who struggle with academic language. Outcomes include not only test scores or reclassification rates, but also engagement and long-term outcomes like graduation rates.



The Opportunity

Multilingual learners have immense potential. Data shows that long-term proficient MLLs have graduation rates that are almost equal to students who entered the school system with a strong command of English (non-MLLs). Some studies show that attendance, course grades, and other metrics are stronger for reclassified multilingual students than for non-MLLs (de la Torre et al, 2019). For those students who do not progress, however, the results are alarming. Students who are still classified as MLLs after 5 or 6 years of instruction in U.S. schools (long-term MLLs) have graduation rates that are 36 points lower than non-MLLs.

Graduation Rates:



Source: Huang et al., 2016

The data is compelling. There is a significant difference in graduation rates between long-term MLLs and those who were successfully reclassified earlier in their school experience. Disparities like these make it crucial to recognize that improved outcomes for students are most impacted by the quality of teachers in front of them. Educator quality and preparedness is the single most important driver of these positive outcomes. In his meta-analysis covering more than 80 million students worldwide, John Hattie identified Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) as the “new number one” factor in improving outcomes. CTE speaks specifically to the belief that one can impact outcomes. CTE is built through building both educator knowledge and practice. As teachers improve their practice, students improve.

MLLs spend the majority of their days in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, the general education teacher has the potential to have an outsized impact on MLL 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 (August & Shannahan, 2006).

The opportunity for impacting outcomes, therefore, requires building teacher capacity to accelerate language and content learning within culturally sustaining environments. These practices enable MLLs to equitably access to high-quality education. When schools are able to build teacher capacity and effectively put research into practice, there is ample evidence of student success. Success is possible. To meet this opportunity, professional learning solutions must address two key dimensions:



Increase Teacher Knowledge By....

- Meet the **6 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) PD criteria**, ensuring PD is data-driven, classroom-focused, job-embedded, collaborative, sustained, and intensive



Change Classroom Practice by....

- Leverage specific **routines and strategies** that impact outcomes for MLLs, putting knowledge and skills into action
- Address a broad range of **language practices** including building background, clarifying input, fortifying output, fostering interactions, developing academic language, assessing language and learning, constructing cultural competency, and advancing biliteracy
- Seamlessly integrating **content and language** to maximize outcomes and engage multilingual students in rigorous, grade-level learning experiences
- **Differentiating instruction** to address the broad diversity of language learners

Ellevation Strategies

Logic Model





Increase Teacher Knowledge

According to the Effective Teacher Professional Development Report (Learning Policy Institute, 2017), professional development must be classroom focused and collaborative, offer feedback and reflection, and be of sustained duration (more than one session). Research on the characteristics of effective professional learning is highly consistent and was recently codified in national education policy as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). When PD meets these six criteria, research demonstrates that it will impact teacher learning, instructional practices, and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Data-Driven analyze data to meet the needs of learners	Classroom-Focused practices taking place during instructional time	Job-Embedded ongoing learning directly connected to instruction	Collaborative multiple people working toward a common goal or shared practice	Sustained not stand-alone, 1 day or short-term workshops	Intensive in-depth learning on a specific concept or practice
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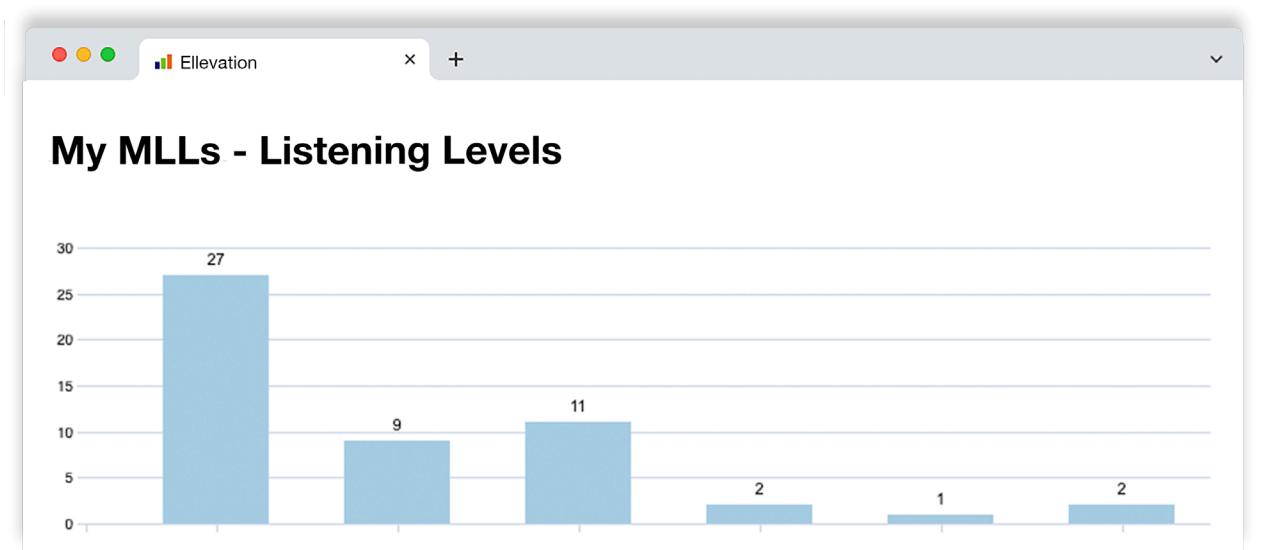
“When these essential elements are present in PD courses, teachers are more invested, have more opportunities to engage in the sustained practice of concepts they are learning about, there is a greater positive impact on student achievement.”

-Darling-Hammond et al., 2017

Data-Driven

Quality professional learning should begin with student data. Timely and useful data ensures learning priorities are focused on the most critical topics for both teachers and for administrators. The MLL population in U.S. schools is richly diverse. The data required to optimize PD for teachers of MLLs needs to address the complexity of home language and culture, language learning, and content learning.

In order to begin an effective learning journey with clarity, teachers need to leverage key data to help build an understanding of their diverse student populations. For multilingual students, there is a broad set of data to consider including English language proficiency assessment (ELP) results, formative and summative measures of content learning, and key demographic data. All educators benefit from deepening their understanding of how students develop language by the domain (reading, writing, listening, speaking). The range of abilities in these four domains is often diverse and varied. Students bring varied assets to learning and progress in one domain may go more quickly than progress in another.

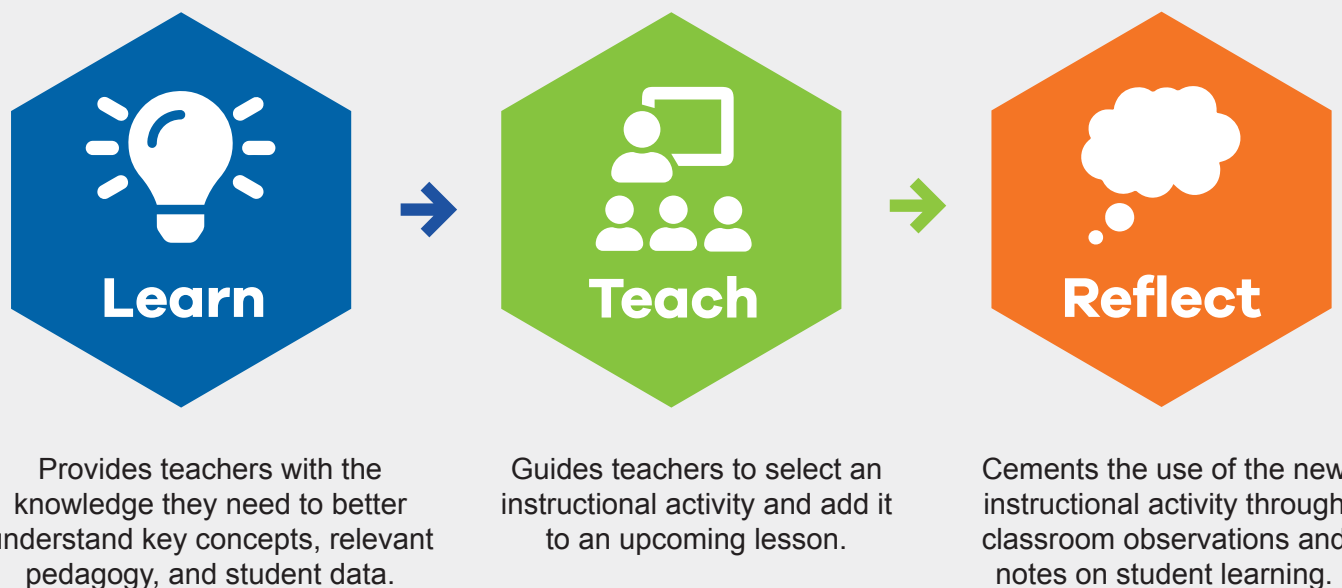


Leveraging data to plan and reflect on instruction is important, but data can be confusing and overwhelming. Increased collaborative time for understanding the data and rethinking instruction, as a result, does have benefits for student learning. And having systems that aggregate data helps focus precious collaborative time on analysis rather than collection of data.

Professional learning should be differentiated for teachers just as classroom learning is differentiated for students. The Council of Great City Schools (2021) summarizes this in their definition of best practices: “professional growth opportunities are purposefully selected and customized to the roles, responsibilities, and needs of the intended audience.” Teachers new to the field with little to no background experiences with MLLs will have different PD needs than experienced teachers who have demonstrated effectiveness with linguistically diverse students. Data in language proficiency test scores may point to areas of focus -- with some cohorts of educators focusing on speaking while others focus on writing, for example.

Classroom-Focused

Teachers need a mix of theory and practice as part of their learning. When teachers more deeply understand and use research-based best practices in the classroom, it contributes to better use of instructional strategies they can apply to meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013). The most effective PD is related to classroom practice, inclusive of subject content, pedagogical content knowledge, and the student learning process specific to the subject (Kooy & van Veen, 2012).



Having classroom-focused PD is especially important for teachers of MLLs. Research has indicated that general education teachers often overlook the needs for scaffolding MLLs, especially those who have some command of social English (de Jong & Harper, 2005). While social language is helpful, it is not sufficient for interacting with the complex ideas, texts, and tasks associated with academic learning. Engaging with the varied MLLs in their classroom enables teachers to bridge the application of theory and practice and more fully understand and hone new teaching routines and strategies.

Job-Embedded

Most districts and schools have structures in place to support job-embedded PD. Job-embedded PD is recurring PD time built into the annual calendar, faculty meeting times, and embedded weekly time for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Croft et al, 2010). In the past, the most common form of PD was stand-alone workshops. Research shows, however, that workshops have little to no impact on student learning or teacher practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Today, PLCs, PD days built into the school calendar, and even faculty meetings have replaced many one-time sessions.

Job-embedded PD goes beyond having clear times and places for learning. It needs to be directly connected to instruction. Developing a shared knowledge and language base that can be leveraged in co-planning equips teaching teams to more efficiently and effectively plan for instruction, conduct and observe instruction, and assess language and content learning (Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014).

“Quality professional development engages teachers in inquiry around the concrete teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection, and provides them with the opportunity to make connections between their learning and their classroom instruction.”

-Borko et al., 2010

Job-embedded PD is particularly important for serving MLLs. MLLs typically interact with a range of teaching professionals across their school day, including specialists and general education teachers. By making PD a part of the fabric of the teaching community, all educators are able to tap into student assets and leverage opportunities to drive success. The intersection between language and content learning is so complex and interrelated. Through job-embedded PD for MLLs educators are best able to collaborate as they analyze what learning successes and challenges are influenced by language acquisition progress versus content learning challenges.

Collaborative

When PD is job-embedded, it provides greater opportunities for collaboration. Adult learning theory shows that encouraging reflection and dialogue, either with a peer, a group, or even internally, enables learning to take place (Kooy & van Veen, 2012; Ruiz-Primo et al., 2011). When teachers have the opportunity to review and discuss materials together, observe the teaching of others, and share expertise and experiences, they are more likely to use what they learn in the classroom. Reflection connects the classroom experience and knowledge gained to instructional planning and practice.

Even with job-embedded PD, time for collaboration is limited and precious. A blended learning experience includes a mix of asynchronous learning, combined with in-person collaboration, classroom instruction and application, and reflection. This combination both meets the tenets of research on outcomes and aligns with the constraints of school systems.

Collaboration is particularly important when addressing the needs and assets of MLLs. In addition to collaboration between peers, co-planning and collaboration with specialists drives strong outcomes (York-Barr, 2007). Classroom teachers benefit from 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.

Sustained

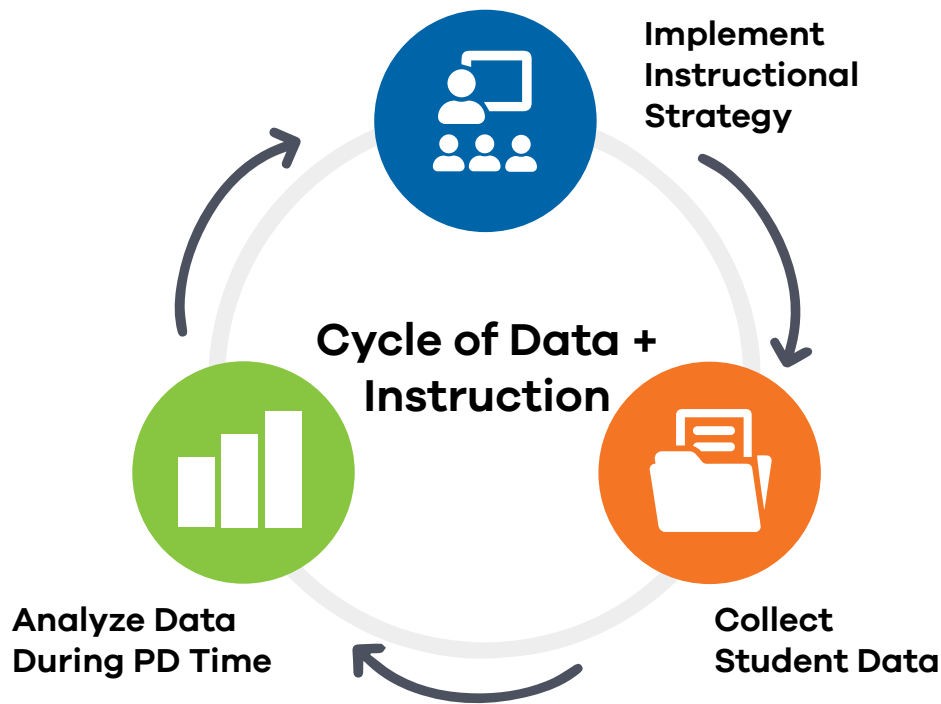
Professional learning and increased teacher knowledge and skills are effective when they take place over time and in more than one sitting. To see a measurable improvement in teacher practice, the study and practice should be for a sustained amount of time over one or more school years. Multiple sessions and a follow-up to teaching are more effective than stand-alone sessions. When teachers attend multiple sessions on a focused topic, it gives them the opportunity to learn, teach, reflect, and then repeat with discussion and collaboration, building up knowledge and skill over time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kooy & van Veen, 2012).

“Encouraging reflection and dialogue, whether with the self, another, or a group, enables learning to take place. However, learning to reflect—especially in a critical manner—is itself a developmental process that needs to be fostered in adult learning settings. Critical reflection is essential for transformative learning.”

-Merriman, 2014

To conduct sustained PD within the constraints of school schedules and other priorities, it is important that PD is delivered in digestible chunks that build upon one another. Engaging in targeted learning experiences over time also enables teachers to not only apply learnings over several lessons but also reflect and assess the impact of new knowledge and practice. When high-quality professional learning materials are persistently available, it's easy to deliver and scale to the educators that need it most.

Sustained PD also enables educators to integrate learning into a consistent cycle of data and instruction. When PD is sustained over time, teachers can continuously collect and monitor formative data, analyze it, and refine the instructional strategies that they employ in the classroom.



Teachers of MLLs must have the opportunity to systematically develop additional skills and knowledge related to language and culture in linguistically integrated classrooms (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Language learning is a complex and multifaceted process and, as noted, the MLL community is broad and diverse. Having a sustained focus on MLLs enables teachers to build the comprehensive background essential to the work of driving both content and language outcomes.



Change Classroom Practice

MLLs are asked to do double the work of their non-MLL peers. In addition to engaging with rigorous content skills and knowledge, MLLs need to simultaneously learn and interact in a new language and, oftentimes, navigate new cultural and social scenarios (Short et al., 2007). Specific teaching routines and practices have been shown to impact outcomes for MLLs (August & Shannahan, 2007). Educators must be able to reduce the cognitive load for students and ensure that teaching and learning activities leverage research-based practices.

What are language routines and practices?

Routines

Routines are consistent classroom moves that are introduced early in the school year and repeated throughout the year. They include classroom management, language or content learning, and assessment all through a culturally relevant lens. Leveraging consistent routines has long been established as an effective approach to teaching. Routines reduce the cognitive load for students by leveraging known, practiced actions. This frees up working memory to focus on new content and language (Leinhardt et al., 1987). Once students understand the process, routines become regularly occurring activities that students are able to complete with little or no guidance, which means that teachers can devote more time to instruction rather than giving students logistical directions. Simply put, students are able to learn more and teachers can teach more. If routines are consistent across a teaching community, this impact is exponential. And the time investment to implement these is relatively small.

“Instructional [routines] are tasks enacted in classrooms that structure the relationship between the teacher and the students around content in ways that consistently maintain high expectations of student learning while adapting to the contingencies of particular instructional interactions.”

-Kazemi, E., Franke, M., & Lampert, M. (2009)

Language Practices

Language practices are research-based, foundational structures that create high-rigor, high-support instructional environments for linguistically diverse students. Instruction and assessment methods that are effective with general education populations are not necessarily effective with MLLs. What's good for MLLs can provide linguistic access for other learners who are grappling with the academic language of schooling. But the opposite is not true. It is vital that educators of multilingual learners use high-quality, evidence-based language acquisition strategies that have been validated with similar students and in similar contexts (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Decades of research has been conducted on which strategies and routines have shown an positive effect size in research studies involving MLLs (August & Shannahan, 2006). These research-based routines fall into key categories.

- Build Background
- Clarify Input
- Fortify Output
- Foster Interactions
- Develop Academic Language
- Assess Language and Learning
- Construct Cultural Competency
- Advance Biliteracy

To be effective, routines and practices must integrate language and content and must allow for differentiation.



Differentiation

The MLL community is not a monolith. Every student brings unique assets to the classroom community. And there is a wide diversity within the MLL population. When it comes to multilingual learners, their strengths and needs are extremely varied based on their language proficiency, academic experience, and other factors such as background and social-emotional circumstances.

- **Varied language backgrounds** can lead to different learning needs, especially when you consider the challenges faced by students with non-Roman language backgrounds.
- The needs of students who are **newly arrived** in the country are quite different from those who were born into families and communities who leverage different languages within the United States.
- Some newly arrived students come with strong academic backgrounds. Others have limited or interrupted formal education (**SIFE students**).
- All MLLs go through **stages of language acquisition**. Those in beginning or emerging stages have different learning needs than those who reach intermediate or bridging levels. **Long-term English learners (LTELs)** have unique learning needs that distinguish them from other MLLs.
- MLLs are disproportionately identified for IEPs or individualized education plans as part of Special Needs programming in districts. These learners are often referred to as **dually identified learners**.

In addition to building knowledge and skills related to language acquisition, educators need to understand and address the unique needs of MLL subpopulations in their classrooms.

“Differentiated instruction means ensuring students have multiple options for understanding language, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn.”

-Zweirs, 2014

Integrating language and content, incorporating research-based language learning practices, employing consistent routines, and addressing specific differentiation needs are all key topics to build a comprehensive understanding of MLLs. As noted earlier, each and every one of these areas involves both a linguistic and a cultural element. Current measures, including summative and formative test scores, focus on academic areas alone, without accounting for linguistic and cultural assets and opportunities for learning. Academic outcomes will not happen without a strong and safe classroom environment. By increasing the understanding and appreciation of how academic learning, language learning, and culture connect to drive outcomes, educators are able to engage their diverse students in learning that will create a long-lasting impact.

Conclusion

Teaching is a complex endeavor and each student has unique assets and opportunities that they bring to the classroom. In order to achieve equitable access to high-quality education, MLLs need specific routines and practices that will enable them to simultaneously learn a new language and engage with grade-level, rigorous content objectives. To meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students, all teachers must be supported with the knowledge and resources required to learn and apply these new routines and practices in the classroom.

By adhering to the key, research-based principles codified in ESSA's requirements for PD, it is possible to provide MLLs with the appropriate balance of challenge and support. With access to the right resources, every teacher who works with multilingual learners can create a classroom that fosters authentic learning, regardless of the student's proficiency in English. By understanding key principles of language acquisition and integrating best practices into planning, instruction, and assessment, all teachers can become better prepared to meet the complex needs of MLLs.



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