



# How Adult Climates Shape Multilingual Learner Experiences

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## **School staff can have some of the most direct impacts on students' educational experiences.**

School systems are disproportionately shaped by adults even though students are the most directly impacted. As such, it is the adults' responsibility to interrogate how their attitudes and beliefs around multilingual learner supports shapes the educational climate. This is relevant both to implementing the community school strategy and engaging in practices for creating climates of safety and care, and cultures of belonging that equitably support multilingual learners.

These tools were adapted from pages 66-67, [A High School Counselor's Toolkit for English Learner Success](#) in partnership with Californians Together and Community Schools Learning Exchange.

## Adult Climate in Our Schools

An affirming climate for cultural and linguistic diversity is shaped in large part by the attitudes of the adults and peers who form the receiving school community. While attention is typically placed on student behaviors and the impacts of peer culture, the understanding, attitudes, and reception of adults is also a powerful influence on multilingual learners. Attitudes of complacency among teachers about low performance and dis-engagement are common around multilingual learners, but especially with Long Term English Learners. Long Term English Learners who have accrued academic gaps and suffer from inadequate language and literacy skills to engage with curriculum content can brew attitudes that adversely affect adult climate in schools. These attitudes can permeate a faculty.

Deficit views about the overall potential of multilingual learners can be pervasive. This shows up, for example, when teachers may express that the work of creating extra accommodations and differentiated planning feels like "too much." This can translate into classrooms that fail to be the affirming and embracing environments needed for multilingual learners and newcomer students (and all students, really).

To see what kinds of environments are affecting students and how, teachers, staff, and administrators should map what they know about student experiences to patterns in the outcomes of multilingual learners as a group. Counselors can be particularly effective to partner with for this work. Counselors are positioned to learn a lot about the lives of multilingual learner students through their work with individual ML students — information that may not be so easily accessible to teachers who work with large groups of students at once in the context of the classroom. This information is important for teachers, staff, and administrators to learn as a context for understanding their students.

**Regardless of the facilitator, their role is threefold:**

- First, to serve as an **advocate and provider** of information to teachers to help them understand their multilingual learner students and what language-supportive instruction means for them.
- Second, to highlight teachers and classrooms with healthy supportive environments for various typologies of multilingual learners—and to exercise **“selective” or “intentional” support** of multilingual learners or newcomer students. This is a very common strategy identified by counselors throughout California and enables equitable educational experiences.
- Third, **to support multilingual learners as they build resilience** in the context of systems and attitudes that are discriminatory, deficiency oriented and unsupportive of their needs, in school and beyond.

As a facilitator, reflect on classrooms you know to be places where multilingual learners find support and success—and the classrooms that disproportionately and continually produce academic struggle and failure for MLs. Reflect also on the staff attitudes and responsiveness to multilingual learners in your school. Consider those who are the voices advocating for multilingual learners and actively working to make their classrooms affirming and places of learning. Consider also those who are willing to do what is needed (once they know what that is)—out of professionalism, or excitement or interest. Others may express resistance. But resistance comes from many different places—from overwhelm and exhaustion, from not understanding what needs to be done, from fear of taking risks, from lack of confidence, from resentment, from bias and outright hostility to “those students.” Then consider how you might actively play a role in improving the climate for multilingual learner students through engaging with faculty.

This tool supports reflection on how adult practices influence whether multilingual learners feel welcomed, supported, and able to succeed. Teachers, administrators, coaches, and staff can use it to examine adult mindsets, identify patterns in support or harm, and strengthen an assets-forward adult climate. Counselors can also use this tool to reflect on their role as advocates, partners to teachers, and supporters of multilingual learners navigating challenging systems. Individuals or teams can use the tool to prompt reflection, guide conversation, and identify actions that improve adult practice and school climate for multilingual learners.

Adult Climate Problem	Possible Antidotes
<p><b>Not aware there is a problem</b> with ML achievement or any particular need to do anything additional for ML support.</p>	<p>Produce and <b>share data regularly</b> about the educational experiences and outcomes of MLs in the school.</p> <p>Share information about <b>bright spots and effective practices</b> that are producing stronger outcomes than the norm.</p> <p>Create <b>opportunities to share</b> ML student voices about challenges, struggles and what they need.</p> <p>Host <b>learning sessions</b> for staff about MLs.</p>
<p><b>Don't believe there is anything they can do</b> to change the outcomes or experiences of multilingual learners.</p>	<p><b>Share information</b> about bright spots and effective practices that are producing stronger outcomes than the norm.</p> <p>Create opportunities to share ML student voices about challenges, struggles and what they need—and also <b>student engagement about what is and has made a difference</b> for them in developing English proficiency and succeeding academically.</p> <p>Share research articles.</p>
<p><b>A sense of complacency</b>—no sense of urgency about doing something about ML engagement, support, access or achievement.</p>	<p>Use a combination of student engagement and existing “satellite” data to <b>underscore the need</b> for more responsive and supportive practices.</p> <p>Host shadowing of MLs to <b>enable teachers to see the reality for MLs</b>.</p> <p><b>Engage administration</b> in messaging the importance of addressing needs of MLs.</p>
<p>Well-meaning and willing to provide support to multilingual learners, but <b>misguided or ill-informed beliefs</b>, lack of effective strategies and/or lack of understanding about the cultural and linguistic issues MLs are facing leads to acting in ways that have a negative impact on students.</p>	<p>Share information about <b>professional learning opportunities</b> for teachers of MLs.</p> <p>Host <b>learning sessions about the cultures and languages</b> of communities served by the school.</p> <p>Start <b>one on one conversations</b> with teachers whose MLs are struggling—to talk about appropriate and needed supports.</p> <p>Offer information about key <b>ML conferences</b>.</p>
<p>Have some concern and empathy for multilingual learners but <b>don't know what needs to be done or how to do it</b>.</p>	<p>Share information about <b>professional learning opportunities</b> for teachers of MLs.</p> <p>Share <b>information about effective practices</b> that are producing stronger outcomes than the norm.</p> <p><b>Offer to partner with other teachers</b> for shadowing in the classrooms of other teachers with MLs.</p>
<p><b>Don't feel they have the resources or conditions</b> (including the energy and bandwidth) to do what has to be done.</p>	<p><b>Encourage teachers to articulate</b> what support, resources and conditions are needed to better respond to MLs.</p> <p><b>Join with teachers in advocating</b> with leadership for the needed resources.</p>
<p><b>Flipping the Script: A positive climate</b> Active advocates for multilingual learners, known for providing extra support, encouragement and instructional scaffolds that facilitate academic support for MLs.</p>	<p><b>Ask these teachers to join you</b> in preparing some “tips” and sharing resources (plans, curriculum, materials, strategies) with others in the school.</p> <p>Place the most vulnerable MLs in these classrooms to the extent possible.</p>