



Building Trusting Relationships for School and Community Partnership

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Trusting Relationships is one of the cornerstones – or, as we call them, Enabling Conditions – of community school development. Trusting relationships also play a critical role in supporting multilingual learner and newcomer students and families. One of the ways in which schools and districts seek to build trust, develop strong relationships, and ultimately foster a sense of belonging for ML and Newcomer students is through mentorship programs. Mentorship programs have helped build connections between students and their schools, and helped students and families navigate new experiences.

These tools were adapted from pages 68-69, **A High School Counselor’s Toolkit for English Learner Success** in partnership with Californians Together and Community Schools Learning Exchange.

Mentor Relationships, Connection, and Personalization

Schools can be large and complex institutions, for students and adults alike. Multilingual learners juggle the challenges of handling academic stress and the complications of cognitive, social, and physical development, all while navigating different cultural worlds. Having a trusting relationship with an adult who listens, who makes time to check in, and who offers a connection to the school is important for all students. But for multilingual learners, this connection can be especially critical to their educational experiences. While some staff may have more formal responsibility to check in with students, many districts have found it effective to also create mentor positions as another layer of connection and support for students.

Mentors can cultivate a different relationship than the teacher or counselor relationship that leverages shared identities and maximizes intergenerational learning. Mentors forge a 1:1 relationship and maintain a connection with their mentees through regular connection and an open agenda. A simple “how’s it going?” and the chance for a multilingual learner to share and be heard can be the seed for building trust, problem solving, helping an ML student feel connected to school, and for identifying the need for additional support. Along the same lines, student mentors may speak the languages of the newcomers, and provide orientation to the school, offer support in navigating the social ecology of a school, and create peer connections. Peer mentors or student ambassadors are paired up with newcomer students at initial entry to the school and are a source of information and support as the newcomer is socialized to the new school and culture.

One way to build connection is through consistent communication. So ideally mentors share the same home language as the ML or Newcomer student they support; particularly for newcomers and MLs who have been in the U.S. less than 6 years. It is also often helpful if the mentor has experienced becoming bicultural and navigating cross-cultural and language worlds themselves. But the most essential characteristics for ML student mentors are empathy, listening skills, and a commitment to supporting ML and newcomer students.

Both adult and student mentors should receive training, have clearly set out responsibilities and structures under the direction of staff, either under direction of school counselors who hold formal responsibility for student wellbeing, or supported by a team including counselors, teachers, and parents. Because this is about relationship building, it is common for those relationships to sustain over time beyond the formal role. And the trust and connection built between mentors and mentees can extend to other adults and peers alike, and to the school community.

Community and School Partnerships

Students’ lives in school are nestled within their lives outside of school—with families, friends, and communities. For immigrant and multilingual students, life in and beyond school is one of language and cultural diversity. Addressing their socio-emotional health and development means supporting them as they move across those worlds—and supporting them to develop the identities and competencies to bridge their cross-cultural experiences. Strong family, community and school partnerships are necessary as school teams seek to understand and support their ML students, and their broader ethnic, racial, and immigrant communities. These relationships and referral connections are the basis of appropriate and effective partnership beyond the school.

School and district teams striving to support multilingual learners through respectful and appropriate strategies need to build their knowledge of legitimate, effective, and authentic community resources. Relationship building, done in part through collaboration and partnership within the school system, can be a great starting point for socio-cultural connections. For example, Home-School Liaisons, social workers, school site coordinators, ELAC and DELACs, bilingual instructional assistants, district translators, and other team members may all have valuable connections into, relationships with, and understandings about students’ communities. Site-based community school coordinators and district-level community school teams can also be great sources of information about and connections to community partners. Interest holder engagement, partnerships, and integrated supports and services all play integral roles in community school development. By fostering partnerships, the community school strategy can also support efforts to create integrated, aligned, and comprehensive systems of referral and resources between schools and communities. Ultimately, this bridges the cultures and institutions of shared space for the benefit of ML students and newcomer community

Is This Us

This reflection tool supports educators in examining how schools engage families, community partners, and local organizations to better support multilingual learner and immigrant students. Strong community connections can expand access to mentoring, resources, and trusting relationships that help students feel supported in school and beyond. This tool is useful for all educators involved in family engagement, community partnerships, or student support systems. Use the indicators below to reflect on current implementation, identify areas of need and opportunity for further partnership and ML support.

Is this us?	Yes	Sometimes, or with some cultural/language groups	There is a starting place, but we need to build	Not started yet
Responsive to Various Typologies of MLs				
Strong referral networks and relationships have been activated between our school's staff and culturally/linguistically accessible and responsive community-based organizations, and health and social agencies.				
School facilities are available and used for community events and activities sponsored and held by organizations representing culturally and linguistically diverse communities.				
The school serves as a site and hub for the delivery of culturally and linguistically responsive support services (e.g., health, dental, mental health, social services, legal, housing and food).				
Opportunities for internships, mentorships and learning in immigrant and "language minority" communities are organized by the school —including opportunities to leverage and use bilingual and cross-cultural skills.				
Our staff and school leaders attend immigrant community events.				
Immigrant and diverse language community mental health experts are drawn upon as resources for our counseling staff.				
We have created an asset map of valuable partners and resources in our community that serve the language and cultural groups of our students.				
Multilingual learner and immigrant students have access to mentors or trusted adults who provide guidance, advocacy, and connection to school and community resources.				

Adult Climate Problem	Possible Antidotes
<p>Not aware there is a problem with ML achievement or any particular need to do anything additional for ML support.</p>	<p>Produce and share data regularly about the educational experiences and outcomes of MLs in the school.</p> <p>Share information 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.</p> <p>Host learning sessions for staff about MLs.</p>
<p>Don't believe there is anything they can do to change the outcomes or experiences of multilingual learners.</p>	<p>Share information 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 student engagement about what is and has made a difference for them in developing English proficiency and succeeding academically.</p> <p>Share research articles.</p>
<p>A sense of complacency—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 underscore the need for more responsive and supportive practices.</p> <p>Host shadowing of MLs to enable teachers to see the reality for MLs.</p> <p>Engage administration in messaging the importance of addressing needs of MLs.</p>
<p>Well-meaning and willing to provide support to multilingual learners, but misguided or ill-informed beliefs, 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 professional learning opportunities for teachers of MLs.</p> <p>Host learning sessions about the cultures and languages of communities served by the school.</p> <p>Start one on one conversations with teachers whose MLs are struggling—to talk about appropriate and needed supports.</p> <p>Offer information about key ML conferences.</p>
<p>Have some concern and empathy for multilingual learners but don't know what needs to be done or how to do it.</p>	<p>Share information about professional learning opportunities for teachers of MLs.</p> <p>Share information about effective practices that are producing stronger outcomes than the norm.</p> <p>Offer to partner with other teachers for shadowing in the classrooms of other teachers with MLs.</p>
<p>Don't feel they have the resources or conditions (including the energy and bandwidth) to do what has to be done.</p>	<p>Encourage teachers to articulate what support, resources and conditions are needed to better respond to MLs.</p> <p>Join with teachers in advocating with leadership for the needed resources.</p>
<p>Flipping the Script: A positive climate Active advocates for multilingual learners, known for providing extra support, encouragement and instructional scaffolds that facilitate academic support for MLs.</p>	<p>Ask these teachers to join you 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>