

What Your Colleagues Are Saying

Advocacy has always been integral to and ingrained in multilingual education. In this second edition, Staehr Fenner and Snyder artfully illustrate how advocacy for multilingual learners extends across major facets of schooling—curriculum, instruction and assessment, and interest groups, fostering newcomer, family, and community partnerships. We come away with a clear vision of how ongoing advocacy enables us to build and maintain a positive mindset and convince others of multilingual strengths. Outreach, articulated through the book's vignettes, personal reflections, and resources, all points to the increasingly essential role and responsibility of educators in supporting our students and how it is more important than ever to collectively continue our advocacy efforts on behalf of multilingual learners.

Margo Gottlieb, Ph.D.

Co-founder, WIDA
Author and Consultant
Madison, WI

Kudos to Diane Staehr Fenner and Sydney Snyder for continuing to lead in the field of TESOL! Their second edition of the critical resource *Advocating for Multilingual Learners* could not have come at a better time. It provides readers with a clear focus on how all educators can ensure that multilingual learners receive equitable and just educational opportunities. In line with the authors' previous publications, this book offers much-needed practical tools that make their recommendations actionable!

Andrea Honigsfeld

Professor, Molloy University
Rockville Centre, NY

Staehr Fenner and Snyder have provided a blueprint for future and current advocates across the field of multilingual learning, teaching, and leadership. By increasing knowledge, awareness, and application of advocacy efforts, readers will be better positioned to champion for the linguistically diverse communities they serve. This book is a much-needed call for action!

Ayanna Cooper

Consultant, A1Cooper Consulting
Atlanta, GA

This book is exactly what educators need right now: a clear-eyed, actionable, and refreshingly human look at what it means to advocate for multilingual learners. Staehr Fenner and Snyder don't just present strategies; they model the mindset and courage the work demands. As an administrator responsible for supporting more than 5,700 English learners, I am grateful for the way this work marries research, lived experience, and practical tools without ever losing its sense of hope. It's a masterclass in how to lead systems that honor and elevate multilingual students and their families.

Samuel Klein

Supervisor, Office of English Learners,
Arlington Public Schools
Arlington, VA

This second edition of *Advocacy for Multilingual Learners* is especially needed at this time. The book shares practical, actionable, and impactful ways educators can advocate for excellent, equitable education for MLs within their sphere of influence.

Beth Skelton

Consultant, Educational Consultants, LLC
Colorado

Time and time again, Staehr Fenner and Snyder share the who, what, why, and how of effective program design and instruction for MLs. This update to their classic books lights the path for those wanting to journey with and alongside their MLs and colleagues.

Tan Huynh

EAL teacher and ML consultant
Cambodia

The first edition of this book brought advocacy for multilingual learners to the attention of English language teachers everywhere. This second edition is timely and expands our understanding of advocacy to include all educators who work with multilingual learners. Staehr Fenner and Snyder skillfully make this case in this clear and engaging edition, and they provide detailed guidance on how to advocate for multilingual learners, no matter your role in the school building.

Heather Linville

Professor, University of Wisconsin
La Crosse, WI

The second edition of *Advocating for Multilingual Learners* is an essential, empowering guide for anyone committed to advancing equity for multilingual learners and their families. Staehr Fenner and Snyder masterfully blend research, practical tools, and real-world examples to illuminate what effective advocacy looks like in today's diverse classrooms. This updated edition equips educators with both the clarity and confidence needed to disrupt inequities and champion meaningful change. It is a must-read for all who believe in the brilliance and potential of multilingual learners.

Melissa Bentley

EL Coordinator, Metro Nashville Public Schools
Nashville, TN

Diane Staehr Fenner has done it again. This time, she and co-author Sydney Snyder bring us a current, eloquently written, urgently needed guide on advocacy for our MLs. Whether you are an administrator, an educator, a teacher preparation professor, or someone who works with MLs, and you want to create the best possible conditions for their success in and out of the classroom, this is an essential tome. We can do this. We must do this. Staehr Fenner and Snyder give us the tools, research, and encouragement to make it happen.

Giselle Lundy-Ponce

Director, Educational Rights and Social Justice Initiatives and Policy
American Federation of Teachers
Washington, DC

Advocating for Multilingual Learners is more important than ever. Use this updated essential guide to deepen your advocacy and asset-based work for ML equity and excellence in your schools.

Tonya Ward Singer

Founder and CEO, Courageous Literacy LLC
Santa Rosa, CA

Advocating for Multilingual Learners

Second Edition

Advocating for Multilingual Learners

A Guide for Educators

Second Edition

Diane Staehr Fenner

Sydney C. Snyder

CORWIN



FOR INFORMATION:

Corwin
A Sage Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
(800) 233-9936
www.corwin.com

Sage Publications Ltd.
3rd Floor, HYLO
103-105 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8LZ
United Kingdom

Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
10th Floor, Emaar Capital Tower 2
MG Road, Sikanderpur
Sector 26, Gurugram
Haryana - 122002
India

Sage Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12
China Square Central
Singapore 048423

Vice President and Editorial
Director: Monica Eckman
Executive Content Leader: Megan Bedell
Senior Product Assistant: Nyle DeLeon
Content Development and
Operations Manager: Lucas Schleicher
Production Editor: Neelu Sahu
Copy Editor: Colleen Brennan
Typesetter: C&M Digital (P) Ltd.
Cover Designer: Candice Harman

Copyright © 2026 by Diane Staehr Fenner and Sydney Snyder.

All rights reserved. Except as permitted by U.S. copyright law, no part of this work may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

When forms and sample documents appearing in this work are intended for reproduction, they will be marked as such. Reproduction of their use is authorized for educational use by educators, local school sites, and/or noncommercial or nonprofit entities that have purchased the book.

All third-party trademarks referenced or depicted herein are included solely for the purpose of illustration and are the property of their respective owners. Reference to these trademarks in no way indicates any relationship with, or endorsement by, the trademark owner.

No AI training. Without in any way limiting the author's and publisher's exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to "train" generative artificial intelligence (AI) or for other AI uses is expressly prohibited. The publisher reserves all rights to license uses of this publication for generative AI training or other AI uses.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026011697

978-1-0719-7479-7 (Paperback ISBN)

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

26 27 28 29 30 31 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DISCLAIMER: This book may direct you to access third-party content via web links, QR codes, or other scannable technologies, which are provided for your reference by the author(s). Corwin makes no guarantee that such third-party content will be available for your use and encourages you to review the terms and conditions of such third-party content. Corwin takes no responsibility and assumes no liability for your use of any third-party content, nor does Corwin approve, sponsor, endorse, verify, or certify such third-party content.

Contents



Foreword	xiii
Preface	xvii
Acknowledgments	xxi
About the Authors	xxiii
 Introduction	 1
Why We Wrote the Second Edition and What's New	2
 Chapter 1. Need for Advocacy for Multilingual Learners	 5
Introduction	6
Call for an Advocacy Perspective on Teaching MLs	7
Who MLs Are	8
Five Core Beliefs	9
Defining Advocacy for MLs	15
What the Research Tells Us	24
The Five-Step Advocacy Process	29
Conclusion	36
 Chapter 2. Advocating for a Shared Sense of Responsibility for Educating Multilingual Learners	 39
Introduction	40
What the Research Tells Us	41
A Shared Sense of Responsibility for ML Education and ML Advocacy	47
The Role of Educators' Culture, Experiences, and Mindsets	50
Understanding and Building Relationships With ML Families	55
Fostering a School Culture and Climate That Center MLs	62
Professional Learning and Reflection	70
Conclusion	71

Chapter 3. Advocating for Effective Instruction of Multilingual Learners 73

Introduction	74
What the Research Tells Us	74
Collaborating to Implement Effective Instructional Practices	85
Collaborating in Support of MLs' Equitable and Excellent Instruction	101
Scaffolded Unit Planning Tool	113
Conclusion	115

Chapter 4. Advocating for Multilingual Learners in Assessment 117

Introduction	118
What the Research Tells Us	119
Validity of Assessments for MLs	125
Assessment of MLs for Special Education Identification	127
Assessment of MLs for Gifted and Talented Programs	128
ML Committees as an Avenue to Advocacy in Assessment	129
ELP Assessment Advocacy Issues	132
ML Progress Monitoring of MLs' Language Development	140
Tracking MLs' Content Assessment Achievement After Exit as an Advocacy Tool	145
Formative Assessment as an Advocacy Tool	146
Advocating for Multilingual Learners' Assessment for Special Education Purposes	150
Advocating for the Appropriate Assessment of Multilingual Learners for Inclusion in Gifted and Talented Programs	151
Grading and Advocating for MLs	154
Equitable Assessment and/or Grading Advocacy Plan	160
Conclusion	160

Chapter 5. Advocating for Multilingual Learner Newcomer Students 163

Introduction	164
Who ML Newcomer Students and Their Families Are	165
What the Research Tells Us	166
Scaffolded Advocacy	171

Intake, Enrollment, and Registration Considerations	171
ML Newcomer Programming	187
Supporting ML Newcomers' Social and Emotional Needs and Mental Health	198
Conclusion	200
 Chapter 6. Advocating for Effective Multilingual Learner Family and School Partnerships	 203
Introduction	204
Who Are ML Families?	204
What the Research Tells Us	206
Strategies for Developing Stronger Family-School Partnerships	214
Conclusion	247
 Chapter 7. Advocating for Multilingual Learners Through Professional Learning	 249
Introduction	250
What the Research Tells Us	250
Professional Learning Options for Improving Instructional Practices for MLs	256
Sample Professional Learning Framework	262
Planning for Professional Learning	263
Professional Learning Cycle Components	272
ML Professional Learning Advocacy Audit	282
Conclusion	284
 Chapter 8. Advocating for Multilingual Learners' Access to Educational Opportunities	 285
Introduction	286
What the Research Tells Us	287
Designing Effective Schedules for MLs	291
Considerations for ML Program Types and Instructional Models	299
Empowering School Counselors to Advocate for MLs	306
Extracurriculars for MLs	318
Advocating for MLs' Access to and Support in Career and Technical Education Programs	320
Conclusion	323

Chapter 9. Next Steps in Advocating for Multilingual Learners	325
Building Your Team of Allies	326
Collaboration Tools for Advocacy Discussions	338
Conclusion	348
Image Sources	351
References	353
Index	367



Visit the companion website at
<https://supported.com/advocate>
for downloadable resources.

Foreword



This second edition of a groundbreaking book could not have come at a more critical time for multilingual learners (MLs), English learners (ELs), and immigrant-background students in U.S. schools. At the time of this writing, the second Trump administration continues to focus intensively on immigration enforcement, with aggressive efforts to detain and deport unauthorized immigrants, strip temporary legal statuses from vulnerable immigrant populations, and reduce new arrivals through multiple actions including imposing travel bans and pausing visa processing for residents of dozens of countries. The effects of these actions on school communities have been profound.

Equally profound though less visible to the public are the effects of the administration's policies on school systems, educators, and education policy more broadly. In its first year, the second Trump administration undermined nearly every federal protection for ELs in public schools. These systems and norms have developed over decades, through lawsuits, legislation, and the collaboration between researchers and practitioners that turn theories into practical advice. The administration has threatened funding for ELs and immigrant students, rescinded important guidance on how schools can fulfill civil rights obligations, gutted the U.S. Department of Education, and rejected educational approaches responsive to linguistic and cultural diversity.

In response, educators of MLs and ELs across the country have stepped up the advocacy activities described by Diane and Sydney in this book, with increasing numbers engaging with politics and policy more broadly through educational associations or community mobilization. In addition to their professional commitment, many such educators have personal connections to immigration and language learning, which drives them to go above and beyond for their students and programs.

Having worked in this field for over 25 years, I have been prompted by this turbulent period to reflect on how the practical, philosophical, and systemic aspects of multilingual education fit together. In the early part of my career at the Center for Applied Linguistics, my work focused on practical questions of program design, primarily in dual language settings. But at the Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, I've been spurred to think expansively about the interplay between the efforts of individual educators, policymakers,

researchers, and advocates and the policy systems they have helped construct over time to ensure equal access to a quality education for MLs and ELs. Individual practitioners and policymakers develop ideas from their direct experiences, which are then incorporated into larger systems. Sometimes these create durable protections and supports, but other times they are obstructed by state and local systems with competing priorities. Many of the administration's actions have disrupted the careers of respected colleagues and friends and swept away years of work to improve educational quality for ML/EL students. That has been hard to watch.

More consequentially, these actions have raised questions for administrators and teachers about the federal government's actual authority over local policy and practice. In the wake of an executive order declaring English the national language, for instance, teachers wondered whether bilingual education remained permissible. (Executive orders apply only to federal agencies and their employees, but their messaging can nevertheless have a chilling effect on practice.) The destabilizing effect runs deeper than confusion about specific policies. It forces educators to navigate conflicting realities: what they learned in their professional training, a growing awareness that foundational protections may be more vulnerable than they realized, and the realities of what their state and local systems can or will support.

For all the confusion they create, executive branch actions cannot overturn the fundamental obligations of the Civil Rights Act or the core premise it established: that all students have the right to access the same high-quality education, and that educators must provide the resources and scaffolds necessary for them to succeed. Over decades, the pioneers of multilingual education translated this principle into concrete systems. Bilingual education emerged as a means to help ELs access grade-level content while building their new language skills. Recognizing that equitable participation in English-medium classrooms was a key goal of any program for identified ELs, English proficiency exit criteria were tied to the academic language structures students would need in the content areas. And although implementation remains uneven, leaders in the field identified and pushed for test accommodations designed to let MLs and ELs better demonstrate their academic learning, recognizing that developing English skills shouldn't be allowed to mask a student's content knowledge skills.

Each advance built on the advocacy of those who came before, and each generation has continued the work of turning principles into practice. It's worth noting that some of the field's pioneers were not educators or policymakers, but parents. Immigrant families challenged discriminatory school practices in their own communities, often facing resistance and rejection. Many landmark court cases that shaped multilingual and English-language education (including *Lau v. Nichols*, which established that identical treatment isn't equitable treatment) began with parents demanding better for their children. Similarly, the growth of dual language programs over six decades has been driven significantly by parent advocates who insisted on bilingual education when English-only instruction was the default. Their courage and persistence created openings that became institutionalized

through Department of Justice settlement agreements with school districts, Office for Civil Rights guidance, and legislation like the Every Student Succeeds Act—each building on previous protections to translate broad principles into specific requirements that would protect students on the ground.

This approach of translating principles into practice is precisely what Diane and Sydney model in this book through five core beliefs that emphasize a commitment to student strengths, a welcoming climate, integration of language and meaningful content, peer conversations, and advocacy. By grounding their discussion of strategies in these beliefs as well as robust education research, the authors provide educators with concrete tools to strengthen multilingual and English-language education in their own contexts, continuing the work of building stronger systems for those who follow.

Scholars and advocates continue the evolution of multilingual education, moving beyond minimum accommodations to embrace students' linguistic and cultural assets as strengths that help them thrive and exceed expectations. Today's hostile policy climate toward immigrants, however, demonstrates the enduring importance of the civil rights framework. It establishes a floor of protection for vulnerable students even where local support is lacking, while creating space for more ambitious, asset-based work where educators are ready to pursue it.

From today's vantage point, with its richness of multilingual approaches and anti-racist pedagogy, some practices that represented breakthroughs in their time now feel incomplete. For example, educators and researchers have raised legitimate criticisms of the English language proficiency screening and assessment systems used to identify ELs, monitor their progress, and hold schools accountable. Yet it's important to remember that these very systems were championed by leaders who saw thousands of children misidentified or underserved through haphazard, subjective approaches. Teachers might identify students as MLs and ELs based on last names, appearance, or informal observations. Students could languish in programs for years without clear exit criteria, or be exited prematurely based on conversational fluency alone. The standardized systems that emerged, imperfect as they may be, brought consistency and accountability and created a platform for continued improvement.

It's tempting to imagine designing better systems from scratch, but meaningful change happens incrementally, shaped by varied contexts, evolving over time, and requiring political negotiation. Accountability systems haven't eliminated achievement and opportunity gaps, yet those who don't remember when MLs and ELs went largely unserved may not recognize the progress made in bringing their needs to the attention of school leaders and policymakers. This book honors that history while showing educators how to continue building on it. The pioneers in our field laid groundwork that connects forward across decades to the work we do today. This is work that will, in turn, become the foundation for those who follow.

—Julie Sugarman

Preface



In this preface to our second edition of *Advocating for Multilingual Learners: A Guide for Educators*, I would like to tell a few short stories that illustrate how the book came to be, its impact on the field, and what Sydney and I hope you take away from reading it.

After I obtained my teacher licensure and spent time as a sixth-grade teacher in a bilingual school in Veracruz, Mexico, I thought I was very prepared for my first English language development (ELD) teaching position back in the United States, which took place in rural North Carolina with mostly Mexican multilingual learners. Boy, was I ever wrong. Although I spoke Spanish fluently and had worked with Mexican students, I was in for a big surprise. What I envisioned would be my first day teaching students ended up being me driving around to students' homes and to migrant camps to tell families school had begun. Many of them had no idea, which was obviously not their fault. In that area, rising numbers of migrant multilingual families who worked in tobacco and melon fields decided to put down roots in the community. Families saw an opportunity for stable work and for better educational opportunities for their children and were eager to send them to school. However, the community did not always see the same opportunity in these "outsiders." Somewhat of an outsider myself as a native New Yorker (albeit from a rural area of the state), I was fortunate that my elementary school principal did not share the same views as most of the community when it came to MLs and also to accepting me and supporting my goals of making students and families feel welcome.

I had never heard the word *advocacy* in any of my teacher education courses, nor had I known that to make a positive impact on MLs' educational experience and increase their chances for academic success and sense of belonging, someone needed to speak up for them. I soon realized that teaching MLs extended beyond providing sound instruction for them; it included gently shifting educator mind-sets, obtaining resources for students (including access to medical care, eyeglasses, and coats in the winter), and serving as a kind of public relations expert to spread the joy of teaching MLs. Although I didn't realize it at the time, the experience I had teaching ELD in this rural community shaped who I am as an educator and, most of all, as an advocate for MLs today on a much larger national scale. I often look back on my first years as an ELD teacher in the United States as some of the most challenging yet most rewarding years of my career. Those years helped me see the stark inequities MLs can face, develop strategies for advocating for MLs

(some of which were successful and others that absolutely flopped), and set the course for my present work with teachers and administrators to ensure that MLs receive the same educational opportunities as any other student would have.

More than a decade later, while presenting about the revised TESOL P–12 Professional Teaching Standards at a TESOL International Association convention in wintry Denver, Colorado, I mentioned how TESOL’s professional standards, whose development I had contributed to, contained a then-new focus on advocacy for MLs. I explained how the standards reflected recent changes and heightened responsibilities for those who teach MLs and that advocacy for MLs is central to the role of the ELD teacher. At the end of the presentation, a professor in an ELD teacher licensure program asked me if there were any books on advocacy for MLs that I could recommend to her. Stumped, I answered her that I did not know of any book she could use in her program. Immediately after that presentation, it all made sense as I trudged through the snowy street, pregnant with my third child and afraid to slip and fall. I realized that advocacy was the thread throughout my career as an ELD teacher, administrator, and professional learning facilitator. I had been advocating for MLs all along and knew so many others who were also unsung advocates for MLs in myriad ways. The child I was carrying is now 16 years old. While so much has changed, much has remained the same, and our need for ML advocacy is even more heightened.

Ironically, after conceiving of the first edition’s idea and submitting a prospectus to Corwin, I did not receive a response, as my blind email had gotten lost in the shuffle and the book almost didn’t come to be. However, after being asked to review a manuscript of Ivania Soto’s first edition of *ELL Shadowing as a Catalyst for Change*, I reached out to Corwin again, and my email landed in Dan Alpert’s inbox. Dan took a chance on an unknown prospective author who had an idea that intrigued him, and the rest is history, as I wrote the first of eight books for Corwin, including the book you’re reading now. I will never forget the feeling when the first edition of *Advocating for English Learners* was published and I saw the book for the first time as I nervously presented my first keynote of a state conference in Illinois—so many firsts, and it was an exhilarating feeling seeing how the topic of advocacy resonated with the hundreds of educators in attendance.

Much to my surprise, the first edition became an immediate bestseller, and in the years since its publication, I have frequently spoken about advocating for MLs to educators in keynotes across North America. This was a groundbreaking book that got the term *advocacy* on people’s radar and in their vocabulary. Although it has been more than a decade since the first edition was published, the topic of advocacy is often the why behind teachers’ motivation to work with MLs and to keep going when the challenges seem to build and multiply. No matter educators’ roles or contexts, they are all advocates in different ways for the MLs they teach or support.

While the advocacy momentum and conversation gained traction across the United States and Canada, the thought of writing a second edition surfaced for me from time to time. Although I had been wanting to write a second edition for

many years, my own three kids and SupportEd (the woman-owned small business I started in 2011) consumed my focus. In addition, the thought of writing it on my own was daunting. While speaking with Sydney Snyder, my first SupportEd hire in 2011, co-author of many books and articles, and most importantly, friend, about how I wanted to write a second edition, she generously offered to co-author it with me. While the acknowledgments mention my dedication of the book to our families, Sydney is also included in who I consider family. We have weathered so many good times and challenges over the years, and I could not have served this role in the education field without her support. Syd, this book is as much for you as it is for everyone who reads it.

Speaking of this second edition, there is great urgency for a revised work. Since the publication of the first book, we have experienced so much change in sentiment (or maybe a newfound freedom for some to express their true feelings) in terms of MLs and how they and their families are regarded. It is now common to witness the accepted demonization of immigrants, casting ML children as political pawns, and observing figures in power spreading extremely harmful misinformation about immigrants and those who speak a language other than English. In the field of education, we sometimes hear educators' complaints about MLs, often see many missed opportunities to truly engage MLs in classrooms, and experience some educators' deficit mindset when it comes to MLs.

At the same time, there is hope. Sydney and I have been inspired by teachers trying out a new strategy, which takes teachers out of their comfort zones but engages their MLs more and offers them access to challenging content. In our work with content teachers, we have witnessed so many of them approaching their work from a place of respect for students and families, including a recognition of the importance of students' culture and language and an acknowledgment of the potential MLs have, which can hinge on the extra temporary support educators provide them. We have seen educators coming together, giving of themselves to advocate fiercely for students and families in times of crisis.

While there is so much Sydney and I hope you take away from this book, we want to emphasize how fortunate we are as a country to have ML students and families as part of the fabric of our communities. Through our decades of work as classroom teachers and later through collaboration with educators in multiple roles, we have experienced firsthand how advocacy can promote MLs' sense of belonging, academic achievement, and constructive contributions to society. Multilingualism and multiculturalism make our nation stronger, but there is great potential for harm to MLs and their families when there is miscommunication and mistrust. MLs and their families have been living through very challenging times in which it is quite apparent that many people do not value their assets and would rather see them gone. It is up to us to provide that safe space, support, and advocacy for our students and families, so they have a chance to thrive and share their many gifts. Let's dig in and begin our work.

—Diane Staehr Fenner

Acknowledgments



A central theme of this book is the importance of collaboration and the powerful impact that it can have on ML advocacy. We are so grateful to the students, families, educators, colleagues, researchers, and thought partners who believe in this work and shared their stories and experiences with us.

We want to begin by thanking the SupportEd team for their contributions and encouragement while we were writing this book. Their commitment to ML advocacy and the passion that they bring to their work inspire us. We want to express a special thanks to Michele Iris for her amazing graphics that bring our writing to life and help tell stories of the many forms that advocacy can take. Thank you to Jasmine Singh for her careful attention to detail and the thoughtful assistance she provided with editing and graphics. Our colleague Shannon Smith dug into the research for us to help make sure that our tools and strategies are grounded in theory and best practice and also provided content on scheduling and programming. Thanks also to Diane Choi, Meghan Gregoire-Smith, Deena Marshall, Mindi Teich, and Wedad Yassin for sharing our commitment to ML advocacy and providing lots of behind-the-scenes support. We appreciate all of you!

We also want to thank colleagues in the field who contributed their expertise to this work. We'd like to give a special shout-out to Julie Sugarman for writing the foreword and for her amazing work at the Migration Policy Institute during these times of head-spinning changes in the field of ML demographics and education. Her policy briefs, reports, and fact sheets are essential tools in understanding ML advocacy issues and brainstorming possible solutions. Thanks to Jessica Fundalinski for the assistance that she provided through her background research and personal insights from her doctoral studies. Thank you also to Lydia Breiseth, Ayanna Cooper, and Heather Linville. We have learned so much from these powerful ML advocates who share different, yet equally important, roles in our field.

This book would not have been possible without ML educators and advocates and especially MLs and families who were willing to contribute personal experiences and perspectives on advocacy. We'd like to give a special thanks to (in alphabetical order) Karina Abruler, Aimee Ackley, Reid Anderson, Amanda Campbell, Alice Collins, Katie Crook, Jenna Davis, Kendra Dyer, Caroline Espinoza Navarrete, Laura Grisso, Beth Hoeft, Martha Holladay, Antonio Vincent Incardona Jr.,

Brittany Jenney, Erin Johnson, Susanne Marcus, Lauren Markham, Casey Minshall, Abraham Olivarez, Tiffany Patterson, April Perkins, Elvira Pichardo, Vitaliya Popovych, Angel Rivera Melara, Lauren Salvatore, Beth Silano, Alamelu Sundaram-Walters, Shawwna Sweet, Hanane Tayebi, Rebecca Thomas, and Yared Velazquez. We are inspired by your stories. Thank you for all you do!

Our Corwin colleagues, each contributing their specific areas of expertise, were critical in assisting us with the publication of this manuscript. We'd like to give a special thanks to Lucas Schleicher, Content Development and Operations Manager, who thoughtfully guided us through the publication process, including the new accessibility features. Thank you also to Megan Bedell, Executive Content Leader, for her enthusiastic championing of a second edition of this book and her patience for our writing process. We also wish to thank Neelu Sahu and Nyle DeLeon for their assistance during the publication process, as well as Colleen Brennan for carefully copyediting the book.

And finally, we would like to thank our families for the many ways that they encourage us in our writing and in our advocacy for MLs and in our never-ending work as mothers. Diane thanks her husband, David, and children, Zoe, Maya, and Carson. Sydney thanks her husband, Gus, and children, Sylvia and Iris.

About the Authors



Diane Staehr Fenner, Ph.D., is the president of SupportEd (SupportEd.com), a woman-owned small business located in the Washington, D.C. metro area that she founded in 2011. SupportEd is dedicated to empowering multilingual learners (MLs) and their educators. Dr. Staehr Fenner leads her team to provide ML professional learning, coaching, technical assistance, and curriculum support to school districts, states, and organizations. Prior to forming SupportEd, Dr. Staehr Fenner was an English language development (ELD) teacher, dual language

assessment teacher, and ELD assessment specialist in Fairfax County Public Schools, VA. She speaks German and Spanish and has taught in Berlin, Germany, and Veracruz, Mexico. Dr. Staehr Fenner grew up on a dairy farm in central New York and is a proud first-generation college graduate. This is her ninth book on ML education, including co-authoring *Unlocking Multilingual Learners' Potential: Making Content Accessible* and *Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners: Tools for Equity*. She is a frequent keynote speaker on ML education at conferences across North America. She earned her Ph.D. in multilingual/multicultural education at George Mason University and her MAT in TESOL at the School for International Training. You can connect with her by email at Diane@SupportEd.com or on LinkedIn at [dstaehrfenner](https://www.linkedin.com/in/dstaehrfenner).



Sydney Snyder, Ph.D., is a principal associate at SupportEd. In this role, Dr. Snyder coaches ML educators and develops and facilitates interactive professional development for teachers of MLs. She also works with the SupportEd team to offer technical assistance to school districts and educational organizations. Dr. Snyder has extensive instructional experience and has worked in the field of English language development for over 25 years. She started her teaching career as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guinea, West Africa. This experience ignited her passion for language teaching, culturally responsive instruction, and ML advocacy. Dr. Snyder is

co-author of *Unlocking Multilingual Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible*, *Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners: Tools for Equity* and contributing author to *Breaking Down the Monolingual Wall*. She served as an English Teaching Fellow at Gadjadara University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. She earned her Ph.D. in multilingual/multicultural education at George Mason University and her MAT in TESOL at the School for International Training. You can connect with her by email at Sydney@SupportEd.com or on LinkedIn at [sydney-cail-snyder](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sydney-cail-snyder).

Introduction



One of the more unspoken and unexplored factors that is central to the success of multilingual learners (MLs) in K–12 schools is educators serving as effective advocates for students. While MLs are the most rapidly growing segment of the U.S. preK–12 population, they do not always possess a strong voice in their own education due to many factors that may work against them, such as their developing English language skills, their family members’ unfamiliarity with the U.S. school system, and their families’ level of understanding of community resources that are available. Yet, despite all of these challenges, MLs bring multiple strengths to the educational landscape that we must recognize and build on. It is of utmost importance for us to approach the education of MLs from an advocacy perspective, defining and operationalizing the multiple forms advocacy for MLs can take so that educators in all roles can be better poised to provide them an equitable as well as excellent education.

Advocating for Multilingual Learners focuses on supporting educators as they examine their views on advocacy for MLs and develop their ML advocacy toolkit to better support MLs’ success. The goal of the book is for all educators to share the responsibility and discover the joy of teaching MLs while honing their advocacy skills for MLs inside and outside the walls of the classroom. This book is intended to continue a much-needed conversation around ML advocacy in four overarching ways. First, the book creates the argument that advocacy for MLs is essential for MLs’ academic success. Second, it provides tools for determining educators’ beliefs and awareness around educating MLs. Third, it helps individual educators as well as groups of educators in schools and districts prioritize which facets of advocacy are most needed. Fourth, it uses hands-on application activities to shine a light on how to improve advocacy of MLs in the areas that warrant further action in educators’ specific context.

This book is applicable to multiple audiences, including preservice teachers, current English language development (ELD) teachers, content or general education teachers, school counselors, and instructional coaches, among others. The book’s content is also relevant to school administrators, district administrators, and state administrators. It can be used for individual professional learning or as part of a larger professional learning initiative at the school, district, or state level. If using our book as part of a group book study, we recommend drawing from each chapter’s reflection questions to guide your conversations. Professors in teacher

education programs will also find the content of the book useful, as it is the second edition of the first book of its kind to focus on what it means and how it can look to advocate for MLs at the K–12 level.¹

All chapters contain application activities, which will help readers reflect on the content and relate the content back to their particular context. Each of the chapters is grounded in relevant research and begins with a section titled *What the Research Tells Us*. The chapters then contain examples of advocacy efforts taking place throughout the United States. Each chapter contains quotes and examples of how different types of educators have advocated for MLs in their contexts. All chapters contain a framework for choosing areas of advocacy to focus on and implement in readers' contexts.

Why We Wrote the Second Edition and What's New

Through our work, we continue to be inspired by educators of MLs and the many ways that they advocate for MLs and their families each day. While the educational landscape has changed since Diane first published *Advocating for English Learners: A Guide for Educators*, the need for ML advocacy remains as urgent as ever, if not more so. The second edition of this book reflects what we have learned through our interactions with students, families, educators, schools, districts, and other organizations over the past decade and includes new strategies and tools that we have used as we work alongside educators in their advocacy for students.

The second edition includes several updates that reflect the evolving advocacy needs of MLs and their educators. We included four new chapters in this edition based on some of the priority areas of ML advocacy that we have seen. These new chapters delve into the topics of ML newcomer students (Chapter 5), professional learning that centers MLs (Chapter 7), and equitable programming for MLs (Chapter 8). We also included an additional chapter (Chapter 9) that is packed with tools and resources to support educators in taking the next steps on their ML advocacy journey.

In addition to these changes, each chapter also includes updated research that, along with our experience, provides the basis for our tools and recommendations. Furthermore, we have integrated updated educator interviews, quotes, and district spotlights to support readers in understanding how the advocacy recommendations can be applied in their context. As a companion to this book, we have developed an online resource collection (SupportEd.com/advocate), which provides links to many of the resources that we share in the book. While this new edition expands on the content of the first edition, it remains rooted in the same core vision. The goal of this book is to equip educators and advocates with the

¹On our additional resources page, SupportEd.com/advocate, you can find a link to our self-paced online book studies at SupportEd.

knowledge, tools, and inspiration to advance equity for MLs and their families. Our hope is that, just as the first edition did, this book continues to serve as both a guide and a catalyst for meaningful change. We outline the contents of each chapter next.

Chapter 1: Need for Advocacy for Multilingual Learners. Chapter 1 presents the research base as well as the urgent call to better advocate for our nation's MLs. This chapter defines the concept of advocacy for MLs that will frame the contents of the book and introduces a new five-step advocacy process to provide you practical guidance on how you can prioritize an area for ML advocacy and see your advocacy through to its successful completion. Chapter 1 also includes a discussion of five core beliefs that ground our work with MLs and their families.

Chapter 2: Advocating for a Shared Sense of Responsibility for Educating Multilingual Learners. The focus of this chapter is on the need to collaborate to foster equitable and excellent education opportunities for MLs and to frame this work through an assets-based perspective of MLs and their families. The chapter contains several application activities that can support educators in examining their own culture, experiences, and mindsets and reflecting on how these may impact their interactions with MLs and their families. The chapter also includes activities to foster a school culture and climate that centers MLs.

Chapter 3: Advocating for Effective Instruction of Multilingual Learners. Chapter 3 provides considerations and examples of the inextricable role of advocacy in the instruction of MLs. This chapter focuses on what educators of MLs can do to advocate for more effective instruction of MLs in their various roles and includes considerations and resources specific to the roles of administrators, content teachers, and ELD teachers. It also highlights research-based practices for ML instruction and includes some tools for collaboration related to scaffolding instruction, teaching academic language, and integrating structured academic conversation routines into instruction of MLs.

Chapter 4: Advocating for Multilingual Learners in Assessment. Chapter 4 examines the role of advocacy related to assessment of MLs for different assessment purposes. The chapter includes tools and strategies for collaborating with colleagues around the assessment of MLs in different areas. It also explores the need for advocacy related to English language proficiency testing, assessing MLs for unique purposes, and progress monitoring for MLs. In addition, the chapter highlights strategies for using formative assessment as an advocacy tool and provides recommendations for equitably grading MLs.

Chapter 5: Advocating for Multilingual Learner Newcomer Students. Chapter 5 addresses unique advocacy considerations for ML newcomer students. The chapter explores who ML newcomer students are and some of potential areas for advocacy related to educating this population of MLs. The chapter highlights tools and strategies related to four focus areas: (1) intake, enrollment, and registration procedures; (2) ML newcomer programming; (3) high-quality instruction

for ML newcomer students; and (4) supporting ML newcomers' social-emotional development and mental health.

Chapter 6: Advocating for Multilingual Learner Family and Community Partnerships. Chapter 6 examines advocacy for strengthening partnerships with ML families. It offers opportunities for educators to examine their expectations of ML family engagement and provides insight into ML families' perspectives on their children's education. The chapter suggests strategies for creating an environment that is welcoming to ML families and that values their languages and cultures. The chapter also provides considerations in how to remove barriers that might stand in the way of strong school and family partnerships. Finally, Chapter 6 offers tools to support ML families in being better positioned to advocate for themselves.

Chapter 7: Advocating for Multilingual Learners Through Professional Learning. Chapter 7 illustrates the impactful role that intentional and well-planned professional learning can have as an advocacy tool for strengthening ML education. It includes recommendations for developing a professional learning framework that takes into account the voices of MLs through the use of student advisory groups as well as the specific needs of ML educators. The chapter also includes considerations and tools for implementing successful professional learning sessions and ML coaching in order to have a positive impact on educator practices for MLs.

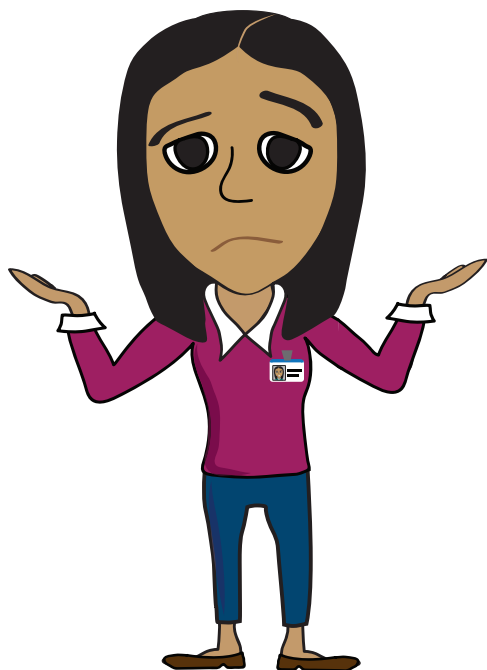
Chapter 8: Advocating for Multilingual Learners' Access to Educational Opportunities. Chapter 8 focuses on how to advocate for MLs' equitable access to educational opportunities on multiple levels. This includes educational pathways that offer opportunities for access to honors and advanced placement coursework as well as career and technical education. This chapter provides tools and strategies related to ways school counselors can ensure MLs' equitable access to courses to set them on a course for high school graduation. It also focuses on advocating for scheduling and programming that support MLs in meeting personal and academic goals while developing their language proficiency. The chapter also takes a look at the importance of extracurricular activities for MLs and how to advocate for students' greater access to them.

Chapter 9: Next Steps in Advocating for Multilingual Learners. The final chapter wraps up our book by providing tools and resources to support educators as they continue on their ML advocacy journeys. It includes planning tools such as an advocacy goal-setting template as well as resources for having data-driven discussions to inform ML advocacy initiatives. It also highlights strategies for building educators' team of allies and how to respond to perspectives that focus on ML deficits.

Need for Advocacy for Multilingual Learners

1

FIGURE 1.1 Ms. Ritter



Ms. Ritter, an English language development (ELD) teacher at Pineview, an elementary school in the midwestern United States, has been teaching for seven years. She has noticed the population of her multilingual learners (MLs) rise dramatically during her tenure, and she has also become keenly aware of her shifting role within her classroom as well as within the larger context of her school. She has gone from being “only” a language teacher to taking on responsibilities beyond teaching that include helping her students’ families acquire affordable housing, translating documents for caregivers, providing professional learning to grade-level general education teachers on implementing ML strategies, and trying to persuade

her principal to devote more resources to the school’s underresourced ELD program.

Frankly, Ms. Ritter is starting to feel burned out this year, as she senses she is fighting an uphill battle. In her eyes, her principal is not fully on board with the idea that the school culture needs to become more affirming of its ML population and take the extra steps necessary to ensure their academic success as well as their social-emotional well-being. In addition, she often hears disparaging comments from her colleagues about all the problems they think MLs are causing, not to mention some of their jabs about immigration in general. Ms. Ritter absolutely loves working with her MLs, who she knows bring rich linguistic and cultural diversity to her school. She also admires her students’ resilience and desire to learn English while maintaining and enhancing their home language skills and revels in all the progress they make through their own hard work. However, she is not sure where she should turn for some additional support to help her school

draw from and realize her students' full potential, and she is often discouraged that many of her colleagues don't seem to recognize their MLs' assets. Ms. Ritter has just learned that another nearby school district with a more established ELD program is going to be hiring an ELD teacher and is considering applying. She knows the schools in the other district have embraced their ML population, and their teachers' mindsets tend to be different than those of most teachers at Pineview Elementary School. She is not sure what to do.

Reflection Questions



1. What advocacy issues is Ms. Ritter facing?
2. What can you relate to from her story?
3. What would you do in her situation?

Introduction

This chapter will outline several areas that provide the sense of urgency as well as the theoretical framework for our book, drawing on ML demographics, research, and recent events. These components support the argument that educators must consider approaching the education of MLs from an advocacy perspective in addition to focusing on ML education from an instructional stance. You will learn that, in order to effectively teach MLs, all educators who work with MLs must realize that they share the responsibility to teach language and content to these students who have so much to offer. Only then can educators experience the joy that is inherent in witnessing MLs make gains academically as well as socially as they become part of the school community. You will walk away from this chapter with a deeper knowledge that advocacy is an integral component of ensuring MLs have both an equitable and an excellent education.

After providing a definition of ML advocacy that we will use in this book, we will present relevant theory and research¹ in such areas as teacher preparation to work with MLs, the ML deficit paradigm, and ML demographics, as well as opportunity gaps that will situate this advocacy perspective and allow for you to apply it throughout the book. Along the way, we will give you multiple opportunities to reflect and apply your learning to your context so that the chapter resonates with you. The chapter will conclude with a five-step advocacy framework that will help you sort through many possible advocacy issues, develop a plan for how to advocate, and guide your advocacy work as you read this book and implement it into your practice. We are eager for you to get started and join us as advocates for multilingual learners.

¹The research appears later in this chapter than it does in other chapters.

- **Teachers:** As you read this first chapter, brainstorm a list of the top five advocacy issues that are facing your MLs. Be thinking about which issue you might like to address and also who you might collaborate with. Use Figure 1.11, the Five-Step Advocacy Process, to determine a path forward to advocate for this issue you have chosen.
- **Administrators:** While you read this chapter, consider your unique context and how the effective instruction of MLs aligns to your school and district initiatives, goals, and plans. Brainstorm how advocacy for MLs might serve as a tool to support your work to educate MLs and improve MLs' educational outcomes. You may find Application Activity 1.2, the ML Advocacy Audit, particularly relevant as you think about your school or district.

Call for an Advocacy Perspective on Teaching MLs

Given all we know about educating MLs, including the multiple joys and rewards that come from empowering MLs to achieve in school and beyond, there is an urgent need to center ML education from a perspective that extends beyond a focus on instructional strategies. Among the many methods and resources that exist for teaching MLs, there are few that consider providing a high-quality education for MLs that holds an advocacy perspective as its core. Specifically, the often-unexplored yet burgeoning concept of advocacy for MLs lies at the heart of teachers' mindsets and expectations for MLs, their interactions with students and families, and their ability to facilitate their students' success through collaboration with colleagues, administrators, and the community as a whole. In short, a teacher can be trained on many of the academic strategies necessary for MLs to achieve, such as scaffolding instruction, providing culturally responsive instruction, and integrating social-emotional learning strategies into teaching. However, we have found over our many years in education that if that teacher does not (1) have the mindset to believe that MLs are capable of working with grade-level content with some extra temporary support and (2) have a sense of shared responsibility for teaching MLs so that they can be successful, that teacher will be less likely to successfully implement the instructional strategies that are known to be effective for MLs. In short, ML strategies in and of themselves are less effective than strategies that are couched within a comprehensive framework that centers advocacy as a core component.² After approximately 30 years each in the education field, we still hear some teachers say that MLs should not be taught grade-level content until they learn English and also that

²We will refer to teachers and administrators collectively as educators. This group includes all personnel who come into contact with MLs, such as counselors, paraprofessionals, and specialists.

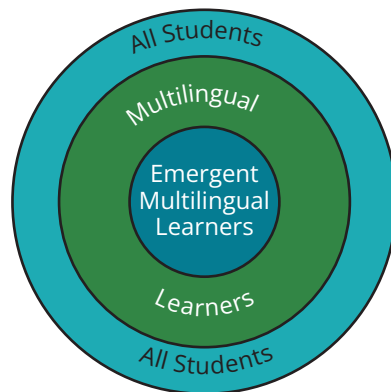
they are the responsibility of the ELD teacher. Hearing these sentiments just makes us want to advocate more, and we hope you also feel the same way.

In order to be effective advocates for MLs, educators must be aware of the dynamic, ever-changing areas in which MLs benefit from educators' advocacy and the underlying reasons these advocacy efforts are needed. Educators will also gain from explicit instruction, ideally at both the preservice and inservice levels, in advocacy research and strategies in order to temporarily strengthen their ML students' voices as students are learning to advocate for themselves. (Remember how we just said that effectively educating MLs extends beyond having a few strategies up your sleeve?) In addition, educators should also note that the concept of self-advocacy is culturally bound. In the United States, students are unquestioningly expected to self-advocate, which is indicative of an individualist culture. However, in many other cultures, a more collectivist stance influences MLs; they may not be accustomed to this expectation of self-advocacy and may need clear guidance in how to self-advocate while teachers affirm their cultural norms (Staehr Fenner & Teich, 2024). Please keep this influence of culture in mind as we explore the concept of advocacy for MLs together.

Who MLs Are

So that we have a shared understanding of what it means to advocate for MLs, we first need to define who we mean by MLs. There are many terms commonly used to describe students who speak a language in addition to or other than English (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021; Snyder et al., 2023; Sugarman, 2020). Multilingual learners, English learners (ELs), and emergent bilinguals are different names for students whose parent or guardian reports their child speaking one or more languages in addition to English in the home. While EL is the

FIGURE 1.2 Visual Representation of All Students, Multilingual Learners, and Emergent Multilingual Learners



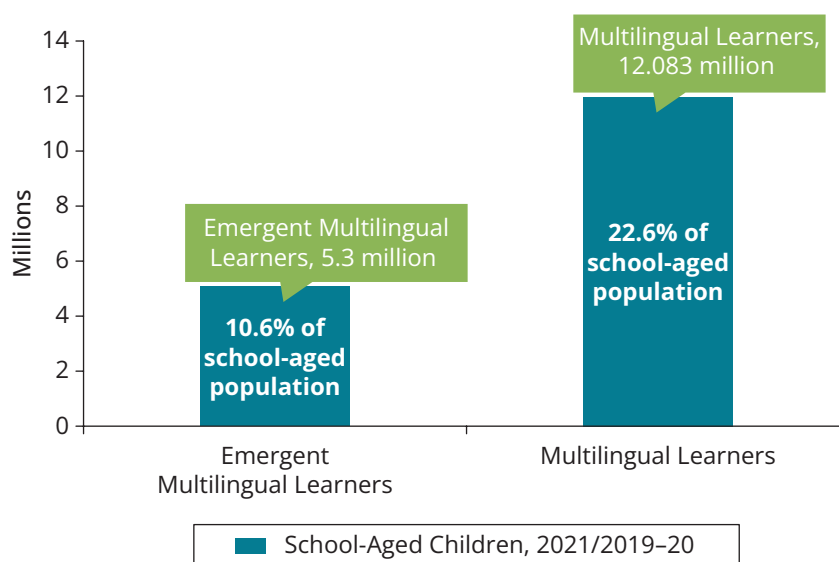
Source: Snyder & Fenner (2021).

term still officially used by the federal government to describe students who are exposed to a language in addition to English, some argue that the term *English learner* focuses more on students' deficits of learning a language while ignoring the strength of their home language (Snyder et al., 2023; Zacarian & Staehr Fenner, 2020). **We define multilingual learners as students whose parent or guardian reports speaking one or more languages in addition to or other than English at home. MLs may or may not qualify for English language development support, depending on their level of English**

proficiency (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021; Snyder et al., 2023). In order to distinguish between MLs as a whole and MLs who qualify for ELD services, particularly in the discussion of data on a nationwide level, we use the term *emergent ML*. **Emergent MLs are MLs who qualify for ELD services.** See Figure 1.2 for a visual representation.

In the United States in fall 2021, there were approximately 5.3 million school-age MLs who qualified for language support services (emergent MLs), making up 10.6% of the school-age population (Irwin et al., 2024; see Figure 1.3). In contrast, the entire group of MLs (both those who qualify for language services and those who do not) encompasses more than double that number of students. In the 2019–2020 school year, more than 12 million, or nearly 23%, of children ages 5 to 17 came from a home in which a language other than or in addition to English was spoken, according to U.S. census figures. In this book, we focus on the more inclusive ML population unless otherwise noted as emergent MLs.

FIGURE 1.3 Number of Emergent MLs and MLs



Sources: National Center for Education Statistics (2021); U.S. Census Bureau (2019a); U.S. Census Bureau (2019b).

Five Core Beliefs

As we previously mentioned, just knowing a few ML strategies is a great start, but we have found a few strategies in isolation will not considerably move the needle in terms of equitably instructing MLs and providing them an excellent education. (Also, please note that the terms *equitable* and *excellent* are not synonymous.) In addition, we recognize that the term *equity* may evoke strong feelings in some readers, so we'd like to clarify what we mean by equity. **We define equity as recognizing that all individuals have different backgrounds,**

strengths, and needs. As a result, we need to align the support we give students to the experiences they bring in order to provide them the best chance possible at success. One size does not fit all for any student, including MLs. For example, Table 1.1 provides what equitable education might look like for different groups of students. In providing Table 1.1, we recognize that there are nuances within each of these examples.

TABLE 1.1 Examples of Equity

GROUP OF STUDENTS	EXAMPLE OF EQUITY
Multilingual learners	Access to grade-level content with appropriate scaffolds
Students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	Consistent structures and tools for organization
Students identified as gifted and talented	Opportunities to explore topics of interest through depth and rigor, not just more work

For MLs, we must situate their instruction within a framework for equitable *and* excellent ML education, and advocacy plays a crucial role to help us get there. Our comprehensive framework is comprised of five interrelated core beliefs with the goal of MLs' successful experiences in school. See Figure 1.4 (Staehr Fenner et al., 2024), for a visual representation.

We have updated our core beliefs, originally written in 2017, to reflect the latest research, the current educational climate, and our continually evolving learning about MLs and their educators. As we revised our beliefs, we expanded and deepened our core belief around advocacy, stressing that collaboration and leadership as well as student well-being are critical components of advocacy, equity, and excellent education for MLs. We provide each of our core beliefs and a brief explanation next. As you read about our core beliefs (Staehr Fenner et al., 2024), begin reflecting on your own beliefs and how they compare to ours. You'll be asked to complete a deeper reflection after you read the section that follows.

1. MLs bring many strengths to the classroom.

MLs enter the classroom with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which are often overlooked or undervalued by educators. To effectively teach MLs, it is crucial to recognize the unique knowledge and skills they already possess, known as their "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al.,

FIGURE 1.4 Five Core Beliefs for MLs' Equitable and Excellent Education

Source: Staehr Fenner et al. (2024), p. 14.

1992).³ Students' home languages, cultural knowledge, and experiences should be integrated into the curriculum to honor students' backgrounds, support their academic growth, and sustain their cultural and linguistic practices (August, 2018; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). For example, refugee students may face gaps in their formal education but tend to bring resilience, oral traditions, and problem-solving skills that can be used to enhance their instruction. By building trusting relationships with MLs and learning about their strengths, teachers can use these assets as a foundation for learning, fostering an inclusive classroom environment where all students benefit from diverse perspectives. Encouraging MLs to share their experiences not only enriches other students' learning but also

³Funds of knowledge refer to the "historically-accumulated and culturally-developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for house-hold or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133).

FIGURE 1.5 Ms. Ritter Welcomes Her Students

prepares all students for a multicultural society (Gorski, 2010; Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021). Additionally, MLs can share cultural insights during content lessons, helping to create an atmosphere of trust and deeper learning.

2. MLs learn best when they are taught in a welcoming and culturally responsive school climate (Figure 1.5).

A school culture that promotes high-quality educational opportunities for MLs involves mindsets that recognize the value of multilingualism, appreciate MLs' cultures, and challenge stereotypes and deficit paradigms. Cooper (2021) highlights the importance of a whole-school approach to meeting MLs' needs, emphasizing that misconceptions about linguistic diversity, racial identity, and cultural inclusion can negatively impact language instruction

and MLs' sense of belonging. School leaders, such as principals and assistant principals, play a key role in shaping this culture by committing to MLs' academic success, fostering positive relationships with MLs and their families, providing professional learning for staff, and providing feedback on teachers' instruction of MLs (Staehr Fenner et al., 2015). However, many administrators lack adequate training in culturally responsive teaching practices, which can hinder their ability to fully support MLs. To build a school culture that promotes high achievement for all MLs, school leaders must be prepared to reflect on their own biases, understand the importance of linguistic civil rights, and view language as a resource rather than a problem (Bryan et al., 2019; Callahan et al., 2019). Further, engaging in ongoing dialogue with teachers, families, and staff is essential for leveraging MLs' strengths and meeting their needs, and fostering strong partnerships with ML families is crucial to creating a welcoming school climate (Callahan et al., 2019).

3. MLs acquire language and content when teachers purposefully integrate language development opportunities into meaningful content instruction.

To help multilingual learners meet rigorous content standards, they require language instruction that is closely aligned with the content they are studying. Language objectives, which focus specifically on students' language use and development, are essential in this process. As many districts adopt collaborative, inclusive models of ELD instruction, where emergent MLs receive language services within their content classes,

teachers can enhance their effectiveness by integrating language and content instruction. It is crucial that both content and ELD teachers implement strategies to teach content and language simultaneously. We understand that stepping outside one's area of expertise can be challenging, particularly if adequate training or resources for teaching MLs are lacking. However, by setting high expectations for MLs and integrating high-leverage strategies that focus on content and language—ideally in collaboration with colleagues—teachers will gain the confidence and skills needed to better support MLs in acquiring both language and content knowledge.⁴

4. MLs thrive when their teachers include opportunities for peer learning and meaningful conversations.

One of the key insights from our work with educators of MLs is the propensity for missed opportunities for peer interactions whereby MLs can more fully develop their oral language skills in the classroom. A whole-class discussion led by a teacher, where only a few students (typically the same ones who frequently raise their hands) are called on to respond, offers limited engagement opportunities compared to when students engage in structured-pair or small-group discussions. The intentional inclusion of peer learning and oral language development throughout a lesson can significantly enhance MLs' language development, content understanding, engagement with the content, and sense of belonging. Well-structured peer interactions allow MLs to engage more deeply, receive feedback, develop their oral language skills, and practice higher-level language skills, all while deepening their understanding of course material. Moreover, these interactions promote social-emotional skills, student agency, and empathy as students learn to appreciate diverse perspectives. To maximize the benefits of peer learning, teachers need to establish routines that foster effective interactions, create a safe environment where MLs feel comfortable taking language risks, and ensure the classroom is set up to support collaborative work.

5. MLs excel when teachers and administrators collaborate, advocate, and lead in support of their students' academic achievement and social-emotional well-being.

Our final core belief is a thread throughout all the other core beliefs and drives the content of this book. Promoting equitable educational opportunities for MLs implores us to draw on the interpersonal skills⁵ of collaboration, advocacy, and leadership, which may not be

⁴See Chapter 3 on instruction for MLs and Chapter 7 on professional learning for more ideas.

⁵These used to be referred to as “soft skills,” but the term *interpersonal skills* captures the multilayered aspect of possessing these skills and elevates their importance.

commonly thought of as having an impact on MLs' outcomes. Intentional collaboration with colleagues, students, families, and communities in support of MLs is paramount to students' success. Teacher collaboration underscores the idea that all teachers, not only the ELD teachers, are responsible for MLs' language development, social-emotional well-being, feeling of belonging, and academic success (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). In order to foster such high-quality collaboration, schools must have a structure in place so that teachers can work together in a systematic and ongoing way and share their expertise with one another. To do so, administrators must intentionally build time into schedules for collaboration and co-planning to occur, make it a priority for the entire staff, and ensure it is happening.

As the second component of our fifth core belief, we cannot underscore enough the importance of advocating for MLs. In order to begin advocating for MLs, we advise you to get a sense of what the larger, systemic, or programmatic advocacy issues may be in your context to decide which direction your advocacy should take. We will guide you in this process throughout this chapter as well as the rest of the book. In order to effectively advocate for MLs' success, you will also need to draw from your leadership skills. While many definitions of leadership exist, one definition of **leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”** (Northouse, 2010, p. 3). To advocate for MLs and support their equitable and excellent education, we encourage you to reflect on your own leadership skills and build upon them to strengthen them. Since teachers do not typically receive training in leadership or often even think of themselves as leaders, colleagues and administrators can help recognize and develop these skills in teachers. In addition, teachers can support each other as leaders. In our work with MLs, we have seen many educators rise up as leaders who successfully advocate for MLs, serve as allies to MLs, and become the catalysts for remarkable change, and you will read quotes from many of them throughout the chapters in this book. It's truly transformational to witness teachers lead and advocate for MLs in their schools; we learn from them and are inspired by them every day.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your reaction to these five core beliefs?
2. What are your core beliefs in educating MLs?
3. How do your core beliefs intersect with advocacy for MLs?



Defining Advocacy for MLs

We will provide a working definition of advocacy for MLs that will ground the rest of the book's contents and application activities. In order to do so, let's first look at the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, which defines an advocate as "one who defends or maintains a cause or proposal," "one who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group," or "one who pleads the cause of another" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). As you read the following quote from Antonio Vincent Incardona Jr., seventh-grade English as a new language (ENL) teacher in Albany, New York, consider how Mr. Incardona might define advocating for MLs.



"I teach in a school district where (newly this year) one-fifth of students are MLs. Our MLs in the district are half Spanish speaking, a good chunk of Arabic, and then many other Middle Eastern and East Asian languages. I am frequently called in when one of my students is involved in an incident or receiving discipline. My assistant principal always appreciates an advocate for my MLs in this situation so that the student understands exactly what they did wrong or the student's voice is completely heard when giving their side of the story or explaining what happened to them."

What Advocating for MLs Means to You

Before we share our definition of advocacy with you, we'd like you to pause and reflect on what the "term advocating for MLs" evokes for you. Look at the four images in Table 1.2.

TABLE 1.2 What Does ML Advocacy Evoke for You?

1 	2 
3 	4 

Reflection Questions



1. What does advocating for MLs look like for you (which number did you choose)?
2. Why did you choose this image? What does it represent about advocacy to you?
3. After reflecting on these images, how would you define advocacy for MLs?



Application Activity 1.1

ML Advocacy Quotes From Colleagues in the Field

As you read the following eight quotes from practitioners in the field about how they define advocating for MLs, please do the following:

- Consider themes that you notice.
 - Highlight one quote that resonates the most with you and think about why.
1. Advocating for multilingual learners means examining every aspect of the district's work, every decision that gets made, through a well-informed lens of what is best for students and their families, and constantly seeking to learn more and do better. It also means striving to create a culture of shared responsibility through empowering others to advocate alongside you. —April Perkins, Director of Multilingual Programs, South Portland School Department, Maine
 2. To me, advocacy means helping those that can't or aren't equipped to help themselves. The most important part of my position as a parent liaison is to educate and empower PARENTS to be the best advocates for their students. This means to provide the ML parents, even if their students are NOT in an ELD program, with resources and opportunities to fill in the gaps where they feel ill-equipped to help their students. Not only are there language gaps, but there are cultural and generational differences that are challenging to ML parents raising students that are experiencing something they themselves have no familiarity with. —Martha Holladay, Bilingual Community Liaison, Fulton County Schools, Georgia
 3. Advocacy can be defined as being the voice for those who are unable to advocate for themselves and ensuring that students and their families are informed, supported, and treated fairly. As the EL Coordinator at my school, I acknowledge that I am the safe space for many of my students. My students will often come to me for help and support when something isn't right or when they feel they are struggling. I am also the go-between for my students, their families, and the classroom teachers. I am always looking out for my students' best interest in the general education classroom, stepping in when I see a student struggling, not only to help the student but to enlighten the classroom teacher

as well and in some cases help the classroom teacher be a little more empathetic and understanding towards this student and family and their language needs. —Beth Silano, EL Coordinator and Teacher, Antonia Pantoja Charter School, Pennsylvania

4. Advocating for multilingual learners means to bring their assets to the forefront at all times. It means to advocate for their physical and mental wellness as well as their academic needs and strengths. It means to advocate for opportunities for them to excel whenever possible. As an ELD teacher, I am seen as a trusted adult to many of my students and for that, I often get to know my students and their families well. In addition, as an ELD teacher, I focus on what they can do and help them to grow using those assets. —Tiffany Patterson, ELD Teacher, Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland
5. Advocating for multilingual learners is supporting leaders, teachers, and colleagues in understanding the needs of and best practices for serving multilingual learners to ensure that our students have their needs met and receive the services and supports they are entitled to. In my role, I have worked to bring multilingual learners to the center of the conversation, rather than a reminder or add-on. —Laura Grisso, Executive Director of Language and Cultural Services, Tulsa Public Schools, Oklahoma
6. Advocating for multilingual students is the heartbeat of my work. As an educator, learning to effectively advocate as a leader is critical to any forward progress. Working across the state I have to listen and meet other educators where they are and search for collaboration points. It's important to honor the work in progress and collectively determine growth areas for our ML students. —Alice Collins, ELD Senior Consultant, Colorado Department of Education (retired)
7. I define advocating for multilingual learners as a steadfast commitment to ensuring every student receives the support they need to thrive. I see linguistic diversity as a powerful asset, and I work diligently to dismantle barriers that limit access to quality education. By implementing culturally responsive practices and engaging families and communities in decision-making, I strive to create inclusive learning environments where every student's background is celebrated and every voice is heard. These experiences have shown me that championing multilingual learners not only supports their academic success but also enriches our entire educational community. —Alamelu Sundaram-Walters, ESL Traveling educator, Mount Laurel, New Jersey
8. Advocating for multilingual learners means ensuring that they have equitable access to high-quality instruction, meaningful language development opportunities, and the necessary supports to thrive academically and socially. It involves championing policies, instructional practices, and systemic changes that remove barriers to their success while fostering an asset-based perspective on their linguistic and cultural strengths. Advocacy also means amplifying the voices of MLs and their families, ensuring that decision-making at all levels—classroom, school, and district—reflects their needs and perspectives. Advocacy is embedded in my role as a district-level EL coach through my work in building the capacity of educators, supporting instructional planning, and fostering meaningful family engagement. —Jenna Davis, District EL Coach, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Tennessee

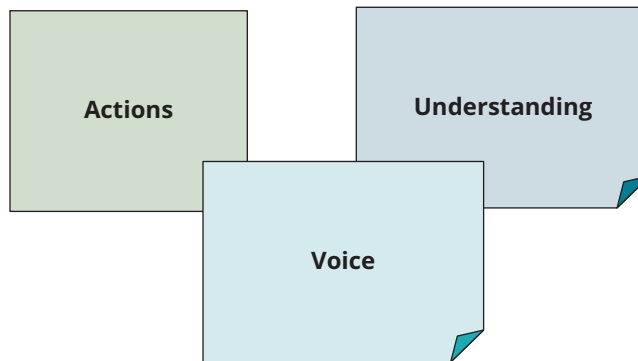
Reflection Questions

- What themes did you notice across the quotes?
- Which quote resonated with you the most? Why?

Our Definition of Advocacy for MLs

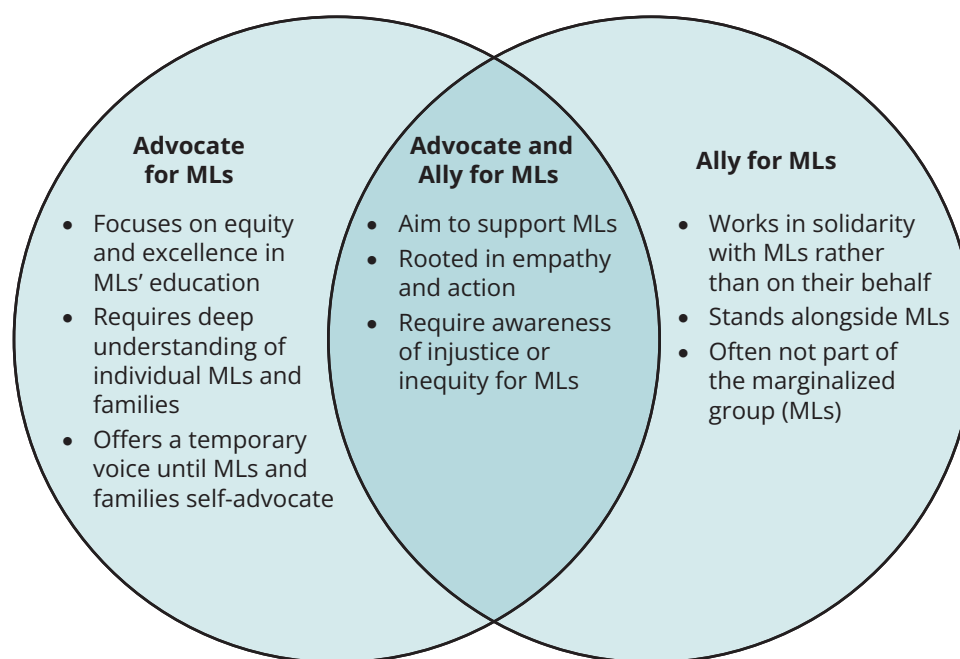
The definition of advocacy for MLs we will use in this book is based on acting on behalf of MLs both inside and outside the classroom.⁶ **We define advocacy for MLs as working for MLs' equitable and excellent education by taking appropriate actions on their behalf. Advocacy for MLs also means knowing about each of our ML students' and families' backgrounds to be able to know which appropriate action(s) to take on each person's behalf. To us, advocacy for MLs means providing a temporary voice for those students—and their families—who have *not yet* developed their own strong voice in their education.** (The word *yet* is important here, as it connotes that MLs and their families will indeed develop their own strong voice in their education!) This approach to advocacy is definitely not a one-size-fits-all approach, as each ML and their family differs from the next in terms of which kinds of advocacy are needed for them in a given moment in time. Figure 1.6 provides a visual representation of how three components of advocacy come together to form our definition.

FIGURE 1.6 Visual Representation of Advocacy for MLs



In conjunction with advocating for MLs, it is also worthwhile to have a look at what it means to be an ally. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines **ally** as “**one that is associated with another as a helper: a person or group that provides assistance and support in an ongoing effort, activity, or struggle, often now used specifically of a person who is not a member of a marginalized or mistreated group but who expresses or gives support to that group**” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Figure 1.7 explores those two concepts further and establishes commonalities between the two.

⁶As we stated in the book's introduction, our focus in this book is advocacy at the classroom, school, district, and/or state level. We do not delve into advocating outside the educational setting (e.g., advocating with political representatives) and would direct you to experts such as TESOL International Association or the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) for more information on that unique type of important advocacy for MLs.

FIGURE 1.7 Being an Advocate and an Ally for MLs

Scaffolded Advocacy

The concept of advocacy that will be used in this book is further influenced by the concept of scaffolding. *Scaffolding* is an instructional strategy that provides MLs an appropriate level of support as they access content material in a language in which they are developing proficiency (Gibbons, 2015; Staehr Fenner et al., 2024). One of the basic principles of scaffolding instruction for MLs is that the teacher must know their MLs' backgrounds (including their linguistic, cultural, and socioemotional strengths as well as areas of need) in order to determine which scaffolds to use and also when to remove the scaffolds. Because no two MLs are exactly the same, the types and amounts of instructional scaffolding used for one ML will vary from the types and amounts of scaffolding used for another ML with a different background. By their very nature, scaffolds should be gradually removed as MLs' levels of English language proficiency (ELP) increase. In this way, students eventually do not require scaffolded instruction, as they have developed enough ELP to successfully engage with challenging, grade-level content without scaffolding alongside their non-ML peers. It is our goal as teachers of MLs to help get our students to a place where they no longer require our scaffolding during instruction (other than scaffolding that is being given to all students).

Much like scaffolded instruction, the concept of advocacy for MLs that we will use in this book is one of *scaffolded advocacy*. Educators tend to naturally advocate more actively for MLs who fit into one or more of the categories below, although the list is by no means exhaustive:

- Are at lower levels of ELP
- Are newcomers

PHOTO 1.1 Scaffolding as Temporary Support



- Have had gaps in their education
- Attend schools in which expectations are low and/or teachers have not received sufficient training to instruct them
- Are from families who are unfamiliar with their children's educational rights and community resources in the United States
- Have undergone trauma

Scaffolded advocacy recognizes educators' goal for MLs and their families is to be able to advocate for themselves, so our advocacy for students will be scaffolded (i.e., aligned to each student's strengths and needs) as well as temporary. All educators, therefore, need to share the responsibility for educating MLs as students' and families' voices grow stronger by providing temporary advocacy scaffolds to help MLs and their families become their own advocates in the U.S. educational arena. All the while, educators should keep in mind that, as we mentioned earlier, the concept of self-advocacy may not exist in MLs' or their families' cultures, and we must be especially sensitive in honoring students' and families' cultures and assets while sharing U.S. expectations with them.

Reflection Questions

1. After reading this far in the chapter, how do you define advocacy for MLs?
2. How does your advocacy differ by student or family?



Application Activity 1.2, ML Advocacy Audit, provides an advocacy audit aligned with each of the book's remaining chapters (with the exception of Chapter 9), which can help you reflect on and take stock of your context at the school or district level. Working through this audit can assist you in the beginning phases of deciding which areas of advocacy for MLs present the highest needs. Prioritizing your top advocacy issue or issues will help you determine your path forward as you work through this chapter and the remainder of the book.



Application Activity 1.2

ML Advocacy Audit

TABLE 1.3 Audit Worksheet

BOOK CHAPTER NUMBER AND POTENTIAL ML ADVOCACY ISSUE	QUESTIONS TO ASK: TO WHAT DEGREE . . .	RESPONSE	POTENTIAL ADVOCACY ISSUE
2. Shared Sense of Responsibility	Do educators have an assets-based mindset and shared commitment to MLs' success?	Not at all Somewhat Extensively	Yes No Unsure
3. Instruction	Do educators have high expectations for MLs and use effective strategies to support MLs' access to grade-level content?	Not at all Somewhat Extensively	Yes No Unsure
4. Assessment	Are assessments valid and allow MLs to demonstrate what they know and can do in content and language?	Not at all Somewhat Extensively	Yes No Unsure
5. Newcomer MLs	Do newcomers feel welcome, have appropriate placement in programs, and benefit from effective instruction?	Not at all Somewhat Extensively	Yes No Unsure
6. ML Families	Do ML families feel like they are a valued part of the school community and partners in helping their children thrive academically and socially and emotionally?	Not at all Somewhat Extensively	Yes No Unsure
7. Professional learning	Do all educators of MLs receive professional learning that facilitates their implementation of effective instructional strategies in teaching MLs?	Not at all Somewhat Extensively	Yes No Unsure

(Continued)

(Continued)

BOOK CHAPTER NUMBER AND POTENTIAL ML ADVOCACY ISSUE	QUESTIONS TO ASK: TO WHAT DEGREE . . .	RESPONSE	POTENTIAL ADVOCACY ISSUE
8. Programming	Are MLs placed in programs that are aligned to their goals, challenge them, and put them on a path to graduation and postsecondary success?	Not at all Somewhat Extensively	Yes No Unsure

Reflection Questions

1. What are your takeaways after completing this audit?
2. Which areas stood out the most to you?

FIGURE 1.8 Ms. Ritter Expands Her Sphere of Influence



Your Sphere of Influence as an ML Advocate

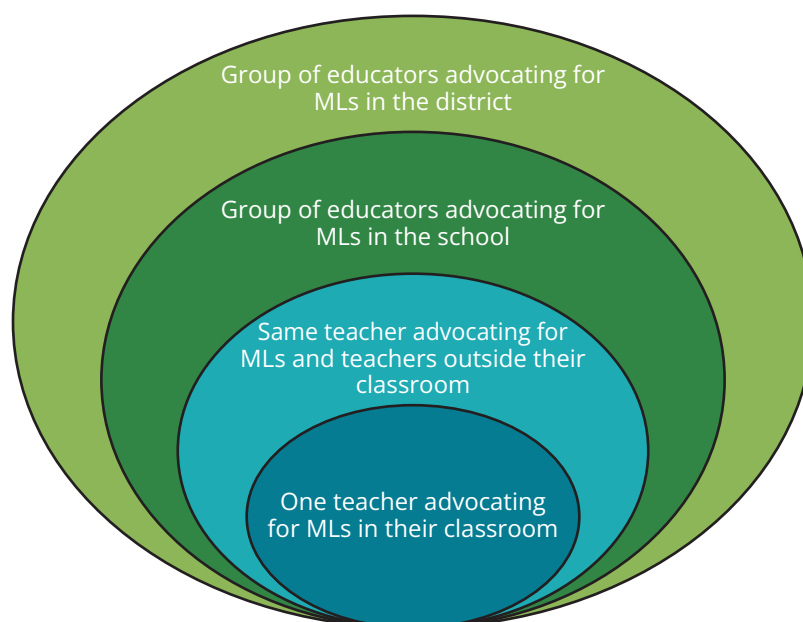
Another concept that is intertwined with advocacy is your sphere of influence (see Figure 1.8), which is “a territorial area within which the political influence or the interests of one nation are held to be more or less paramount” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). We have adapted that definition and applied it to advocating for MLs, where **a sphere of influence is the level of impact an educator or educators can have through advocacy (e.g., at the classroom level, the grade level, the school level).**

Paul Gorski (2014) writes,

Each of us does have a sphere in which we have the power to decide just how equitable an environment we want to make for students and

their families. Maybe that sphere is a classroom or department within a school. Maybe it's a school or district or state . . . Within this sphere, based on the circumstances over which you do have control, commit to doing all you can do to provide an equitable, safe, welcoming, and validating learning environment for ML students and their families. (Cited in Staehr Fenner, 2014, p. 57)

Figure 1.9 represents different spheres in which educators may operate to advocate for MLs.

FIGURE 1.9 Sphere of Influence

Source: Staehr Fenner (2024).

As you continue to develop your ideas around what advocating for MLs means to you, take a look at the following quote from Katie Crook, the founding director of the South Carolina Multilingual Learner Educator Network, and reflect on what you think her definition of advocacy for MLs might be and what her sphere of influence might look like.



"In South Carolina, currently 77,000 students, or about 10% of the state's total school population, are classified as multilingual learners. In 2019, I was an ML teacher in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, near Charleston.

Teachers of MLs in South Carolina face unique challenges, including restrictive language policies, rapid growth (400% from 2000–2001 to 2019–2020), no state funding for ML programs, inequitable access to professional learning (PL) opportunities about MLs, a critical shortage of ML teachers since 2014, and large numbers of itinerant/solo ML teachers who feel isolated/cut off from support and community.

"In August 2019, I started a small Facebook group for 'South Carolina ESOL Teachers,' which we were called at the time . . . Shortly after I started the Facebook group, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and we had our first online meeting to collaborate and design our first published resource, which was called *Virtual Supports and Accommodations for English Learners*. In the past five years, we have continued to grow in number and impact, and in 2023, we became a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Our programs now include monthly virtual and in-person PL, networking events, and social media content.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Our Diverse Book Bank gives books to SC teachers that feature diverse authors and characters so that all children, regardless of race or language, can see themselves represented in their classroom libraries. Our direct advocacy activities include sharing data with SC teachers about ML students (demographic, achievement, etc.), releasing open letters to school district leadership on important topics, and collaborating with other organizations in South Carolina to encourage advocacy activities, such as our yearly Advocacy Bingo during National Bilingual/Multilingual Learner Advocacy Month (April) . . . Our partners include the SC world languages teacher association and state agency, Carolina TESOL, the Reading League South Carolina, community organizations that serve immigrant communities, SC Appleseed Justice Center, South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs, and ACLU-SC. Our biggest advocates and most hardworking volunteers continue to be ML teachers across the state who donate their time, energy, and expertise after school hours to support our colleagues, their ML students, and their families.”



What the Research Tells Us

Now that we have a nuanced, shared definition of advocacy for MLs, in this section, we will take a brief look at some relevant research. We begin by exploring some ML demographics so you can get a sense of the nationwide context in the United States for educating MLs and make comparisons to trends in your state or region. Next, we will share relevant information on teachers’ preparation to teach MLs and advocate for them so you can discern strengths and gaps in the way we approach MLs’ education. Finally, we explore some facets of the ML opportunity gap that will paint a picture that may illuminate some potential areas for advocacy.

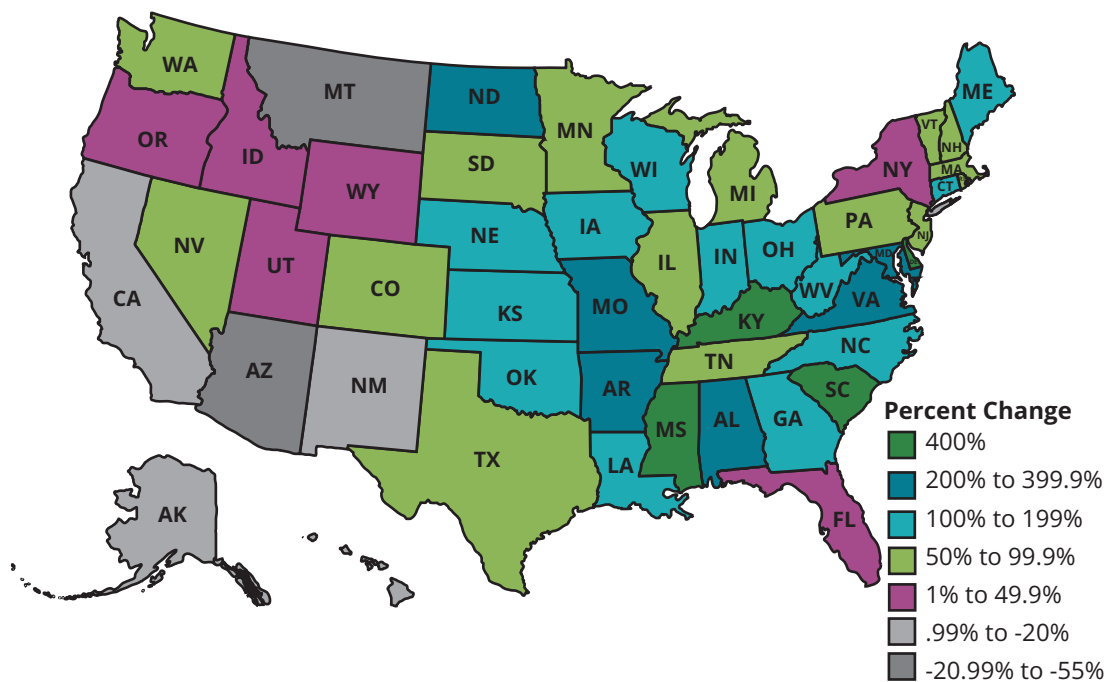
ML Demographics

Let’s shift our attention to several key changes that have created the need for educators to develop their advocacy efforts around MLs. First, the number of emergent MLs in preK–12 classrooms who are learning English continues to grow overall. As we have established, nearly a quarter of the preK–12 population across the United States is composed of multilingual learners (Irwin et al., 2024). MLs constitute a growing presence across most, but not all, of the United States.⁷ According to the most recent data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2021), three states experienced more than 400% growth in their preK–12 emergent ML populations between the 2000–2001 and 2019–2020 school years. At the same time, five states lost a percentage

⁷During the time we wrote this book, changes began occurring in numbers of MLs in the United States with a reduction of MLs in some communities. We recommend that readers be up to date on demographics that may be shifting in their communities.

of their emergent ML population. Significant shifts in numbers of ML families can have profound impacts on communities and schools. Although the United States experienced a great deal of ML population growth from 2000 to 2020, with policies at the time of the book's publication aimed at drastically reducing the number of immigrants, we are learning of a drop in numbers of MLs in some districts. This reduction in numbers not only has an impact on schools as they plan their programming, but it also gives rise to a larger social-emotional impact on students and families. See Figure 1.10 for a state-by-state look at ML growth trends over those two decades.

FIGURE 1.10 PreK–12 Emergent ML Population Growth From 2000–2001 to 2019–2020



Source: Office of English Language Acquisition (2022).

These numbers tell a nuanced story, and when there is significant growth in ML populations, it can bring about strong, negative emotions in some people. When Diane first began teaching ELD in rural North Carolina, there had been an uptick in the region's Spanish-speaking population, beginning with migrant families who then permanently settled in the area. Many community members did not readily embrace this new population and spoke out against the extra resources they felt were needed to educate these families' children. More recently, while we (Sydney and Diane) were providing guidance to several districts in the state of Massachusetts that had experienced rapid growth in their newcomer population, communities fell along a continuum of acceptance and support of their new neighbors. Despite the varying views of the larger community, we were inspired by so many educators' undying resolve to welcome newcomer MLs and families

into their school systems. One piece of advice we'd like to share with you is that semantics matter. Whenever we hear about an "influx" of MLs, we immediately hear the negative connotation that word can bring about. We've stricken that word from our vocabulary when it comes to MLs and prefer to say "increase" or "growth" in population.

In addition, we recognize that MLs and their families can unfortunately be used as pawns for political gain. As educators of MLs, it is always important to be mindful of immigration trends locally, in your state or province, nationally, and internationally. In our positions as educators, we must be knowledgeable of current events, both in the U.S. and internationally, that affect our ML population. So, while we share these numbers, we must realize that these figures represent actual people who have made great sacrifices to provide a better life for their children, just like any parent would do regardless of political affiliation or beliefs. Each ML and their family has a story, just like each of us does, and we must recognize and support our students and families since they are fellow human beings who, given the proper tools, will contribute their talents and their passions to the future of their country of residence. It is also surprising to many that the majority of emergent MLs were born in the United States and are U.S. citizens (Pew Research Center, 2018). Regardless of where our K–12 MLs were born, it is our imperative to educate all children, including those MLs who did not have a say in where they are living or what their parents' or family members' choices were.

Reflection Questions



1. What are your school, district, and state ML demographics?
2. What is your ML rate of growth (or decline), and what impact has this had?
3. Which languages do your MLs speak?
4. Which countries do your MLs or their families come from?
5. Why do they move to your area?
6. How does your community generally feel about their presence?

One important piece of the ML advocacy puzzle occurs when you hear other educators or community members perpetuate myths about MLs. (In one instance, Diane learned her children's pediatrician, who had been practicing more than 30 years, had always told ML families to speak English with their children at home. She tactfully set him straight, much to his surprise.) In Application Activity 1.3, read the 10 myths and determine how you might respond to them.



Application Activity 1.3

Ten Myths About MLs

1. If a multilingual learner speaks with their peers in their home language in class, it means they are not discussing academic content.
2. If a multilingual learner is quiet in class, it usually means they don't understand the content or aren't motivated to learn.
3. Multilingual learners need simplified content because they can't handle grade-level work until they are fully proficient in English.
4. Multilingual learners' families care less than native English speakers about their children's education.
5. A student who speaks English fluently with peers no longer needs academic language support.
6. Most MLs were born in countries outside the United States and are therefore not U.S. citizens.
7. MLs do not have plans beyond high school and will not aspire to attend college or have careers.
8. MLs do not benefit from instruction that connects to their cultural and linguistic background.
9. MLs will always perform worse on academic end-of-year assessments than native speakers.⁸
10. Standardized tests in English are an accurate measure of a multilingual learner's abilities.

Reflection Questions

1. Which myth do you hear the most often?
2. Which myth do you hear that is not included on this list?
3. What do you do when you hear it?
4. How can you advocate to dispel rumors and myths about MLs while maintaining relationships with colleagues and community members?

Teachers' Preparation to Teach MLs and Advocate for Them

Despite the overall growth of ML students, the majority of teacher education courses that prepare general education and content area teachers do not include coursework on teaching MLs (Ballantyne et al., 2008). This omission speaks volumes. Even if teachers don't have an ML in their classrooms currently, they are very likely to have at least one ML in the future. Further, in many general education teacher preparation programs, multilingual learners receive limited attention or are framed within coursework under umbrella labels of "diverse

⁸See Chapter 4 for more information. Spoiler: this is not true!

learners” and deficit-based terms such as “struggling” learners or “students with special needs” (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019; Li & Bian, 2021).

The lack of a focus on MLs also extends to inservice professional learning requirements. Duggan et al. (2020) found that only four U.S. states (Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New York) required any type of coursework on ML education in order for teachers to be recertified. While many states require recertification every five years, a handful of states outside of the four we just mentioned require districts to offer professional learning on MLs, but completing this professional learning is not a requirement for teachers to become recertified.

Despite these gloomy facts, some teacher preparation programs do take up the call for preparing general education teachers in a variety of ways, including through innovative ML-oriented pedagogies within coursework, field placements anchored by university coursework, and cross-cultural or language immersion opportunities during university (Mills et al., 2020). The impact of intentional coursework and field placements with MLs are promising for teacher candidates. Multiple studies reveal that teacher candidates who have taken coursework on MLs report feeling more prepared to teach MLs (Deng & Hayden, 2021; Deng et al., 2021; Kananu Kiramba et al., 2022; Truscott & Obiwo, 2021). In addition, teacher candidates with direct experience with MLs in their field placements also feel more prepared to teach MLs (Deng et al., 2021; Kananu Kiramba et al., 2022).

In their comprehensive report *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English*, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) recommend that state and professional credentialing bodies should require that “all educators with instructional and support roles (e.g., teachers, care and education practitioners, administrators, guidance counselors, psychologists, and therapists) . . . be prepared through credentialing and licensing as well as pre- and in-service training” to work with multilingual learners (p. 476). This comprehensive report recommends professional learning in areas such as second language acquisition, effective practices for multilingual learner instruction and assessment, and the development of skills related to multilingual learner family engagement and (you guessed it!) advocacy.

ML Opportunity Gap

In addition to the sheer numbers of MLs and lacking teacher preparation, another area that points to the need for advocacy for MLs is the opportunity gap between MLs and non-MLs, including a difference between high school completion rates as well as attainment of postsecondary degrees by emergent MLs versus non-MLs. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Irwin et al., 2024), current emergent MLs have an adjusted cohort graduation rate in public schools of 72%, compared to the U.S. average of 87%. Research has also found that MLs who were at any point in their education classified as emergent

MLs and those never classified as emergent MLs⁹ have distinct graduation outcomes. Never-emergent MLs are more likely to graduate, with an 81% chance of graduating within four years compared to 77% for ever-emergent MLs (Le et al., 2024). Further, this study of a large data set from New York City public school students reveals the ways in which race/ethnicity impacts graduation rates. The study found that Asian/Pacific Islander ever-emergent MLs (students who once received ELD services but were reclassified after they reached the level of ELP needed to exit) had the strongest graduation outcomes, Latino ever-emergent MLs had the lowest predicted graduation rates, and Black ever-emergent MLs outperformed Black students who were never emergent MLs when it comes to graduation rates. There are other districts that see this same trend of some groups of former emergent MLs graduating at higher rates than native English speakers. These data underscore the importance of tracking data of emergent MLs who have been reclassified as no longer needing ELD services at the district and state level to get a sense of what is happening in your district or state.

The Five-Step Advocacy Process

Now that we have defined advocacy and provided some demographic and research data that support the need for advocacy, it's time to learn about how to advocate for MLs. In their advocacy guidance document *All In! How Educators Can Advocate for English Language Learners* (2015), the National Education Association (NEA) offers a five-step approach for planning and carrying out advocacy work. We are proud to have helped develop this original model with the NEA and have gone on to use, adapt, and share this framework extensively. We are drawn to this model because it takes a potentially overwhelming, somewhat abstract-seeming task and provides a clear step-by-step plan for how to move forward to advocate for MLs and accomplish goals.

We have also found that educators feel more empowered once they have a practical plan for how to advocate for MLs, which can feel like a very daunting and possibly isolating task. We will explore how you can apply this five-step advocacy process to various advocacy issues throughout the book and will provide you the opportunity to reflect on how you can use this process within your own personalized context. First, however, we will share the five steps (Figure 1.11), and then we will offer an explanation of each couched in an ML advocacy issue.

The five steps are

Step 1. Isolate the issue.

Step 2. Be clear on the research as well as students' and families' rights.

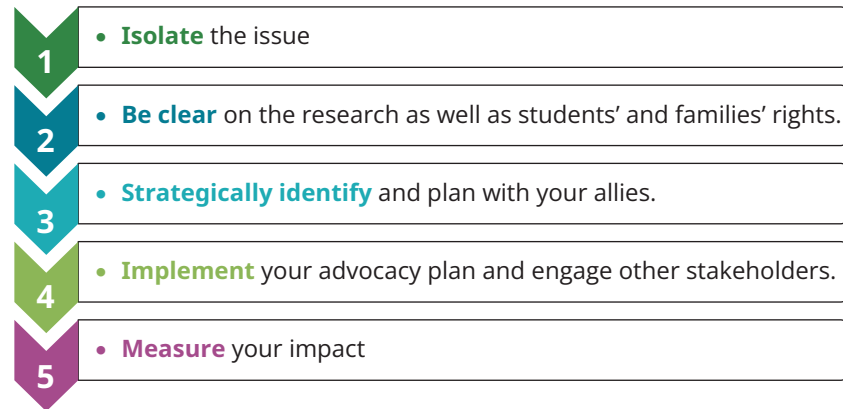
⁹By "those never classified as emergent MLs," we mean native English speakers or students not identified for ELD services.

Step 3. Strategically identify and plan with your allies.

Step 4. Implement your advocacy plan and engage other stakeholders.

Step 5. Measure your impact.

FIGURE 1.11 Five-Step Advocacy Process



Step 1. Isolate the issue. The first step is one of the most important steps to undertake. There are so, so many advocacy issues that affect MLs. But why, and how, do you choose just one to focus on? As educators, we are naturally drawn to seeking solutions to problems. We want to fix everything that comes our way to ensure our students are positioned for academic and personal success. We notice inequitable situations, wrongdoings, and general areas for improvement to smooth the path for our MLs every day. However, if we don't focus on one issue at a time, we risk being in a mode of spending our energy putting out multiple small fires rather than strategically planning for long-term change for MLs and/or their families. By choosing and isolating just one issue, we increase the chances that we can bring about meaningful change for our MLs in one area. In order to illustrate the five-step ML advocacy process, we will present a scenario framed around the advocacy issue of equitable grading. Let's dive in.

Five-Step Scenario: Imagine Mr. Dubois is working as an ELD teacher at Central Elementary School, where he's noticed so many areas in which he could advocate for MLs. For example, many MLs don't make expected progress in English acquisition, ML families don't seem to feel welcome in the school community, and some teachers assign failing grades to MLs without providing them adequate instructional support and scaffolds on content assessments. With all of those issues circulating, how can he decide where to advocate? He decides to focus on the issue of inequitable grading of MLs because of the impact it is having on students in his school.

To further isolate the issue, Mr. Dubois follows the advice of our colleague Paul Gorski (2012, as cited in Staehr Fenner, 2014) and considers the questions:

- What do I have control over in this environment?
- What do I not have control over here?

When thinking about inequitable grading for MLs, which is a really broad topic, here are some things he thinks he might have control over and have the ability to change:

- A. Some content teachers' mindsets on how to approach grading MLs (e.g., helping them understand the impact of language acquisition and literacy on MLs' engagement with content in English, the interplay between background knowledge and understanding content)
- B. Equipping content teachers to more consistently provide scaffolds to MLs during instruction and assessment so that students are graded on a more level playing field and providing models of scaffolded and multimodal assessments
- C. His school's report card structure (e.g., separating out process from product, which is their mastery of standards; including input from the ELD teacher or a notation that the student is an emergent multilingual learner)

When thinking about inequitable grading for MLs, here are some things Mr. Dubois understands that he doesn't have control over and probably can't change (or can't change quite yet):

- A. His school district's grading policy for all students
- B. His school district's grading policy for MLs
- C. His state's policy on retaining students in a grade

As part of isolating the issue, we also need to be clear on our goals in advocating for MLs. Just as we need to define success criteria when teaching students, we also need to define our advocacy expectations and also know what a successful endpoint for our advocacy might look like. In the case of this grading example, Mr. Dubois reflected on the three things he noted that he had the capability to have an impact on. He decided that he'd focus on working to change Central Elementary School's report card for MLs since making that change would also help change some content teachers' mindsets and encourage more use of instructional scaffolding at all grade levels. It would also hold more teachers accountable to grade MLs fairly. If he is able to work with a team to change his school's report card to make grading more transparent and equitable for MLs, then he will have been successful with his advocacy efforts.

Step 2. Be clear on the research as well as students' and families' rights.

Often, when we advocate for MLs, it feels like it's us against the world. When we (Diane and Sydney) were in the classroom as ELD teachers, we would often think we were the only people at our school or in our district who were advocating for

MLs. To help avoid this sense of isolation and, more importantly, to buoy your advocacy, it's important to do some research so it's not just you alone advocating for MLs. When you can back up your claim (or what you want to change) with relevant research as well as citing MLs' and their families' rights, it's not just you anymore. It's you coupled with objective research as well as rights and even legal precedents to help you advocate.

In the case of grading MLs, Mr. Dubois is able to easily locate some research on grading in general from Guskey and Hattie.¹⁰ He discovers there's less research available on grading MLs in particular, but he does find "The Five Pillars of Equitably Grading ELLs" (Staehr Fenner et al., 2018) and also research on the assessment and grading of MLs (e.g., Gottlieb, 2023). He looks at his state policies on grading and doesn't find anything on grading MLs specifically, but his district has very vague guidelines for grading all students, which seem quite subjective and open to interpretation. He identifies some gaps in research as well as policies for MLs that he thinks could fill with his advocacy. One gap is that he has a sense that MLs aren't being graded fairly but still needs to see the data to confirm his suspicion. Consequently, he is now a little more prepared to engage in advocacy on this topic and feels a little less alone.

Step 3. Strategically identify and plan with your allies. During this step, we recommend you pause and brainstorm a list of colleagues who you think might be supportive of MLs in general. This list could begin with and might extend beyond ELD, grade level, or content area colleagues. In addition to those colleagues, think of what other staff might be open to collaborating with you, especially those who you believe seem to want to see MLs succeed even if they may have had no formal training on ML education. For example, you could approach an assistant principal, school counselor, librarian, family liaison (if you have one), social worker, and/or ML families and selected students. Write down your issue and a summary of your research and policy findings on one page, and use this advocacy summary as a conversation starter with your future allies. You may wish to share the summary in writing with your potential allies first and what your "ask" of them is. This approach will allow your future allies time to think about your request and not put them on the spot compared to approaching them in person.

Then, once you have your core group of allies in place, collaboratively map out a timeline and schedule for your advocacy, including what your collective goals are, what steps you will take, who will be the lead on each step, when each step will be completed, and your metrics for success. Set up a way to track your progress, be it in a shared document, a spreadsheet, or any way that works for you and your allies. Also, determine how often you will meet, where you will meet, and how long your meetings will be. This is the step where you will begin to get a sense of the

¹⁰See Chapter 4 for more research and tools on advocacy for grading MLs.

rhythm of your advocacy and the results. This piece may require some trial and error as you figure out your group dynamics, who will take on which roles, and who is poised to do which components of the work.

In the case of the ML grading advocacy, Mr. Dubois starts to feel a little overwhelmed again, so he thinks about who he could work with to advocate around this issue. The allies Mr. Dubois chooses and who commit to the project are Mr. Tabuni, third-grade teacher; Ms. Adebayo, school counselor; Ms. Tran, test coordinator; Mr. Rodriguez, family liaison; Ms. Patel, ML parent; and Ms. Martinez, assistant principal. Table 1.4 provides a sample tool that outlines the allies' plan for collaboration.

TABLE 1.4 Collaboration Plan for ML Grading Advocacy

ML Advocacy Goal: Improve the fairness of grading practices for MLs

ACTION STEP	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE	NOTES
Meet with school leadership to outline issue	Assistant Principal	Weeks 1–2	Share the advocacy summary document, clearly state the issue, data, and proposed next steps
Conduct data analysis to determine trends in ML grades vs. non-ML grades	School Counselor and Third-Grade Teacher	Weeks 3–5	Use the past two or three years of report card data, disaggregating by emergent ML status and language proficiency level; seek assistance and input from school data analyst
Contact district to obtain information on how to change a school report card framework	Test Coordinator	Weeks 6–7	Rehearse what you will say, gather relevant report card policy information and examples from other districts in the state
Meet with selected ML families, older students, and other teachers to find out their perspectives on grading and fairness	ELD teacher, parent, and family liaison	Weeks 6–8	Draft guiding questions to enable small-group discussions in the form of listening sessions with interpreters, be clear with families and students on the purpose of the meetings

(Continued)

(Continued)

ACTION STEP	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE	NOTES
Meet to discuss findings from policy research and interviews and focus groups and determine recommended changes	Team	Weeks 9–10	Discuss the data obtained in the previous action steps, determine possible changes
Outline draft changes to report cards for MLs	ELD teacher	Weeks 11–12	Draft changes and solicit feedback from the team

Step 4. Implement your advocacy plan and engage other stakeholders.

At some point, once you have made some gains in your advocacy, you will want to expand beyond your group of core allies to share the results of your advocacy and obtain others’ input and feedback to determine your course forward. We advise you to confer with your core group of allies as you undergo your advocacy action steps and outline when you will be ready to expand your sphere of influence and include others outside your immediate circle. You will need to reach consensus collaboratively to find the “right” time to share your advocacy with additional stakeholders to get more ideas for how to refine your work. You will also want to make a clear plan for how you will communicate your advocacy work to these stakeholders and how you might respond if you face resistance or doubt.

At Central Elementary School, after undertaking all the action steps outlined in Table 4.1, Collaboration Plan for ML Grading Advocacy, the core group of allies determines they are ready to share a summary of their work and get feedback on their draft changes to the report card. They don’t feel quite ready to share the project with the entire school at this point, but they know it’s time to expand their sphere of influence. They decide to share the draft report card with a handful of grade-level teachers at each of the elementary school’s grade levels. They also know it’s important to bring in additional ML student voices, so they reconvene the student and parent advisory group that provided their perspectives on grading and also invite some additional ML parent and student voices. After they fine-tune their product based on this expanded group’s input, they are ready to share the new report card with the school administrators for approval.

Step 5. Measure your impact. In the final step, our advocacy comes full circle. We now come back to our original metrics for success to reflect upon the impact our advocacy has had for MLs and/or their families. This final step underscores the need to carefully outline metrics for success when making a plan for your advocacy issue in Step 3 so that you can determine how successful your advocacy has been and where there is a need for improvement. This “measuring” could be quantitative, qualitative, or a mixture of both. If you determine your impact has not been what you had envisioned, at this point you can revisit Steps 1 and 3 and refine your issue, your metrics for success, and your approach to advocating for this particular issue. You may decide to fine-tune your issue or choose a different, more feasible one.

In our Central Elementary School example, the metrics for success were a changed report card that reflects additional considerations for grading MLs that have been determined in a collaborative fashion with stakeholders sharing different perspectives. The team wanted their school's report card to make grading more transparent and equitable for MLs. After obtaining feedback on this complex issue from the larger circle and sharing it with the entire school, they felt that they had made great strides. The final measure of impact, then, will be to pilot the report card for a quarter and speak with ML families, students, and teachers about how well the report card describes ML performance while acknowledging the interplay between students' language acquisition and background knowledge on meeting content standards. Once they learn that students, families, teachers, and administrators benefit from the changes they have made while not inflating grades, they will be satisfied that their ML advocacy was successful.

Reflection Questions



1. What are your takeaways from Central Elementary School's advocacy story?
2. What are your thoughts on the five-step advocacy process?¹¹
3. How are you feeling right now about moving forward with advocating for MLs?

As we close out this chapter, we would like to share another quote from Alice Collins, ELD Senior Consultant, Colorado Department of Education (retired),

¹¹We will include a five-step advocacy process template in Chapter 9.

an inspiring figure who tirelessly served MLs and their educators. She notes, “What gives me hope and keeps me motivated, especially right now advocating for our multilinguals and emerging bilinguals across our nation . . . for me, it’s about students and it’s about dedicated teachers. I believe wholeheartedly they deserve the best support and every possible pathway that we could be taking to support them and fund the work. We just have to stay the course and for me as an educator and having done this now for so many years, the truth is we’re an immigrant nation. We’re always going to be an immigrant nation, and every day we’re going to have students in front of us that want to learn.”

Conclusion

Since all educators share the responsibility for ensuring MLs’ achievement and well-being, and just using a few strategies will not promote needed long-lasting change, it is imperative to examine how critical a role advocacy plays in MLs’ education. In this chapter, we framed the need to advocate for MLs around such factors as ML demographics, the ML/non-ML opportunity gap, and the lack of preparation for teachers to effectively work with MLs. We defined advocacy for MLs and presented a scaffolded approach to advocacy, in which each ML’s background variables must be known and addressed in order for educators to truly serve and support each ML student and their families. The chapter closed with the five-step ML advocacy framework using an example of grading for MLs and considerations for programmatic and system-level factors that affect advocacy for MLs. Chapter 2 will focus on creating a sense of shared responsibility for teaching MLs through shifting educators’ mindsets.

Summary of Key Ideas

- Educators have different ways of defining advocacy, and there are multiple ways to advocate for MLs at the classroom, grade, school, district, or state level.
- All educators share the responsibility for MLs’ academic learning and well-being and must collaborate to support their students’ growth.
- The concept of scaffolded advocacy means providing the right amount of advocacy for MLs and then removing advocacy so MLs and their families are able to advocate for themselves.
- The five-step advocacy process provides a systematic approach for educators to determine an area for advocacy and be successful in taking steps to advocate for MLs in their chosen area.

Reflection Questions

As we end this chapter, we will return to your original chapter entry points to compare your thoughts.

- **Teachers:** Take a look at your original brainstormed list of your top five advocacy issues your MLs are facing. Which issue might you like to try and address? Why? Who might you collaborate with?
- **Administrators:** What stood out to you as you thought about your unique context and how effective instruction for MLs aligns to your school and district initiatives, goals, and plans? How can advocacy for MLs serve as a means to support your work to elevate instruction for MLs?

