A young boy and girl are reading a book together in a library. The boy is on the left, wearing a red shirt, and the girl is on the right, wearing a blue polka-dot shirt and glasses. They are both looking at the book, which has the title 'Famous Americans' visible on the cover. The background shows bookshelves filled with books.

Considerations for Teaching Literacy Instruction of Illinois Multilingual and Bidialectal Learners

Illinois State Board of Education & Region 9 Comprehensive Center

Definitions

Multilingual learners (ML)

A student that is developing proficiency in two or more languages.

Bidialectal learners

A student who uses two dialects of the same language.

English learners (EL)

A student who has qualified for English learner services under criteria of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), also used when students with EL status are cited or studied within research.

Illinois Assessment of Readiness - ELA

Percentage change in English learners scoring Below Basic on the IAR in ELA, 2019–23



From **38.9%** to **50.3%** of ELs scoring Below Basic.



11.4% fewer students achieving Basic Proficiency post-pandemic.

Percentage change in English learners scoring Not Proficient on the IAR in ELA, 2019–23



5.4% more ELs scoring Not Proficient.



From **17.3%** to **11.9%** of ELs demonstrating Proficiency.

Illinois' Guiding Values for Literacy

Every learner is capable and has the right to equitable access to high-quality, **inclusive, differentiated, and evidence-based** literacy instruction.

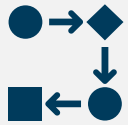
Every learner deserves schools that **nurture their unique assets and interests,** honoring their complexity within the context of their communities.

Every learner has the right to **develop literacy in two or more languages to prepare for success in our global world.**

Every learner has the right to be **empowered through agency to self-advocate within supportive learning environments.**

Every learner has the right to **reliable and valid assessments** that accurately measure their literacy skills.

Objectives



Build a comprehensive screening system for multilingual learners.



Leverage students' language assets to accelerate learning.



Consider data in relation to “true peers.”



Develop a plan for supporting newcomers.

Build a Comprehensive Screening System

1

Select and administer appropriate early literacy screening assessments and tools.

2

Use bilingual or native language assessments, when possible.

3

Gather and use data from other data sources.

1. Appropriate Assessments

Questions to consider:

- Does it provide guidance on interpreting scores for multilingual learners?
- Does it include multilingual learners in the norming process?
- Does it offer some or all subtests in a language(s) other than English?
- Does it use measures that are culturally and linguistically authentic rather than directly translated from English?
- Does it provide guidance regarding when and how to present students with directions in their home language?

2. Bilingual and Native Language Assessment

Native language assessments may be either:

- Written translations of English tests (native language only or presented bilingually).
- Scripted oral translations of a test administered by a person or audio recording.
- Assessments designed from scratch in a non-English language.



These tests can be used as:

- An alternative test format
- An accommodation
- A supplemental assessment

What if there's no native language assessment?

- The Migrant Policy Institute (2020) suggests the following testing supports or accommodation options for English learners:

Types	Purpose	Examples
Direct native language support	Modify language of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bilingual glossary/dictionary.• Interpreter translates directions and test questions.
Direct English language support	Modify language of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Directions or test questions provided in simplified English.• Key phrases highlighted.• Proctor repeats or clarifies the meaning of directions or key phrases.
Indirect language support	Modifying testing conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Additional testing time or rest breaks.• Adjust testing setting.• Testing in small groups with staff support.

Sugarman & Villegas, 2020

3. Gathering Additional Data

Other Sources

- Classroom observations
- Interviews with students and families
- Informal assessments
- Home Language Surveys
- Parent-teacher meetings
- Student work or performance samples

Other Information

- Family history of dyslexia/reading difficulty
- Students' language skills in reading both their native language and English
- Students' exposure and experiences with both their native language and English
- Students' educational history

Questions to consider during screening:

- What level of English proficiency has the student achieved in each of the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing)?
- Are reading difficulties present in both the native language and English?
- Did the student experience delay in learning to talk?
- Did the student experience limited or interrupted formal education?
- Have educators provided structured reading instruction and interventions?
- Have cognitive functions, such as rapid automatized naming, phonological memory, and phonemic awareness, been assessed? What were the results of such assessments?

Guiding Questions

1

Are the student's reading difficulties due to typical language development?

2

Is the student making progress when compared to multilingual learners with similar backgrounds?

Using True Peer Comparisons

- Use a minimum of 3–5 students.
- Three qualities:
 - Native language proficiency
 - English language proficiency level
 - Time in current school or an academic program



Brown and Doolittle, 2008

Brown & Sanford, 2011

Bidialectalism

- Dialects are variations of a language that naturally occur when a language is spoken by a large enough population.
- They are spoken by groups of people with a shared commonality, such as a geographic place, race, or ethnicity.

EXAMPLES

General British English, General American English, Southern American English, African American English



Supporting Multilingual/Bidialectal Learners — Leverage Assets

Schools should value all varieties of dialects and languages equally and recognize that language practices vary among speakers to foster multilingualism and sustain students' native language.

TEACH SIMILARITIES

- Common phoneme and grapheme correspondences
- Cognates

Supporting Multilingual/Bidialectal Learners

TEACH DIFFERENCES

- Between their spoken dialect and written text (e.g., in the Boston dialect, *car* pronounced as /kă/).
- Words that rhyme in General American English may not rhyme under pronunciation norms of a different language dialect.
- Some language varieties do not vocalize some consonants (e.g., in African American English, *told* pronounced as /tōl/).

Enable and Support Translanguaging

- Use multiple languages together in a single situation or task.



Brown & Sanford, 2011

Common Question



In which language(s) should we assess our students?

Be Clear About What You Are Assessing

A Specific Language

- Does this student know the letters or characters, sounds, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of the language?
- **FOR EXAMPLE:**
 - Chinese
 - English
 - Hmong
 - Somali
 - Spanish

Reading Knowledge and Skills

- Does this student know how to monitor thinking, apply comprehension strategies, read with expression, use text features, etc.
- **FOR EXAMPLE:** When I come to a word I don't know, I can use context clues to make an educated guess of its meaning.

Match Your Assessments to Your Program Goal

A Specific Language

- Measure in the language(s) being developed to show growth over time.

Reading Knowledge and Skills

- Measure in the students' strongest language.
- This better assesses those “universal” abilities by reducing the potential impact of poor language acquisition.

You May Choose To Assess in Two Languages

- If you don't know a student's academic language abilities in her/his known languages, and/or your program differentiates language instruction by need.
- If your program is designed to build proficiency in multiple languages.
- If your program is designed to build language knowledge *and* build universal reading knowledge.

REMEMBER...

Reading ability is best assessed in the strongest language, when practicable.

Turn and Talk



Identify areas where students have learning gaps:

Is our program assessing our students' language development, their reading development, or both?

What are our articulated goals or targets for language or reading?



Newcomer

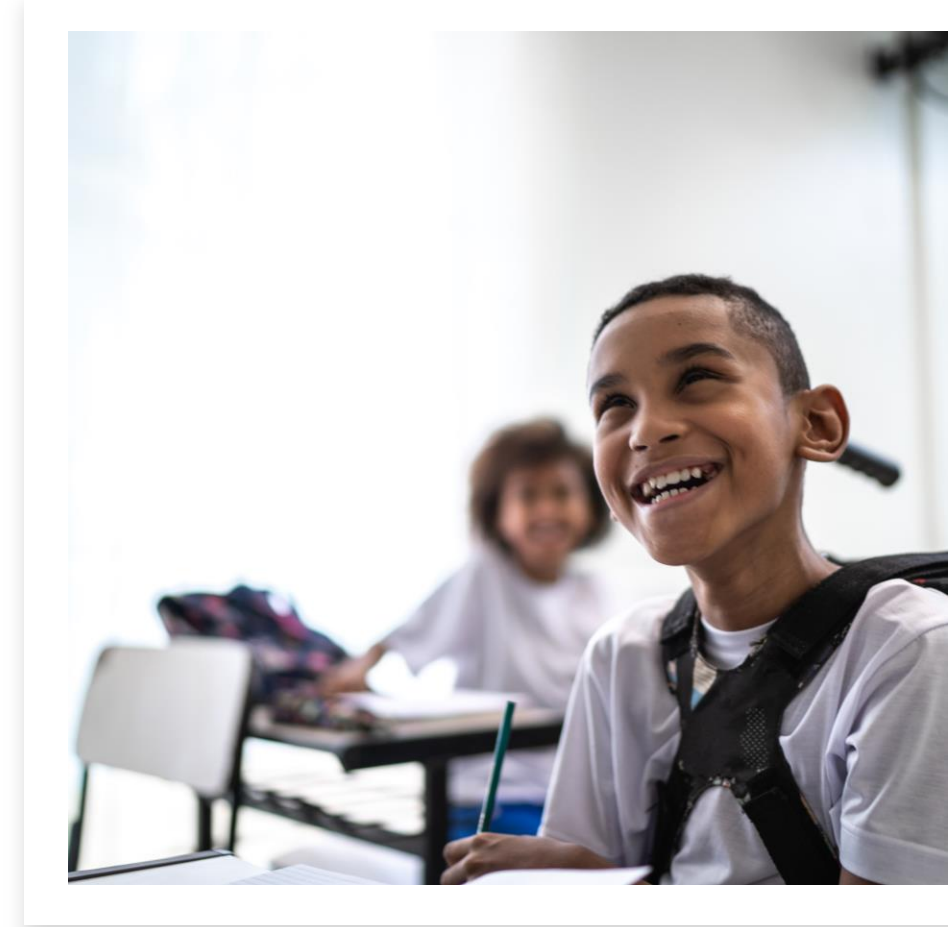
An umbrella term inclusive of all recent immigrants who are born outside of the United States.

Develop a Safe and Supportive School Environment

- Welcome students and families to school and ensure an inviting, inclusive environment.
- Build relationships with students:
 - Learn correct pronunciation and spelling of students' names.
 - Provide opportunities for students to share their stories; their interests, strengths, and talents; and their cultural celebrations and family traditions.
 - Value and encourage students' use of their native languages.
- Establish partnerships with parents.
- Foster community and cultural connections.
- Recruit, cultivate, and develop community liaisons and interpreters to support communication.
- Provide communications in families' home languages.

Providing High-Quality, Responsive Instruction

- Maintain high expectations, but tailor instruction to what students can do.
- Build background knowledge and make connections to students' lives.
- Model and support students' practice with academic conversations and writing.
- Support instruction with visuals and non-verbal gestures.



Support Students' Social-Emotional Needs

- Understand and help students to process common stages of the newcomer experience: euphoria (initial excitement), culture shock, acceptance, and assimilation/adaptation (e.g., new normal).
- Understand and attend to signs of trauma.
- Understand the unique, diverse experiences of different populations of multilingual learners, including immigrant and refugee students, migrant students, and students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE).
- Foster a whole child approach supported by wrap-around services and a tiered system of supports.



Other Considerations for a Newcomer Program

- Establish processes for student transition to a mainstream program or postsecondary options.
- Recruit, place, and retain qualified teachers and provide ongoing professional learning.
- Develop protocols to ensure newcomers have access to all course offerings and educational services.
- Collect and analyze student and program data to drive continuous improvement.
- Allocate appropriate resources.



Resources



ISBE Resources

- See resources under the Professional Development dropdown on ISBE's [Multilingual Resources for Districts](#) webpage.
- ISBE's [Migrant Education Program](#) page shares information about the federally funded Migrant Education Program (MEP) program, including its purpose, eligibility requirements, fundings, prioritization for services, and resources to support identification and recruitment.
- ISBE's [Newcomer Resources](#) page includes school and district resources, social-emotional learning (SEL) resources, and other resources.
- [Illinois English Learner Handbook for School Board Members, District Administrators, and Principals](#), Chapter 6 (Latino Policy Forum, pp. 37–47), provides research-based principles for instructional programs, assessment, support services, and family engagement.

National Clearinghouse for ELA Acquisition Resources

THREE TOOLKITS

- Family
- English learner
- Newcomer

ncela.ed.gov

References

- Sugarman, J., & Villegas, L. (2020). [Native language assessments for K–12 English learners](#). Migration Policy Institute.
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