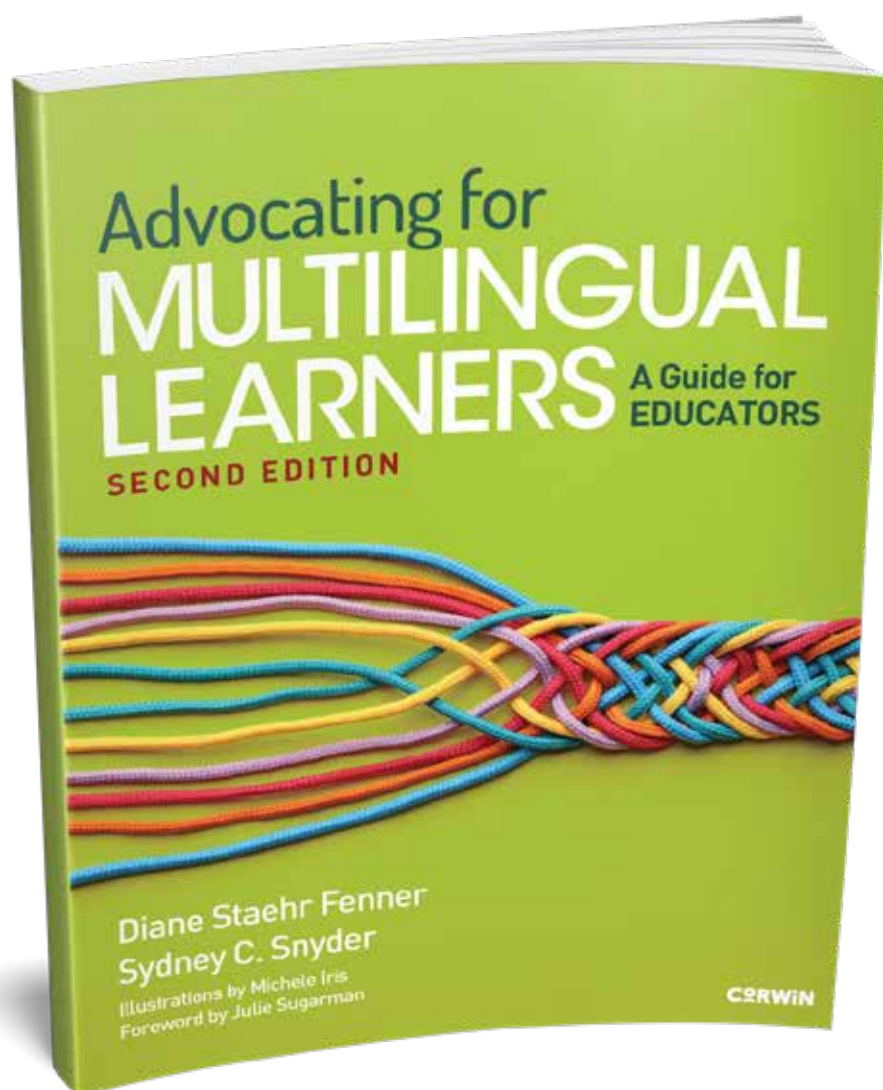


**Complimentary
excerpt**



**[Click here](#)
to learn more
about this title**

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.

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

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 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.

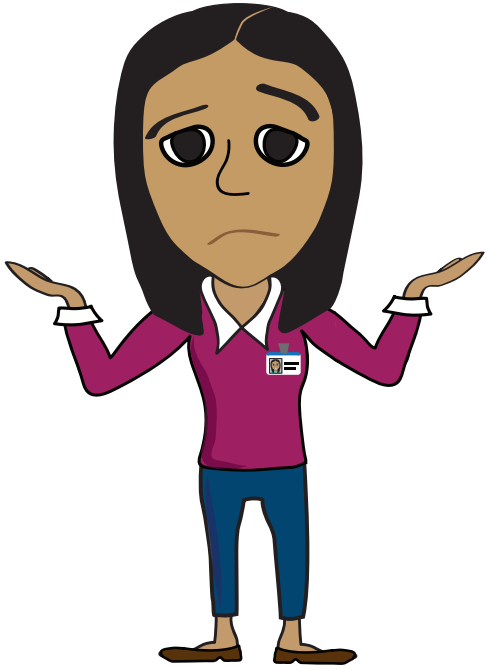
Chapter 8: Advocating for Multilingual Learners' Access to Educational Opportunities. Chapter 8 focuses on how to advocate for MLs' equitable access to educational opportunities on multiple levels. This includes educational pathways that offer opportunities for access to honors and advanced placement 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.

- **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

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

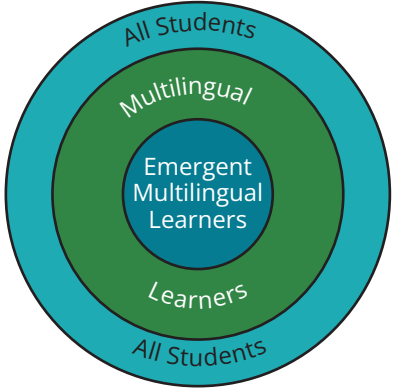
that they can be successful, that teacher will be less likely to successfully implement the instructional strategies that are known to be effective for MLs. In short, ML strategies in and of themselves are less effective than strategies that are couched within a comprehensive framework that centers advocacy 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 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 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.

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

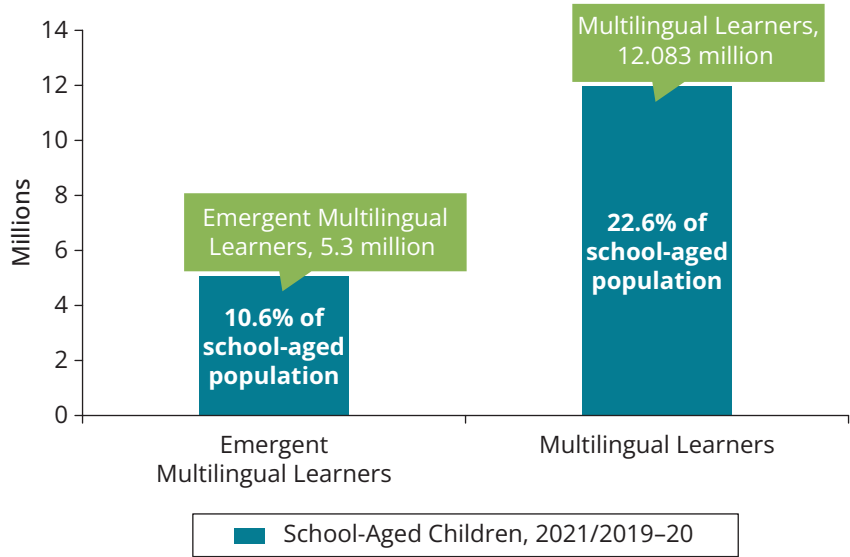


Source: Snyder & Fenner (2021).

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.

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.

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.

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

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



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

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., 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 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.

FIGURE 1.5 Ms. Ritter Welcomes Her Students



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

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).

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 commonly thought of as having an impact on MLs' outcomes. Intentional collaboration with colleagues, students, families, and

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.

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.

(Continued)

(Continued)

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

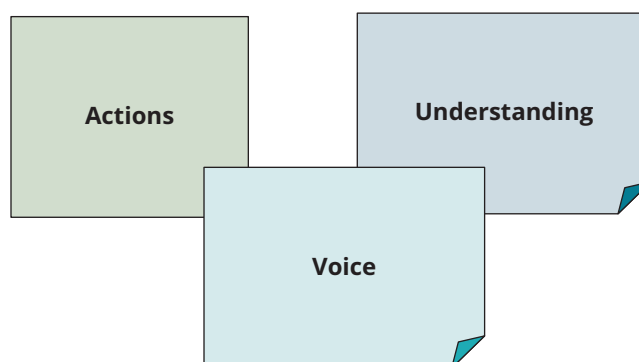
Reflection Questions

- 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.

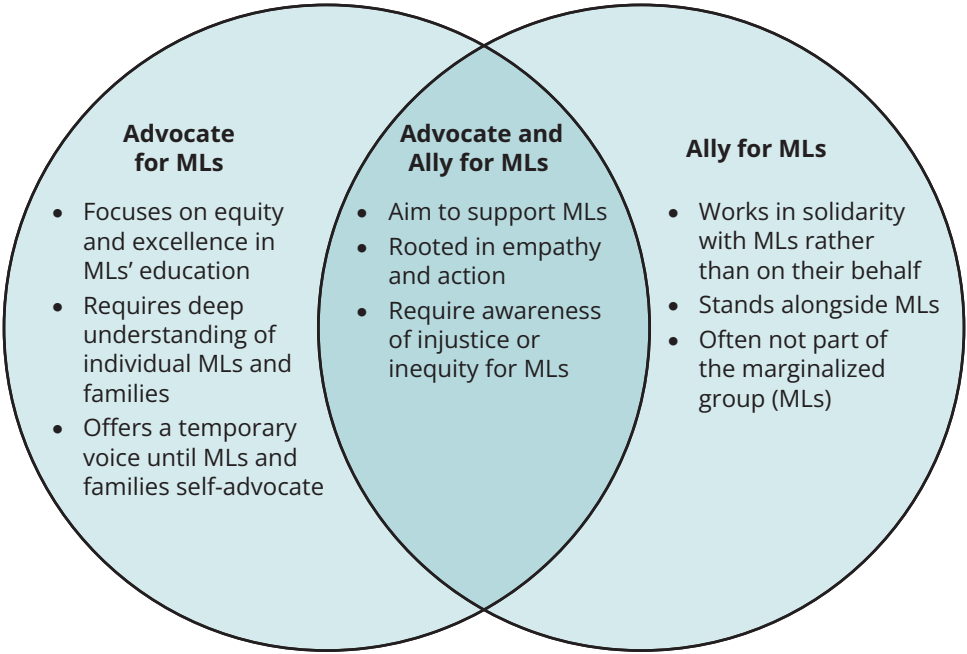
FIGURE 1.6 Visual Representation of Advocacy for MLs



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.

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 mis-treated 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.

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
- 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

BOOK CHAPTER NUMBER AND POTENTIAL ML ADVOCACY ISSUE	QUESTIONS TO ASK: TO WHAT DEGREE . . .	RESPONSE	POTENTIAL ADVOCACY ISSUE
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
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?

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,

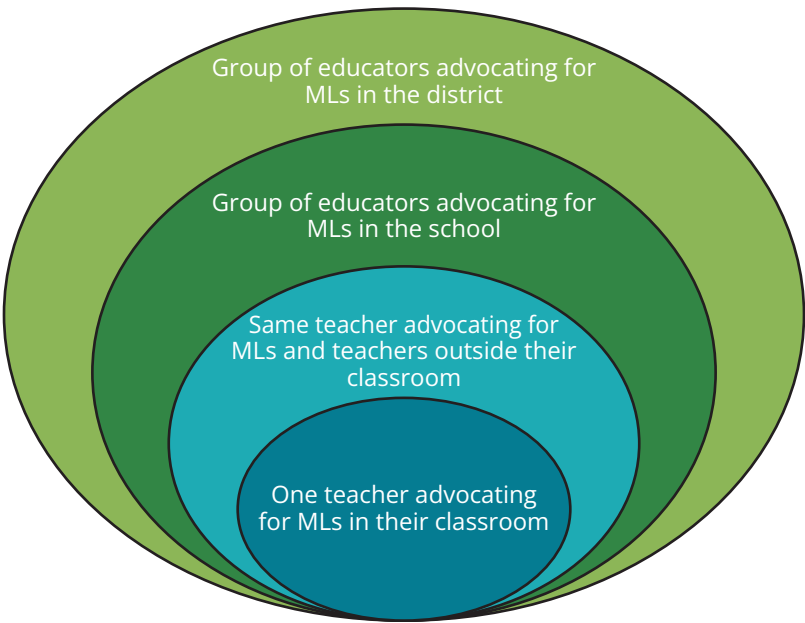
Each of us does have a sphere in which we have the power to decide just how equitable an environment we want to make for students and their families. Maybe that sphere is a classroom or department within a school. Maybe it's a school or district or state . . . Within this sphere, based on the circumstances 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 1.8 Ms. Ritter Expands Her Sphere of Influence



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. 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.

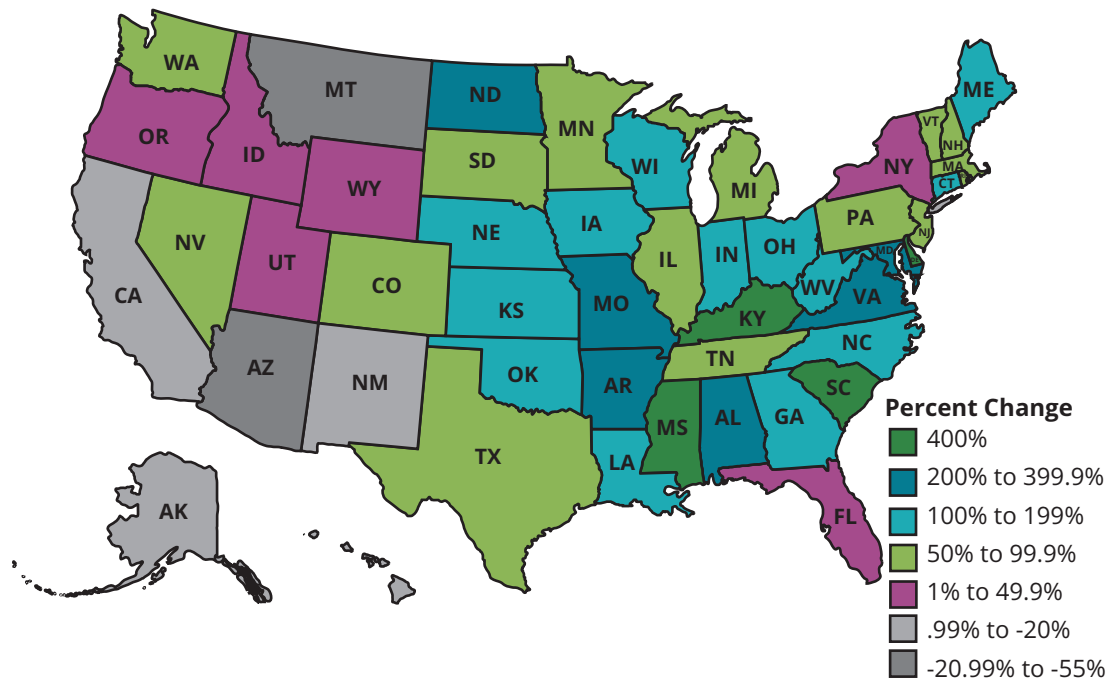
ML Demographics

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 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.

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

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.

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



Source: Office of English Language Acquisition (2022).

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.

(Continued)

(Continued)

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 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

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

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.

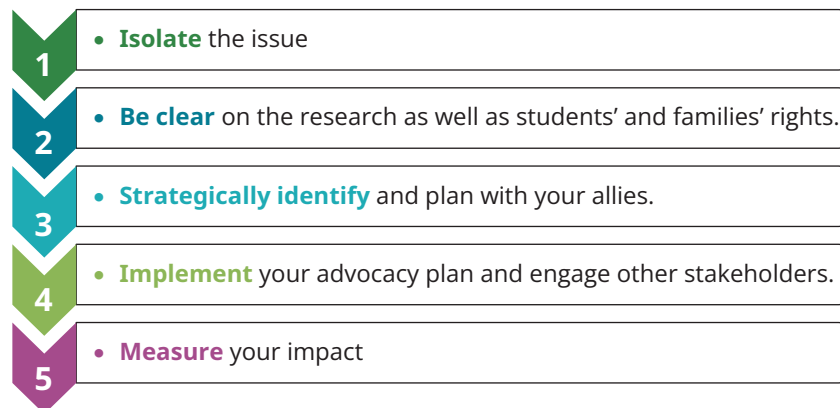
Step 3. Strategically identify and plan with your allies.

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

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.

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

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 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

ACTION STEP	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE	NOTES
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
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), 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.

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

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?