English Learners (ELs) in Maryland's Community Schools

Maryland State Department of Education

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Community Schools and English Learners (ELs)

- Research[1] shows that well-implemented community schools and their component features provide a strong warrant for their potential contribution to school improvement. Sufficient evidence meeting ESSA's criteria for "evidence-based" approaches exists to justify including community schools as part of targeted and comprehensive interventions in high-poverty schools.

- Research analysis[2] of 51 studies related to family involvement in US public schools found that the kinds of family engagement that was most effective was that which **built upon families' strengths**, **recognized class and cultural differences**, and **addressed specific family needs**.

- The Blueprint for Maryland's Future Pillar 4 focuses on strengthening wraparound services through the expansion of community schools and targeting supports for students and families based on differentiated need.

1 https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED574713.pdf

2 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340062010_Engaging_Multilingual_Families_in_the_US_Research_and_Practice_for_Educators

Community Schools and ELs

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future Pillar 4 also established a [workgroup on English learners](#). The workgroup released a comprehensive final report with recommendations for transforming education for Maryland's English learners. Key workgroup recommendations include:

1. Supporting and sustaining multilingualism by promoting an asset-based approach

2. Ensuring equitable engagement and communication with multilingual families

3. Implementing instructional programs to support ELs

4. Identifying and supporting young ELs

5. Supporting students with limited or interrupted formal education

6. Providing equitable access to college and career readiness curriculum and pathways

[Workgroup on ELs in Public Schools Final Report](#)

Presentation Outline

1. Maryland Context: English Learner Data

2. Legal Framework: EL Identification and Parent Communication

3. Research and National Best Practices: Equitable Engagement and Communication with Multilingual Families

4. Funds of Knowledge: An Asset-Based Approach to EL Family Engagement

5. Insights from the Field

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Maryland Context: English Learner Data

English learner data for the 2022-2023 school year. This data is based on the 2022-2023 EL October enrollment survey completed by local education agencies (LEAs).

Total EL Enrollment and Top Languages

## Total number of ELs: 105,653*

Top five languages spoken by ELs
- Spanish: 79,325
- French: 1,352
- Arabic: 1,154
- Chinese: 1,086
- Urdu: 902

■ Spanish   ■ French   ■ Arabic   ■ Chinese   ■ Urdu
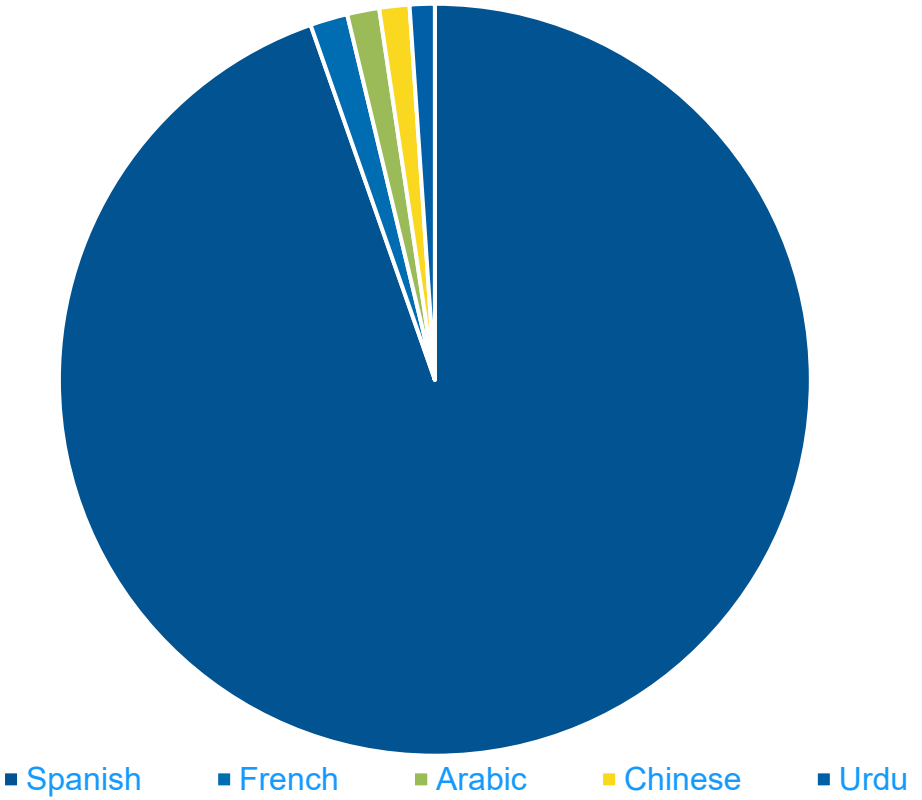
*(based on the 2022-23 EL October Enrollment Survey)

EL Enrollment in Elementary, Middle and High Schools

- Elementary: 61,568

- Middle: 19,453

- High: 24,632

Legend:
- Elementary
- Middle
- High

(Pie chart: 58% Elementary, 19% Middle, 23% High)
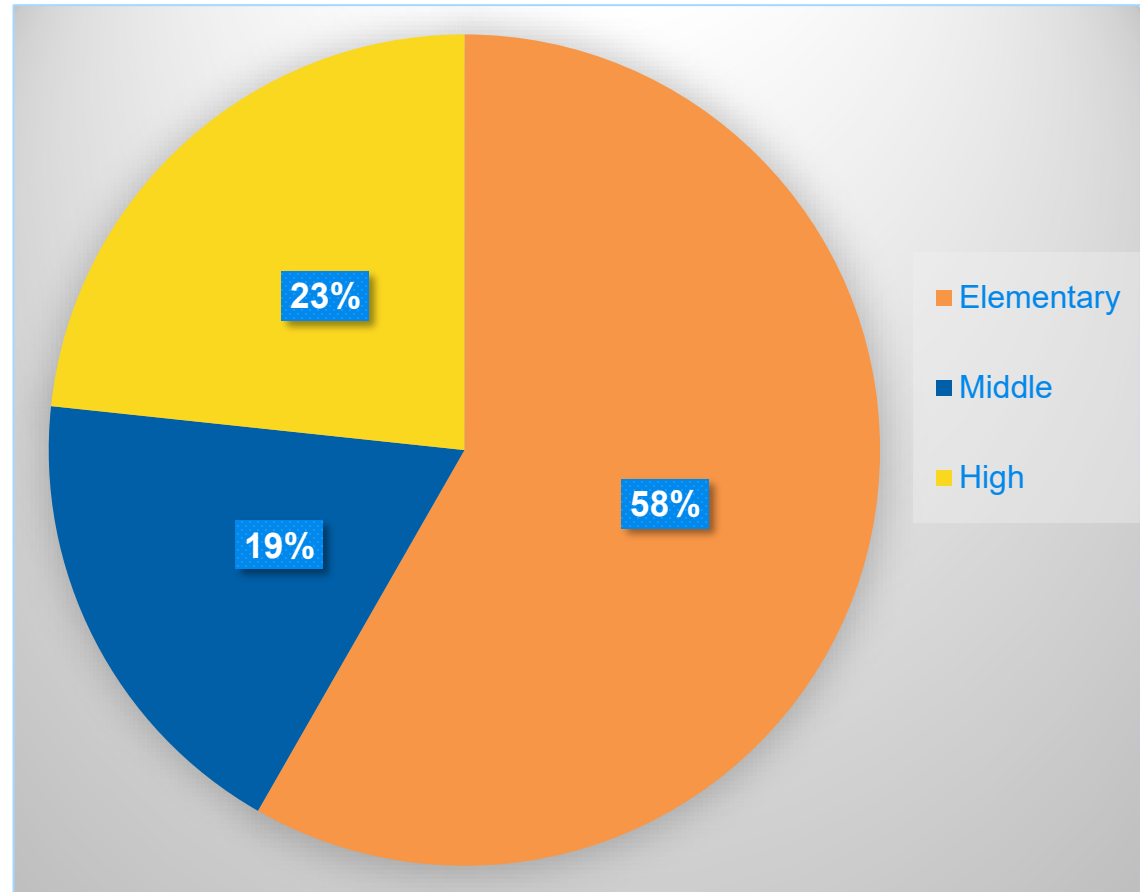
10-year EL Population Growth

Year	Total EL Population
2014	56,027
2015	60,705
2016	63,348
2017	69,079
2018	79,656
2019	84,121
2020	93,250
2021	88,838
2022	98,567
2023	105,653
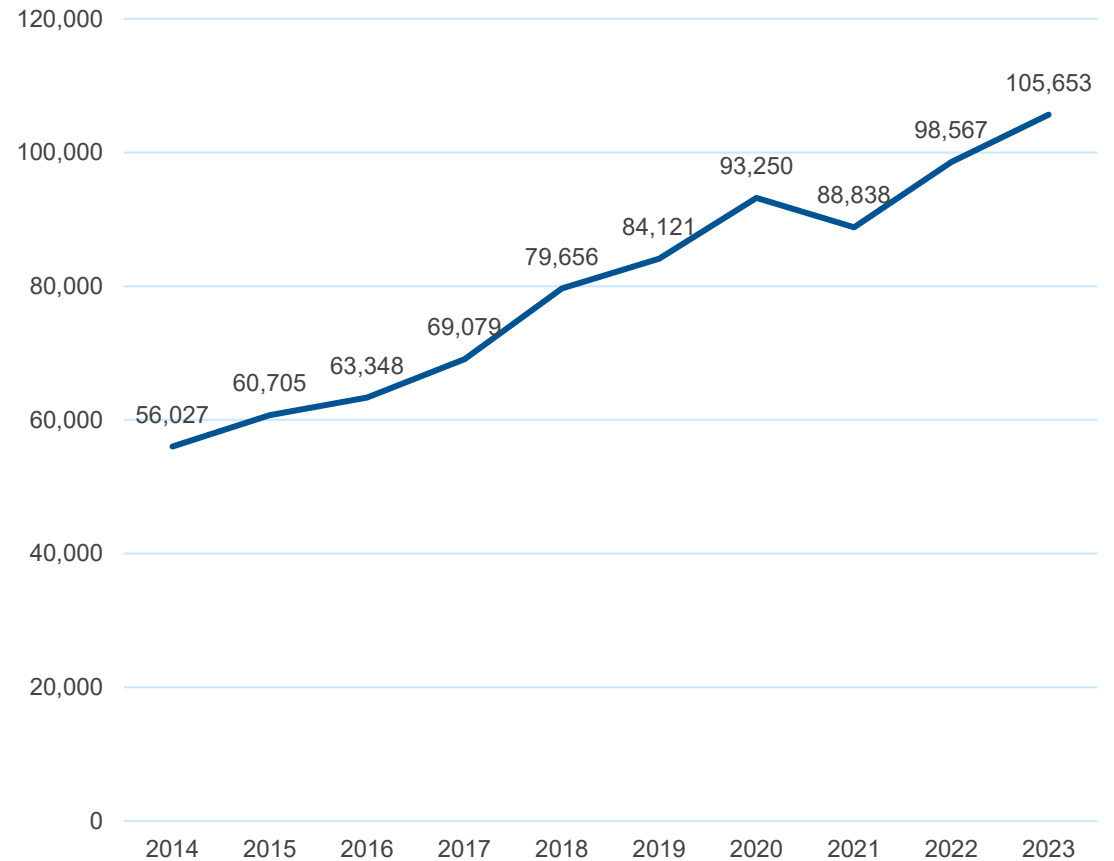
EL Enrollment in Local Education Agencies (LEAs)
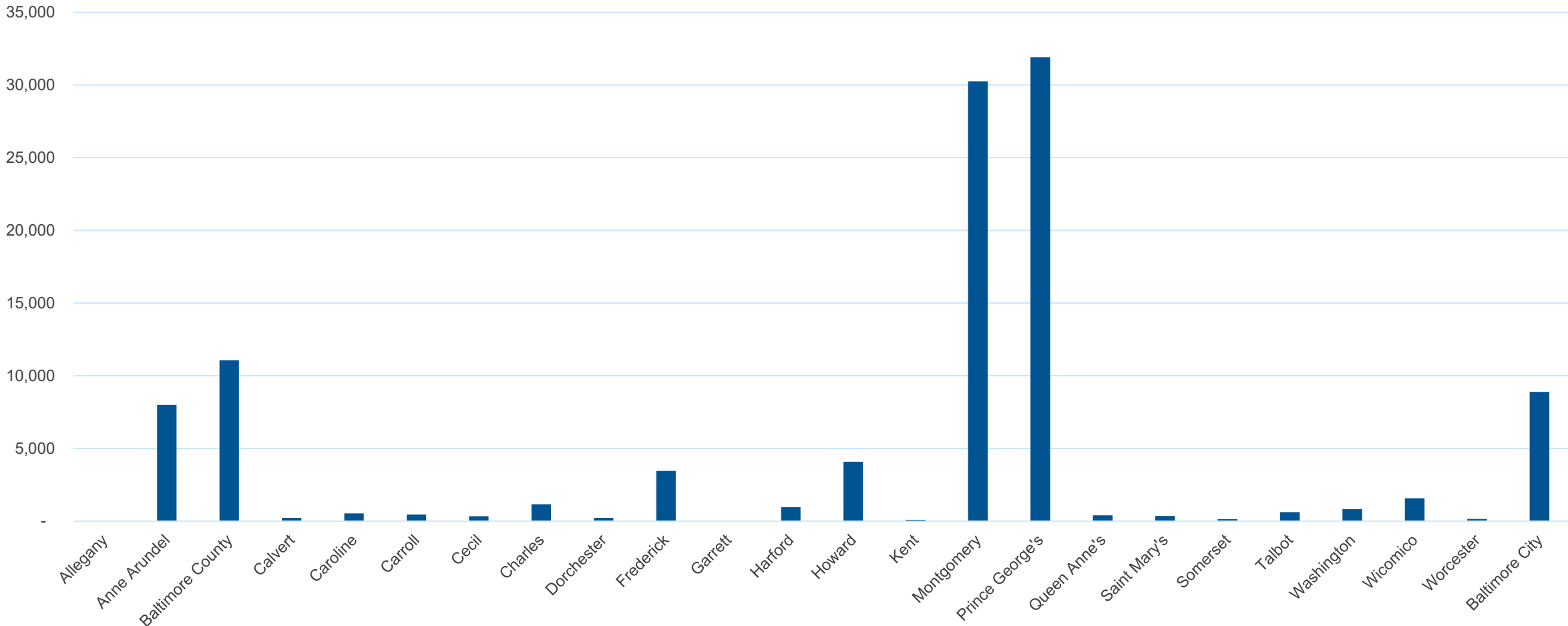
EL Enrollment in LEAs

*Community school locations

LEA	Number of ELs	LEA	Number of ELs	LEA	Number of ELs
Allegany County*	33	Charles County*	1,154	Prince George's County*	31,911
Anne Arundel County*	7,993	Dorchester County*	221	Queen Anne's County	389
Baltimore City*	8,894	Frederick County*	3,445	Somerset County*	126
Baltimore County*	11,063	Garrett County	7	St. Mary's County*	359
Calvert County	221	Harford County*	959	Talbot County*	616
Caroline County*	524	Howard County	4,082	Washington County*	819
Carroll County	452	Kent County*	83	Wicomico County*	1,566
Cecil County*	341	Montgomery County*	30,250	Worcester County*	142

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Legal Framework: English Learner Identification and Parent Communication

All public school have legal obligations to ensure that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs and services.

Identification of English Learners

1. Local education agencies are required to ask the parents of every student upon enrollment if a language other than English is spoken using a Home Language Survey (HLS) to identify potential ELs. An EL is a student who **may** have been born outside of the United States:

- who communicates in a language other than English; or

- whose family uses a primary language other than English in the home; and

- whose English language proficiency falls within the range established by the State for an English language development program.

2. After a review of the HSL, potential ELs are given the **WIDA Screener for K-12** to determine if their English proficiency level falls within the state range for English language development (ELD) program qualification.

Office of Civil Rights: Dear Colleague Letter

❑ State Education Agencies (SEAs) and school districts develop and implement a process for determining whether parents are Limited English Proficient (LEP), and evaluate the language needs of these LEP parents;

❑ SEAs and school districts provide language assistance to parents or guardians who indicate they require such assistance;

❑ SEAs and school districts ensure that LEP parents have adequate notice of and meaningful access to information about all school district or SEA programs, services, and activities; and

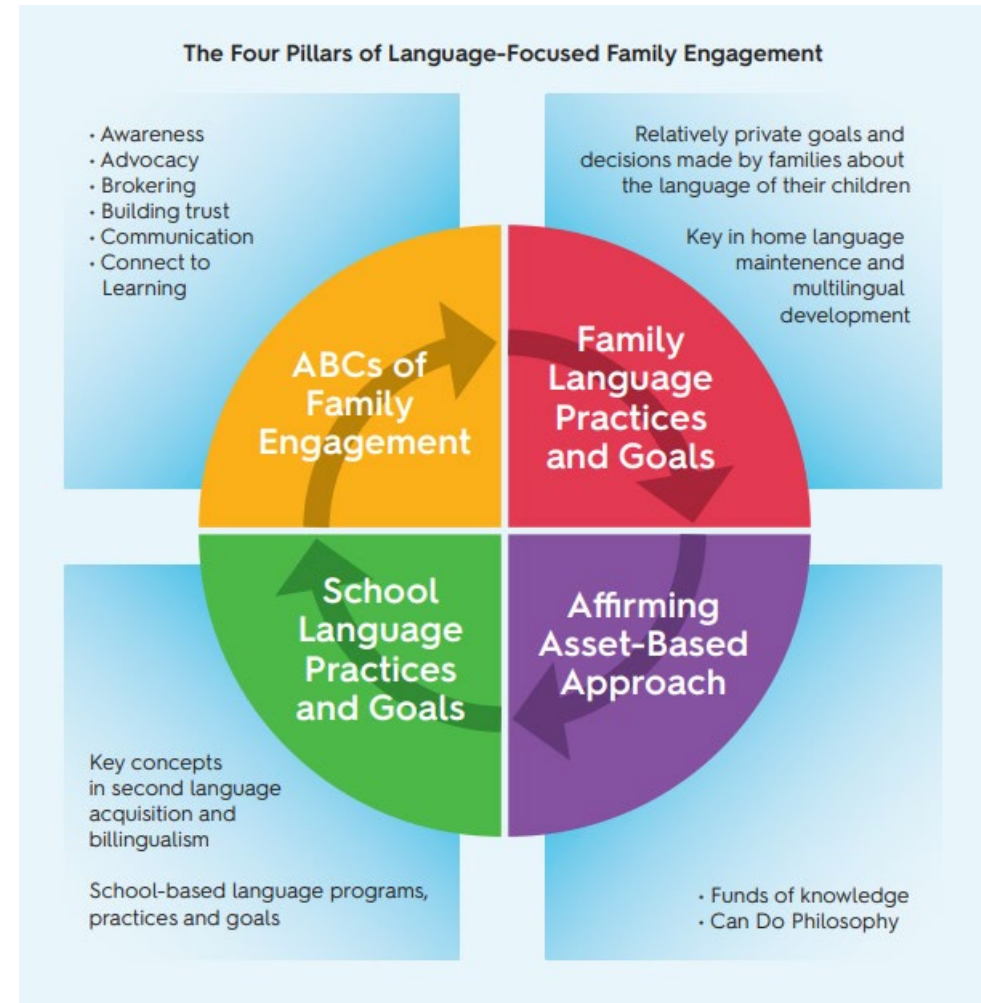❑ SEAs and school districts provide free qualified language assistance services to LEP parents.

https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf

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Research and National Best Practices: Equitable Engagement and Communication with Multilingual Families

Communication that is not linguistically and culturally appropriate is a barrier to family engagement.

Research: Language-Focused Family Engagement

- Language-focused family engagement keeps the unique needs and experiences of multilingual learners and their families, including language education, at the center of every home-school interaction.

- More traditional approaches to family engagement often focus on what families can do to support school-related or academic achievement while overlooking multilingual learners' home language/and English language development.

- Language-focused family engagement is focused on a model of family engagement defined by relationship.

https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-Language-Focused-Family-Engagement.pdf

The Four Pillars of Language-Focused Family Engagement

Research: "Engaging Multilingual Families in the US: Research and Practice for Educators"

Coady and Ankeny's conceptual model for multilingual family engagement includes five components:

1. Listening to and learning about multilingual families' cultures, languages, literacy practices, and needs;

2. Reflecting on families' strengths and seeking input from community leaders and key informants;

3. Communicating with and building relationships with families in culturally and linguistically responsive and effective ways;

4. Using knowledge of families' strengths and backgrounds to support student learning; and

5. Advocating for equity and change in and outside of school.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340062010_Engaging_Multilingual_Families_in_the_US_Research_and_Practice_for_Educators

Case Study: Redwood City School District, CA

Since 2007, the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (JGC) at Stanford University has partnered with the Redwood City School District (RCSD) in Redwood City, California, south of San Francisco, to conduct research on participation and outcomes for students in the Redwood City School District's community schools. This local initiative includes five community schools, with students in grades K through 8, that provided more than 250 programs, services, and events in the 2010-11 school year.

- The study revealed English learner students with consistent program participation over time showed gains in English language development scores. In the elementary grades, these gains were tied to family engagement participation, but continued gains during middle school were associated with frequent extended learning program participation.
- Academic score gains linked to community school program participation were especially strong for English learners and were tied to receiving multiple services.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535614.pdf

Case Study: Oakland International High School, CA

Oakland International High School opened in August 2007 as part of the Internationals Network of Public Schools. The school targets a population of newly arrived immigrant students. The students speak more than 32 different languages, 100% are English learners, 22% are refugees and approximately 33% of student arrive with limited or large gaps in their formal education. Oakland International High School is a community school with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth development and family/community engagement.

- Two-thirds of students surveyed said they are "happy at school", compared to just over half of other Oakland high school students.

- 72% of students graduate within 5 years

- 51% of 2014-2015 graduating seniors took and passed college level entry exams compared to 24% of EL peers districtwide

- College enrollment rates were 68% by 2014, outperforming the state average of 52% for ELs

Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence

https://www.oaklandinternational.org/about

Case Study: Austin Independent School District, TX

The Austin Independent School District has welcomed over 500 Afghan students in the past 5 years. The district recognized the need to tailor their work to prepare to welcome Afghan children and their families into their classrooms. The district has a Refugee Family Support Office that serves as a language and resources hub for refugee and asylee students and their families. The office partners with Afghan cultural liaisons and community partners to identify:

- culturally appropriate ways of communicating with Afghan families,

- how to best partner with and support families who have experienced significant trauma and upheaval, and

- professional development topics for staff.

The cultural liaison's relationships with families are essential for building trust.

More broadly, the Refugee Family Support Office helps parents with registration and enrollment, tests students' English proficiency and provides interpreters. They provide guidance about classroom placement to ensure the students are in classrooms with ESOL certified teachers. They work with other offices to support the needs beyond the classroom such as housing, food stamps and health insurance.

https://www.nassp.org/2021/09/24/successfully-communicating-with-multilingual-families/

https://www.kut.org/education/2021-08-26/aisd-prepares-to-welcome-afghan-refugee-students

https://www.austinisd.org/refugee-immigrant-services

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"Funds of Knowledge": An Asset-Based Approach to EL Family Engagement

Seeking out families' "Funds of Knowledge" offer schools a chance to see more complex views of the families they serve and develop deeper relationships with them.

Student Profile- First Grader

New Student Profile*
Refugee from Ethiopia
English proficiency level 1
Three fights in his first 2 weeks of school
Wears the same clothes several days a week
His mother has never been to school.
His father is legally blind.

What are your thoughts about this child?

Are you worried about his academic success?

*From Language Magazine

Another Student Profile- First Grader

New Student Profile*
Refugee
Speaks 2 languages, Tigrinya and Arabic
Can add and subtract
Excellent soccer player
His parents value school.
He is on time every day.

What are your thoughts about this child?

Are you worried about his academic success?

*From Language Magazine

What is an Asset-Based Approach to ELs?

An **asset-based approach** to working with ELs means…

- creating a culture where teachers and staff acknowledge strengths and expect success.

- valuing what ELs bring to the classroom rather than characterizing them by what they LACK.

- having a deep understanding of what ELs CAN DO.

- recognizing that English learners bring linguistic, cultural, and experiential assets to schools and larger communities.

What are "Funds of Knowledge?"

"The funds of knowledge concept was originally applied by Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) to describe the **historical accumulation of abilities, bodies of knowledge, assets, and cultural ways** of interacting that were evident in U.S.-Mexican households in Tucson, Arizona." *

In more general terms, a student's and family's funds of knowledge can be described as:

- Academic and personal background knowledge,

- Accumulated life experiences,

- Skills and knowledge used to navigate everyday social contexts, and

- World views structured by broader historically and politically influenced social forces.

The underlying premise is that most school-based practices, engagement strategies, and communication methods are rooted in mainstream middle-class norms and perspectives that may not coincide with multilingual families' experiences.

* https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/migrantbilingual/pubdocs/Funds_of_Knowledge_Toolkit.pdf

How can this be used to support multilingual learners and their families?

- Document the knowledge base of families by conducting home visits.

- Conduct a "Funds of Knowledge" inventory by observing families or asking them to complete an inventory.

https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/spring2spring-funds-of-knowledge-eng.pdf

https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/migrantbilingual/pubdocs/Funds_of_Knowledge_Toolkit.pdf

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Insights from the Field

Listen to local CSCs talking about what is working in their schools, how they measure effectiveness, and how they implemented their strategies.

Panel

Sherri Allen, Carter G. Woodson Elementary School, Somerset County Public Schools

Sarah Daniels Larson, Tyler Heights Elementary School, Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Kim Duncan, Community School Coordinator-Central Office, Washington County Public Schools

Megan Miller, Princess Anne Elementary (early childhood), Somerset County Public Schools

Guiding Questions

1. What are you doing to engage EL students, families, and the community?

2. How do you know what you are doing is working? What results are you seeing?

3. How did you establish partnerships in the community designed to serve the EL population?

4. Who helped you identify resources?

5. What did you learn from these experiences about your community and how to build relationships?

6. What were the challenges you faced? How did you overcome those challenges?

7. What advice would you give to a community school coordinator in the early stages of program implementation?

Best Practices: Learn about your EL families

- What do you know about your EL students and families?

- What do you want to learn?

- Who on the staff works most closely with your EL families?

- What would be valuable for your school-wide staff to know?

If you do not yet know this information about your ELs, find out:

- What countries your families come from

- How many of your ELs were born in the U.S.

- What languages they speak (which may be at least two or three!)

- If families who speak the same language, such as Spanish, come from different countries or different regions within the same country

- The educational background of families and the school system of their countries

- If any of your ELs are refugees or students with interrupted formal education

- If your families have experienced war or another traumatic event such as a natural disaster

Best Practices: Effectively partner with EL Families and Communities

- Be open to different forms of parental engagement.

- Don't forget about extended families.

- Increase families' comfort levels being at school. Provide programs that directly benefit them (e.g., free English classes, information about immigrant rights or community services).

- Recognize and eliminate barriers to family involvement.

- Build relationships with family and community.

- Developing trusting and respectful relationships with parents will go a long way toward helping EL students succeed in school.

- Use multiple forms of communication.

- Share resources and your expectations for students with families.

- Make sure parents know their rights.

https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/english-language-learners-what-you-need-know

Questions?

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