



Strengthening Multilingual Learners (MLs) Instruction

Topic 2: Communicating and Engaging with Families of MLs

ELL Leadership Council

Elisa Alvarez, Associate Commissioner



New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity



Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages
89 Washington Avenue, EB505W
Albany, NY 12234

OBEWL Mission

Our mission is to ensure that all New York State English Language Learners (ELLs) attain the highest level of academic success and that all Multilingual Learners (MLs) - which include ELLs, Former/Ever ELLs, World Languages students, and heritage speakers of World Languages – achieve the highest level of language proficiency in English and in one or more other languages.

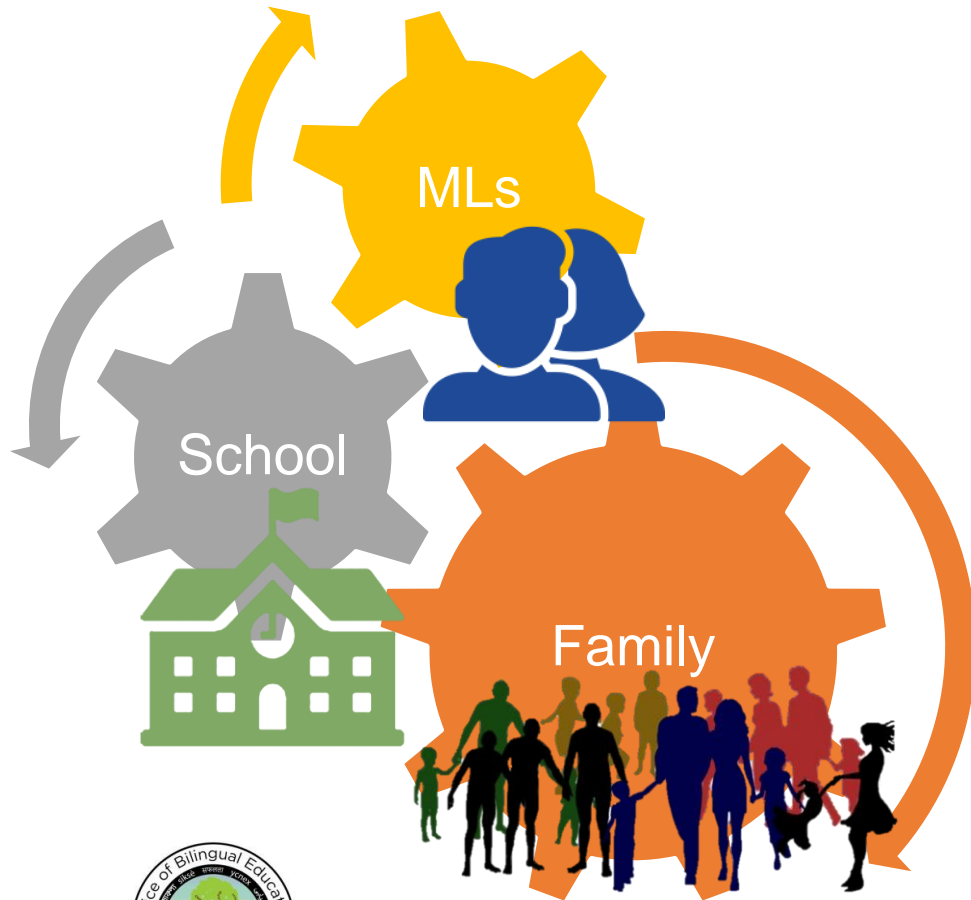


The Strengthening ML Instruction Working Group

- ❖ The Strengthening Multilingual Learner (ML) Instruction working group is a sub-group of the ELL Leadership Council. The group includes six ML educational leaders representing various regions across the state and one Associate of the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages.
- ❖ The team collaborates and works on assessing the needs educators may have during and post-COVID-19 through remote learning experiences.



Introduction



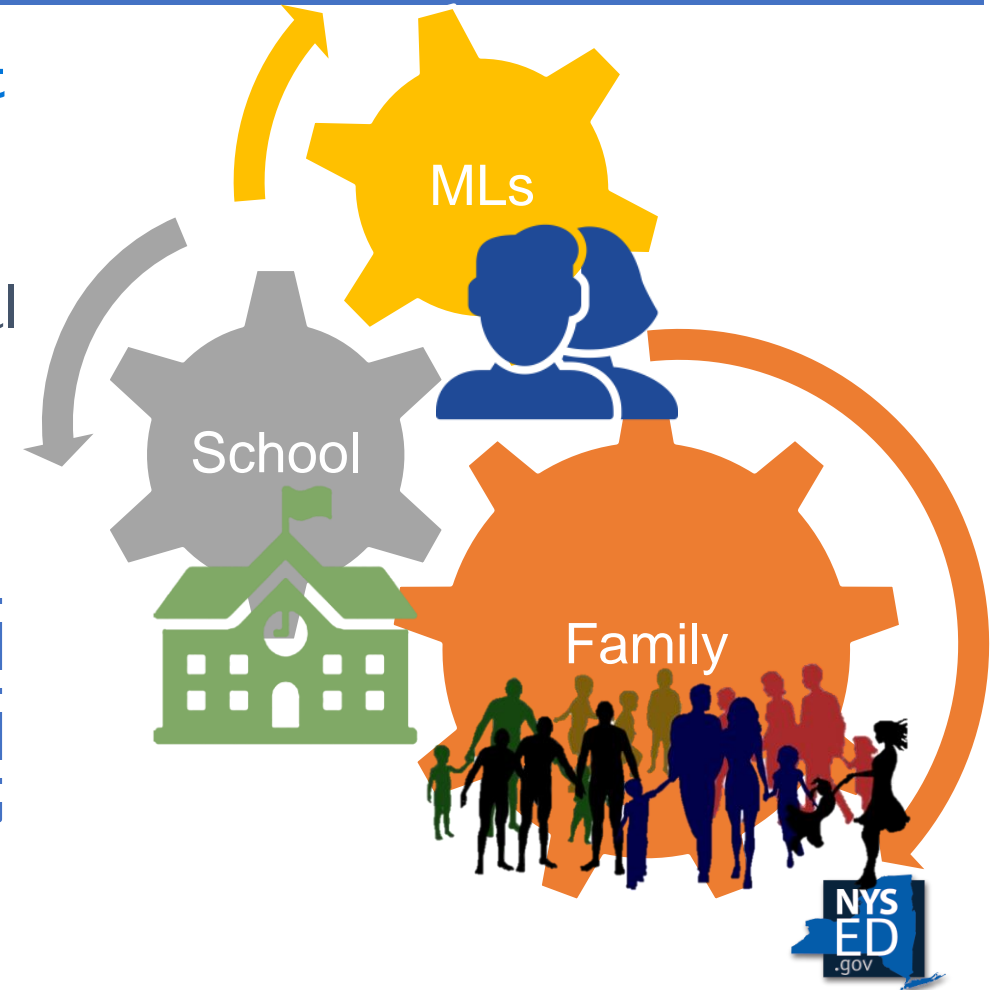
In order to ensure the academic development and personal growth of all of our MLs, families and teachers must maintain good communication and be equally engaged in the education and development of the students. Communication between families and teachers and family engagement is key for the students to achieve success and growth. It is very important that both families and teachers maintain fluid communication.



Introduction (Cont.)

In traditional classroom settings, family and parent engagement has been shown to improve student mastery and social skills, deepen engagement, and minimize behavioral issues. With the shift to virtual learning, engaging with your students' families is arguably more important than ever. ([Source](#))

This presentation focuses on providing best practices for communicating and engaging with families of MLs



Overarching Goals

- ❖ Create practical and accessible resources for **ALL** teachers of MLs to support instruction.
- ❖ Close the Gap by Strengthening ML Instruction and by focusing on the following topics:
 - Topic 1. Using Translations as a Support Not a Solution;
 - ➡ **Topic 2: Communicating and Engaging with Families of MLs;**
 - Topic 3: Supporting our Multilingual Digital Learners; and
 - Topic 4: Building the Bridge from Content to Academic Language Development.



Topic 2- Communicating and Engaging with Families of MLs

Objectives:

- To review the importance of maintaining an open communication with families;
- To identify useful strategies for maintaining a good communication with the families of MLs; and
- To share different methods, tips, and tools to engage families and improve the communication between the home, the district, and the school.



2020 Reopening Guidance- Effective Communications With Families

Provide all communications to parents/guardians of MLs in their preferred language and mode of communication to ensure that they have equitable access to critical information about their children's education. Document outreach efforts.

- Districts should provide regular updates about health and safety, scheduling, and all other information families should know. When distributing plans and information, schools should make clear the ways that families can provide feedback.
- Present information through a wide array of platforms, such as traditional mail, email, telephone calls, texting, social media, news media, and website postings. Consider creating a website for parents and families to access the latest information and updates.
- Survey parents and guardians to determine the level of access to computing devices and high speed internet to which students have access in their places of residence.
- Maintain regular communication with the parents/guardians and other family members of MLs to ensure that they are engaged in their children's education.



**RECOVERING, REBUILDING, AND RENEWING:
THE SPIRIT OF NEW YORK'S SCHOOLS**
REOPENING GUIDANCE

Why Is Keeping Strong Communication and Engagement Essential for All?

“Effective communication is essential for building school-family partnerships. It constitutes the foundation for all other forms of family involvement in education.” -[Building Parent-Teacher Relationships](#) By: American Federation of Teachers

Family Benefits	Student Benefits	Teacher Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Increases quality of families' home involvement with their children's learning★ Provides families with different ideas on how to help and support their children★ Improves families confidence about the value of their own school involvement★ Improves families' views of teachers, which results in improved teacher morale	<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Raises student academic achievement★ Increases student motivation for learning★ Improves student behavior★ Improves student attendance★ Improves student attitudes about homework and school in general★ It empowers students to be part of their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Allows teachers to focus more on the task of teaching children★ Helps teachers learn more about students' needs and home environment which is information they can apply toward better meeting those needs <p>Source: Reading Rockets</p>

Dr. Karen Mapp's 3 Prerequisites of Effective Family and Community Engagement



How Can Administrators and School Boards Engage with Families?

Guide teachers on how to partner with families to make home an extension of school.	Use a variety of ways to communicate with families: e.g., phone, email, newsletters, web pages, automated calls, backpack notes, monthly board of education meetings.	Help families learn to use online communication technology and tools, such as student grade portals, so they can stay on top of their children's school work.	Offer technology bootcamps for families who are unfamiliar with technology in order to support their children at home.
Engage families in decision making processes that have direct impact on their children's learning.	Utilize student data to link family engagement strategies to grade-level fundamental skills and learning goals.	Stay in touch with families through positive and frequent information and messages.	Understand that school boards, districts, and schools are responsible for building a welcoming culture and environment.

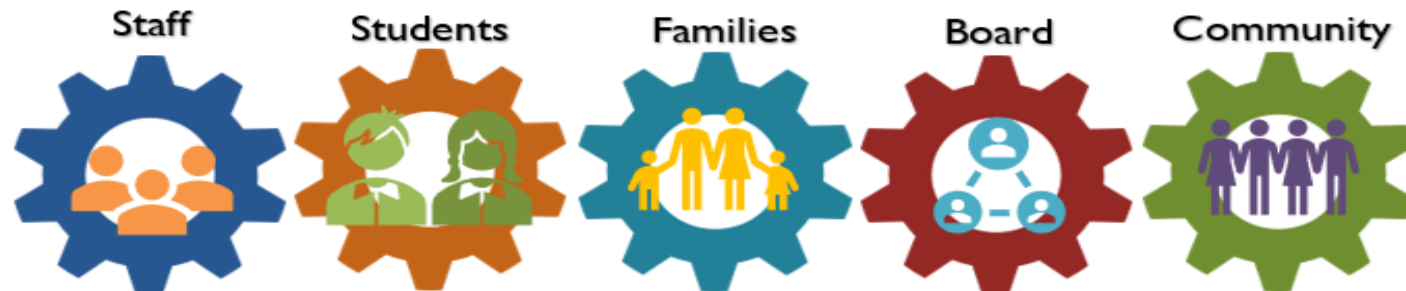
School and District Personnel



School Boards

How Can Administrators and School Boards Engage with Families? (Cont.)

Don't expect families to come to you. Meet them in community centers, churches, and neighborhoods.	Offer babysitters for younger children so that families can focus on school programs or attend school board meetings.	Stimulate family participation in school events by offering bonus points for students or coupons redeemable for homework passes.	Issue VIP badges (Very Important Parent) to parents when they visit your school.
Invite them to enrich school programs by sharing their culture, occupations, and talents.	Clearly delineate policies and procedures which encourage and place priority on family engagement and communication.	Develop policies in consultation with families, rather than in isolation.	Developed policies that build the capacity of both families and school personnel to engage in support of better learning outcomes for every student.



Create a Welcoming Environment From the Start



[A Warm Welcome for Immigrant Families in the Front Office](#)

Physical Environment:

- When possible, does the main office staff speak the native tongue of the families you are serving?
- Do signs/posters reflect a welcoming environment and are they translated into a language families can understand?
- Do the school hallways and walls reflect a culturally responsive environment depicting student work and representative of varying cultures? Or is the first thing families see represent only American heritage/culture?
- Are documents and other paperwork translated for families to understand? Does this include resources from community based organizations in the area and other related services?
- Does your staff (*main office or registration*) welcome all families with a smile and enthusiasm?

Create a Welcoming Environment From the Start (Cont.)

Giving Families a Voice:

- Share surveys to gauge what times they are available to participate in school events, to share concerns, family schedules or ideas for informational workshops all in a language they can understand.
- Provide them with an opportunity to be leaders and help engage more families.
- Share communication apps with families that use their home language so families know how to stay connected.
- Make connections even if you don't speak their language by learning small phrases. This creates a welcoming and safe space for families to feel comfortable approaching you.
- Hold orientations that are delivered bilingually (*when possible*) to foster an inclusive environment for all community members.
- Share opportunities being offered in the community for them to learn English if they are interested.

Reflection ([Source- Colorin Colorado](#))

- What do you know about your ML students and families?
- What do you want to learn?
- Who on the staff works most closely with your ML families?
- What would be valuable for your school-wide staff to know?

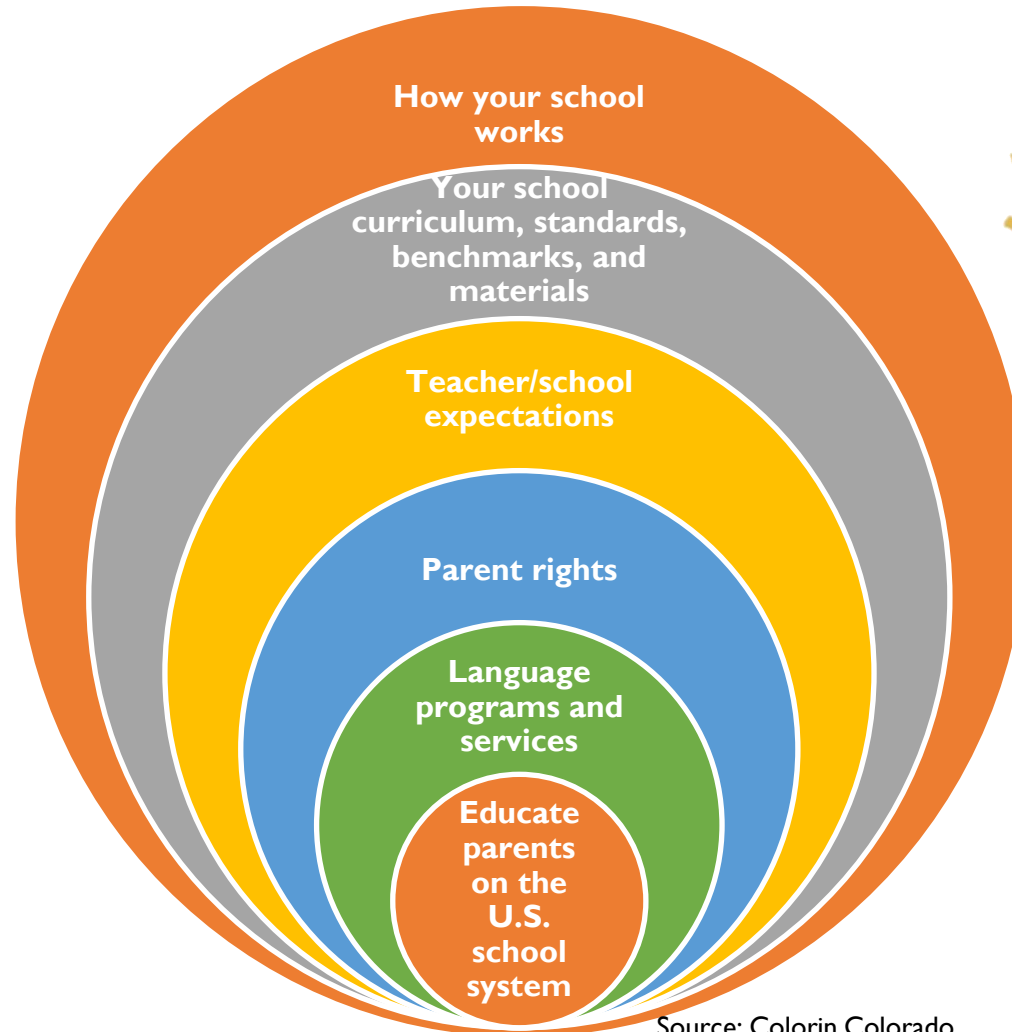
What Can I Do To Support My families of MLs?

Educate

Engage

Empower

Enlighten



Source: [Colorin Colorado](#)

Parents' Bill of Rights for New York State's ELLs

**THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT /
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234**

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PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS FOR NEW YORK STATE'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) Commissioner Regulations Part 154 provides you – the parents/guardians of English Language Learners (ELLs) – with:

1. The right for your children to receive a free public education in the school district where you live, regardless of your or your children's immigration status (e.g., whether your family members are citizens, immigrants, or undocumented) and the language that you or your children speak.
2. The right to enroll your children in school without being asked to provide information or paperwork which may reveal your or your children's immigration status. You cannot be asked to provide a social security card or number, an immigration visa or visa status, or citizenship documents or citizenship status.
3. The right under federal law to have a qualified interpreter/translator in your preferred language for critical interactions with the school district.
4. The right to have your children in a Bilingual Education (BE) program when there are 20 or more grade-level students that speak the same home/primary language.¹
5. The right to written notice in English and your preferred language that your children have been identified as ELLs and will be placed in a Bilingual Education or English as a New Language (formerly called English as a Second Language) program.²
6. The right to a high quality orientation session, provided by your school district, that focuses on state standards, tests, and school expectations for ELLs, as well as the program goals and requirements for Bilingual Education and English as a New Language. This orientation must occur before final school program placement, and must be in your preferred language.
7. The right to receive information about your children's English language development, and also about their home language development if they are in a Bilingual Education program.
8. The right to meet with school staff at least once a year, in addition to other generally required meetings, to discuss your children's overall learning and language development progress.
9. The right for your children to be placed in a Bilingual Education or English as a New Language program within 10 days of enrollment, and the right to opt out of a Bilingual Education program. At a minimum, your children must receive English as a New Language instruction.
10. The right for your children to transfer to another school in your district that offers Bilingual Education in your language, if your children's original school does not offer such a program.
11. The right for your children to have equal access to all programming and services offered by the school district, appropriate to age and grade level including those required for graduation, and to all school programs available to other students.
12. The right for your children to receive all core content instruction, and to learn English and other subjects such as Reading/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies at the same academic level as all other children. Being entitled to ELL services does not limit the ability to get core content instruction.
13. The right for your children to have full access to extracurricular activities (afterschool clubs, sports, etc.). Being entitled to ELL services does not limit the ability to take part in extracurricular activities.
14. The right for your children to get support services (e.g., Academic Intervention Services) aligned with any intervention plans that the school/district provides to all students.
15. The right to have your children tested yearly to determine their English language progress, and to obtain information about your children's performance on academic tests, including New York State tests.
16. The right to have your children continuously enrolled year to year in a Bilingual Education or English as a New Language program while they remain ELLs.
17. The right to contact the New York State Education Department's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages if any of the above rights have been violated.

Please call the **ELL Parent Hotline** at 1-800-469-8224, or email: nysparenthotline@nyu.edu
For more information visit:
www.p12.nysed.gov/biling
or write to:
New York State Education Department
Office of Bilingual Education & World Languages
55 Hanson Place, Room 594
Brooklyn, NY 11217

English Language Learner [Parents' Bill of Rights](#) summarizes critical rights concerning educational access and programming for ELLs and their parents. The Parent Bill of Rights has been translated into 27 languages.



What's My Role When I Communicate with My Families of MLs?



Your role is to:

- Be a liaison between the school and the home;
- Advocate for the rights of parents when it comes to school-home communications;
- Ensure there is communication being provided in the parents' home languages;
- Ensure there is communication in multiple formats (audio, visual, written, etc.);
- Provide information through various communication platforms: email, phone, mail, and other specific platforms used by the school district;
- Provide opportunities for parents to engage in school activities on a time that is convenient for them.



How to keep parents informed?

Help them learn about:

- Their rights;
- School events;
- Classroom procedures;
- Educational strategies;
- Test dates;
- Homework;
- Student behavior (both good and not so good);
- Academic progress;
- Resources to use at home;
- Use of their home language;
- Family learning resources.



What Can I Share with My ML Families?

- Talk to them about the importance of reading and maintaining their home language.
- Encourage them to visit their local libraries or digital libraries.
- Help them explore websites that can help students support the home language and English at home. Also, include parent/family resources and links to the school or classroom newsletters and websites.
- Recommend them to reach out to local community based organizations for additional support related to topics beyond education.
- Share opportunities and the space for parents to talk to one another.



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Minnesotadiversity.com

How Do I Communicate With My Families of MLs?



Use their preferred language and mode of communication.



Find a fully bilingual interpreter for your verbal interactions or a translator for your written communications.*



Translate the written communications that you send home.**



Learn some of their language.



Put parents/families in touch with bilingual staff.

Source: [Colorin Colorado](#)



*Please make sure, when finding a bilingual interpreter, you are following, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). [FERPA](#) safeguards student privacy.

** Please know that none of the translation tools replace using a human translator.



Communicate Often



An effective teacher will likely use several means over the course of the year. Good teachers communicate frequently. If a parent or family member hears it from you, there is a lesser chance of something getting misinterpreted in the process.

Source: Meador, Derrick. "Cultivating Highly Successful Parent Teacher Communication." ThoughtCo, Feb. 11, 2020, [thoughtco.com/tips-for-highly-successful-parent-teacher-communication-3194676](https://www.thoughtco.com/tips-for-highly-successful-parent-teacher-communication-3194676).



Communicate Often (Cont.)

An important thing to note is that most families do not only like to hear unpleasant news about their child. **Pick three to four students per week and contact their families with something positive.** Try not to include anything negative in these types of communications. When you do have to contact a family for something negative like a [discipline issue](#), try to end the conversation on a positive note.

Source: Meador, Derrick. "Cultivating Highly Successful Parent Teacher Communication." ThoughtCo, Feb. 11, 2020, [thoughtco.com/tips-for-highly-successful-parent-teacher-communication-3194676](https://www.thoughtco.com/tips-for-highly-successful-parent-teacher-communication-3194676).



How Can We Engage Our Families of MLs?

Parent/family newsletters	Annual open houses	Curriculum nights
Home visits (where applicable)	Phone calls	Annual school calendars
Inserts in local newspapers	Annual field days	Homework hotlines
Notices and handouts in local markets, clinics, churches, mosques, temples, workplaces or other gathering sites	Annual grandparents or "special persons" days	Board of Education spokesperson or communications officer at PTA meetings
Website for the school	Website for your classroom	Workshops for parents/families
Meet the teacher night ENL nights throughout the year	Create parents' groups- arrange the space and a common time for them to meet.	Discuss the importance of using their home language at home



Source: American Federation of Teachers, (2007). Building Parent-Teacher Relationships. Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers



How Does It Look?



Source: [How Does Family Engagement Look Like?](#)



What Can I Include in My ML Newsletter?

Important Dates	What Parents/Families Can Do at Home	Classroom Expectations
What are your students learning?	Contact Information	Highlights of Community Resources and Events
Acknowledgements to Parents/Families		



- And remember**
- ★ Communicate in the students' home languages
 - ★ Keep it as visual and as easy to read as possible
 - ★ Keep it regular
 - ★ Provide links to further reading and resources in the students' home languages
 - ★ Proofread one, two, three times
 - ★ Make a personal connection



What Are Some TIPS When Working with Families of MLs?



Communicate with your ML families in their language and mode of preference.

Create a welcome packet for the new families in your class.	Survey families at the beginning of the year to figure out work schedules, prior commitments, language of preference, mode of communication, cultures, etc.	Be open to families about how to communicate with you right from the beginning and be flexible with their schedule.
Send home information about a new topic before a new unit is started in class.	Prepare a presentation for Open House and share a translated copy with them.	Make families feel welcome before they enter the classroom.
Give families a list of suggested questions about what to ask their child about school or about your class.	Recognize all cultural traditions in your classroom.	Create a short communications each month, week, or season to talk about class events.
Do not use email as a replacement for face to face or phone conversations.	Offer frequent chances for families to volunteer in your class and promote them.	Inform yourself of school-wide events and keep track of the school calendar.
Make sure that the families in your school know the full range of resources provided by the school.	Call home when there is “good news” to report about student behavior or progress.	When you are speaking with them, make sure that you are hearing what they are trying to say to you.



Source: [InformED: 50 Tips On How To Work Harmoniously With Parents.](#)



Best Practices for Supporting Families with Remote Learning

Have a plan to share important information

- Decide how and how often families will receive updates.
- As you work in a virtual setting, ensure that families have access to and know where they can find important updates.

- Communicate in multiple formats.
- Provide access for all by using a mode of communication they prefer.
- Communicate weekly.

Create opportunities for mutual dialogue

- Educators should create partnerships with families to help them provide support for students.
- Create a system that works for you and them. Be open and empathetic.

- Have a way for them to contact you, when needed.
- Hold virtual conferences and meetings.
- Offer opportunities for them to provide feedback around remote learning.

Share resources to support learning at home

- Share helpful resources with and provide guidance related to learning at home.
- Do not overwhelm families and be strategic with resources that will help create deeper alignment between home and school.

- Share resources and strategies according to specific grade level.
- Don't be afraid to share resources in their home languages.
- Think about activities all can be involved.

Additional Tools to Communicating and Engaging with Families of MLs

- Use Class Dojo
- Use Remind app
- Use traditional methods and make a call
- Conduct a video conference
- Host a Google Meet meeting
- Provide in person or online “office hours”
- Send letters/postcards
- Use different Apps
- Use Google Voice



** Please know that none of the translation tools replace using a human translator.



What Tools Can I Use to Communicate with My ML Families?

TalkingPoints

- Teachers can text directly with families in multiple languages (limited free service and paid service available for district)

ParentSquare

- ParentSquare is a two-way private communication platform for preschools and K-12 schools. It provides a safe way for administrators, teachers, staff, groups and parents to connect and effectively communicate.

Live translator

- Work with translators and interpreters who are native speakers
- For example Propio- Language Services. Districts can get information through BOCES

Microsoft Translator for Education

- The Translator for Education site provides free resources, tools, and how-to guides for live captioning and translation in the classroom.

Translation Equipment

- Using translation devices with a live translator at events.

Google Translate

- Offers a free plug-in that can translate an entire website into more than 100 languages on demand.

Remind

- Remind is a free, safe messaging app that keeps families up to date with what's happening in the classroom.



** Please know that none of the translation tools replace learning a language or using a human translator.



What Resources Are Ready To Use?

Fun Home Learning PDFs produced by RBERNs

- PDFs ready to print and produced by RBERNs in :

- [Arabic](#)
- [Bengali](#)
- [Chinese](#)
- [English](#)
- [French](#)
- [Haitian Creole](#)
- [Karen](#)
- [Russian](#)
- [Spanish](#)
- [Urdu](#)
- [Uzbek](#)



Source: <https://speakt.com/>

[Colorin Colorado](#) [Learning Together at Home](#)

- [Learning Together at Home: Math](#)
- [Learning Together at Home: Science](#)
- [In the Neighborhood](#)
- [Exploring the Outdoors](#)
- [Winter & Holiday Activities](#)
- [Summer Learning & Reading](#)



[Home is the First Classroom](#) and other RBERN Resources

- [RBERN - Home is the First Classroom – English](#)
- [RBERN - Home is the First Classroom – Chinese](#)
- [RBERN - Home Is the First Classroom - Spanish](#)
- [Resources for Parents during the COVID-19 school closures](#)



Source: [Unesco](#)

[OBEWL Resources for Parents](#)

- [Common Core State Standards Guide \(translated\)](#)
- [Comprehensive English Language Learner Parent Guide \(translated\)](#)
- [English Language Learner Parent Events](#)
- [Helpful Links for English Language Learner Parents](#)
- [Next Generation Learning Standards: Parent Resources](#)
- [Parent Bill of Rights \(translated\) and ELL Parent Hotline](#)
- [Parent Guide to the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners \(NYSITELL\) \(translated\)](#)
- [Parent Guide to the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test \(NYSESLAT\) \(translated\)](#)
- [Parent Orientation Video: English Language Learner Programs in New York State \(translated\)](#)
- [Puerto Rican/Hispanic Youth Leadership Institute \(PR/HYLI\)](#)
- [Roadmap to College for ELLs/MLLs](#)

Community Based Organizations and Beyond

Students, Families and Teachers Need a Sense of Community

- Check the **NYS Website**
- Reach out to **Local Advocates** and **Local Community Centers**
- Join **Social Media Groups**



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[Advocates of Children of New York](#)



Educate

- Visit bilingual sites for educators and families of English Language Learners.
- Link to Resources that have relevant government offices and non-profit organizations



NOELA

National Clearinghouse for
English Language Acquisition

Regional Resources

- Touch base with your **Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN)**
- The RBERNs provide regional supports in various areas across NY State.



[NYS Language RBERN \(Statewide\)](#)

[Capital District RBE-RN at Questar III BOCES](#)

[Hudson Valley RBERN at SW BOCES](#)

[Long Island RBERN at Eastern Suffolk BOCES](#)

[Mid-State RBERN at OCM BOCES](#)

[New York City RBERN at Fordham University](#)

[West Region RBERN at Erie I BOCES](#)

Resources

- Roadmap to College for ELLs and MLs- Available in 9 languages
<http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/roadmap-college>
- Keeping Parents Informed from Scholastic: <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/keeping-parents-informed/>
- A Guide for Parents of English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners in New York State
<http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/guide-parents-english-language-learnersmultilingual-learners-new-york-state>
- Distance Learning for ELLs: Making Family Partnerships Work:
<https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/distance-learning-ells-family>
- Encouraging and Sustaining ELL Parent Engagement: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/encouraging-and-sustaining-ell-parent-engagement>
- A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders:
https://www.colorincolorado.org/sites/default/files/Engaging_ELL_Families_FINAL.pdf





THANK YOU!



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Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages
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Key Definitions

English Language Learner: A student who, by foreign birth or ancestry, speaks or understands a language other than English and who scores below a NYS designated level of proficiency on the NYSITELL or the NYSESLAT. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) refers to ELLs as “English Learners,” and ELLs are also sometimes referred to as Emergent Bilinguals or Dual Language Learners.

Multilingual Learner: All students who speak or are learning one or more language(s) other than English, including: 1) current ELLs, 2) students who were once ELLs but have exited out ELL status, 3) students who were never ELLs but are heritage speakers of a language other than English, and 4) World Languages students.



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OFFICE OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND WORLD LANGUAGES

[http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/
OBEWL@NYSED.GOV](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/OBEWL@NYSED.GOV)

ML Parent Hotline at 1-800-469-8224

<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/language-rbern/parent-hotline>
nysparenthotline@nyu.edu

REGIONAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION RESOURCE NETWORKS

<http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/regional-supportrberns>

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