

## Supporting Developing Multilingual Learners English/ Language Learners in New York State

### About this Document

This document contains three different sections which provide resources for administrators and educators working with Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs).

- The first section is a topic brief that addresses questions such as: Who are developing MLLs/ELLs? What are the Educational Services available to this group of students? It also provides examples of promising practices to support developing MLLs/ ELLs in schools.
- The second section presents profiles of developing MLLs/ ELLs to encourage educators in New York to think about how unique each of their students are, regardless of the labels that they have received.
- The third and last section offers an annotated bibliography.

These sections complement each other, but can also be read and used as separate documents.

### Who are Developing Multilingual Learners /English Language Learners?

The New York State Education Department defines the subpopulation of Developing Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (Developing MLLs/ELLs) as students who have been identified as MLLs/ELLs<sup>1</sup> and who have received English language supports through Bilingual Education or English as a New Language (ENL) for a total **of four to six continuous school years in the U.S.** Developing MLLs/ELLs include students who were born in the U.S. and those born outside of the country who immigrated to the US at some point in their childhood. Developing MLLs/ELLs' identifiers are based on students' length of time receiving English language support services, rather than their measured levels of language, literacy, or content knowledge.

In New York State, Developing MLLs/ELLs are the second-largest subgroup of MLLs/ELLs after Newcomers, numbering more than 60,000 students and comprising about 25% of the total multilingual learner population (NYSED, 2017). They may intersect with several other subgroups of MLLs/ELLs. For example, some Developing MLLs/ELLs have been identified as having a disability and receive Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Other students in this category have not attended school for periods of time and are considered Students with [Inconsistent/ Interrupted Formal Education](#) (SIFE).

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<sup>1</sup> Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) are defined by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as children who “by reason of foreign birth or ancestry, speak or understand a language other than English...and require support in order to become proficient in English” (NYSED, 2014, p. 17).

Developing MLLs/ELLs are diverse in their competency levels, language backgrounds, and experiences. Developing MLLs/ELLs may have some command of the English language but have not yet met the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts within their grade level. Evidenced by length of time spent receiving English as a New Language instruction, developing MLLs/ELLs may struggle to keep pace with the literacy demands of the standards-based curriculum as they advance through elementary level and into the secondary level.

## How are Developing Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners Identified?

The designation “Developing MLLs/ELLs” is based solely on the length of time a student has been receiving English language support services, which is four to six years. Upon initial school registration, the families of MLL/ELL students complete a home language survey indicating that a language other than English is spoken at home. Next, a trained educator interviews the student informally, and then administers the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL) to determine the student’s English language proficiency level. The NYSITELL includes listening, reading, writing, and speaking tasks in English. If the exam results indicate that the student needs English support services, they are designated MLLs/ELLs.

Developing MLLs/ELLs who continue to receive services for more than six years will then be considered Long-Term MLLs/ELLs. Once these students perform at the highest or “Commanding” level on the NYSESLAT, they are considered Former MLLs/ELLs.

### What are the limits of the Developing MLLs/ELLs Designation?

Because this is a time-based subpopulation, the designation itself sheds minimal light on MLLs/ELLs’ actual abilities and needs. Thus, it is necessary for schools and teachers to combine their knowledge of Developing MLLs/ELLs with other information that includes overlapping identifications (such as MLL/ELL SWD<sup>2</sup> or SIFE<sup>3</sup>); proficiency levels on the New York State Home and New Language Arts Progressions (which are aligned to the Next Generation Learning Standards); information gathered about students’ language practices through observation, analysis of student work, and conversations with the students and their families.

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<sup>2</sup> MLL/ELL Students with Disabilities (SWD) enter or re-enter school with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) (NYSED, 2018, p. ii).

<sup>3</sup> New York State Education Department defines Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) as Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners (MLLs/ELLs) who have attended school in the U.S. for fewer than 12 months, and are two or more years below grade level in home language literacy and/or math due to inconsistent or interrupted schooling prior to their arrival (NYSED, 2014).

## What Educational Services Do Developing Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners?

Developing MLLs/ELLs receive targeted English language instruction and support depending on their NYSESLAT scores. Bilingual programs such as Transitional Bilingual (TBE) and Dual language (DL) are the default programs for MLL/ELL students in New York State. If there are 20 or more students on grade-level within a language group a school is mandated to create a bilingual program. The availability of bilingual programming is an important factor in determining if Developing MLLs/ELLs receive educational services bilingually (TBE/DL) or in primarily in English (Stand Alone ENL). Depending on their individual learning needs, Developing MLLs/ELLs who also have IEPs may receive a range of bilingual or ENL programming combined with special education services.

## What are Some Best Practices to Support Developing Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners?

Developing MLLs/ELLs have valuable academic and life experiences to draw from in their education. They also may continue to face challenges and require targeted support. Their varying language, literacy, and grade levels, as well as their socio-emotional needs make it difficult to generalize a one-size-fits-all approach to working with all students; however, there are particular perspectives that can lead to successful practices with Developing MLLs/ELLs, such as:

**Build on students' strengths.** With four to six years of school experiences, Developing Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners have rich academic and social knowledge on which to build. Students benefit when their teachers build on their prior knowledge and experiences. It is important that schools and teachers learn the particular strengths and abilities of their Developing MLLs/ELLs (Santamaria, 2009). This can be done through diagnostic assessments, informal conversations with students, learning from students' previous teachers, family conversations, and student surveys (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). Once there is awareness of these individual and community strengths, teachers can use them to design instruction that leads to increased academic success for students (Moll et al., 1992).

**Scaffold for the range of students' language abilities.** Students are too often conceptualized as either "having" or "not having" a particular language (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Students in this subgroup have received years of language services, and as such, may find themselves at different points along the multilingual spectrum, or continuum, in regards to receptive and productive language, academic and social languages, or oral and written language. During late elementary, middle, and high school, there is growing demand of English for academic purposes. It is important for teachers to design instruction that allows for student engagement across a spectrum of language abilities (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017) through scaffolding (Gibbons, 2002). For example, students can talk about a topic before writing in a multilingual

think-pair-share, turn-and-talk, or 4-corners activity (as described in the *learning from schools* scenario below). In addition, students can listen to information about a topic before and during the reading of an associated text (Celic & Selzer, 2013; Hesson, Seltzer, & Woodley, 2014; Garcia et al., 2017). These varied approaches to linguistic input and output can help students of diverse language and content abilities both to access information and to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways.

**Leverage home language practices and bilingualism as a resource.** By the time multilingual learners become Developing MLLs/ELLs, they may have had very different experiences with home language education and integration into their schooling (García & Kleifgan, 2010). Some may have been immersed in home language literacy education in a bilingual program while others may have engaged little with their home language in school. Regardless of their past or current exposure to learning bilingually, all Developing MLLs/ELLs can benefit from teachers' and schools' use of their bilingualism as a resource through translanguaging<sup>4</sup> pedagogies and building a multilingual environment or ecology.<sup>5</sup> Developing MLLs/ELLs have the ability to take an active role in creating their class and school multilingual ecology and engaging in translanguaging as leaders and language experts in their classroom as described below in the *Learning from Schools Section*.

### Focusing on Middle Grades for Developing MLLs/ELLs

Because Developing MLLs/ELLs range from grade 3 to 12, this Topic Brief explores activities mostly geared toward the middle grades, which can be adapted for both elementary and high school contexts. It is important to remember that these categorizations provide only guidelines, and the best practice is always to focus on specific student needs, rather than on a broad designation or label. In addition, it is always important for educators to understand students' prior experiences, and that Developing MLLs/ELLs have at least four years of prior experience in English language programming combined with their early childhood years of communicating in languages other than English.

### School-based practices

Schools can create a rich, supportive learning environment and a coherent, consistent schooling experience for Developing MLLs/ELLs. They can accomplish this by cultivating a sense of ownership and belonging in the school environment and by encouraging the use of students' home languages in school. Practices for achieving these goals include:

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<sup>4</sup> Translanguaging is the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential.

Ofelia García (2009, p. 140)

<sup>5</sup> To learn more about translanguaging theory and pedagogies, see García, Johnson, & Seltzer (2017), García & Kleyn (2016), Hesson, Seltzer, & Woodley (2014), and visit the [CUNY-NYSIEB website](http://www.cuny-nysieb.org) (<http://www.cuny-nysieb.org>).

**Opportunities for leadership.** Developing MLLs/ELLs, as other MLLs/ELLs, are too often left out of leadership roles in schools. This may be due to a number of factors including family responsibilities, having a job, or already being enrolled in language-based school activities (Olsen, 2010; Salerno & Kibler, 2015). It is important for schools to make targeted efforts to include Developing MLLs/ELLs in leadership positions and opportunities within a school including elected roles, leading student clubs, and incorporating students’ bilingualism meaningfully in school tasks. For example, students can provide multilingual translations of school announcements and provide interpretation services at family events and Parent Association meetings. This supports students’ academic, social and linguistic development as well as social capital and sense of belonging with schools (Villareal & Gonzalez, 2016).

**Supporting family inclusion.** Strong family-school relations and parental involvement in education support academic achievement and positive socialization by students (Hill & Tyson, 2009). It is critical for schools to strategically target the families of Developing MLLs/ELLs with opportunities to participate in meaningful learning activities in school and, for families whose schedules might conflict with daytime activities, outside of school through creative homework assignments and technology. Research has demonstrated that parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes (Jeynes, 2005). With this in mind, parents and guardians are encouraged to become active participants in their children’s education. For example, in the comprehensive [Guide for Parents of English Language Learners in New York State](#), parents are encouraged to attend parent-teacher conferences and to engage in educational activities with their children. It is noted that “in the United States, parents are an integral part of the education system” and encourage them to “ask your child’s teacher how you can participate.” In addition, NYSED wants to ensure that parents and guardians have access to the information they need to be advocates and to make informed decisions regarding their children’s education. To access resources created by NYSED please visit: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/parent-information/home.html>.

**All teachers are teachers of MLLs/ELLs.** According to principal one of the [Blueprint for English Language Learners’ Success](#), All teachers are teachers of ELLs and need to plan accordingly (NYSED, 2019). The blueprint outlines four guidelines to ensure successful planning for the instruction of MLL/ELL students. The first guideline is to design and deliver instruction that is culturally and linguistically appropriate for all diverse learners, including those with Individualized Educational Programs (IEP). The second is to provide integrated language and content instruction to support language development through language-focused scaffolds so that both content and language are addressed in lessons. Bilingual, ESL, and other content-area teachers must collaborate purposefully and consistently to promote academic achievement in all content areas. All staff members are responsible for the growth and development of MLL/ELL students. Even teachers of art, music, physical education, and other “specials” should receive professional development regarding best practices for Developing MLLs/ELLs. The third

guideline is for teachers to use materials and instructional resources that are linguistically, age and grade appropriate and are aligned to the Next Generation Learning Standards. Finally, by collaborating with school support personnel and community-based human resources, schools can successfully address the multiple needs of ELLs.

**Building a school-wide multilingual ecology.** Creating and maintaining a school-wide environment or ecology which represents and celebrates students’ multilingualism, supports the academic and socio-emotional needs of Developing MLLs/ELLs (García & Menken, 2015). In promoting a multilingual ecology throughout the building, consider asking Developing MLLs/ELLs for their help. They can create multilingual signs and posters, add visuals and artwork to their words, and truly own the space while utilizing their bilingualism as a valuable resource (Celic & Seltzer, 2013). In addition, cross-disciplinary planning, ongoing professional development, and leveraging the skills of multilingual and culturally responsive staff members are important features of this environment, as well.

### Learning from Schools:

#### Opportunities for Leadership & Building a Schoolwide Multilingual Ecology

After 4–6 years in the school system, Developing MLLs/ELLs have ample experience and knowledge to be leaders in their schools and classrooms. At an elementary school in Queens, students’ bilingualism is used for meaningful school tasks, especially for the older students in grades 5 and 6. Each morning, different students lead the announcements with “good morning” in their home languages. Students act as translators for family-teacher conferences (for a different class and grade). Developing MLLs/ELLs use their linguistic and artistic skills to help create the multilingual ecology of both their classrooms and the schools with multilingual labels, signs, and academic work. Students also take the lead in creating multilingual materials, such as bilingual books-on-tape (recorded audio files of read-alouds) and home language handouts for themselves and other students to use.

### Learning from Schools: Supporting Family Inclusion

To support Developing MLLs/ELLs with academic work at home, it is crucial to make connections with families. At a high school in the Bronx, it is recognized that many students’ homes are multilingual spaces, so teachers provide resources in languages other than English for students to use beyond the classroom. This includes copies of bilingual content glossaries<sup>6</sup> which help support families taking part in student learning. Parents and guardians have valuable knowledge to offer their children as they complete homework or projects, but may lack the English to express it in academic terms. These bilingual glossaries help family members make connections to content and foster multilingual communication between students and their families.

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<sup>6</sup> Glossaries and additional resources available via the [NYU Metropolitan Center website \(http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/resources/glossaries\)](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/resources/glossaries).

## Classroom-based practices

**Scaffolding Tasks.** When working with Developing MLLs/ELLs, it is important to keep expectations high and to scaffold tasks for students (Gibbons, 2002). As an example, teachers can provide opportunities for Developing MLLs/ELLs to engage in meaningful speaking activities before writing. This added step of talking it out, in English and in home languages, can provide students with a chance to generate and build on more ideas as seeds for writing (Fu, 2009). A multilingual turn-and-talk and think-pair-share (Celic & Seltzer, 2013; Hesson, Seltzer, & Woodley, 2014) are valuable ways to integrate brief, but meaningful, moments of discussion within a larger lesson and as a scaffolded step before a written task.

**Developing Academic Language.** Typically, Developing MLLs/ELLs speak English fairly fluently and have developed what Cummins (2008) describes as conversational language. Academic language, on the other hand, takes longer to develop and involves talking, reading, and writing about school subjects. It is the language MLL/ELL students need to understand and use in order to be successful with grade level curriculum. Unlike conversational language, it is typically used to discuss abstract or unfamiliar concepts. It uses more academic vocabulary and sentence structures are typically more complex.

Academic language is best learned in context when content-specific vocabulary is used and focused on within its discipline. Academic language, however, goes beyond vocabulary and extends to the forms of writing that are used in different academic disciplines. Developing academic language includes understanding the different genres or writing used in different academic fields. As students have opportunities to use language for authentic purposes, in different content areas, they learn how to use language as mathematicians, scientists, social scientists and as literary scholars. Developing MLL/ELL students can develop the academic language they need for school success as they are immersed in the language of different content areas. Teachers can further support academic language by developing language objectives which specify the language students should use when demonstrating understanding of content (Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Gibbons, 2009).

**Heterogeneous groupings.** Purposeful grouping benefits Developing MLLs/ELLs as they progress in their language, literacy, and content skills and grow in their abilities to lead and teach others in the classroom. Pairing Developing MLLs/ELLs with Newcomers who share the same home language can be a valuable experience for both students. As the Newcomer gets language support and a student perspective, the Developing MLL/ELL is able to dive deeper into the content by breaking it down for a peer. Developing MLLs/ELLs can also be paired with Long-Term MLLs/ELLs, Former MLLs/ELLs, and monolingual students in collaborative work, as they learn from each other's points of view (Francis et al., 2006).



**Meaningful and approachable texts.** As Developing MLLs/ELLs grow in their language skills, they are also growing emotionally. Often times, reading materials at lower English levels touch on simple topics more appropriate for younger students and do not engage with the complex social issues that older students grapple with. Middle school and high school students should not be given books written for elementary school students just because they are “at their language level.” Rather, teachers must use texts that have a lower linguistic demand but explore topics that are of interest to older students and reflect their interests and emotional and social lives (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Hesson, Seltzer, & Woodley, 2014).

**Using technology resources.** Developing MLLs/ELLs can use technology in meaningful ways, both as a support and a creative challenge (Foulger & Jimenez-Silva, 2007). Software that allows students to create authentic materials, such as comic strips, books, albums, websites, podcasts, and blogs are supportive of Developing MLLs/ELLs’ progressing language abilities and provide a creative outlet for students to express themselves. The linguistic demands of these creative technological tasks can be scaffolded or modified for Developing MLLs/ELLs, but the content and cognitive demands can remain high so that students are challenged while their language skills are still developing. Using technology for both input and output also allows spaces for Developing MLLs/ELLs to construct knowledge together and work independently from the teacher in more student-centered learning groups (Lee, 2006).

### Learning from Schools: Scaffolding Tasks

At a secondary newcomer high school in the Bronx, writing academic essays is a complex process for most students. The teacher of a 9<sup>th</sup> grade ELA class encouraged Developing MLLs/ELLs to first discuss their ideas in a 4-corners activity. The corners of the room were labeled “*Agree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, and Strongly Disagree*” and a provocative statement was read aloud: “Violence can be necessary to achieve peace.” After students physically moved to the corner corresponding with their opinion, they provided their opinions, and the teacher probed for supporting evidence. Students cited various sources such as personal anecdotes, statistics, media, news, or history. Through these short conversations, students formulated what became written paragraphs in a persuasive essay.



### Learning from Schools: Meaningful and Approachable Texts

Developing MLLs/ELLs range in age from 8 to 21. Their maturity, social awareness, and literacy levels vary. Regardless of language and literacy skills, students deserve reading material that speaks to them. Some suggestions of linguistically approachable texts that explore high-interest and complex themes.

- *The House on Mango Street* - Sandra Cisneros
- *Drown* - Junot Díaz
- *\*A Long Walk to Water* - Linda Sue Park
- *\*The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* - Khaled Hosseini
- *The I Survived...series* - Lauren Tarshis
- *Bad Boy: A Memoir* - Walter Dean Myers
- *American Born Chinese* - Gene Luen Yang
- *The Outsiders* - S.E. Hinton
- *The Hunger Games series* - Susan Collins

Texts marked with an asterisk (\*) are featured in the translanguaging unit plans in Hesson, Seltzer, & Woodley, 2014)

### Learning from Schools: Building a Multilingual Ecology

At an elementary school in Brooklyn, second graders in the Dual Language Bilingual program learn American Sign Language in addition to Spanish and English. They have (at least) three languages available to receive information and to respond. Consequently, students have increased opportunities to communicate across languages and modalities (speaking, listening, writing, reading, and signing). By introducing sign language, their teacher has reduced barriers to learning content because of language abilities and has also drawn on the tactile and kinetic learning strengths of students.

### Learning from Schools: Using Technology Resources

Developing MLLs/ELLs in an 8th grade social studies class in Yonkers were studying the Civil Rights movement and were tasked with retelling an important moment of history in a creative way. Students were introduced to a variety of technology tools for this task, including Make Beliefs Comix. The site allows students to make their own comic strips for free online, using a variety of stock images and characters and adding their own dialogue. On the site, students wrote comics in Spanish and French, creating multilingual characters and stories. Some students took advantage of the Spanish version of the site's interface, but generated their comics in English. Through this activity, students were challenged to write dialogue, produce images, and imagine a storyline reflective of history in an imaginative way with the low linguistic demand of a comic strip.

## Profiles of Students Identified as Developing Multilingual Learners /English Language Learners Who Attend School in New York State

Below you will find the profiles of three students who have been identified as Developing MLLs/ELLs because they have been receiving ENL services between four to six continuous years. These profiles were gathered from information provided by their teachers. In order to protect the students' confidentiality, they have been given a pseudonym and no information on their schools or teachers are provided. None of these students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and do not receive special education services.

You will meet **Fatima** (5<sup>th</sup> grader from Egypt), **Tajh** (11<sup>th</sup> grader from Bangladesh), and **Ahmed** (12<sup>th</sup> grader from Yemen). Each of their stories show how unique these students are. They have different prior educational experiences, they receive different services from their school and from their teachers. They also have different learning needs, preferences, and personalities. These profiles serve as an example of the vast diversity of the students labeled as Developing MLLs/ELLs. It is very important that educators in New York learn about how unique each of their students really are, regardless of the labels that they have received.

### Fatima, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Student from Egypt

Fatima is a 10-year old student from Egypt who arrived to New York in kindergarten. She was identified as a **Developing MLL/ELL** because she has been **receiving ENL services for the sixth consecutive year**. She is in 5th grade in a school in a large city in New York and her **ENL services are provided by her general education teacher who is also ENL-certified**. Fatima speaks Arabic and English with her family at home. She had attended a religious pre-school in Egypt before arriving, but doesn't remember much about it. She is also a dedicated big sister who helps out with her baby brother at home.

Fatima is outgoing, has a good sense of humor, and is quick to break out her joke books for wordplay knock-knock jokes. During this school year, she has made steady progress in English and in Math even if at the beginning of the school year she struggled to pick out simple sight words in reading and did not know her times tables in Math. Her teacher reached out to her family, encouraged them to send her to the extra math help program that the school offered, and to sign her reading logs nightly. Her father, an engineer who typically works long hours on city projects, began to support her with her math work. By the end of the school year, her grades have improved tremendously and enjoys math projects. One of the math projects asked to build a small house using stock paper and 3-D shapes as a way of exploring the concept of volume. Fatima was one of the few students who actually used the graph paper provided to create mini-stoves and appliances.

Still, Fatima struggles with reading and writing. She has difficulties incorporating text-based evidence into her writing, and her spelling is an impediment to understanding the meaning of what she writes.

A strategy that has helped Fatima improve her writing are “paint chip flashcards.” On the first panel of a paint swatch from the hardware store, students write basic, everyday words. On the second panel, students write sophisticated synonyms for those words that they come across in their reading and classwork. On the last swatch, they write definitions. When Fatima writes essays, her teacher encourages her to keep her paint swatches by her. This activity has motivated her to take the risk to incorporate new words into her writing.

### Tahj, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Student from Bangladesh

Tahj is a 16-year old student from Bangladesh who arrived to New York at the beginning of 8th grade. He was identified as a **Developing MLL/ELL** because he has been **receiving ENL services for the fourth consecutive year**. He is in 11th grade in a school in a large city in New York and receives **ENL services through his English Language Arts teacher who is also ENL- certified. In addition, he receives ENL pull-out sessions** to work on his English language development. Tahj attended schools in Bangladesh before coming to the U.S. He mostly speaks **Bengali** in his home with his parents but since arriving to the U.S. he has not continued with his literacy development in Bengali. Tahj is extremely polite, respectful, and open to receiving assistance. He is also very inquisitive and consistently asks questions to deepen his understanding. He plays on the school’s soccer team, and the group often texts each other during the week. After the games, the team members will often go out to eat together at various restaurants. Tahj relishes the time spent with his teammates. Outside of soccer, he enjoys travelling back to Bangladesh to visit extended family and friends.

Tahj is intently dedicated to improving his English language development. He is able to decode words in English, but he is struggling with academic vocabulary. His teacher has observed an improvement in his spelling and decoding from the prior year, and she adds that he seeks a lot of support for his writing.

Although he is at the Transitioning level in the NYSESLAT, the school is providing an additional period of pull-out ENL services in order to focus more on his English-language needs. His teachers shared that the strategies that have supported his progress include the use of T charts, graphic organizers, annotation, and modeling the steps for crafting paragraphs and essays. In addition, modifying the questions on written classwork to amplify and extend the language has been beneficial. These modifications have included; breaking down the question into smaller chunks, using Bengali through Google Translate, adding pictures, underlining and highlighting, using sentence stems and referring to previous examples.

Tahj’s best classes are Web Design and Math. He struggles most with Social Studies, English Language Arts, and Spanish, which makes him feel overwhelmed.

His ENL teacher often assists the family with composing letters in English. For example, his parents wanted his younger sibling to apply to the same school, and the teacher worked with him to translate the application. Through the use of the school-provided IPAD, Tahj has access to machine translation software to assist with translation.

## Ahmed, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Taking Credit Recovery from Yemen

Ahmed is an 18-year old student who arrived to a large urban area in New York from Yemen in 9th grade. He was identified as a **Developing MLL/ELL** because he has been **receiving ENL services for the fourth consecutive year**. Ahmed and his twin brother who arrived in the U.S. together were expected to graduate in June of 2016. While his brother met graduation requirements and went on to a local community college, Ahmed was not able to pass the English and History Regents examinations. For this, Ahmed currently **attends a high school for half of the day to prepare for those tests in classes focused on English and History content, taught by ENL-certified teachers**. One key challenge currently facing Ahmed is being an older student in his classes. In response, the school has created a special advisory class which brings together seniors who, like Ahmed, have a few exams to complete before graduating, or who are at risk of not graduating.

Ahmed uses fashion to express himself and to represent who he is. Ahmed enjoys showing his teachers the mobile apps that he uses to browse for shoes, clothes, and designers on his phone. Another way Ahmed communicates who he is to the outside world is through kind gestures, offering his teachers and classmates mints, gum, and other treats from the deli where he works and that his family members own.

Ahmed says he has not had interrupted schooling, and when he arrived to school in New York, he had higher literacy in his home language than in English. He often reads the news in Arabic. At this point in his schooling however, he has not continued to study academic Arabic.

Traditional approaches to teaching the content of the History Regents exam that rely on memorization of details about the Boston Tea Party or the Civil War, have not been effective with Ahmed. What has been more helpful has been drawing on his oral language and cultural background. He will make connections to Yemen and with its politics. He also lights up when he is able to engage with visual content. He enjoys searching for vocabulary words using Google Image search, and analyzing artwork, political cartoons, and photographs. While for many months he was reluctant to share his ideas out to the whole class, he was emboldened when his teachers gave him the opportunity to describe what he infers from images. One of his teachers mentioned that it was huge step for him to share out in English with his peers.

During this past year, he has grown very much in his English academic work. Since arriving to his school, he has become more willing to participate in class, to make mistakes, to ask for feedback and to collaborate. He pushes himself, even if that means he spends all of his school time on a Regents exam. He tries very hard and is extremely dedicated.

## Research Studies on Supporting Developing Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) Annotated Bibliography

Since articles that specifically address the Developing MLLs/ELLs population are not found in the literature, this annotated bibliography includes articles that address general issues within the broader population of MLLs/ELLs and could be helpful to educators of Developing MLLs/ELLs. Within those studies, two research areas are found: a) challenges in serving Developing MLLs/ELLs and b) classroom and/or school-based supports for these students. This annotated bibliography is intended to be a resource for educators who serve this population of students; it is not an exhaustive list of resources, but, rather, serves to highlight representative research in the field around these areas.

### Methodology for Selecting the Articles Featured

This annotated bibliography includes current research found through structured internet and database searches on the two areas of research presented above and from suggestions of scholars knowledgeable in the literature on Developing MLLs/ELLs. The following search terms were used: ELLs, English language learners, former Limited English Proficient (LEP), reclassification, developing ELLs, ELLs and middle grades, upper elementary ELLs, ELLs in 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> grade. The works included in this annotated bibliography were selected based on the following criteria:

- They come from a credible publication source, such as a peer-reviewed journal, educational institution, or agency (books are not included in this list);
- They are current, being published in past ten years (between 2009 and 2019); and
- The methods of analysis were clearly identified in the publication in order to evaluate the rigor of the study.

The authors of this annotated bibliography then selected five sources that they consider the most useful for educators working with Developing MLLs/ELLs.

First, an overview of what current research says about the two analyses is provided: a) what are the challenges in serving Developing MLLs/ELLs; and b) what school- and/or classroom-based supports are most suitable for working with these students. Next, a summarizing table indicating the authors and year of the works included, the type of article they are (journal or report) and on which area(s) of analysis they have information, is provided. Finally each article is presented alphabetically along with a summary of the findings by analysis.

**What does the research say about challenges in serving Developing Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) and school- and recommended classroom-based supports?**

None of the articles included in this Annotated Bibliography directly mention the Developing MLLs/ELLs population—those students labeled as MLL/ELL for four to six years. The articles included are general articles on MLLs/ELLs in the middle grades; the recommended best practices may be of help to educators working with Developing MLLs/ELLs.

Based on the available literature, one of the greatest challenges presented in serving MLLs/ELLs (and Developing MLLs/ELLs) is the lack of specialized research and teacher education on this population. Students may be broadly labeled as MLLs/ELLs but demonstrate a wide array of abilities and strengths. This diversity extends to include academic language and strategies, which can vary depending on students’ previous exposures to English and literacy practices in their home language(s). MLLs/ELLs may also be placed in specialized programs which provide structured, but isolated, academic support. The additional time spent in these programs can result in long school days which exhaust and isolate students from their peers, and prevent them from participating in other activities critical to healthy school life (Carhill-Poza, 2017).

Specific classroom approaches to serving this population include reading and comprehension strategies such as SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol), CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach), interactive read-alouds, vocabulary practice, and the use of metacognitive reading strategies (e.g., thinking aloud, modeling). More broadly, instructional approaches that facilitate academic progression and promote a culture of inclusion in the classroom include allowing students to leverage their home language to promote good literacy practices, and getting to know students in order to gain a better understanding of their home language and culture.

On a school-wide level, incorporating home language assessments for both content knowledge and language/literacy allows for a more accurate measure of students’ abilities, and providing opportunities for collaborative learning practices with other students may reduce the isolating effects of specialized MLL/ELL programs and supports.

Author and Year	Type of Article	Challenges in serving Developing MLLs/ELLs	School- and/or classroom-based supports for Developing MLLs/ELLs
Bolos (2012)	Journal		✓
Carhill-Poza (2017)	Journal	✓	✓
Cisco & Padrón (2012)	Journal	✓	✓
Pacheco, David, & Jiménez (2015)	Journal	✓	✓
Umansky et al. (2015)	Report	✓	✓

**Bolos, N. (2012). Successful strategies for teaching reading to middle grades English language learners. *Middle School Journal*, 44(2), 14–20.**

**Full text access:**

<http://ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/docview/1282264897?accountid=7287>

The author explores strategies that would be helpful for middle grade MLLs/ELLs (specifically sixth grade) in developing reading proficiency in English. She gives a general overview of commonly understood struggles that MLLs/ELLs have in developing language, specifically academic English. Important to note is the fact that the author maintains a monolingual view of language (seeing it as a “skill” to be added) and does not explore the cultural or political dimensions of education for MLLs/ELLs beyond cursory nods toward connection-making between students’ education and their lived experiences. In addition to promoting the effectiveness of SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) and CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach), she suggests three strategies may be used to support MLLs/ELLs in middle grades as they develop their reading skills: interactive read-alouds, comprehension strategies to be deployed through shared reading and vocabulary enrichment using frontloading (previewing vocabulary) and graphic organizers. The author does not specify different sub-groups of MLLs/ELLs, but this article has been included because the strategies may be helpful for Developing MLLs/ELLs.

Classroom- and/or school-based recommendations for supporting Developing MLLs/ELLs:

- Reflect on programmatic options given the current Developing MLLs/ELLs students and consider shifts per their availability.
- In addition to SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) and CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach), the author suggests three strategies to develop reading skills: interactive read-alouds, comprehension strategies to be deployed through shared reading, and vocabulary enrichment using frontloading (previewing vocabulary) and graphic organizers.
- Attend to students’ individual learning styles as well as their linguistic needs to avoid oversimplifying content.
- Work to help students transition from short-term comprehension skills to lifelong comprehension skills.

**Carhill-Poza, A. (2017). “If you don’t find a friend in here, it’s gonna be hard for you”: Structuring bilingual peer support for language learning in urban high schools. *Linguistics and Education*, 37, 63–72.**

This article has four descriptive case studies of Spanish-speaking adolescent Developing MLLs/ELLs in New York City public high schools, examining how schools structured peer linguistic resources. Findings suggest that school policies designed to support language development created boundaries that isolated language learners from mainstream and bilingual peers and had profound repercussions for access to opportunities to use and learn academic English. Hyper-segregation is used to describe the multilayered social separation experienced by Developing MLLs/ELLs in this study.

Challenges in serving Developing MLLs/ELLs:

- The article addresses the challenges of lengthy 10-hour school schedules that Developing MLLs/ELLs have in urban high schools. In particular, these long schedules:
  - hindered these students’ opportunities for extracurricular activities that could have supported greater participation in the life of the school;



- o didn't allow Developing MLLs/ELLs to take mainstream courses thus separating them from interacting with mainstream students;
- o made students physically tired, interfering with their ability to pay attention in class.

Classroom- and/or school-based recommendations for supporting Developing MLLs/ELLs:

- Policies that isolate ELLs from mainstream and bilingual peers may stunt Developing MLLs/ELLs' opportunities to master academic English.
- School policies should aim to bring Developing MLLs/ELLs into collaborative learning communities of practice that build on their strengths and skills as valued members of their academic community.

**Cisco, B. K., & Padrón, Y. (2012). Investigating vocabulary and reading strategies with middle grades English language learners: A research synthesis. *RMLE Online*, 36(4), 1–23.**

The authors embark on a review of research to address the fact that the majority of adolescent MLLs/ELLs have only a basic literal-meaning comprehension of texts, which impacts their ability to participate in mainstream content-area classes as well as standardized testing. The authors sought to connect this issue to the role of home-language transfer, the importance of vocabulary development, and the need to identify instructional approaches that would improve the current situation. The authors do not specify different sub-groups of MLLs/ELLs, but this article has been included because the suggested strategies may be helpful for Developing MLLs/ELLs.

Challenges in serving Developing MLLs/ELLs:

- Teacher preparation on how to serve MLLs/ELLs is lacking; likewise, the relatively limited research about middle-school-age MLLs/ELLs contributes to a lack of information about these students.

Classroom- and/or school-based recommendations for supporting Developing MLLs/ELLs:

- “Provide students with specific instruction on strategic approaches for deciphering a single word instead of a whole text, as would typically be done in a middle school classroom.” (p. 9)
- Leverage home-language skills to help students comprehend texts by providing instruction in the home language and creating a classroom environment in which the use of students' home languages is valued as a strategic approach to English reading comprehension.
- Provide explanations that help students develop their metacognitive awareness of how to approach the comprehension of texts (thinking aloud while reading, modeling, explicitly teaching reading strategies).

**Pacheco, M. B., David, S. S., & Jiménez, R. T. (2015). Translating pedagogies: Leveraging students' heritage languages in the literacy classroom. *Middle Grades Research Journal*, 10(1), 49–63.**

The authors address the strategy of incorporating students' home languages (the authors use the term “heritage languages”) into instruction, especially when teachers do not speak these languages, as a form of procedural, cognitive, educational, and social support in literacy instruction. The authors employed a sociocultural approach to studying ways in which a particular activity that uses students' home languages could be valuable in scaffolding literacy development in English as well as in encouraging and supporting the participation of 8th grade MLLs/ELLs in learning. The authors do not specify different sub-groups of MLLs/ELLs, but this article has been included because the strategies may be helpful for Developing MLLs/ELLs.

Classroom- and/or school-based recommendations for supporting Developing MLLs/ELLs:

- The authors assert that pedagogical techniques that use students’ home languages can be beneficial for MLLs/ELLs. Techniques that employ a collaborative approach emphasizing student authority and the development of metalinguistic awareness can benefit MLLs/ELLs by focusing on students’ linguistic resources and giving teachers an approach to become confident learners about their students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

**Umansky, I. M., Reardon, S. F., Hakuta, K., Thompson, K. D., Estrada, P., Hayes, K., Maldonado, H., Tandberg, S., & Goldenberg, C. (2015). *Improving the opportunities and outcomes of California's students learning English: Findings from school district-university collaborative partnerships*. Sacramento: Policy Analysis for California Education.**

**Full text access:** <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED562543.pdf>

In 2015, California underwent shifts, including the introduction of new English Language Development (ELD) standards, in its policies around how to educate English learners and evaluate their progress. The policy brief draws from research conducted in three university-school partnerships to articulate current challenges in the education of multilingual learners, including problems of classification which tend to homogenize students and overlook their diverse needs as well as the need for more access to content-rich academic work supported by teachers with appropriate preparation.

Challenges in serving Developing MLLs/ELLs:

- Developing MLLs/ELLs may be those students whose home language/literacy skills were lower when they arrived in school and/or whose home environment does not include much English, factors which may contribute to these students’ struggles with academic language skill development.
- Students who are categorized as MLLs/ELLs and who are of non-Latino origin may be reclassified faster than Latino multilingual learners, meaning that there may be an overrepresentation of Latino students in the 3–5 year multilingual learners group
- Students’ participation in bilingual programs aimed at supporting biliteracy may contribute to a lower likelihood of reclassification in the early grades, meaning that 3–5 year MLLs/ELLs may still be in the “building phase” of their bilingualism and biliteracy in these educational contexts. Often bilingual programs are designed to focus on developing home language first, so students are able to later transfer their skills to a new language. However, multilingual learners in bilingual programs appear to show greater academic growth and achievement overall as compared to multilingual learners in English-only environments (Umansky et al., 2015).

Classroom- and/or school-based recommendations for supporting Developing MLLs/ELLs:

- Consider home language assessments for content knowledge, especially for newcomers and multilingual learners in bilingual programming.
- Conduct home language literacy assessments to determine students’ initial literacy in their home languages and their current needs.

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The CUNY-NYSIEB Topic Brief and the student profiles were written by Kahdeidra Monét Martin, Heather H. Woodley, Sara Vogel, and Ann Ebe. Maite Sánchez and Kate Seltzer served as content advisors. The authors are very grateful for the following educators in New York State schools and districts who have also contributed to this document: Andy Brown (Maspeth Elementary, P.S.153) and Leonore Smith (Long Island City High School). The Annotated Bibliography was written by Katherine E. Entigar and Diego Vargas Barona with the support of Maite (María Teresa) Sánchez.

This document was published in September 2019 and has been funded by the New York State Education Department Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages, whose officials have reviewed and provided feedback. For more information on Developing Multilingual Learners and for the work of CUNY-NYSIEB, visit the [CUNY-NYSIEB website \(www.cuny-nysieb.org\)](http://www.cuny-nysieb.org).