Advocating for Multilingual Learners

Competency

The educator approaches multilingual education from an advocacy perspective and understands the needs of multilingual learners.

Key Method

The educator will analyze an issue affecting multilingual learners and/or their families, use evidence to identify an appropriate advocacy response, develop an action plan in partnership with relevant stakeholders, and communicate with an audience positioned to support equitable policy or practice change.

Method Components

Multilingual Learners and Why Advocate for Them

Multilingual learners, sometimes referred to as English Language Learners, are students from diverse linguistic backgrounds who are learning English while maintaining their native language. These students and their families bring a wealth of cultural experiences to the school, enriching the educational environment. There may be various categories of multilingual learners in your classroom, for example:

- Students born in the United States
- Newcomers to the United States
- Heritage Language Learners

Mental Health of Multilingual Learners

Multilingualism is an asset and is not itself a cause of mental health challenges. However, multilingual learners may experience stress or barriers related to educational environments, language discrimination, inequitable systems, limited linguistic access, exclusionary policies or practices, and the challenges of navigating different cultural and linguistic contexts. Understanding these factors can help educators identify barriers and advocate for learning environments that affirm students' languages, cultures, identities, and well-being.

Some of these can include:

- Language Dominance and Identity
  - They may feel pressure to fit in, thus losing their identity
  - Identity confusion, which may lead to feelings of isolation
  - Learners may feel stressed by their family situation and worried about permanency
- Language Use and Cognitive Load
  - Multilingual learners may use their full linguistic repertoire, including translanguaging, to communicate, make meaning, and support learning.
  - Translanguaging can be an asset and should not be viewed as a deficiency.
  - Mental fatigue can occur, especially when being precise in language usage is necessary
- Language Discrimination and Stigma
  - Students may experience discrimination based on their language use
  - These actions may impact learners' r self-esteem
- Communication Anxiety
  - Worry about making a mistake
  - Fear of facing negative judgments from others
- Social Isolation
  - Learners may feel excluded from conversations
- Academic Pressure
  - Academic pressure can contribute to stress when a student is learning a new language in addition to grade-level expectations
- Family and Cultural Expectations
  - There may be conflicts between family and cultural expectations related to language use
- Loss of Heritage Language
  - Multilingual learners may experience a sense of loss if they do not maintain their heritage or native language.
  - This can lead to disconnectedness from cultural roots
- Limited Mental Health Resources
  - There may be limited access to resources available to learners in their native languages
  - This can hinder their ability to seek help
- Acculturation Stress
  - Adapting to a new culture and language can lead to stress and anxiety or feelings of alienation
- Pressure to Conform
  - Multilingual learners may face pressure to conform, but their preferences may differ from the dominant culture.

Origins or History of Multilingual Education

The landscape of multilingual education has been shaped by several legal cases. These cases have worked to shape policies and practices to ensure equitable access to resources, programs, and teaching and learning for multilingual learners. Understanding the history of multilingual education helps educators see models of prior experiences so that they can support learners and look for opportunities for advocacy.

- Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado
- Lau v. Nichols
- Castañeda v. Pickard
- Plyler v. Doe
- Dear Colleague Letter

Understanding Multilingual Learners and their Families

Multilingual learners bring a wealth of experiences to the classroom. To harness the power of this diversity, educators must understand their learners and collaborate with their families. Explore the benefits of multilingualism and the different types of multilingual families.

Multilingualism as an Asset	Different Types of Multilingual Families
Research shows that multilingual individuals often have enhanced cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, multitasking, and creative thinking. Their ability to communicate across languages also promotes cultural sensitivity and global awareness, attributes that are increasingly valuable in today's interconnected world. By recognizing and celebrating multilingualism, educators can encourage students to take pride in their linguistic heritage and leverage their diverse linguistic abilities to excel academically and socially.	Multilingual families come in different forms; each is shaped by unique cultural backgrounds, family dynamics, and societal influences. Intergenerational families may have grandparents who speak one language, parents who use another, and children who are exposed to yet another. Bilingual families might use two languages interchangeably at home, while mixed-language families navigate the complexities of blending languages from different origins. Understanding these diverse family dynamics is important for educators who aim to build meaningful relationships and create inclusive learning environments.

Strategies for Engaging and Sustaining Work with Multilingual Families

Many strategies for working with multilingual families have proven useful and effective. Educators should be equipped with many of these to reach their students' families. Embracing multilingualism can strengthen school-family relationships and nurture every student's potential. These strategies build trust and encourage open communication.

Activities of advocacy should be grounded in the following:

Cultural Sensitivity and Respect: Educators should approach multilingual families with cultural sensitivity and respect, valuing the richness of their diverse backgrounds and traditions.
Two-Way Communication: Clear and effective communication is vital. Providing translated materials and interpretation can bridge linguistic gaps.

Family Involvement Activities: Organizing events to celebrate the cultures of diverse families creates opportunities for shared experiences. These can connect families and the school community.

Home-School Connection: Encourage families to maintain native languages at home. This can strengthen language development and preserve cultural identity.

Collaborative Goal Setting: Involve families in setting academic and language goals. Working together can create a holistic approach to learning that respects the family's aspirations and cultural values.

Equity Issues in Education with Multilingual Learners

Culture and culturally relevant pedagogy play an important role in equitable education for multilingual learners. Through learning about these issues, educators can better advocate for their students' educational experiences.

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy for multilingual learners is deliberate action taken to work toward high-quality education and equitable educational opportunities. Advocacy for multilingual learners includes equitable access to content, equitable assessment opportunities, effective collaboration with families, and clear, transparent processes for identifying, monitoring, and exiting multilingual learners.

As multilingual learners and their families become more familiar with the U.S. educational system and learn to advocate for themselves, they will need less advocacy from others to obtain equitable educational opportunities. Educators should practice this scaffolded advocacy strategy so their multilingual learners can become self-advocates.

Advocates work to influence policies, systems, and public opinion to create a more equitable and just society. Advocacy plays a crucial role in empowering marginalized communities, amplifying their concerns, and challenging existing norms to bring about transformation.

Educators as Advocates

Educators are uniquely positioned to advocate for meaningful changes that positively impact students, schools, and communities. By leveraging their expertise, passion, and influence, educators can help build a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape. You will ensure that multilingual learners in your school district not only receive all the services they are entitled to under the law, but also have access to all programs in which every other student can participate. These are some ways you can become an effective advocate:

- Stay informed about educational policies and issues affecting your students
- Identify areas within your community that require advocacy
- Cultivate relationships with fellow educators, parents, students, and policymakers
- Share real-life experiences faced by your students to illustrate the need for change

- Join or engage with professional organizations related to education advocacy
- Use social media platforms to raise awareness
- Attend school board meetings, town halls, etc. to express your concerns
- Contribute opinion pieces to publications
- Reach out to elected officials individually or with a group to advocate for your students
- Plan workshops to educate the community and stakeholders
- Involve students in advocacy efforts
- Offer your expertise in education to local organizations that align with your advocacy goals

Five Advocacy Steps:

These steps will empower you to begin your journey of change-making to create a more equitable educational system for multilingual learners.

1. **Isolate the issue**—Think about your own context and how you can be an agent of change. By identifying an issue, you will have the opportunity to propose a solution. You will need concrete steps and a clear, concise way to describe the advocacy issue.
2. **Gather information and evidence**—This step involves systematically collecting data, research, anecdotes, and real-life stories that substantiate the need for change and underscore the significance of the cause you advocate for.
3. **Build a Coalition**—Identify and engage people and groups whose perspectives, expertise, support, or decision-making authority are relevant to the issue. Engage multilingual learners and/or their families as partners, when appropriate, so advocacy reflects their experiences, priorities, and perspectives. Coalition members may bring different perspectives while contributing to a shared goal for change.
4. **Take action**—Plans are put into motion, and deliberate efforts are made to raise awareness, engage stakeholders, and create meaningful change. This phase involves a range of strategic activities aimed at mobilizing support, influencing decision-makers, and garnering public attention.
5. **Evaluate and reflect**—Evaluation and reflection are integral components of effective advocacy. In this step, you will assess the impact of your efforts, learn from your successes and challenges, and refine strategies for future endeavors. Through evaluation and reflection, you will contribute to the growth and success of your cause while advancing positive change in the community and beyond.

Before developing an advocacy plan, educators should examine the issue to understand why it is occurring. This includes gathering evidence from their professional context, considering the factors contributing to the issue, and identifying underlying causes. Understanding these causes helps educators determine where advocacy may have the greatest impact and identify possible solutions.

When advocating for multilingual learners and their families, be mindful of their rights, the data and other evidence that support your position, and the policies in place.

Supporting Rationale and Research

Blanco, María. “Before *Brown*, there was *Mendez*: The Lasting Impact of *Mendez* v. *Westminster* in the Struggle for Desegregation.” American Immigration Council. American Immigration Council, 25 March 2010, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1isSM7_hqoz0MSfCIYF59GH0fIIdnVFf0/view?usp=sharing

Wright, Wayne E. “Landmark Court Rulings Regarding English Language Learners.” Colorín Colorado. WETA Public Broadcasting, 2010, https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/landmark-court-rulings-regarding-english-language-learners

Zacarian, Debbie. “Serving English Learners: Laws, Policies, and Regulations.” Colorín Colorado. WETA Public Broadcasting, 2012, https://www.colorincolorado.org/guide/serving-english-learners-laws-policies-and-regulations

Resources

Who are Multilingual Students?

Strategies for Helping ELLs that were Born in the US - A World of Language Learners

Who's Teaching the Children Crossing the U.S. Border? Answers to 6 Questions

Newcomer Tool Kit (PDF)

Who is a heritage language learner?

Mental Health and Multilingual Learners

Mental health challenges impact ELL population - The Martha's Vineyard Times

SEL for English Language Learners: What Educators Need to Know | Colorín Colorado

How to Support the Social and Emotional Health of Middle/High School ELLs | Colorín Colorado

Helping immigrant children heal

Origin of Multilingual Education

History of ELL

Lau vs. Nichols: A Landmark Case for ELL Education

Castañeda v. Pickard: Are ELLs receiving the services they need?

Legal Protections for K-12 English Learner and Immigrant-Background Students

Understanding Multilingual Learners and their Families

The changing ELL field: Seeing language and culture as assets

Native Language Use and Support - Accessibility Strategy

The Home Language: An English Language Learner's Most Valuable Resource

How to Support ELL Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFEs)

Learning English While Homeless: Fast Fluency Drives Academic Success (Part 1)

Communicating with ELL Families: 10 Strategies for Schools

Two Venezuelan families. Two immigration policies. Two different outcomes - Los Angeles Times

The Link Between Spanish Language and Culture

Strategies to Engage and Sustain Work with Multilingual Learners and Their Families

Five Ways to Engage Parents of ELL Students

Encouraging and Sustaining ELL Parent Engagement

Improving Achievement for English Learners: Conclusions from 2 Research Reviews

Pre-K and Latinos

ESL Support in Elementary School

Scenarios for Advocacy

Support Options for Submission:

Approaches to Root Cause Analysis | U.S. Department of Education

5-Step Action Plan (click on the link to make a copy of a sample action plan)

Cause and Effect Analysis

Fishbone

SWOT Analysis

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3 and receive a proficient score for all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

Suggested word count: 200–300 words
Please do not include any information that could identify you, your students, or their families to your reviewers.

Answer the following prompts.

1. Describe your professional context. Include your role, educational setting, grade level(s) or age group(s) served, and the languages represented among the multilingual learners and families you serve.
2. Think about how multilingual learners and their families experience your educational setting. Describe ways their languages, cultures, knowledge, and perspectives are currently recognized and valued. Also identify an area where multilingual learners and/or their families could be better supported.
3. What experience have you had working with colleagues, families, community members, or other stakeholders to address the needs of multilingual learners and their families? If this is new to your role, describe who you currently work with to support multilingual learners and their families.

Passing: To receive a passing score for Part 1, you must respond to all questions clearly and thoughtfully and describe your professional context without revealing identifying information.

A passing response:

- Describes the educator's role, educational setting, grade level(s) or age group(s), and languages represented among the multilingual learners and families served;
- Describes how the languages, cultures, knowledge, and perspectives of multilingual learners and families are recognized and valued and identifies an area where additional support is needed; and
- Describes experience working with others to support multilingual learners and families or identifies current collaboration relevant to this work.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following three artifacts:

Artifact 1. Identify and Analyze the Issue

Suggested word count: 500–750 words

Identify a specific issue in your professional context that affects multilingual learners and/or their families. This issue should be one that you could address through advocacy. Base your analysis on your actual classroom, school, district, or community context rather than a hypothetical situation.

In your submission:

- Describe the specific issue and explain how it affects multilingual learners and/or their families.
- Provide evidence from your professional context that demonstrates the issue exists. Evidence may include observations, experiences, feedback from multilingual learners or families, relevant school or district information, or other appropriate information to demonstrate the issue.
    - *Do not include personally identifiable information.*
- Analyze the factors contributing to the issue and identify the underlying cause(s) to address.
- Explain what you learned from your analysis and how it helped you determine where advocacy could make a difference.
- Identify possible solutions and select one solution you believe would most effectively address the issue.
- Explain why the selected solution is appropriate for your context and how it could contribute to a more equitable educational experience for multilingual learners and their families.

Artifact 2. Action Plan
Suggested word count: 750–1,000 words

Using the issue and solution identified in Artifact 1, develop an action plan for advocating for a policy or practice change that would better support multilingual learners and/or their families.

Your advocacy may focus on change at the school, district, local, state, or federal level.

Organize your plan using the following five advocacy steps:

1. **Isolate the issue:** Briefly identify the issue, the policy or practice you want to change, and the change you are advocating for.
2. **Gather information and evidence:** Describe the information and evidence that will support your advocacy. Explain how the evidence relates to the issue and the change you are seeking.
3. **Build a coalition:** Identify the people or groups whose perspectives, expertise, support, or decision-making authority are relevant to the issue. Consider and include an explanation of how you will engage multilingual learners and/or their families as partners in the advocacy effort.
4. **Take action:** Describe the advocacy actions you will take, who you need to reach, and how those actions will support the change you are seeking.
5. **Plan for Evaluation and Reflection—** Determine how you will recognize progress toward your advocacy goal and what information or feedback you will use to evaluate your efforts. Consider how what you learn could help you adjust your strategies and determine next steps.

Artifact 3. Advocacy Communication

Suggested word count: 400–600 words

Using the advocacy plan developed in Artifact 2, create a professional written communication for a person or group who has the ability or influence to support the policy or practice change you are advocating for. The communication is appropriate for the intended audience, professionally presented, and ready for use in the educator's advocacy context.

In your communication:

- Clearly identify the policy or practice change you are advocating for and explain why the change is needed.
- Explain how the current policy or practice affects multilingual learners and/or their families.
- Use relevant evidence to support the need for change.
- Incorporate the perspectives and priorities of multilingual learners and/or their families without including personally identifiable information.
- Address relevant policies, rights, laws, or other guidance when applicable to the issue.
- Acknowledge relevant perspectives or considerations that may differ from your own.
- Clearly communicate the action or response you are seeking from your audience.

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	**Basic**	**Developing**
Artifact 1: Identify and Analyze the Issue	Clearly identifies a specific issue from the educator's professional context, explains how it affects multilingual learners and/or their families, and provides relevant evidence demonstrating that the issue exists. Analyzes contributing factors and underlying cause(s) and explains how the analysis identifies an opportunity for advocacy. Identifies possible solutions and selects a solution that addresses the issue and underlying cause(s). Explains why the selected solution is appropriate for the educator's context and how it could contribute to a more equitable educational experience for multilingual learners and their families.	Identifies an issue affecting multilingual learners and/or their families and provides some evidence related to the issue, but the impact or supporting evidence is not clearly explained. Identifies contributing factors or underlying cause(s), but the analysis or connection to an opportunity for advocacy is underdeveloped. Identifies possible solutions and selects a solution, but the connection to the analysis, professional context, or a more equitable educational experience is not fully explained.	Identifies an issue, but its connection to the educator's professional context or its impact on multilingual learners and/or their families is unclear or unsupported by evidence. Provides limited analysis of the factors or underlying cause(s) contributing to the issue and does not clearly connect the analysis to advocacy. Identifies a solution with little connection to the analysis or does not explain how the solution could contribute to a more equitable educational experience for multilingual learners and their families.
Artifact 2: Action Plan	Clearly identifies the issue, the policy or practice to be	Identifies the issue and proposed change, but the connection to	Identifies an issue or proposed change, but the

	addressed, and the change being advocated for. The plan builds logically from the issue and solution identified in Artifact 1. Uses relevant information and evidence to support the proposed change and identifies people or groups who can contribute to the advocacy effort. The plan identifies how multilingual learners and/or their families will be engaged as partners in the advocacy effort. Describes actionable advocacy steps, including who will be engaged and how the actions support the proposed change. Explains how progress will be evaluated and how findings will inform next steps.	the analysis and solution from Artifact 1 is underdeveloped. Includes information or evidence and identifies people or groups relevant to the advocacy effort, but their roles or the partnership with multilingual learners and/or their families are not clearly developed. Describes advocacy actions and a way to evaluate progress, but some elements are unclear or not well connected to the proposed change.	advocacy goal is unclear or has little connection to the work completed in Artifact 1. Provides limited supporting information or evidence and gives little attention to the people or groups needed for the advocacy effort or to partnership with multilingual learners and/or their families. Provides an incomplete or unclear course of action and does not adequately explain how progress will be evaluated or used to determine next steps.
Artifact 3: Advocacy Communication	Clearly communicates the policy or practice change being advocated for, why the change is needed, and the action or response being sought from the intended audience. Explains how the current policy or practice affects multilingual learners and/or their families	Communicates the proposed policy or practice change and the need for change, but the action or response being sought from the intended audience is unclear or underdeveloped. Describes how the current policy or practice affects multilingual learners and/or their families and	Identifies a policy or practice issue, but the proposed change, need for change, or action being sought is unclear. Provides limited explanation or evidence of how the current policy or practice affects multilingual learners

	and uses relevant evidence and, when applicable, policies, rights, laws, or other guidance to support the need for change. Incorporates the perspectives and priorities of multilingual learners and/or their families and acknowledges relevant perspectives or considerations that may differ from the educator's own.	provides supporting evidence, but the evidence or applicable guidance is not clearly connected to the proposed change. Includes the perspectives of multilingual learners and/or their families or other relevant perspectives, but these perspectives are not clearly connected to the advocacy communication.	and/or their families. Provides little evidence of the perspectives and priorities of multilingual learners and/or their families or consideration of other relevant perspectives.

Part 3. Reflection

Suggested word count: 250–400 words

Use the word count as a guide to write a personal reflection about your work on this micro-credential. For guidance on writing a good reflection, review this resource:

How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?

Please do not include any information that could identify you, your students, or their families to your reviewers.

Answer the following questions:

1. How has your understanding of advocacy for multilingual learners and their families changed or deepened through this micro-credential? Describe what you now understand about identifying issues, examining evidence, and advocating for equitable policies or practices.
2. What have you learned about advocating with multilingual learners and their families rather than only advocating for them? How will this understanding influence the way you listen to, include, and respond to their perspectives and priorities?
3. How will you apply what you have learned about advocacy in your professional practice? Identify an actionable next step you can take to strengthen your advocacy for multilingual learners and their families.

Passing:

To receive a passing score for Part 3, your reflection must demonstrate how your learning in this micro-credential has influenced your understanding of advocacy and your future professional practice.

A passing response:

- Explains how the educator's understanding of advocacy for multilingual learners and their families has changed or deepened;
- Reflects on the importance of partnering with multilingual learners and families and incorporating their perspectives and priorities into advocacy; and
- Identifies how the educator will apply the learning in professional practice, including an actionable next step.