What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

The education of multilingual learners requires both a depth and a breadth of knowledge among leaders to ensure that systems are established and resourced to provide equitable opportunities for students and equitable access for families. *Transforming Schools for Multilingual Learners: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators* provides both the research foundation and the practical application for schools, through the requisite asset-based lens. This framework can assist schools in planning school improvement plans and in their equity, diversity, and inclusion goals. In the end, schools can be places where all are welcomed, all are celebrated, and all can achieve.

—Kellie Jones, Director of Bilingual Education, Brockton Public Schools

Transforming Schools for Multilingual Learners: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators is a must-have resource for school leaders, as well as in-service teachers and preservice teachers, to better understand how to create policies, practices, and programs for multilingual learners to thrive. In this second edition, Debbie Zacarian provides the latest, detailed information for all educators to better understand the needs of multilingual learners and what to do to support their success. This book should be a staple in everyone's professional library.

—Maria G. Dove, Professor, Molloy University, School of Education and Human Services

As a nation, we have undergone and continue to experience changes in school policies, practices, and programs for multilingual learners. Through myriad real-life vignettes and exemplars, in this updated edition we come to witness how effective language programs can meet the requirements for federal compliance while slowly evolving on the local level to be more inclusive of the voices of educators, students, and families. Debbie Zacarian adeptly captures this transformation as she juxtaposes the increasingly important roles of educators as collaborators and advocates for multilingual learners in program planning, delivery, and evaluation against a backdrop of a less-than-adequate workforce that is not well informed in understanding the social, cultural, and linguistic assets of these students.

—Margo Gottlieb, WIDA Co-founder and Lead Developer, Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The second edition of *Transforming Schools for Multilingual Learners: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators* definitely joins the short list of books that all teachers and schools who serve English language learners should be reading!

—Larry Ferlazzo, High School Teacher, *Education Week* Teacher Advice Columnist, Author

This newly revised edition of *Transforming Schools for Multilingual Learners: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators* is a must-have for schools on the journey of creating equitable learning opportunities for all students. In these times of racial injustices, the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and a slew of global and regional crises, it is critically important that all educators hear Debbie Zacarian's argument and act on her carefully created recommendations for supporting multilingual learners.

—Andrea Honigsfeld, Professor and Author, Molloy University

Under the guidance of well-informed and dedicated district leadership, multilinguals can thrive. Debbie Zacarian's second edition addresses the most recent topics in our field while anchored firmly on decades of sound research around what works for multilingual students. The first edition lit the way for many, and this second edition promises to illuminate the path for school leaders committed to the march for educational equity for multilingual students.

—Tan Huynh, Language Specialist, Author, Blogger, Podcaster

Debbie's second edition brings to the forefront of school reform the importance of assets-based approaches to strengthen the success of multilingual learners. School teams will definitely welcome the ideas, rubrics, and strategies for creating effective policies, practices, and structures for transforming schools.

—Margarita Espino Calderón, Professor Emerita, Johns Hopkins University

Debbie Zacarian's heartfelt and strategic guide is a must-read for leaders designing and refining programs for MLs!

—Tonya Ward Singer, Author of *EL Excellence Every Day* and Founder of Courageous Literacy LLC
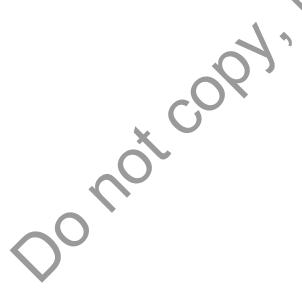
Transforming Schools
for Multilingual Learners

Second Edition

This book is dedicated to educators who are transforming schools to support the strengths, talents, and contributions of multilingual learners.

Transforming Schools for Multilingual Learners

A Comprehensive Guide for Educators

Second Edition

Debbie Zacarian

Foreword by Katie Toppel

CORWIN

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for downloadable resources.

Foreword

In 2016, I co-founded a virtual book chat with Tan Huynh on Twitter to connect and learn from other educators who teach multilingual learners. Since then, I have led educators from across the globe in over 30 book studies focused on improving practice and instruction for multilingual learners. Educators from a variety of time zones, backgrounds, and educational contexts connect virtually with shared interest in enhancing our professional learning around meeting the needs of multilingual learners. Learning with and from this network has dramatically shifted my practice, and I owe a debt of gratitude to all the researchers, authors, and educators in the field who humbly and openly share their expertise. Debbie Zacarian is a prime example of someone who continuously shares important information to support educators with varying levels of expertise about working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. She has participated in several book studies as a featured author and generously engages with audiences as an advocate for inclusive and asset-based practices.

Although many educators are dedicated to effectively teaching and supporting multilingual learners, we know that teachers alone cannot bear the responsibility of knowing and providing what that entails. In particular, the sole responsibility cannot fall to language teachers alone—the success of such learners warrants a communal response. In the opening pages of *Transforming Schools for Multilingual Learners: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators*, Dr. Zacarian affirms the need for a collective effort among a larger network of stakeholders to share responsibility and collectively shape policies and decisions that impact the school experiences of multilingual learners. Shared ownership requires that we collectively learn and increase our awareness so that educators in a variety of roles can make informed decisions in the best interest of multilingual learners. Dr. Zacarian's guide provides foundational information about multilingual learners that is valuable to anyone who works in and on behalf of school systems.

Whether you are a teacher, coach, building or district-level leader, university faculty, or you serve students in another capacity, the information in this book will equip you with tremendous insight and tools to strategically inform and improve language education programming.

As I read, I came across sections that made me reflect on my journey across my life cycle as an educator. When I got my first job teaching in a bilingual Head Start program for migrant children, I quickly realized that my teacher program had not sufficiently prepared me to teach the students in my classroom. I truly don't remember learning much, if anything, about how to support students learning English, and I certainly did not have extensive, or even adequate, knowledge about language acquisition, instructional strategies, or working with diverse families. I appreciate Dr. Zacarian's advocacy for professional learning that aligns with the needs of educators, much in the way that we tailor our instruction to the unique needs of the students we serve. I am excited thinking about this book being in the hands of instructional coaches, administrators, and other influencers who can be instrumental changemakers in support of educating multilingual learners. I am equally excited for this book to be in the hands of educators and others so we may be empowered to better advocate for what we and our students need.

When I became a language specialist, a colleague introduced me to the concept of coteaching, and we took an interest in establishing more collaboration between classroom teachers and language specialists to better align content and language instruction. We gathered informative resources on collaboration and coteaching, which we used to advocate for program change. I wish this book had been among those resources because of its comprehensive approach.

Dr. Zacarian emphasizes how important it is to critically reflect on the factors that influence program success and for whom. She provides insight on the differences within populations of students who qualify for language support as well as the educators who teach them. She wholly addresses how these differences require thoughtful consideration when selecting programming and planning instruction for multilingual learners. She helps us see that English learners are not a homogenous group, providing us with essential tools for learning about the various multilingual learners in our contexts and making informed decisions given the multitude of language program options.

Something else I loved in this book is the phrase *constellation of caregivers* in reference to the various adults who make up students' families and extended support systems. It brings to mind the idea that constellations are all beautifully unique, which is true for students and their circumstances. Part of our work is becoming familiar with each constellation so that we see its uniqueness among the others but also to understand the collective beauty that exists in the larger expanse of sky.

I hope this book influences your knowledge, intentions, decisions, and actions so that your multilingual learners can shine brightly.

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Katie Toppel

English Language Development Specialist

Co-author of *DIY PD: A Guide to Self-Directed Learning for Educators of
Multilingual Learners* and *Making Content Comprehensible
for Multilingual Learners* (6th ed.)

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Acknowledgments

About the Author

Dr. Debbie Zacarian, founder of Zacarian Consulting, provides professional development, strategic planning, and technical assistance for K–16 educators of culturally and linguistically diverse populations. She has served as an expert consultant for school districts, universities, associations, and organizations including the Massachusetts Parent Information Resource Center and Federation for Children with Special Needs.

Debbie has worked with numerous state and local education agencies as well as community and technical colleges and universities, and she has written the language assistance programming policies for many rural, suburban, and urban districts. Debbie served on the faculty of University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where she co-wrote and was the co-principal investigator of a National Professional Development grant initiative supporting the professional preparation of educators of multilingual learners. Debbie also designed and taught courses for pre- and in-service administrators and teachers on culturally responsive teaching and supervision practices, multilingual development, and ethnographic research. In addition, she served as a program director at the Collaborative for Educational Services, where she provided professional development for thousands of educators of multilingual students, mentored many community-technical and university faculty on responsive practices with culturally and linguistically diverse populations, and partnered with Fitchburg State University in co-writing and enacting a National Professional Development initiative that supported STEM education. Debbie also directed the Amherst Public Schools bilingual and English learner programming, for which she and the district received state and national honors.

The author of more than 100 publications, her most recent professional books include *Beyond Crises: Overcoming Linguistic and Cultural Inequities in Communities, Schools, and Classrooms; Responsive Schooling for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students; Teaching to Empower: Taking Action to Foster Student Agency, Self-Confidence, and Collaboration;* and *Teaching to Strengths: Supporting Students Living With Trauma, Violence, and Chronic Stress.*

Introduction

The first edition of this book was written as a comprehensive resource of the most up-to-date research and evidence-based strategies to create successful programming for the rapidly changing population of multilingual learners (MLs). It was also written as a user-friendly guide for educators to put pedagogy into practice. Highly received by leading scholars and practitioners across the country, it became the go-to book nationally and required reading for many pre- and in-service administrators, teacher-leaders, coaches, and other stakeholders.

A good deal has transpired since the first edition was published, including

- changes to federal laws and regulations;

- increased understanding about the urgency to use strengths-based and culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies and practices;

- deeper understanding about the epic number of children experiencing adverse childhood experiences, including children fleeing crises in their home countries, children who are undocumented, children of undocumented families, and unaccompanied minors who live in constant fear of deportation;

- the global COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustices, and natural disasters; and

- increased awareness about the importance of supporting and enhancing student, family, school, and community partnerships.

As a result of these changes, most educators and stakeholders at the school, district, and state levels are seeking support in building, strengthening, and sustaining successful programming for MLs. It has been my honor to work with many state and local educators across the country during these unprecedented times and to see the creativity, flexibility, and downright genius that so many have engaged to transform practice.

What's New in the Second Edition?

This second edition adds to the practice by looking closely at the lessons learned during the past decade and the changes that are likely to occur in the future. The change in the title to *Transforming Schools for Multilingual Learners: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators* reflects a renewed spirit of inclusion and solidarity by reflecting

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the strengths that all MLs, their families, educators, and local, school, and classroom communities possess and bring to creating successful programming for MLs. This edition also acknowledges the move away from using a deficit-based approach where MLs and their families are seen as having missed something (such as English) to acknowledging and infusing the assets they bring to all that we do. In this spirit, a range of terms and associated acronyms have been used interchangeably, including English learners (ELs); English language learners (ELLs); heritage language learners; long-term English learners (LTELs); students in dual language, two-way, and immersion programs; and students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). However, the strengths-based term *multilingual learner* is used throughout the book to describe this broad range of students. It encompasses those who have learned or are learning two or more languages and cultures.

The new edition also reflects the trends of leadership in our ever-changing society, from the singular person sitting atop the mantle of power to a collective of people who work together. While leaders have a prominent role in shaping and supervising state policy implementation at the district, school, and classroom levels, they also are charged with creating a school and classroom culture and climate that fully support MLs to succeed. One of the largest lessons we learned during the COVID-19 crises is that we cannot do this work alone. It becomes much more possible when we work in close collaboration and partnership with others. Working groups composed of multilingual, multicultural family liaisons, teachers, coaches, counselors, and others are foundational for creating and sustaining successful language assistance programs. As such, the term *educators* is used throughout this book to reflect the agency that we all exercise, as leaders, advocates, policy makers, and truly inspirers of educating MLs. The book also moves from the term *parents/guardians* to *families* to reflect the ever-changing constellation of caregivers in our society, from the traditional two-parent home to two parents, single parents, foster parents, grandparents, custodial parents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, unrelated people, and extrafamilial people who care for a child. The new edition also includes various voices from the field to illustrate the ideals of creating language assistance programming that works.

Transforming Schools for Multilingual Learners: A Comprehensive Guide for Educators focuses on the ways in which school leaders—including superintendents, principals, curriculum supervisors, coaches, mentors, teachers, teacher educators, and other stakeholders—can create effective school policies, practices, and structures for MLs in their contexts. The goal of this second edition is to help educators who are just beginning to work with MLs as well as those who are veterans build a school environment where MLs can flourish. Each chapter opens with a scenario and focuses on a key element of language assistance programming.

Chapter 1: Starting With Our Students and Ourselves describes this ever-expanding population of students, their educational programming, and their teachers. It presents an analysis of what the demographics tell us and a rationale for developing programming for MLs that is targeted to the needs of individual districts.

Chapter 2: Integrating the Regulations and Principles presents the major historical events that led to the current laws and regulations governing the education of MLs, key principles of second language acquisition, and a description of the various types of program models for teaching MLs.

Chapter 3: Selecting Effective Program Models discusses the processes and protocols for identifying MLs, selecting a program model, staffing the model, and evaluating its effectiveness. It includes forms and protocols associated with the various processes involved in the identification, program selection, and ongoing evaluation tasks and procedures.

Chapter 4: Designing, Implementing, and Strengthening the English Language Development Component details the organizational structures, such as time allocation and staffing considerations, and practices that should be included to effectively implement this critical component into all that educators do.

Chapter 5: Addressing the Core Content Component of a Language Education Program. As schools build, strengthen, and maintain programs for MLs, it is important to define what constitutes a high-quality core content lesson and learning environment. This chapter provides eight guiding principles for providing such lessons for language and content learning and a checklist for teachers, peers, supervisors, and others to use in assessing the overall success of content planning and delivery.

Chapter 6: Emphasizing the Importance of Family Engagement acknowledges that establishing relationships with families is an important objective for educators at all levels. Many educators are not familiar with the various cultural norms of MLs and their families, and many families of MLs are not familiar with school practices in the United States. This chapter provides a strengths-based framework for creating, enacting, and sustaining strong family–school partnerships.

Chapter 7: Identifying and Working With Multilingual Learners With Learning Differences and Learning Disabilities describes U.S. special education trends, the application of a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, and the factors that should be considered to use this framework effectively with MLs. It presents a team approach for evaluating and improving the learning environment and outcomes for MLs and a protocol for engaging in this process.

Chapter 8: Putting It All Together: Making Data-Driven Decisions to Strengthen the Success of Language Assistance Programs discusses the application of strengths-based assessment and evaluation of language assistance programming by exploring the following questions: What role can educators play in enacting language education instruction policies and programming that are evidence based, properly resourced, and proven to work? What are key considerations for enacting strengths-based policies and practices that empower MLs and their families? What rubrics and monitoring charts should we consider for examining the effectiveness of our language assistance programming in relation to MLs? This chapter also offers a rationale for selecting and using a collaborative process for understanding MLs' academic performance and needs. Included in this chapter are protocols for examining the effectiveness of the classroom as well as school–parent engagement and community building.

Starting With Our Students and Ourselves

Manuel moved to the United States from El Salvador when he was 13 years old. In El Salvador, he had worked on his uncle's bus as the ticket taker and money exchanger. He is a very sweet, polite Spanish speaker who came to the United States without any formal schooling or prior exposure to English. His family moved to Centerville, a small town, to work in a relative's restaurant, where they hoped they could earn a living wage. Although Manuel had no prior schooling, Mr. Pronowitz, the principal at Centerville Middle School, decided to place Manuel in the eighth grade so that he could be with his same-age peers.

Ernesto moved from Mexico to the same town as Manuel. His father, an engineer, had been transferred to work in a city near Centerville. Before moving, Ernesto had completed seventh grade in a private school where he had received an excellent education. He loved mathematics and had won an award for "most promising mathematician." When his parents enrolled him in Centerville Middle School, his father tried to convey Ernesto's prior schooling experiences to Mr. Pronowitz. But because Ernesto's father's English was limited and Ernesto and his mother could not speak any English at all, Mr. Pronowitz could not understand much about Ernesto's strengths, achievements, and needs. He assigned him to the same grade as Manuel.

A few days after Manuel and Ernesto began school, they were given a standardized test to determine their fluency in English. Both scored at the beginning level. With this testing information, Mr. Pronowitz assigned them to the English as a second language (ESL) class that met for one 45-minute class period a day. He also placed them in the same remedial classes for the rest of their school day. He assumed that Manuel and Ernesto would feel more comfortable with each other because they were the school's only Spanish-speaking multilingual learners (MLs). He also thought that placing them in remedial classes would be less demanding for them because they were both beginning learners of English, unlike the other MLs in the school. Overall, Mr. Pronowitz thought that these placements were academically appropriate and sensitive to the boys' needs.

When Manuel and Ernesto began speaking to each other, Ernesto quickly realized that Manuel had never been to school. Ernesto felt that his classes, especially math, were much easier than he was used to. He assumed that being a Spanish-speaking ML in the United States must mean that he was not a smart or good student. He felt isolated and divorced from everything that was familiar to him. Within a few weeks, he began to feel very depressed. By the end of the first term, Ernesto had decided to stop attending school. His parents quickly moved him to a parochial school, assuming that it would be a much better place for their son than Centerville Middle School was. When Mr. Pronowitz was made aware of Ernesto's absences, he called Ernesto's home. He was unable to communicate with Ernesto or his parents. While he thought about Ernesto occasionally, he never knew why he missed so much school. When Ernesto stopped attending altogether, Mr. Pronowitz assumed that he had moved to another town.

Manuel also felt entirely lost. He could not understand any of his classes. They were moving much too quickly for him. He was constantly exhausted from trying to learn. At least Ernesto could help him understand a little about what was happening. But when Ernesto was absent, which had become a frequent occurrence, Manuel's day was hopelessly confusing. He began thinking about quitting school. After a month of struggling, he decided to meet with Mr. Pronowitz. He was failing all his classes and desperately wanted to do well. He asked his uncle if he would come to translate for him at the meeting. When they met, Mr. Pronowitz decided that Manuel should be referred for a special education evaluation to see if he had a learning disability. With Manuel's parents' approval (they trusted the school and didn't believe it was their place to do anything more than listen and heed the principal's advice), the referral process began. The assessors assumed that Manuel's poor progress was due to a disability as opposed to what it really was: lack of prior formal education and academic skills, even in his first language.

Sergi, a Ukrainian American multilingual learner who was born in the United States and had attended Centerville Middle School for 3 years, then moved to New York City, where he enrolled in the ninth grade. He was one of the city's 140,000 MLs (New York City Department of Education, 2020–21), and when his English proficiency was tested, Sergi was found to be at the fourth of five English proficiency levels for MLs (New York City Department of Education, 2022). The school decided that he did not need to be enrolled in the language education program as he appeared to be able to learn in the same classes as his English-fluent classmates. Within the first few weeks, Sergi was unable to keep up with his peers. He had trouble grasping some of the vocabulary and course assignments and tasks. He pored over his homework and stayed up well after midnight each night. He also attempted to go for after-school help but worried that he would be fired from the after-school job that his family depended on. As a result, Sergi began failing many of his courses and thinking that school was not for him. By the end of the ninth grade, Sergi was like 28% of the city's MLs—a dropout (New York State Education Department, 2019).

These scenarios are not unusual among MLs in the United States. Many are failing, being referred to special education programs, and dropping out of school. When we measure achievement by the tests that each state administers to its students, as required by federal regulations (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2015) or the graduation rates of MLs in the United States (USDOE, n.d.-c), the achievement gap between the nation's MLs and the overall student population is significant and growing. Data from the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.-a) show that close to 80% of eighth-grade English-fluent students scored at the basic or above level in reading, whereas only 32% of MLs performed at these levels. Additionally, 84% of students graduated from high school in 4 years as opposed to 67% of MLs (USDOE, n.d.-c). The difference in graduation rates between the two groups exposes a grave consequence to consider—especially because we know the economic and employment benefits of possessing at least a high school diploma.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the nation. One month into the crisis, Dr. Anthony Fauci, advisor to the White House, stated that the pandemic "shines a very bright light on some of the real weaknesses and foibles in our society" (C-SPAN, 2020). His words affirm the data that have been presented thus far about the growing ML population, and there are additional data that are as important for us to consider as we make our way forward. Shortly after the pandemic began, over 1.1 million students—2% of the total student population and five times more than what was anticipated—dropped out of school. It may take years for enrollment to return, if at all, to its prepandemic level (Lennon & Stanton, 2021). After a year of the COVID-19 crises, absenteeism surged among the nation's MLs (Lehrer-Small, 2021) and was in sharp contrast to prepandemic findings that MLs were 15% more likely to attend school than never-MLs (USDOE, n.d.-b). Further, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2022), in its "nationally representative report of elementary and secondary public school teachers" (p. v), found that during the 2020–21 school year (the height of the pandemic), many MLs lacked access to school meals and school supports and lacked appropriate workspace to learn remotely. The cascade of obstacles that so many MLs and their families faced led many of us to see just how impactful the pandemic was for the most vulnerable of our students.

All of the data that have been presented about MLs thus far speaks not only to the need to think of more responsive ways of designing more effective language assistance programming, but also to the ways in which we must transform our practices for MLs to succeed in school and in their lives. This book focuses on creating, implementing, and sustaining effective language assistance programs for MLs. It is intended for school- and district-level leaders, teachers, leaders, advocates, and others who are charged with administering and supervising the curriculum, instructional programming, teachers and support staff, family and community outreach and engagement, and all related activities regarding the successful education of MLs.

The following questions are intended to help us in this reexamination process:

- Who are MLs?
- Typically, who are the educators of MLs?
- How does what we are doing complement our district's and school's mission and vision?

Who are MLs?

MLs represent a large and growing population in U.S. schools. Between 2000 and 2017, the number of MLs in the United States increased by more than 1 million, from 8% to close to 10% of the total student population (Mitchell, 2020; USDOE, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2020). During the same time, the total number of students flatlined (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019, 2021). Urban schools, which were once dominated by monolingual speakers of English, have quickly become much more linguistically diverse. Simultaneously, suburban districts that had never had MLs are "rapidly becoming more culturally, economically, linguistically, and racially diverse, yet these diverse groups are likely to live in neighborhoods where they are isolated from whites regardless of income" (Edwards et al., 2017, p. 109–110. Rural areas of the United States are also experiencing significant growth in MLs (REL Central, 2019).

Almost half of the nation's students lived in poverty before the COVID-19 pandemic (Southern Education Foundation, 2020), and the number of MLs living in poverty is disproportionately higher than those who speak English only (Century Foundation, 2021). Further, MLs are much more likely to attend socioeconomically segregated schools with fewer resources (Quintero & Hansen, 2021).

One of the most profound factors among all the nation's students is the epic number of them who are exposed to adverse childhood experiences. Almost half of U.S. children and youth have experienced or are experiencing trauma, violence, and/or chronic stress in the form of abuse, neglect, or household challenges such as a family member who is seriously ill or has died, is incarcerated, abuses drugs, and more (Bethell et al., 2017; Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, 2013). In addition to this startling statistic about the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, many MLs and their families have also had major disruptions in their lives. Millions of MLs have experienced the following:

- ✓ living in war or conflict zones;
- ✓ being persecuted in their home countries; being displaced;
- ✓ the long, arduous, and extremely dangerous trip to perceived safety in the United States;
- ✓ being separated from families; being inhumanely treated in detention centers; and
- ✓ living in constant fear of being deported and/or becoming homeless.

(Zacarian et al., 2021, p. 47)

As a result, they have not had the continuous systematic acculturation experiences of schooling. Further, when many enroll in U.S. schools, it may be their first exposure to literacy and content learning (Calderón, 2007).

What constitutes a family is also evolving in our contemporary society to include children being raised by two parents, a single parent, foster parents, grandparents, blended parents, extended family, and/or with extrafamilial supports (Zacarian & Silverstone, 2015). It also includes MLs who have come to the United States as a whole family unit and those who have been separated from their families, as well as undocumented children or citizen children of undocumented families (Menjivar & Cervantes, 2016), many of whom are living with unrelated people and in extreme isolation (Yoshikawa, 2011).

To say the least, MLs are not a monolithic group. In addition to all the factors that have already been presented, MLs in the United States represent 400 languages (USDOE, n.d.-d). While 75% are Spanish speakers and 2% each Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese speakers, the diversity of languages is important to consider as we build language assistance programming for all MLs. Equally important is the reality that some schools have MLs from a wide range of language groups, while others have students from just one, and adjacent districts may have MLs who speak different languages than their neighbors. Further, there may be speakers of one language in one school and speakers of another language in another school in the same district. The sheer diversity of MLs' home languages is important for us to consider.

The primary language that a student speaks is but one descriptor. Even students who speak Spanish, for example, have distinct cultures and represent many countries. Some hail from countries in Central and South America, others are from Caribbean nations, and many others were born in the United States. They also speak different dialects. Similar diversity is the reality for students from any language group.

Additionally, some of the nation's MLs have had rich literacy and prior schooling experiences (Zacarian, 2013; Zacarian & Soto, 2020). Typically, these students' families have had strong literacy experiences and their child-rearing practices are oriented to developing the language and cognitive skills that their children will need in school. It is typical in these homes to observe families reading a variety of texts and for their children to observe these literacy behaviors as part of their development. As such, their home life includes everyday practices such as observing a family member reading the newspaper, recipes, books, and other written materials that demonstrate literacy as a cultural way of being and acting. Thus, one segment of MLs enters school with the type of school-matched language and thinking skills that are used in school regardless of what language(s) they speak. However, this does not negate the fact that they need responsive cultural supports to become members of their school and classroom communities and language supports to become proficient in English and able to perform

at grade level in core academic subjects in English (Zacarian & Soto, 2020; Zacarian et al., 2021).

Conversely, there is also a large group of MLs who have not yet had the opportunity to be exposed to the repeated and continuous school-matched language and literacy experiences that are used in school. While they must receive the same types of culturally responsive practices that support them to feel safe, a sense of belonging, valued, and competent, as do all MLs, they must also engage in learning and using the type of vocabulary, language functions, and context knowledge that is used in school settings (Zacarian & Soto, 2020). This is not to say that such students do not possess communicative skills or that they are not academically inclined! Indeed, they possess a repertoire of language practices that they routinely use, as we all do, to communicate, think, and much more. An essential condition, which is discussed in later chapters of this book, is that educators designing, implementing, and sustaining effective ML language assistance programming must take time to understand, affirm, and acknowledge the various experiences of such students and draw from this knowledge to support them in learning successfully in school settings (Solorza & Garcia, 2020).

Each of these factors is important to consider when building and sustaining effective language assistance programs for MLs. While many of us are most concerned with the speed at which students learn English and are often impatient with the process, the variation among MLs in the United States must not be ignored, as it will greatly help us in creating, implementing, and sustaining programs that work.

In sum, MLs in the United States come from a wide range of personal, linguistic, cultural, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. They also continue to grow significantly as an important segment of the nation's students. However, overall, they are performing at a much lower rate than their English-fluent peers and have been dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To advocate for the best language assistance program and support students' success, district- and school-based administrators, teachers, specialists, and others need to understand their ML populations very well, from personal, social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. They also need to understand that MLs come from diverse backgrounds, including the epic number that have experienced one or more adversities and have varying degrees of school readiness. Simultaneously, we must acknowledge and affirm the wealth of personal, social, cultural, and linguistic assets and experiences that all MLs and their families possess and support these in all we do to create effective programming on behalf of this growing population.

Are there commonalities among the ways in which we organize programming for MLs?

If you were to visit classrooms in the United States that have MLs, you might notice many different features. In some, you would hear the student's native language being spoken. In others, you would hear only English because even using another language informally is discouraged. You might also observe students having little to no

support to learn English in some schools, while in others you would observe MLs in multigrade classrooms spending the school day with other MLs. You might travel only a few miles to another school and see students spending half of their school day learning in one language and half in another. There are literally hundreds of programming models for MLs to learn English as they learn academic content (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Soltero, 2004). While many believe that the name of a program, such as *transitional bilingual education*, defines how it is practiced, the reality is that any program model can be enacted differently in one district than it is in the next, adding up to the hundreds of types of language assistance programming offered (Lessow-Hurley, 2008). We will look more closely at these in the next chapter.

School leaders have to sift through each of these types to try to identify the one that they believe will work most effectively in their context. They also must consider how prepared their school's or district's teachers are to work with MLs.

Typically, who are the educators of MLs?

In the early 1990s, most of the nation's teachers were white, middle-class, monolingual English speakers (Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996), and the situation has not changed dramatically since then (NCES, 2018). Further, the percentage of teachers and administrators formally trained in ESL or bilingual education has not kept pace with the growth in the nation's ML population (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). Teacher preparation programs are overwhelmingly dominated by faculty who are white (NCES, 2020). Additionally, in an empirical review of 101 studies that were conducted between 1980 and 2002 to investigate teacher preparation to work with students from diverse populations, Hollins and Guzman (2005) found that most students enrolled in teacher preparation programs were more comfortable and preferred working with students and parents from backgrounds similar to their own. Further, many educators who work in poor urban and rural areas were fast-tracked into teaching without the depth of training required to effectively teach MLs (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

Because many educators have no experience working with students unlike themselves—including students who live in poverty, students who have experienced adversities, and older students who have had limited exposure to literacy, or none at all, and no prior formal schooling—they have no experiential framework to draw from. Further, many report feeling inadequate in working with this growing population (Heineke & Vera, 2022; Samson & Lesaux, 2015). All these factors pose complex challenges for educators to truly create effective programs for MLs (Arias & Markos, 2016; Lindholm-Leary, 2015). Research in this critical area demonstrates the disparities between the significant number of MLs and the less-than-adequate workforce prepared to teach them (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

We must pay far more attention to the federal laws and regulations governing the preparation of educators and resources required on behalf of the growing population

of MLs in the United States. The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education (2015) stated:

> School districts have an obligation to provide the personnel and resources necessary to effectively implement their chosen EL [English learner] programs. This obligation includes having highly qualified teachers to provide language assistance services, trained administrators who can evaluate these teachers, and adequate and appropriate materials for the EL programs. At a minimum, every school district is responsible for ensuring that there is an adequate number of teachers to instruct EL students and that these teachers have mastered the skills necessary to effectively teach in the district's program for EL students. (p. 14)

While Title II of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) changed the previously used term "highly qualified" to the term "effective" (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, p. 436), the sheer number of teachers that need to be trained across the country is staggering. In 2013–14, the 10 states with the highest percentage of MLs needed about 82,000 "effectively" prepared teachers in the succeeding 5 years. When we consider the growth that has occurred in the ML population across the country, it is likely that most of the nation's teachers need training on how to work successfully with MLs. Just as we don't want MLs to sink or swim in the educational system, we all want educators who are prepared to meet the needs of our ever-growing, ever-changing MLs.

What about teachers who have had training?

Some schools do have general education teachers who are trained to teach MLs. Many are members of the same language-minority groups as their students and have a solid understanding about their students' language, culture, and prior schooling as well as the developmental process of learning a new language and are prepared to teach this diverse population.

It is critical to support such educators to feel and be empowered as leaders in their schools and valued as assets for teaching MLs. In a study of a large group of teachers who participated in a longitudinal study that led to what is known as the *sheltered instruction observation protocol* (Echevarria et al., 2008), researchers from the Center for Applied Linguistics and the Center for Research on Equity and Diversity spent 5 years observing classroom teachers at schools in which MLs were performing well. At the heart of this research and the findings associated with it is a strong belief in working as collaborative partners on behalf of the success of MLs. In writing about moving beyond crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises that students experience, Zacarian et al. (2021) demonstrate the critical importance of partnerships among students, families, and educators in creating successful programming for MLs and overcoming longstanding inequities that have persisted for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

We need to understand ways to transform our schools so that students, families, and educators have a voice in the programming that we implement. MLs can succeed in the learning process and become active members of their school community when we work together and are copowered to do so. Educators and other stakeholders have an enormous, if not the most essential, role in the educational programming for the nation's MLs. We are the primary architects and supervisors of the instructional programming that is provided.

How does what we are doing complement our district's and school's mission and vision?

Many, if not most, schools have a mission statement. Mission statements typically mean that educators have examined their school and its core purpose to define and make available to the community their school's or district's goals and how they will be measured. Mission statements might be considered the symbolic heart of the school, as they describe the best of an organization's core values and beliefs for building a school culture and climate. In mission statements, school leaders often encapsulate what they believe to be important for learners and the school community.

The same type of process is needed for creating a language assistance program for MLs. Doing so takes time, collaboration, and a belief that the program must complement the mission of the school while also addressing the complex needs of language-minority students. Selecting a one-size-fits-all model does not work for the widely diverse population of MLs.

To create optimal language education assistance programming, whether for large or small numbers of MLs, requires that we think of learners as individuals, members of the school community, and members of the town or city community as well. To lead our schools, we must collaborate with our students, their families, teachers, and other stakeholders.

In Chapter 2, we begin to look more closely at developing a rationale for a district's or school's program model for its MLs.

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