

Creating a Supportive Teaching and Learning Environment for English Language Learners

Why go this route?

It is necessary to build the environment that will support learning. It does not just magically appear. It takes time, commitment, and belief in oneself and one's students. All students can learn, given the appropriate supports and models, once the barriers to responsive education are eliminated. These barriers include:

- Climate barriers
- Expectational barriers
- Cultural barriers
- Language barriers
- Content barriers
- Resource barriers
- Delivery barriers
- Assessment barriers
- Community involvement barriers (SEE INSERT C for Step 2)

In a supportive and responsive environment students feel more confident and capable of accessing the language and content, and teachers feel more competent, and know they have done their best to meet the needs of their students.

You'll know you've arrived when...

- When students have built meaningful and trusting relationships with other students and adults in the school
- Students take risks in interacting with others and producing language
- English Language Learner (ELL) attendance rates increase
- ELLs are motivated to learn
- There is active involvement by parents
- Students are ready to learn!

Construction Zone



It's about TIME

- It is imperative that the entire staff increase their intercultural competence, based on the nine areas. This can be facilitated by someone who is well versed in cultural topics, and is able to present a wide range of engaging activities for staff to increase their competence.
- It would be wise to administer an attitudinal survey to staff based on the nine areas of intercultural competence, to increase their self-awareness and determine staff needs.



- Staff should be involved in activities designed to enhance their ability to develop and maintain effective staff-student relationships.


Potential COSTS

- Workshop presenters and/or speakers to facilitate the dialogue. The costs for these sessions can range from \$500-\$3000 per day, in addition to possible teacher stipends and substitute costs.
- Materials should be made available to staff on the various cultures and religions represented in the student body.



The Process

*A step-by-step
guide to developing a
shared school vision.*

NOTE: Steps marked with a  are accompanied by one or more inserts, included in this packet.

1 Get to Know Your Students Get to know them as a whole individual, not just as an English Language Learner.

Each student comes into our school system with a cultural/linguistic background that we need to become familiar with. Understanding these unique aspects of our individual students makes the difference between the student being ready to learn or not. (See INSERT for Step 1.)

2 Build Connections and Relationships It is important that the child see that you value them as a person, and are willing and eager to become an important part of their lives.

Assign the student a buddy, not necessarily a same language peer. This will help them acquire English, and get them to speak English more readily. Do not have them depend too much on a native language peer to translate, or they will not strive to understand English, and will just wait for the translation. Additionally, we must encourage teacher-parent, parent-teacher relationships, which can only be initiated when the student feels comfortable enough to bring the parent into the setting. (See INSERTS A, B and C for Step 2.)


3 Increase Your Cultural Knowledge Learn as much as you can about the language and culture of your students.

Encourage students to express their points of view and opinions on different issues and share information about their culture. Bring language and culture into the classroom. Culture is a recipe for behavior, whether it be social or academic behavior. The better we understand a student's culture, we can more fully accommodate their social and academic behavior. (See INSERT for Step 3.)

4 Create an Environment of High Expectations English Language Learners must strive to achieve the same goals as native speakers, and are capable of achieving those goals if proper supports are put in place for them from the onset.

5 Develop a Student-Centered Approach to Teaching and Learning. Students can better acquire language when activities are planned that actively involve students.

We can only get meaningful student input once we have established trusting relationships with our students. (See INSERTS A-C for Step 5.)



Getting more mileage from creating supportive teaching and learning environments for ELLs

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

- Title III of NCLB requires that schools ensure that children who come from homes where English is not the primary language (ELLs) are assessed annually for English proficiency to determine if they are achieving adequate yearly progress in English Language acquisition. ELL's are one of the subpopulations for NCLB AYP on MEAP and MI-ACCESS. In order to facilitate success for these students, a responsive and supportive teaching and learning environment must be established.

Education YES!

- A component of each school's annual report card is assessment data on student performance. AYP is based on scores for all students, and ELLs are one of the nine designated sub-populations for which data is disaggregated. In order for these students to experience fair access to the curriculum and the entire educational experience, they must feel supported in their efforts in a system that recognizes their uniqueness and builds on their strengths.



Resources

Books

The Principal's Book of Lists

Ramsey, John Wiley & Sons. 2002.

The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning

Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson, Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer Press. 2004.

What Every Teacher Should Know About Diverse Learners

Donna Walker Tileston, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. 2004.

Relationship-Driven Classroom Management

John M. Vitto, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. 2003.

Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators

Jerry V. Diller and Jean Moule, Belmont, CA: Thomson-Wadsworth. 2005.

Primary Author for this MI-Map Packet

Dr. Samir A Haddad
Farmington Public Schools

Bridget Dean
Farmington Public Schools

People

Specialists

Contact the Intermediate School District in your area for a specialist working in ESL/Bilingual Education

Michigan Department of Education

Office of School Improvement
517/241-4285

Samir Haddad

Exec. Director of Instructional Equity and Support
Farmington Public Schools
samir.haddad@farmington.k12.mi.us

Bridget Dean

Bilingual Coordinator
Farmington Public Schools
bridget.dean@farmington.k12.mi.us

Intercultural Development Research Association

San Antonio TX
www.idra.org
210/444-1710

Contact **Community and Faith-based Organizations** in your area for suggestions and support

For more information, contact

Office of School Improvement
Michigan Department of Education
517/241-4285

Websites

Website for the Responsive Classroom

www.responsiveclassroom.org

Link to Multicultural Education Based Websites

www.edchange.org/multicultural/sites1.html

National Association for Multicultural Education

www.nameorg.org

The Southern Poverty Law Center's Website with materials and suggestions for inclusive education

www.tolerance.org

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