

# CALL TO ACTION

## *Strategic Actions to Realize Equity and Excellence in Gifted Education for Multilingual Learners*

Within the educational landscape of North Carolina, diversity takes on a linguistic dimension. This linguistic tapestry enriches North Carolina’s educational system, providing students with a unique opportunity to thrive in a globalized society while celebrating the vibrant mix of cultures that call the state home. North Carolina’s public schools stand as a testament to the state’s extraordinary linguistic diversity, with a remarkable 386 different languages spoken among its students in 2023. This vibrant linguistic tapestry reflects the rich cultural mosaic that defines North Carolina’s educational landscape.

North Carolina is part of the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium, which is a collaborative organization focused on supporting multilingual learners (ML) in K-12 education. It consists of 41 U.S. states, territories, and federal agencies. The primary goal of the WIDA Consortium is to provide a comprehensive system that addresses the needs of multilingual learners in terms of language development, academic achievement, and social-emotional wellbeing. The consortium’s work is grounded in research and feedback from educators, ensuring that the system is effective and responsive to the needs of diverse learners.

### **EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SCHOOL AND DISTRICT PROGRAMS**

State and federal civil rights laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, mandate that school districts must ensure that multilingual learners have the opportunity to participate in all programs, services, and activities provided by the Public School Unit (PSU). These laws explicitly prohibit PSUs from excluding multilingual learners from any program, service, or activity solely based on their proficiency in English. This inclusivity encompasses a wide range of offerings, such as honors or advanced courses, Career and Technical Education, online programs, Title I services, AIG programming, special education, extracurricular activities, and athletic programs. For instance, if a school district has procedures in place to identify students eligible for a specific program or activity, they must also identify and include Multilingual/English learners who could benefit from these opportunities.

Multilingual learners can exhibit valuable knowledge of multiple languages, different ways of representing ideas, a higher level of metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, and multiple approaches to expressing their thoughts. When working with potential Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) ML students, the distinct life and educational experiences should be taken into

consideration. Educators play a crucial role in advocating for MLs and implementing effective strategies to bring about positive change collectively.

The North Carolina Academically or Intellectually Gifted Program Standards (2021) address multilingual learners as part of the founding principles, which states, “Gifted learners from under-represented populations are often overlooked in gifted programming, therefore, they require purposeful and intentional support to ensure that their potential is cultivated, recognized, and served. Gifted learners who are often left underserved include students who are culturally/ethnically diverse, economically disadvantaged, English Learners, highly gifted, and twice exceptional” (p. 2). The needs of AIG ML students are specifically addressed in Student Identification Practice 1c, Comprehensive Programming Practices 2h and 2i, and Program Accountability Practice 6e.



## Successful Programming for MLs in Gifted Education: What it is and What it isn't

- *It is providing multiple screening opportunities for MLs throughout their school career; it is not about screening for one moment in time only.*
- *It is utilizing a variety of student data in formal AIG nomination decisions; it is not solely relying on the high-stakes summative data.*
- *It is leveraging linguistic expertise from the ESL department and establishing an ongoing cadence of collaboration opportunities; it is not working in a silo to try to meet the diverse needs of gifted learners.*
- *It is ensuring that assessment data are interpreted accurately; it is not confusing summative assessment scale scores with a student's intellectual capacity to learn.*
- *It is providing professional learning opportunities for school counselors and/or student services staff to equip them with skills and resources needed to provide appropriate counseling services; it is not providing professional learning opportunities for AIG and ESL staff only.*
- *It is involving students and families/caregivers in discussions to inform future decisions; it is not informing the students and families/caregivers as an afterthought.*

### Strategic Actions to Realize Equity and Excellence in Gifted Education for Multilingual Learners

A linguistically diverse AIG student exhibits the characteristics of gifted students with the potential for high achievement and speaks a language in addition to English. Keep in mind, multilingual learners are simultaneously developing their language and content area proficiency, and an ML's language proficiency may impact their coursework completion. However, linguistically and culturally diverse multilingual learners bring unique assets to our classrooms, which can enhance the learning experiences of all students and educators. By recognizing and leveraging their strengths through several strategic actions that provide support, we can unlock the potential that MLs bring to their learning communities. No single strategic action will change the mindsets, policies, and practices; we must synergize our efforts to ensure that the strengths and challenges of each student are met.



### Action 1. Provide multiple screening opportunities to access advanced instruction throughout a student's school career.

**What?** We must ensure that we are not placing barriers in the path of a student whose academic needs would best be met through advanced instruction. Multilingual learners' academic needs may emerge in a different way, therefore we must eliminate barriers of new language acquisition that would impede a student's chance of being served in an advanced instructional setting.

**How?** Screen all students using qualitative and quantitative data. Include observation scales and aptitude assessments. Look for signs in which an ML student shows particular interest in an academic area that stands out or is exceptional compared to peers. Ensure assessment data are interpreted appropriately by teachers or administrators and not confused with a student's intellectual capacity to learn. Explore data to find students' strengths, such as in written or verbal expression, rather than a weakness in extensive vocabulary. Keep the program free of cut offs or 'must have' criteria which includes only summative data. Establish an eligibility pathway for MLs not formally identified as gifted to access advanced courses at all levels. Allow students different ways to express or show their learning that also includes student choice.

**Why?** When we limit students' access to advanced learning opportunities or opportunities to show their strengths, we are creating barriers that prevent students from reaching their full potential.



### Action 3. Provide intentional and sustained professional learning opportunities.

**What?** The entire school community, including classroom teachers, are responsible for providing instruction and meeting the needs of a wide variety of learners. To ensure teachers and other staff are supporting individual students in the most effective way, professional learning opportunities must be provided for the entire school community. This will enable teachers to have the tools and skills they need to successfully differentiate instruction that meets the needs of the students they serve. Support staff, counselors, specialists, and administrators should be included to ensure comprehensive school programming within the school environment.

**How?** Provide professional learning opportunities for school counselors, student services staff, AIG and ML staff, administrators, as well as classroom teachers. Provide intentional and sustained adult learning opportunities to include a focus on equity and excellence. Intersect these opportunities with standards, rigorous curriculum, and instructional practices, as well as research and evidence-based language acquisition and content integration. Build educator capacities and agency by discipline-specific competencies, deeper content knowledge, mindsets and behaviors, while attending to academic, social, and emotional needs of MLs. Ensure that the professional development is relevant and aligned to the district's instructional priorities and/or strategic plan.

**Why?** In an effort to continue to grow in our professional best practice, it is vital that educators stay abreast of current research-based methods as well as understand the diversity of student needs in their classrooms. Studies in teacher professional development state that sustained duration in the learning process is critical for effective and transformative growth. Thus, teachers, counselors, specialists, and administrators need opportunities to learn the latest best practices, as well as to apply them in authentic learning environments.



### Action 2. Use a variety of student data in decision-making.

**What?** We collect a variety of student data including quantitative, qualitative, summative, and formative, and it is important to consider each of these in determining the academic needs of individual students. Thus, gathering portfolios, artwork, and other such evidence that highlight uniquely advanced abilities that allow students to stand out from their peers need to be considered.

**How?** Include a student's WIDA ACCESS\* growth data as evidence in formal AIG screening decisions. Intentionally look for ways in which multilingual learners express creativity and problem solve in unique ways. Utilize placement assessments that show how students learn in multiple ways instead of assessments with vocabulary or language that is highly academic in nature. Look for trends in data, especially areas of high performance on formative or summative assessments, even when they are not consistent. Conduct ongoing and periodic checkups of ML student data, especially English language proficiency (ELP) growth and observations of non-traditional and traditional gifted characteristics.

**Why?** Students show giftedness in multiple ways. It is important to elicit divergent thinking when trying to identify gifted students since they process abstract ideas in ways that are conceptual and not as easily represented. Take a closer look at the intricacies of the different facets of a multilingual learner's data to fully understand these abstract representations. It is important for teachers to consider these characteristics when identifying giftedness in MLs as they may exhibit their giftedness differently due to the additional challenge of acquiring English.

\*ACCESS Online meets U.S. federal requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for monitoring and reporting ELs' progress toward English language proficiency. It tests students' language in the four domains: Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing.

## Action 4. Collaborate with the Multilingual Learner/English Learner department.

**What?** Leverage linguistic expertise from the ML/EL department and establish an ongoing cadence of collaboration opportunities. Working in a silo to meet the diverse needs of gifted learners will likely not result in meeting the unique needs of MLs. Together, it is pertinent to educate stakeholders to challenge the assumption that lack of English language proficiency automatically assumes the lack of giftedness and need of AIG services.

**How?** Establish Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with AIG and ML staff at the district and school levels to conduct ongoing and periodic checkup of ML student data, especially English language proficiency growth and observations of non-traditional and traditional gifted characteristics. Conduct periodic checks with ML personnel to recognize students who are making more rapid English language acquisition as compared to their ML peers. Establish annual goals to meet the needs of AIG MLs as outlined in their Differentiated Education Plans, with intentional progress monitoring of these goals.

**Why?** English learning progression is not a linear process, but rather multifaceted linguistic progression in multiple and various domains. MLs' learning needs go beyond content area expectations to include language acquisition and development. When teachers of multilingual learners collaborate, each educator brings a unique perspective and array of knowledge and experience. Combining AIG and ML expertise will help meet the diverse needs of both the gifted learners and multilingual learners within school communities.



## Action 5. Implement a comprehensive and inclusive programming model.

**What?** Establish a comprehensive and inclusive program model with AIG and ESL certified teachers to challenge gifted multilingual learners in specific ways. Allow students to express their learning in unique and non-linguistic ways. Multilingual learners are multilingual, multiliterate, and multicultural, resulting in high meta-cognitive and meta-literate skill possessions.

**How?** Provide services for gifted multilingual learners that allow them to learn with AIG peers where they can express their creativity and learning in multiple ways (written, hands on, verbally, artistically, etc.). Consider non-traditional ways to service AIG ML students while cultivating and leveraging the potential of their intellectual capacities. Collaborate with the ML/EL Department in curating instructional resources for multilingual learners and integrate them within the regular classroom when possible.

**Why?** Multilingual learners, along with their school peers, are held accountable to meet rigorous standards while simultaneously acquiring the English language. Content and language integration is an integral part of the success for multilingual learners. It takes a collaborative team effort within a comprehensive AIG programming model to reach this goal, and building capacity and sustainability is key.



## Action 6. Partner with family/caregivers, community, and students.

**What?** Establish collaborative and strong partnerships with families/caregivers, communities, and students to overcome any language or cultural barriers that may impede any participation in educational opportunities, especially AIG programs. Ensure communication and resources are accessible so that these partnerships are beneficial for all stakeholders.

**How?** Build an intentional infrastructure for systemic change, while involving family, community, and students themselves from the beginning to end. Create a student advisory group to better inform and discuss ways to improve the gifted program for MLs and inform future programmatic decisions. Ensure parents/guardians have the opportunity to participate in advocacy groups to provide feedback which represents their needs and ideas. Use inclusive strategies to ensure access in a language that families can understand so that they can participate and engage. Find key people or organizations in the community that offer resources or opportunities for parent/student education and engagement.

**Why?** Meeting the unique linguistic, academic, and social-emotional needs of gifted multilingual learners is a very complex matter. Parent/Caregiver engagement is part of the school culture, therefore, it is important to create an environment where student self-advocacy is encouraged and supported. Collaborative partnerships with parents/guardians and the community are central to ensuring the success of AIG MLs and their complex needs.

## Guiding Questions for Districts to Consider:

1. What is your district plan to ensure talent development to cultivate the potential giftedness for multilingual learners?
2. How are you incorporating the state English language development data in your district's data analysis as a part of the screening, referral, and identification processes? What is your district strategy to ensure data are reviewed annually across grades K-12?
3. How are AIG and ML collaboration and outcomes considered in existing district-wide or schoolwide PLCs or committees? How can AIG and ML collaboration and outcomes be integrated with existing district-wide or school-wide structures?
4. What are your strategies for providing ongoing and meaningful professional development and curating instructional resources for multilingual learners?
5. What kinds of language support are needed for multilingual learners to be successful in the current K-12 AIG programs?
6. How are you providing services to AIG multilingual learners in a timely manner?
7. How do you shift policies and practices to result in asset-over-deficit mindsets in AIG programming for linguistically diverse students, especially identification criteria and service delivery options?
8. What are your systemic approaches to scale up the AIG ML student success stories and showcase them districtwide?
9. How does your district engage families/caregivers and include multilingual learners to promote self-advocacy within gifted programming?
10. In what ways does your district strategically elicit active community outreach and partnerships for AIG ML students?



## Resources

- Colorado Department of Education. (2023). Multi-tiered systems of support: Special education needs, and gifted education. *English language development guidebook: Designing, delivering, evaluating instruction and services for multilingual learners* (pp.92-110). [https://www.cde.state.co.us/cde\\_english/eldguidebook](https://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/eldguidebook)
- DuBois, M. P., & Greene, R.M. (2021). *Supporting gifted ELLs in the Latinx community: Practical strategies, K-12*. Routledge.
- Ford, D. Y., Grantham, T. C., & Whiting, G. W. (2008). Culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education: Recruitment and retention issues. *Exceptional Children, 74*(3), 289-306.
- Frazier, A. D., & Castellano, J. A. (Eds). (2011). *Special populations in gifted education: Understanding our most able students from diverse backgrounds*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003238157>
- Hamilton, R., McCoach, D. B., Tutwiler, M. S., Siegle, D., Gubbins, E. J., Callahan, C. M., Brodersen, A. V., & Mun, R. U. (2018). Disentangling the roles of institutional and individual poverty in the identification of gifted students. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 62*(1), 6-24. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0016986217738053>
- Matthews, M. S., & Castellano, J. A. (Eds). (2014). *Talent development for English language learners: Identifying and developing potential*, Routledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003238461>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Advanced Learning and Gifted Education. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/students-families/enhanced-opportunities/advanced-learning-and-gifted-education>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Office of Academic Standards, ML/Title III Program. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/academic-standards/programs-and-initiatives/mltitle-iii>
- Siegle, D., Gubbins, E. J., O'Rourke, P., Langley, S. D., Mun, R. U., Luria, S. R., Little, C. A., McCoach, D. B., Knupp, T., Callahan, C. M., & Plucker, J. A. (2016). Barriers to underserved students' participation in gifted programs and possible solutions. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 39*(2), 103-131. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0162353216640930>
- Texas Education Agency. (2023). *Gifted English learners. Equity in Gifted/Talented Education*. <https://gtequity.tea.texas.gov/gifted-english-language-learners>
- The National Center for Research on Gifted Education. (n.d.). *15 Tips for identifying EL students*. University of Connecticut. <https://ncrge.uconn.edu/el-tips/>

