

EL Advocacy Case Study #3: Multilingual Learners in

Career and Technical Education Programs

During COVID-19

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Present Issues & Examples

This case study is the final of three that focus on advocating for multilingual learners (MLs) during the Covid-19 pandemic. We developed this case study based on conversations we have had with teachers of MLs as well as research and best practices we read about.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic a number of inequities including a higher dropout rate, lower graduation rate, and a wide opportunity gap existed for MLs in comparison to their non-ML peers. A report by the U.S. Department of Education, [Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students](#), demonstrated that many of the inequities that existed for MLs were exasperated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, in school year 2022 – 2023, while the pandemic still lingers, schools across the country are operating in-person and educators have the opportunity to make changes based on lessons learned over the past two school years.

One possible avenue for change is through career and technical education (CTE) courses and programs. CTE education encompasses courses and programs of study in which students acquire challenging academic, technical, and employability skills to succeed in postsecondary education and in-demand careers. High-quality CTE can increase student success in high school and postsecondary education and accelerates workforce development. Additionally, it provides MLs with real-world opportunities to explore, engage in, and pursue rewarding careers. This case study will focus on advocating for MLs' access to and engagement in CTE courses and programs.

We begin by presenting the benefits of CTE for MLs. Next, we focus on possible advocacy issues around MLs' access to and engagement in CTE and share a case study to serve as an example of how educators can advocate for MLs within CTE. We apply a five-step ML advocacy framework as a guide for steps that you can take in your own advocacy work. Finally, we conclude with some closing thoughts.

Why CTE for MLs?

CTE programs are a promising pathway for preparing ML students for postsecondary education and careers. In April 2022 the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) released [an infographic](#) on

preparing MLs for postsecondary education and careers through CTE. The infographic outlines the benefits of CTE for MLs, including higher high school graduation rates for CTE concentrators versus non-CTE concentrators. Additionally, CTE opens up doors to careers in high-demand occupations that have high growth and earning potential. As of [2017-18 school year](#), 8,835,158 secondary students were enrolled in CTE programs and only 427,302 (4.8%) of those students were MLs.

CTE classrooms include a [hands-on approach](#) to learning that tends to be concrete and provides immediate relevance for ML students. In addition, CTE programs provide regular opportunities for productive talk in which students are working together to solve a problem or create something, making these classrooms an ideal place to learn and practice language. These features of CTE classrooms can have a positive impact on language acquisition and should be leveraged. CTE courses and programs may be one avenue to help alleviate the inequities, such as dropout rate and graduation rate, that were exasperated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Focusing on One Advocacy Issue

While there are multiple areas in which you could advocate for MLs within CTE programs, we recommend narrowing your focus to one area to start (Staehr Fenner, 2014). Some of the advocacy issues you may be facing include the following:

- Access to CTE programs (e.g., English proficiency level restrictions, limited translation of advertising and application documents, family outreach)
- Appropriate instruction (e.g., instruction not scaffolded to meet the needs and strengths of MLs, English Language Development (ELD) teacher not available onsite, limited knowledge of individual ML needs and strengths such as English proficiency levels and accommodations)
- Teacher training (e.g., CTE instructors have received no or little training on appropriate instruction for MLs)

In order to identify a priority area to focus on for your students, start by brainstorming a few advocacy issues related to MLs and CTE programs. Think about the challenges ML students face. Do MLs have access to the full range of CTE programs available in your district? If so, do they receive appropriately scaffolded and challenging instruction within those programs? Try to select an area in which you are likely to be able to make a change. To learn more about steps you can take once you have identified your area for advocacy, take a look at the following case study [Access to CTE Programs for MLs in Bay Winds School District](#). In this case study we narrow our focus on one advocacy issue.



Case Study: Access to CTE Programs for MLs in Bay Winds School District¹

Ms. Siopa is an English Language Development (ELD) Instructional Specialist in a district of approximately 85,000 students with MLs making up 12% of the student population. During a data meeting at the beginning of the 2022-23 school year she learns that MLs currently represent only 3% of the high school students enrolled in CTE programs. Upon digging deeper into the data, she finds that the percentage of MLs enrolled in the CTE programs dropped from 5% during the 2019-20 school year to 3% during the 2021-22 school year.

Ms. Siopa recently read the April 2022 the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) [infographic](#) on preparing MLs for postsecondary education and careers through CTE and recognizes the benefits of CTE for MLs. She would like to see more MLs across the district access these high-quality programs. As a first step, she reaches out to colleagues and explores district resources to learn more about the CTE programs available. She learns that there are two CTE school sites in the district, one serving the western side of the district (CTE West), the other serving the eastern side of the district (CTE East). Beginning in 8th grade students can complete an online application to attend their feeder CTE school on a part-time basis. Acceptance is based on a lottery system. The online application is available in English and Spanish, however the step-by-step guide to completing the application is only available in English on the district website. While Spanish is the predominant language spoken by MLs in the district, many other languages are spoken including Urdu, Chinese, Arabic, and Vietnamese. Upon speaking to ELD teachers and administrators at the both the middle and high school level, she learns that outreach specifically targeted to MLs has been limited and/or nonexistent. She also learns that educators at the CTE sites have had no or very limited training on effective instructional strategies for working with MLs.

While Ms. Siopa sees multiple advocacy issues in this situation including access to the CTE programs and appropriate instruction for MLs already enrolled in her district's CTE programs, she decides to focus on access to the CTE programs as her first step. Keeping her focus in mind, Ms. Siopa used the 5-step process for ML advocacy as a framework for her advocacy efforts. First, she familiarized herself with the 5-step ML advocacy process (Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2021), outlined on page 5.

¹ This is adapted from a real-world experience. District and educator names have been changed for anonymity.



5-Step Advocacy Process for MLs



Step	Ideas/Notes
1. Isolate the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Siopa found that the most pressing issue within the Bay Winds School District related to CTE and MLs was that MLs had inequitable access to the CTE programs.• While the online application was available in both English and Spanish, the step-by-step guide to completing the application was only available in English on the district website. Additionally, while Spanish is the predominant language spoken by MLs in the district, many other languages are spoken including Urdu, Chinese, Arabic, and Vietnamese and the online application was not available in these languages.• Bilingual family outreach, knowledge of the program by teachers, and advertising on the benefits of the CTE for ML students (to both families and educators) was very limited or nonexistent across the district.

² The original 5-step process can be found [here](#).



<p>2. Know students' and families' rights and relevant research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before she began advocating, Ms. Siopa needed to first have a clear understanding of her students' and families' rights. In addition, she searched for relevant research related to MLs within CTE programs so that she had the information she needed to support her advocacy efforts. <p>In this case, she knew that MLs and their families had an equal right to access curricular and extracurricular activities and that they had a right to all materials in their home language. She located language directly from the Office of English Language Acquisition English Learner Toolkit to support this knowledge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "In addition to offering equal access to the core curriculum, LEAs have an obligation to provide ELs with equal opportunities to participate meaningfully in "all programs and activities . . . whether curricular, curricular, or extracurricular." (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, and U.S. Department of Justice, January 2015). This includes the obligation to provide ELs with equal access to ... career and technical education programs" (OELA EL Toolkit, Chapter 4, page 2) • "LEAs have an obligation to communicate meaningfully with limited English proficient (LEP) parents and to notify LEP parents adequately of information about any program, service, or activity called to the attention of non-LEP parents." (OELA EL Toolkit, Chapter 10, page 1) • In terms of research, she found that as of the 2017-18 school year, MLs represented 4.8% of secondary students enrolled in CTE programs in the United States. This contrasted with the Bay Winds School District current enrollment of only 3% of MLs enrolled in their CTE programs. • Additionally, based on research from the April 2022 OELA infographic, she knows that CTE programs offer many benefits for MLs including higher high school graduation rates for CTE concentrators versus non-CTE concentrators.
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<p>3. Develop your allies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once Ms. Siopa determined her priority issue and learned more about students' and families' rights as well as some research supporting that issue, it was time for her to give some thought to who she might be able to partner with to advance her advocacy. • She thought about all of her colleagues who might be able to lend their expertise. She decided to reach out to ML students, the CTE East principal, ELD teachers, and bilingual facilitators. She knew that including various stakeholders would increase her likelihood of success. • She began by asking ML students directly about their interests related to the CTE programs available. During her meetings with students, she found that many students were unaware these programs existed and were excited about the possibility of enrolling. • Then, she reached out the CTE East principal, Mr. Thomas. She had worked with him the past and already had a good working relationship. During their meeting Ms. Siopa shared her findings related to MLs' limited access to the CTE programs in the district including the recent ML student testimonials. Mr. Thomas was immediately on board to plan for more inclusive access to CTE East for the ML students in the district. • Her next step was to involve ELD teachers and bilingual facilitators. She invited middle and high school ELD teachers and bilingual facilitators that worked in the feeder schools for CTE East to an initial information meeting. During the meeting they received information and resources on the benefits of CTE programs for ML students.
<p>4. Identify your outlets for change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Siopa and Mr. Thomas decided their outlet for change could happen at CTE East. They decided to pilot an initiative to provide more equitable access for MLs to enroll at CTE East. • Ms. Siopa began by meeting the ELD teachers and bilingual facilitators for a second time. During this meeting, she shared information about CTE East's programs and provided them with information and resources to share with MLs and their families. • Ms. Siopa and Mr. Thomas then co-planned a field trip to CTE East for rising 8th grade MLs to visit the school and learn about the various programs from current students and teachers. Bilingual facilitators joined the field trip to serve as interpreters as needed. • Next, the bilingual facilitators developed written translations of the application directions in the top languages of the district. • Following the field trip, feeder middle schools provided time for interested MLs and their families to work with ELD teachers and bilingual facilitators in person to complete CTE applications.

5. Organize and educate others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a final step, Ms. Siopa and the team decided that they would need to analyze the impact of their initiative and make a plan for broadening its reach. • They held a focus group with ML students that applied and began attending the CTE program as a result of the pilot. Student testimonials were shared with decision makers at the district level, including the principal at CTE West. • Additionally, they decided to work with the district data team to analyze the impact of the work. The data team conducted a data analysis of the number of MLs that applied to the CTE East program for the 23-24 school year versus the previous 4 school years. They also conducted a data analysis of the number of MLs that were enrolled in programs at CTE East in the 23-24 school year versus the previous 4 school years. The data showed an increase in both the number of ML applications and MLs enrolled in the program. • After feeling confident that they were able to provide more equitable access to MLs at CTE East, Ms. Siopa and Mr. Thomas reached out to the principal at CTE West in hopes of implementing the ML access initiative at that school the next year.
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Conclusion

As school districts continue to consider the myriad needs of students as they engage in full time in-person instruction, many will be discussing SEL. Educators know that students need to feel connected with each other and that they are in a safe learning environment. One way to address the need for belonging is by advocating for using linguistically and culturally relevant SEL strategies. We have chosen to highlight the advocacy efforts of one ESOL teacher as he works to ensure that SEL practices used in his school addressed the strengths and met the unique needs of his ELs. Students will have many new challenges and many new opportunities as they continue learning in person, and you may have a different priority for advocacy. We hope this case study will serve as a helpful framework for thinking about the steps you will take to approach your own EL advocacy issue.



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Partnership

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