

Helping English Learners Succeed



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When a child walks into school brand new to English, they are doing something incredibly brave. They're learning new routines, new friendships, new expectations and a whole new language at the same time. That's a lot for anyone. The good news? With the right support at home and at school, multilingual kids can absolutely thrive.

First, let's start here: being multilingual is a gift. Research shared by Colorín Colorado and the National Association for the Education of Young Children shows that speaking more than one language strengthens thinking skills, problem-solving, and flexibility. So instead of seeing English as something a child is "behind" in, it helps to see all the language they already have as a huge strength.

Keep the Home Language Strong

Parents, keep speaking your strongest language at home. Tell stories. Ask questions. Laugh. Read together. A strong foundation in a child's first language actually

helps them learn English faster. You are not “confusing” them—you are building their brain.

Teachers, use their name correctly. Invite families to share traditions or favorite books. Even small efforts show children that who they are matters.

Make Things Visual and Clear

When kids are learning English, they understand more when they can see what’s happening. Pictures, gestures, modeling, and clear examples make a big difference.

At school, that might mean showing what to do instead of only explaining it. At home, it might look like previewing new topics. If your child is learning about weather, talk about rain, snow, or sunshine in your home language first. When they hear those ideas again in English, they’ll connect the dots more easily.

Be Patient with Talking

Many children go through a “silent period” when learning a new language. They may listen carefully but say very little. That’s normal. They are absorbing everything.

Instead of pushing them to speak before they’re ready, focus on helping them feel safe. Smile. Offer encouragement. Celebrate effort. Confidence grows when children feel accepted, not corrected at every turn. Social language comes more easily than academic language. It all takes time.

Support “School Words”

Kids often learn playground English faster than classroom English. They might chat easily with friends but struggle with words like “compare,” “predict,” or “explain.”

Parents can help by asking open-ended questions like, “Tell me what you learned today,” or “Why do you think that happened?” It’s okay if they answer in your home language—that thinking still counts. Teachers can help by modeling sentence starters like, “I think ___ because ___.”

Stay Connected

Clear, kind communication between home and school matters so much. If something is confusing, ask questions. Schools want families involved, even if language feels like a barrier. Translation tools and apps can help bridge gaps. Most importantly, remember this: learning a new language takes time. It’s not a race. With patience, encouragement, and teamwork, multilingual children don’t just “catch up.” They grow into confident, capable learners with a powerful skill that will serve them for life.

Strengths While Building Access

When we lead with patience, clear instruction, visual supports, and genuine connection, we create classrooms where language development and confidence grow together. With the right scaffolds and a belief in their

potential, our multilingual learners don't just adjust—they thrive.