

Summer 2021 newsletter:

Heritage Languages are an Asset- not a Barrier



Heritage languages are an asset and not a barrier to overcome. The research has established over and over that the key to literacy for Multilingual and English Learner students is making connections to what they already know in their first languages. This is especially true when it comes to reading. Reading to children in their native language from the moment they are born, into elementary school, and beyond can accelerate reading in their second language.

For newcomers who are in kindergarten or first grade and learning to read, allowing them to read in their native language will also accelerate their ability to read in a second language. We know this from the research of Dr. Krashen on the [power of reading](#). In our schools, when we make connections with parents of multilingual and English learner students, it is important to let them know:

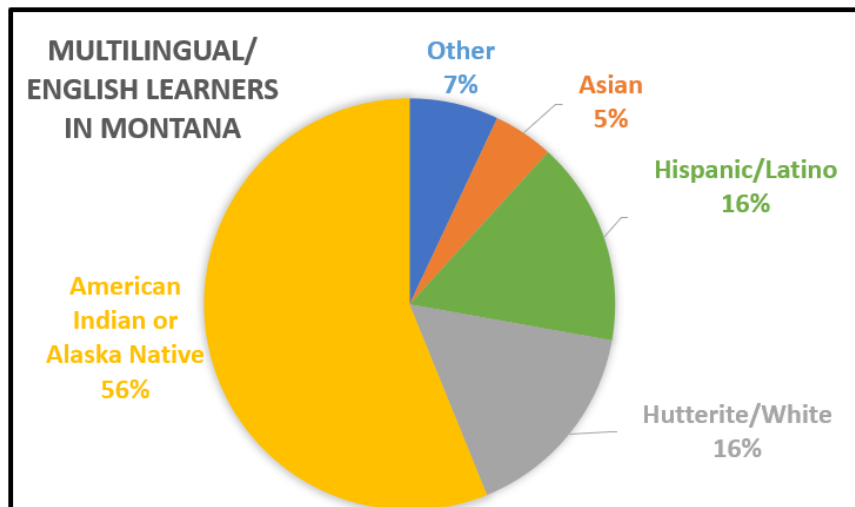
1. Reading skills transfer from language one (L1) to language two (L2).
2. Reading provides knowledge of the world that makes reading in a new language more accessible and comprehensible.
3. The pleasure of reading itself is more readily transferable to the second language.

To support your Multilingual/English Learner student's literacy development, find out all the languages that your ELs speak, and talk to the librarian at your school to make sure books in heritage languages are readily available for ML/EL students. Also, have a talk with parents about the power of reading to their children in their heritage languages. [Colorín Colorado](#) has created eight beautiful [downloadable posters](#) in 16 languages. If your student's language is not represented here, work with your students to create posters to take home. The posters contain these eight great reading tips for families of ML/EL students:

1. Speak to your child in your language.

2. Tell your child about the benefits of being bilingual.
3. Share stories and songs from your culture.
4. Share special traditions and recipes from home.
5. Talk with your children about their day.
6. Encourage your child to write every day.
7. Listen to your child read out loud.
8. Get free e-books from the library on your phone.

American Indian Students Make Up Our Largest Subgroup of English Learners in Montana



American Indian students make up about 56% of English learners in Montana, despite that over 90% report only speaking English at home. There are two intersecting reasons for this: the historical suppression and systemic eradication of indigenous languages and the development of distinct English dialects in indigenous communities. Federal law recognizes that, because these dialects have been influenced and impacted by their heritage languages and differ quite a bit from the *academic English* used in school, American Indian students qualify for English language development services. For these students, English is not a foreign language, but the specific register, vocabulary, and grammatical structures of academic English taught and expected from them in school are distinct from the everyday vernacular of their communities. Just like newcomer, refugee, migrant, or Hutterite students who speak other languages at home, many American Indian students are also entitled to additional support for their academic English development in order for districts to be in compliance with civil rights law.

For American Indian students who qualify for services as English Learners, a great place to find resources that are culturally responsive is to check out the [Indian Education Classroom](#)

[Resources](#) created by the Indian Education For All unit at the OPI. These wonderful resources celebrate American Indian students' identities by allowing them to identify with the content in a more authentic and meaningful way. Many of these lessons can be used as a starting point to focus on **academic language development** in all of the content areas.

Summer Professional Development Opportunities for Equitably Serving ML/EL students



In the month of August, the office of Multilingual/English Learners will be hosting professional development opportunities to support your district in equitably serving your ML/EL students. We will be hosting webinars and workshops the first three Tuesdays in August with sessions for educators, school leaders and administrators. We will have sessions for educators and administrators on culturally responsive instruction, sheltered instruction basics, EL identification, and WIDA kindergarten screener. For school leaders and administrators we will be hosting a three part series presented by [WIDA on Ensuring Equity for Multilingual Learners](#). Please register for any of these opportunities by **July 26th, 2021**: [Summer 2021 Educating Multilingual/English Learners Professional Learning Opportunities](#).

Multilingual/English Learner Summer and Fall Book Studies



The office of Multilingual/English Learners at the OPI is hosting book studies that will begin this summer. The summer book study will begin this June 14th with the memoir *Burro Genius* by Victor Villaseñor. The story recounts the life of the author who was an English Learner of Mexican Heritage in the 1940's and also had learning disabilities to contend with when he entered school. We will also read *The Newcomers* by Helen Thorpe, who also authored *Just Like Us*, another great book about undocumented students. Since she is a reporter, her style gives us a unique glimpse into the life of refugees resettling in the United States and their struggles in acquiring a new language and the sociopolitical contexts that surround their struggles adapting to a new culture. **These books are also a great addition to any ELA or Social Studies unit of study in order to diversify the voices and points of view that should be part of any culturally rich curriculum.** We welcome all teachers to be part of our discussions.

In the fall of next year, we will be focusing on instructional strategies for ML/EL students through a study and discussion of *Reading and Writing with English Learners* by Valentina Gonzalez and Melinda Miller. Registration is still open for any of our [ML/EL 2021-2022 Book Studies](#). Summer book studies registration closes **June 10th**.

ML/EL Educator and Advocate Spotlight



This month we were fortunate to publish another Educator Spotlight with an amazing advocate for ELs in our state. We got to talk with the ML/EL coordinator and educator in the Belgrade district, Susan Davis.

Susan Davis was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. During her university studies, she had the opportunity to study in Norway and China. For a linguistic course, she volunteered with an Adult English as a New Language program for refugee families. After graduating and starting a Master of Arts in Teaching program, she got a job with the same organization and taught English in the family room where mothers with newborns to Pre-K aged children could bring their children to class so they could access English classes in their new community. While teaching adults, working in an after-school program at an elementary school and completing practicum hours at a dual language high school, she found herself working with every member of some of her families. After four years with Omaha Public Schools, she moved to Montana where she became the English as a Second Language teacher and ML/EL coordinator for Belgrade Schools. Her experience in Omaha informs her approach to developing the Multilingual Learner program at Belgrade School District. For Susan, the most gratifying part of working with multilingual and multicultural students is when she sees a student use the tools she has taught them in order to overcome language barriers.

Susan describes the need she saw to have information for ELs in Belgrade in a centralized location. Her goal was also to create a space where parents could feel less intimidated to access information since it translates into their language with the click of a button. The website is also a way to disseminate information to content teachers and other stakeholders in the district that serve ML/EL students.

[**Watch Spotlight**](#)

