

How School Staff Can Support ELLs



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School-wide Support for English Language Learners

School staff have a critical role to play in creating safe and caring school communities for all students, including English language learners (ELLs). They can make an important difference by:

- Welcoming students and families
- Keeping students safe
- Helping students navigate the school and understand routines
- Getting families information that they need
- Keeping an eye out for bullying

In addition, every adult in the school community has an opportunity to make a positive difference for students. Educator advocate Ricky Robertson writes,

I worked in a building where the custodian had some of the strongest relationships with the students in the building ... I have no doubt that he positively impacted the lives of thousands of students over the course of his career. ([Video excerpt](#))

This tip sheet series includes ELL tips for:

- Front office staff
- School nurses
- Food service staff
- Custodians
- Bus drivers
- Crossing guards
- School resource officers

To see more great tips, visit [our related resources online!](#)

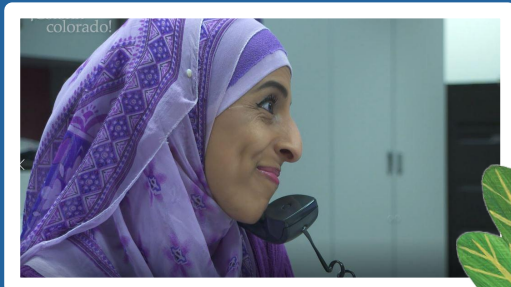


Colorín Colorado is a national multimedia project that offers a wealth of bilingual resources for educators and families of English language learners. Illustrations by Rafael López.



Schoolwide Support for ELLs: Front Office

Here are some ways that front office staff can support English language learners (ELLs).



Welcoming Families

You may be one of the first people families meet at their child's school. Welcome families with a smile and introduce yourself. Post welcome signs in their languages.



Explain Your Role

New families may not be sure where to ask questions or get information. Post a sign in families' languages with your name and how you can help.



Language Support

All families have a legal right to information in their language. Find out what language resources are available, such as interpreters or language lines.



Enrollment Procedures

Provide families with translated instructions for enrollment. Spell and enter students' names correctly in the school database – confirm spelling if needed.



Collaboration

Reach out to colleagues who work with ELLs, such as family liaisons and ESL specialists, to address key issues that need attention. Ask for additional training if needed.



Immigrant Students' Rights

All students have a right to a free public K-12 education, regardless of immigration status. Schools should not request documents related to immigration status.

To see more great tips, visit [the online version of this article!](#)



ELL Tips for School Staff: School Nurses

Here are some ways that nurses can support English language learners (ELLs).



Health Services at School

ELLs and their families may not be familiar with health services at your school. Ensure that students and families know how to find the clinic and what's offered there.



Contacting the School Nurse

Tell families how to contact the school nurse and share important health information, such as students' allergies or medical conditions.



Welcoming Students

Greet students warmly and look for ways to make the clinic welcoming by posting signs in students' languages. Offer kid-friendly items like stickers.



Language Support

Find out what language resources are available, such as interpreters, language lines, and approved translation apps. Ask for additional training if needed.



Community Resources

Connect families with local resources related to health, mental health, food, child care, and other basic needs, such as clinics, health organizations, and universities.



Immigrant Families

Families' access to health care may be impacted by their immigration status. All students have a right to a free public K-12 education, regardless of their immigration status.

To see more great tips, visit [the online version](#) of this article!



ELL Tips for School Staff: Food Service/Cafeteria

Here are some ways that food service staff can support English language learners (ELLs).



Introduce yourself.

Greet students with a smile and introduce yourself. Let students and families know you are there to help them in the cafeteria and where to ask questions.



Show students what to do.

Help students find their way around the cafeteria. Find a staff member or student buddy to show new students where to get food and drinks, as well as how to pay for meals.



Use visuals.

Use visuals in the cafeteria and bilingual signs and menus where possible. This is especially helpful for safety signs.



Review allergy safety.

Review safety procedures related to food allergies with the school nurse and other teachers, including how to quickly contact the nurse if students have an allergic reaction.



Support communication.

Find out which staff members work with multilingual families. Share your ideas about issues that need to be addressed or ways to make students feel welcome.



Address bullying.

Address any bullying in the cafeteria immediately. ELLs and their families may not be familiar with school policies related to bullying and they may be afraid to report any incidents.

To see more great tips, visit [the online version](#) of this article!



ELL Tips for School Staff: Custodial & Maintenance

Here are some ways that custodians can support English language learners (ELLs).



Introduce yourself.

Greet students with a smile and introduce yourself. Let students and families know you are there to help them and where to ask questions.



Remind students of safety.

Help students understand safety rules. Use safety signs with visuals, and if possible, use bilingual signs. Keep in mind that students may be new to the school.



Address safety issues.

If you notice recurring safety issues, bring these issues up to a supervisor. Students or families may need more information or reminders in their language about specific policies.



Address bullying.

Address any bullying you see immediately. ELLs and their families may not be familiar with school policies related to bullying and they may be afraid to report any incidents.



Educator Voices: Ricky Robertson, Education Advocate

I worked in a building where the custodian had some of the strongest relationships with the students in the building because of the time he took to say hello, greet them, or to check in with them. He built trust and he built relationships. And I have no doubt that he positively impacted the lives of thousands of students over the course of his career. ([Video excerpt](#))

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ELL Tips for School Staff: Bus Drivers

Here are some ways that bus drivers can support English language learners (ELLs).



Smile!

Greet students with warm smiles and a friendly greeting. Riding a school bus may be new for some ELLs and their families. Students (and adults!) may be very nervous.



Show students where to go.

Ensure students know where to go and get off of the bus. Confirm bus stops and always double-check if you have a question.



Help ELLs adjust.

Pair students with a buddy if needed and ask bus patrols or bus monitors to lend a hand.



Review safety rules.

Review safety rules early and often. Post signs with safety rules that include visuals, and if possible, use bilingual signs or add translated terms to safety signs.



Identify language resources.

Find out how to communicate with multilingual families, especially in an emergency, and which staff members work with families, such as liaisons.



Address bullying.

Address any bullying on the bus immediately. ELLs and their families may not be familiar with school policies related to bullying and they may be afraid to report any incidents.

To see more great tips, visit [the online version](#) of this article!



ELL Tips for School Staff: Crossing Guards

Here are some ways that crossing guard can support English language learners (ELLs).



Introduce yourself.

Greet students with a smile and introduce yourself. Let students and families know you are there to help them cross the street safely.



Show students where to go.

Keep in mind that students may be new to the school. Show them where to cross the road safely and tell them to wait for your signal.



Support communication.

Use gestures, eye contact, safety signs with visuals, and bilingual signs. A family liaison may be able to help during arrival and dismissal.



Address safety issues.

If you notice recurring safety issues, bring these issues up to a supervisor. Students or families may need more information or reminders in their language about specific policies.



Identify language resources.

Find out how you can communicate with multilingual families and what to do in case of an emergency. Ask for more training in this area if needed.



Check on school policies.

Ask about your school policies related to interaction with law and immigration enforcement. Ask for training as needed.

To see more great tips, visit [the online version](#) of this article!



ELL Tips for School Staff: School Resource Officers

Here are some ways that safety personnel can support English language learners (ELLs).



Create a positive climate.

Greet students each day, and treat students and families with respect. These interactions can help contribute to a positive school climate.



Review safety rules.

Use safety signs with visuals, and if possible, use bilingual signs. Keep in mind that students may be new to the school and may need help learning about school policies.



Review students' rights.

All K-12 students have a right have a right to attend public schools regardless of immigration status. School staff should **never** ask students about their legal status.



Flag safety issues.

If you notice recurring safety issues, bring these issues to a supervisor. Students and families may need information in their language.



Ask for training if needed.

If you have questions about school policies, ask for additional training. Ensure you understand protocols for interacting with law and immigration enforcement.



Address bullying.

Address any bullying you see immediately. ELLs and their families may not be familiar with school policies related to bullying and they may be afraid to report any incidents.

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