

English Learner/Multilingual Learner (EL/ML) Education Summit

Building Bridges to Success: Sustaining the Linguistic and Cultural Assets of Connecticut's ELs/MLs

Wednesday, September 30, 2026

8:30 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Southern Connecticut State University
Michael J. Adanti Student Center
345 Fitch Street
New Haven, CT 06515



Conference Schedule

- 8:30–9:00 a.m. Registration/Check-In
- 9:00–9:20 a.m. Welcome/Opening Remarks
- 9:20–10:20 a.m. Keynote Address:
Dr. José Enriquez, CEO and
Founder of Latinos In Action
- 10:20–10:35 a.m. Transition
- 10:35–11:30 a.m. Breakout Session 1
- 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. Lunch & Sponsor Table Displays
- 12:35–1:30 p.m. Breakout Session 2
- 1:30–1:45 p.m. Transition
- 1:45–2:40 p.m. Breakout Session 3
- 2:40–3:00 p.m. Closing (Don't forget to return
to the main ballroom for free
resources.)

Conference Information

- Please plan to arrive at 8:30 a.m. to allow yourself time to walk to the Adanti Student Center from the garage and pick up your name tag. The conference will start at 9 a.m. sharp.
- Parking is available in the Wintergreen Garage. The GPS address is 23 Wintergreen Ave., New Haven, CT.
- The Michael J. Adanti Student Center is located at 345 Fitch St., New Haven, CT 06515.
- Visit www.southernct.edu/campus-map for directions and a full campus map to the Adanti Student Center.
- The conference will conclude at 3:00 p.m. Please stop by the main ballroom after the last session to get some free resources.
- Free Wi-Fi will be available for attendees.

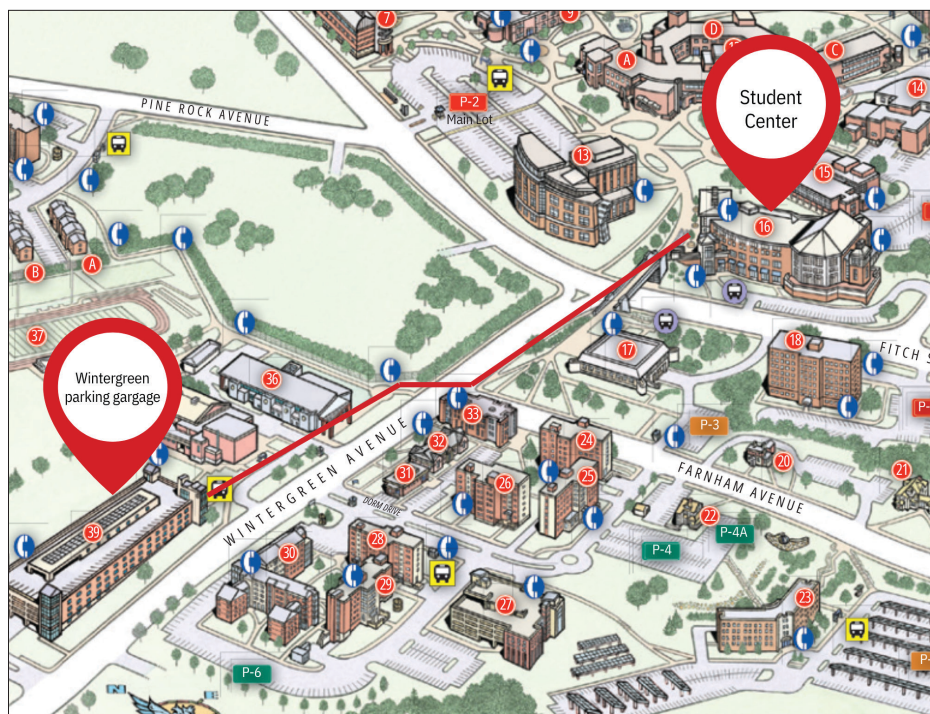


*Every strategy we refine and every skill we build helps us create
bridges and open pathways to meaningful, lasting success.*

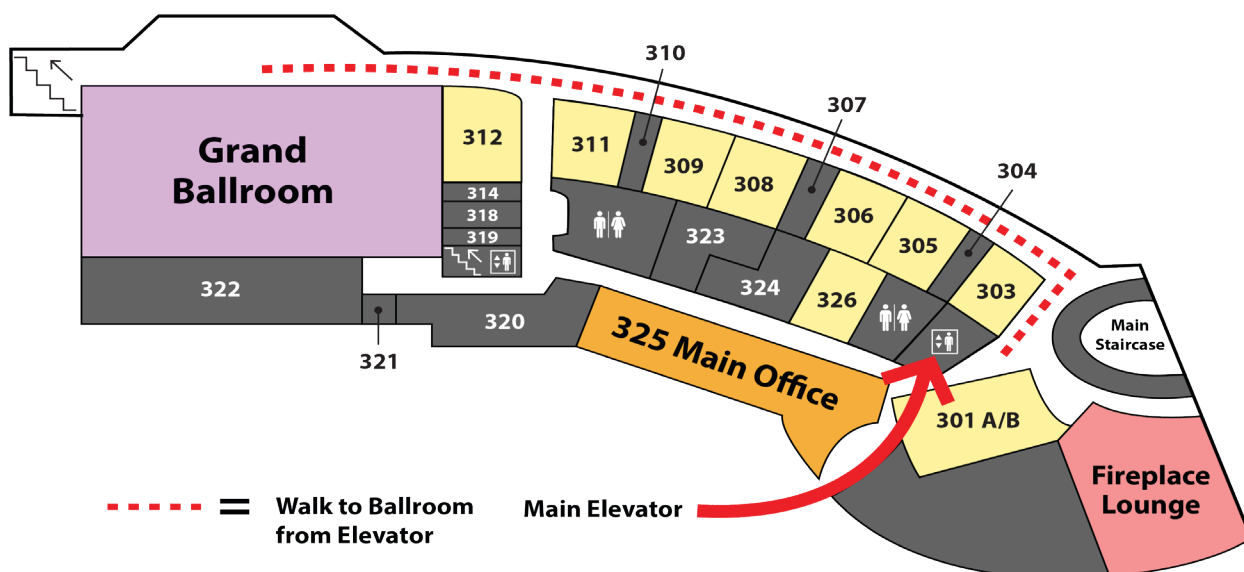
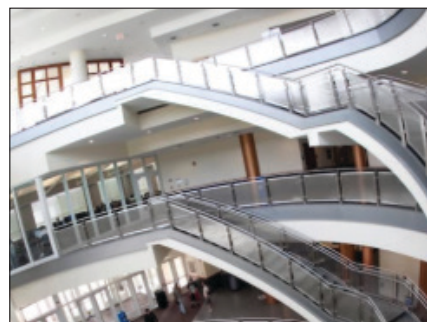
Michael J. Adanti Student Center: Reaching the 3rd Floor

You can enter the doors on the ground level. Once inside, take the elevators or the central staircase (located near the food court) up to the **3rd Floor**. Once you're on the third floor, exit the elevator, and make a left towards the registration table.

- **Accessibility:** The building is fully ADA-compliant; elevators provide easy access for all guests to the 3rd-floor meeting rooms and ballrooms.
- **Overview** of the Adanti Student Center: <https://inside.southernct.edu/student-center>
- **Visual Tour** of The Adanti Student Center: <https://visual.southernct.edu/places/student-center>



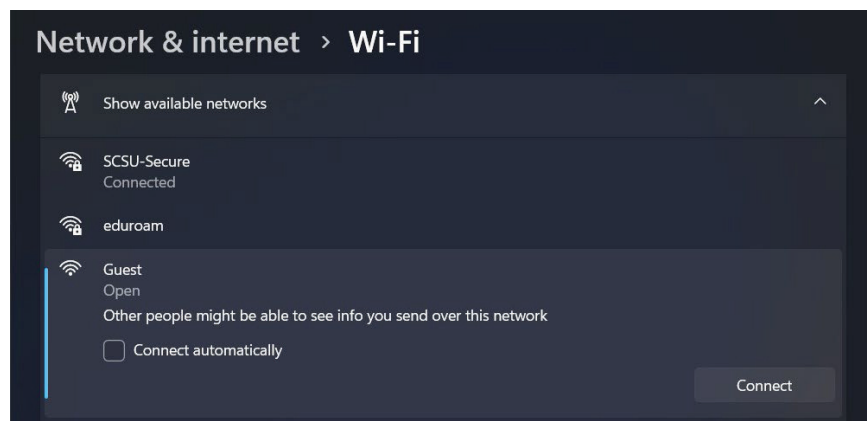
Main Entrance — Adanti Student Center



Accessing the SCSU Guest Wi-Fi Network

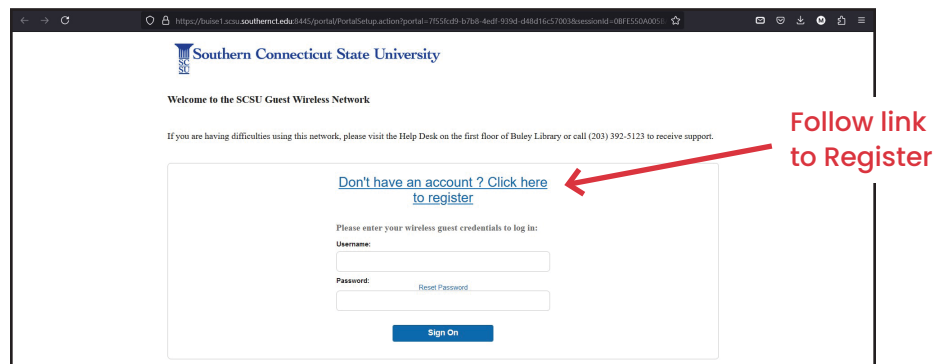
The purpose of this document is to guide users through the process of connecting to SCSU's Guest Wi-Fi network. The network is a self-registration model which will allow users to provide their own information and connect without a university sponsor.

Locate the Guest network and connect



Once you click "Connect" an internet browser will automatically open and display the page below. Click on the blue text to open the registration page.

When the registration page (seen below) has loaded, fill out the requested fields and click "Register".



Breakout Sessions at a Glance

Adanti Student Center Room	Session 1: 10:35 – 11:30am	Session 2: 12:35–1:30pm	Session 3: 1:45–2:40pm
Main ballroom	From Voice to Systems: Building Structures Where Multilingual Learners Lead and Belong Dr. José Enriquez and Sheena Lall	From Voice to Systems: Building Structures Where Multilingual Learners Lead and Belong Dr. José Enriquez and Sheena Lall	None
ASC 301A	From the “Helped” to the Helpers: Activating Identity Agency through a Full-Circle ML Pipeline: How a small district integrates elementary vertical alignment with secondary peer mentorship to build a self-sustaining culture of success. Liliberto “Lily” Cornielle-Cordero	The Knowledge Advantage: Literacy and Language for ELs/MLs Caroline Messenger and Deirdre Savarese	Beyond Simplification: Evidence-Based Practices for Adolescent Multilingual Learners to Access Complex Text Dr. José Viana
ASC 303	Empowering Multilingual Learners Through Evidence-Based Career and Technical Education Practices Andrea Luna and Lorrie Tine	The CIRC Audit: Exploring the Cultural Impact of Parental Engagement for Parents of Arabic-speaking students Dalia Assem	Parent University: Bridging Home and School for Student Success Christine Butler, Susan Krauss & Maria Zampano
ASC 305	From State to Classroom: Building Collaborative Systems That Support ELs/MLs in Mathematics Jennifer Michalek, Dr. Amanda Peterson, and Dr. Rachel Saunders	Revolutionizing Student Success with Individual Language Plans Lisanne Kaplan and Billie Shea	LEAP: Relationships at the Heart of Attendance & Engagement Caroline Calhoun and Carli Rocha-Reaes
ASC 306	Small Structures, Big Impact: Centering Language & Culture to Engage, Empower, and Build Bridges Across Ages & Identities Jean Borrup	Visualizing Voices: Scaffolding Wit & Wisdom for Accessible, High-Quality Instruction Donna Mauro	Sustaining Linguistic Wealth: Designing a Grades 7–12 Heritage Spanish Pathway for Biliteracy and Beyond Elizabeth Lapman and Erica Torruellas
ASC 308	Elevating the ML Experience: Visual Scaffolds and Strategies Using Canva Samira Zuniga-Thomas	Supporting English Learners/Multilingual Learners in the Mathematics Classroom: Evidence-Based Strategies Johannah Nikula and Kate Coleman	Where do language learners fit in the tiers of MTSS? Sandra Schwoerer and Dr. Monica Lahiri-Hoherchak

Adanti Student Center Room	Session 1: 10:35 – 11:30am	Session 2: 12:35–1:30pm	Session 3: 1:45–2:40pm
ASC 309	Story as a Bridge: Using SIOP Strategies and Culturally Relevant Texts to Honor the Assets of Multilingual Learners Jennifer Hill and Johanna Robles	What I needed then, What my students need now: Practical Strategies for Supporting Multilingual Learners Hee (Clara) Choi	Building Inclusive, Accessible, & Representative Schools that Center Belonging Amanda Pickett
ASC 311	The Writing Revolution x Building Thinking Classrooms: Increase Access, Preserve Rigor Jonathan Hull and Dr. Erin Birden	Building Capacity through LAS Links Data-Driven Instruction Chelsea Rivera	Empowering Skilled Educators: Making the Architecture of Language Expectations Visible, Viable, and Available Dr. Melissa Jenkins and Dr. Beryl Irene Bailey
ASC 326	Talk, Know, Write: Using Collaboration as a Tool for Applying Knowledge in Writing Benavides, Brian	From Assessment to Achievement: Helping Families Understand Multilingual Growth and Academic Success Christina Schiano	Talk Data with the Performance Office Dr. David Alexandro, Dr. Michael Sabados, Abe Krisst, and Ajit Gopalakrishnan
ASC 201 (2nd floor)	Literacy Essentials: Engagement, Effectiveness, and Equity for All Learners Marisa Russo	Designing for ALL: Translingual Universal Design for Learning Using AI Dr. Sophia Diamantis and Dr. Smita Worah	Ground Up Multiliteracy: A Brainstorming Workshop about AI and Literacy Dr. Matthew Ciscel

Keynote Speaker: Dr. José Enriquez

"You Are Still the One"

Creating Stages Where Multilingual Learners are Seen, Heard, and Empowered



Dr. José Enriquez is the founder and CEO of Latinos in Action (LIA), a nationally recognized organization serving students in more than 13 states. Born in El Salvador and raised in East Los Angeles, he draws from his lived experience as a multilingual learner to inform his work in education, leadership, and systems change.

He holds a Ph.D. and master's degree in Educational Leadership and a bachelor's degree in Spanish Education with an ESL minor from Brigham Young University (BYU).

Dr. Enriquez has served as a teacher, assistant principal, and Director of Title III and Special Programs at the Utah State Office of Education. He is married to Julie Arocha-Enriquez, with their blended beautiful family of seven plus three grandkids, with a fourth on the horizon.

A former NCAA Division I wrestler and two-time national qualifier, he brings a message of resilience, identity, and purpose to his work. Under his leadership, LIA has grown into a national model for student leadership and has received recognition from the White House as a Bright Spot in Hispanic Education in 2015.

Breakout Session 1: 10:35–11:30 a.m.

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
Main Ballroom	From Voice to Systems: Building Structures Where Multilingual Learners Lead and Belong What happens when we stop asking students to adapt to systems—and instead design systems that respond to student voice? This interactive breakout session brings together the work of Latinos in Action (LIA) and insights from The GRAD Partnership at Johns Hopkins University, which focuses on building student-centered systems of success. Grounded in a recent student voice blog featuring LIA students, this session explores what students say they need to feel a true sense of belonging—and what they wish educators understood about their experiences. Participants will: 1. Engage directly with student reflections on belonging, identity, and support, and examine how these insights can be translated into intentional systems, structures, and practices within schools. 2. Learn strategies to center student voice as data, design for belonging, build systems of success, and create student leadership structures. 3. Leave with a simple framework to audit their own classrooms and schools through the lens of student voice and belonging.	Dr. José Enriquez, Sheena Lall, and The GRAD Partnership at Johns Hopkins University
ASC 301	From the “Helped” to the Helpers: Activating Identity Agency through a Full-Circle ML Pipeline: How a Small District Integrates Elementary Vertical Alignment with Secondary Peer Mentorship to Build a Self-Sustaining Culture of Success Discover how a small district transformed multilingual learners from recipients of support into essential community leaders. This engaging session combines data-driven, elementary vertical alignment with a powerful secondary Cultural Ambassador program. Featuring a live student panel and teacher perspectives, we'll share a replicable blueprint for scaling academic success, overcoming scheduling barriers, and fostering administrative collaboration. Walk away inspired to flip the script, activate student agency, and build a self-sustaining culture of success! Participants will: 1. Engage in a range of activities that they can apply in their own roles, including designing a peer-mentorship framework, implementing student-led community engagement, strategically disaggregating performance data, navigating scheduling and staffing barriers, analyzing the K-12 “full-circle” ecosystem, formulating effective central office-building level partnerships, and shifting from deficit to asset-based mindsets. 2. Participants will internalize the concept of identity agency and will be better equipped to value student voices in professional spaces.	Liliber “Lily” Cornielle-Cordero

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 303	Empowering Multilingual Learners Through Evidence-Based Career and Technical Education Practices Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in career and technical education require equitable linguistic support to access all concepts to maximize their opportunity to learn and share their funds of knowledge about their trade. In this multimodal session, educators will receive linguistic support strategies to increase accessibility and comprehension for technical proficiency, while acquiring English. Technical concepts will be explored through engaging sheltered instruction activities embedded with best practices that promote empowering linguistic and skill growth. Participants will: 1. Experience proven sheltered instruction techniques specifically designed for career and technical education settings while engaging with technical concepts embedded with language scaffolds. 2. Learn to design culturally responsive activities that actively engage adolescents' full linguistic repertoires and leverage their diverse funds of knowledge. 3. Become empowered to lower the affective filter for adolescent multilingual learners, significantly increasing confidence, language proficiency, and academic success for all learners.	Andrea Luna and Lorrie Tine
ASC 305	From State to Classroom: Building Collaborative Systems That Support ELs/MLs in Mathematics High-quality math instruction for ELs/MLs depends on strong collaboration. This session explores what that looks like in practice, featuring Danbury Public Schools' work building math-EL/ML teaming structures at the district and classroom levels, alongside a look at how CSDE's math and EL/ML consultants collaborate at the state level to support this work statewide. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for building similar cross-content partnerships in their own districts. Participants will: Gain strategies for supporting collaboration to meet the needs of EL/ML students in mathematics.	Jennifer Michalek, Dr. Amanda Peterson, and Dr. Rachel Saunders

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 306	Small Structures, Big Impact: Centering Language & Culture to Engage, Empower, and Build Bridges Across Ages & Identities Easily create new opportunities for MLs to shine with pride and leadership. We'll share specific programs/activities that center the assets of our multilingual students and families, building bridges across grade levels, buildings, students, staff, and families. Any size district can implement these meaningful, sustainable, and impactful practicum and enrichment experiences. Capitalize on cultural and linguistic identity to engage, empower, inspire, develop empathy, build community, and improve academic outcomes for MLs at little or no cost. Participants will: 1. Leave inspired, optimistic, and confident, and with resources. 2. Be ready to implement six new activities/programs that are impactful for MLs and community-building, flexible to suit their environments, easily replicable and sustainable, and low- or no-cost to put forward.	Jean Borrup
ASC 308	Elevating the ML Experience: Visual Scaffolds and Strategies Using Canva What happens when a multilingual learner becomes the teacher? Samira Zuniga, a first-generation Latina and ESL teacher, has spent her career asking what her students need — and designing her classroom to provide it. In this hands-on session, she shares how purposeful visual design using Canva can serve as a powerful scaffold for multilingual learners across all proficiency levels, while simultaneously celebrating and sustaining their native language connections. Come explore the power behind visual instructional tools! Participants will: 1. Analyze the research behind visual instructional tools to navigate Canva's built-in features and ultimately construct a ready-to-use visual scaffold for an upcoming unit. 2. Apply framework-grounded design principles to create a multi-language "Meet-the-Teacher" page in order to establish a reusable digital template to strengthen family engagement and bridge home-school communication.	Samira Zuniga

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 309	Story as a Bridge: Using SIOP Strategies and Culturally Relevant Texts to Honor the Assets of Multilingual Learners This workshop offers educators a framework for understanding the distinct needs of multilingual learners and the tools essential for their growth. Participants will explore a two-step approach: first, using SIOP strategies to make grade-level content accessible within any adopted curriculum; then incorporating culturally relevant texts so students see themselves, connect with experiences similar to their own, and understand that their lives extend far beyond their current neighborhood. Practical, replicable tools included. Participants will: 1. Identify core SIOP strategies and explain how each supports multilingual learner access to rigorous content as districts transition to ELA curricula. 2. Examine how culturally relevant texts create space for multilingual learners to see themselves, connect with others, and deepen language acquisition and engagement. 3. Explore at least one asset-based instructional strategy and consider how it might transfer to their own classroom or curriculum context.	Jennifer Hill and Johanna Robles
ASC 311	The Writing Revolution x Building Thinking Classrooms: Increase Access, Preserve Rigor Teachers with multilingual learners (MLs) in their classroom are often confronted with the tension between thinking tasks and ensuring they have created access regarding language demands. This session illustrates how the structures of Building Thinking Classrooms and the strategies of The Writing Revolution can be combined to support MLs. A few intentional teacher moves can significantly increase access to content for our students without simplifying the thinking. Participants will: 1. Learn and put into practice high-leverage instructional routines that increase access for MLs while preserving rigor: visual supports, collaborative sentence-level tools, and other teacher moves grounded in principles of UDL. 2. Analyze where elements of The Writing Revolution and Building Thinking Classrooms naturally support MLs and where additional entry points are needed. 3. Reflect on the equity implications of this work. 4. Leave with a folder of ready-to-use tools including templates, samples, and more. 5. Adapt an existing task from their own content area (if time).	Jonathan Hull and Dr. Erin Birden

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 326	Talk, Know, Write: Using Collaboration as a Tool for Applying Knowledge in Writing In this session, educators will explore how collaborative conversation and note-taking can help students apply knowledge and enhance writing skills. Participants will dive into strategies that use rich, content-based texts to deepen students' understanding of a variety of topics, which in turn fuels their writing. We'll examine how note-taking and structured, collaborative discussion can help students organize their thoughts, develop vocabulary, and refine ideas before putting pen to paper. Through practical examples and hands-on activities, educators will leave with methods to integrate reading, discussion, and writing across the curriculum. Participants will: 1. Dive into strategies that use rich, content-based texts to deepen students' understanding of a variety of topics, which in turn fuels their writing. 2. Examine how note-taking and structured, collaborative discussion can help students organize their thoughts, develop vocabulary, and refine ideas before putting pen to paper. 3. Use practical examples and hands-on activities to learn new strategies to integrate reading, discussion, and writing across the curriculum.	Brian Benavides
ASC 201 (2nd floor)	Literacy Essentials: Engagement, Effectiveness, and Equity for All Learners The goal of this session is to accelerate literacy and language development for multilingual learners through targeted, differentiated instruction and intentional, embedded scaffolds. Participants will explore practical strategies that remove barriers to learning while maintaining high expectations for every student. The session will focus on strengthening vocabulary and oral language, supporting foundational literacy skills, and using immediate scaffolds to help students access grade-level reading and writing instruction. Participants will: Leave with evidence-based strategies and actionable practices they can use to promote confidence, engagement, and literacy success for multilingual learners.	Marisa Russo

Breakout Session 2: 12:35–1:30 p.m.

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
Main Ballroom	From Voice to Systems: Building Structures Where Multilingual Learners Lead & Belong What happens when we stop asking students to adapt to systems—and instead design systems that respond to student voice? This interactive breakout session brings together the work of Latinos in Action (LIA) and insights from The GRAD Partnership at Johns Hopkins University, which focuses on building student-centered systems of success. Grounded in a recent student voice blog featuring LIA students, this session explores what students say they need to feel a true sense of belonging—and what they wish educators understood about their experiences. Participants will: 1. Engage directly with student reflections on belonging, identity, and support, and examine how these insights can be translated into intentional systems, structures, and practices within schools. 2. Learn strategies to center student voice as data, design for belonging, build systems of success, and create student leadership structures. 3. Leave with a simple framework to audit their own classrooms and schools through the lens of student voice and belonging.	Dr. José Enriquez, Sheena Lall, and The GRAD Partnership at Johns Hopkins University
ASC 301	The Knowledge Advantage: Literacy and Language for ELs/MLs Two ELs/MLs walk into a classroom. Both are developing English language and literacy skills. Only one possesses background knowledge and relevant vocabulary. And that matters. ELs/MLs are learning a language while simultaneously building world knowledge. In this workshop, learn how to grow your ELs/MLs' knowledge and vocabulary skills through interactive activities supported by the science of reading. Participants will learn how to support students and collaborate with educators to ensure ELs/MLs have access to grade-level learning experiences throughout the day. Participants will: 1. Understand the role knowledge plays in literacy and how to effectively turn the research into best instructional practices. 2. Expand instructional toolkit to build ELs/MLs' knowledge and vocabulary skills to improve their literacy outcomes across disciplines. 3. Identify opportunities to collaborate with educators to embed these research-based instructional strategies across classrooms.	Caroline Messenger and Deirdre Savarese

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 303	The CIRC Audit: Exploring the Cultural Impact of Parental Engagement for Parents of Arabic-speaking students Participants in this workshop will have an opportunity to examine family engagement policies for MLL families utilizing an asset-based lens. Participants will stretch beyond the language barrier to explore the cultural perceptions of parental engagement for Arabic-speaking immigrants and refugees in a district adult education ESL classroom and how they can be bridged for schools/districts. Participants will assess their school/district's current policies in family engagement for culturally responsive policies and explore how to support as well as bridge the cultural differences to enhance their school/district's family engagement offerings. Participants will walk away with resources to plan for intentional family engagement policies for parents from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Participants will: 1. Explore the cultural barriers and facilitators of parental engagement for parents of Arabic-speaking students, utilizing an asset-based lens. 2. Explore the CIRC Audit—an audit developed to assess a district/school's capacity to plan for family engagement policies aimed at developing trusting relationships between families and schools. 3. Utilize Connecticut-based resources: EL/ML Framework, Parent Bill of Rights to develop their capacity in supporting two-way trusting relationships between schools and families.	Dalia Assem
ASC 305	Revolutionizing Student Success with Individual Language Plans Join us to learn how Individual Language Plans (ILPs) can elevate multilingual learner success in the classroom. This session will highlight our work to support student progress by scaffolding curriculum and offering high-impact strategies tailored to students' language proficiency levels. Participants will see examples from a CT district of how ILPs can personalize language instruction, improve educational equity, and inform instructional decisions in the classroom and beyond, such as in MTSS, PPT and 504 teams. Participants will: 1. Explore how the systematic use of Individual Language Plans (ILPs) support student progress through scaffolding content, curriculum, and assessments through specific examples achieved in a CT district. 2. Consider how this model could be applied within the context of their collaborative structures.	Lisanne Kaplan and Billie Shea

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 306	Visualizing Voices: Scaffolding Wit & Wisdom for Accessible, High-Quality Instruction Unlock complex texts for every student. In this session, educators will learn to design and implement targeted visual scaffolding strategies tailored for the Wit & Wisdom curriculum. Discover practical techniques to help 4th–6th grade learners engage deeply with grade-level content, make their thinking visible, and independently adjust their learning in real time. Leave with actionable tools to foster academic independence and language acquisition. Participants will: 1. Analyze Text & Curriculum: Cognitive Outcome. Participants will evaluate Wit & Wisdom modules to identify complex text demands and determine exactly where high-quality visual scaffolds are necessary to bridge the gap for multilingual learners. 2. Design Visual Scaffolds: Application Outcome. Participants will build a toolkit of evidence-based visual strategies including the Picture Word Inductive Model (PWIM) tailored specifically to make abstract language and concepts visible to students. 3. Formulate Real-Time Assessment Routines: Behavioral Outcome. Participants will construct strategies that empower students to look at visual cues, self-assess their understanding, and actively adjust their learning in real time during a lesson.	Donna Mauro
ASC 308	Supporting English Learners/Multilingual Learners in the Mathematics Classroom: Evidence-Based Strategies This presentation focuses on strengthening mathematics instruction for English learners/multilingual learners (ELs/MLs). Participants will explore evidence-based strategies for planning language objectives, facilitating student access, and supporting student communication. By engaging in mathematics tasks with embedded language support and reflecting on instruction, participants will examine strategies, structures, and questions that promote ELs'/MLs' engagement and agency within mathematics classrooms. Participants will leave with an infographic to use and share that highlights strategies from the session. Participants will: 1. Explain how language demands can affect EL's/ML's access to mathematics. 2. Identify evidence-based strategies for planning language objectives, facilitating access, and supporting communication. 3. Plan next steps for applying these strategies in their own practice.	Johannah Nikula and Kate Coleman

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 309	What I Needed Then, What My Students Need Now: Practical Strategies for Supporting Multilingual Learners Why did Hamden Public Schools shift to a sheltered instruction model? This session will share our district's journey, including the rationale for change, professional learning experiences, implementation challenges, and lessons learned. Participants will explore key differences between sheltered and non-sheltered instruction through classroom examples, including the use of language objectives and structured student interaction strategies. Attendees will leave with practical tools and reflection protocols that can be adapted to support multilingual learners. Participants will: 1. Be able to identify key differences between sheltered and non-sheltered instruction and explain the rationale for implementing a sheltered instruction model. 2. Analyze classroom examples, reflect on implementation successes and challenges, and identify at least two practical strategies or tools that can be applied in their own schools or classrooms to better support multilingual learners.	Hee (Clara) Choi
ASC 311	Building Capacity through LAS Links Data-Driven Instruction Join DRC to review using your LAS Links data to support instruction: understanding what students can do and how to share information and results with content area teachers. Participants will review the connection of oral/oracy and literacy skills and practice instructional strategies to take back to their district. All attendees will receive a digital copy of the LAS Links Instructional Strategies! Participants will: 1. Identify what students can do at earned Proficiency Levels. 2. Understand the connection between oracy/oral skills and literacy skills in language development. 3. Share instructional strategies with content area colleagues to ensure EL/ML students can actively engage in classes.	Chelsea Rivera

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 326	From Assessment to Achievement: Helping Families Understand Multilingual Growth and Academic Success This session explores how schools can strengthen family and community partnerships by helping families understand language achievement data and celebrating multilingual learner success. Participants will learn strategies for using LAS Links results to help families understand English learner exit criteria, language growth targets, progress monitoring, and student achievement. The session will also highlight how Connecticut's Seal of Biliteracy can be used to promote biliteracy, recognize student accomplishments, and empower families to support academic success. Participants will: 1. Interpret and communicate multilingual learner assessment data by understanding LAS Links proficiency levels, growth targets, progress-monitoring measures, and English learner exit criteria. 2. Develop family engagement strategies that help families understand language achievement data and actively support their child's language development and academic success.	Christina Schiano
ASC 201 (2 nd floor)	Designing for ALL: Translingual Universal Design for Learning Using AI CSDE acknowledges that educators need an understanding of emerging technology including AI and how it applies to learning. In this session, participants will connect the principles of Translanguaging and UDL (TrUDL), which emphasizes proactive planning and an inclusive environment. Educators will connect: • Culturally responsive practices that connect learning to students' identities and interests, fostering engagement; • Multilingual and multimodal teacher strategies that increase accessibility and comprehension; and • Multilingual and multimodal student practices that provide flexible ways to demonstrate understanding. Participants will: 1. Understand the benefits of TrUDL when working with multilingual students. 2. Create AI generated supplementary materials to address specific learning barriers using the TrUDL principles as a framework.	Dr. Sophia Diamantis and Dr. Smita Worah

Breakout Session 3: 1:45–2:40 p.m.

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 301	Beyond Simplification: Evidence-Based Practices for Adolescent Multilingual Learners to Access Complex Text Adolescent multilingual learners—including long-term English learners (LTELs)—often face the greatest barriers to rigorous, grade-level literacy instruction. This session examines evidence-based practices that help secondary educators maintain high expectations while providing effective language and literacy supports. Secondary students must simultaneously acquire academic English while mastering increasingly complex, grade-level content across disciplines. This session addresses that critical need by equipping educators with evidence-based practices that help adolescent multilingual learners access rigorous texts, strengthen disciplinary literacy, and succeed without lowering expectations. Participants will: Identify the unique literacy challenges adolescent multilingual learners—including long-term English learners (LTELs)—face when accessing complex, grade-level texts. 1. Implement evidence-based instructional practices that support adolescent multilingual learners' comprehension of complex texts through oral language development, purposeful scaffolding, background knowledge, and strategic use of students' home languages. 2. Recognize classroom practices and instructional look-fors that promote rigorous, grade-level learning while ensuring equitable access and success for adolescent multilingual learners.	Dr. José Viana
ASC 303	Parent University: Bridging Home and School for Student Success Parent University: Bridging Home and School will provide educators with practical, high-impact strategies to transform traditional parent involvement into a collaborative partnership. In this session, we will shift the paradigm from simply "inviting" parents to school to actively empowering them as co-educators in their child's academic journey. Learn how to host your own family workshops that boast high attendance and high engagement. Join us to re-imagine family engagement and build a unified school community! Participants will: Walk away with a blueprint to host successful, high-attendance family events (like "What You Need to Know" or Summer Reading Kickoffs).	Christine Butler, Susan Krauss, and Maria Zampano

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 305	LEAP: Relationships at the Heart of Attendance & Engagement LEAP (Learner Engagement & Attendance Program) is Connecticut's research-based, relational home visit model that boosts student attendance and family engagement. This session shares the program's philosophy, key components, and evaluation results, such as the positive impact on multilingual learners and their families. Participants will reflect on cultural responsiveness as a cornerstone of building trusting relationships. Learn more at ct.gov/leap. Participants will: 1. Learn how creating meaningful partnerships with families can have a significant impact on student attendance. 2. Understand the nationally-recognized LEAP relational home visit model as an example of a data-driven, culturally-responsive intervention.	Caroline Calhoun and Carli Rocha-Reaes
ASC 306	Sustaining Linguistic Wealth: Designing a Grades 7–12 Heritage Spanish Pathway for Biliteracy and Beyond How can we transform secondary heritage language instruction into a driver for lifelong success? Hamden Public Schools shares its innovative Grades 7–12 Heritage Spanish pathway designed to sustain the linguistic and cultural assets of multilingual learners. Presenters will share curriculum frameworks, instructional practices, and student outcome evidence that strengthen first-language proficiency, support cultural identity development, and prepare students for the Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy. Walk away with practical tools and actionable strategies to build equity-centered, college-and-career-ready pathways. Participants will: 1. Analyze Hamden's secondary vertical-alignment model to identify curriculum-mapping strategies that explicitly bridge heritage language coursework with the linguistic demands of the Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy. 2. Evaluate evidence-based pedagogical strategies that simultaneously support an EL/ML's primary language proficiency, cultural identity development, and cross-linguistic transfer to English literacy, leaving with actionable practices to implement in their own district's secondary heritage language pathways.	Elizabeth Lapman and Erica Torruellas

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 308	Where Do Language Learners Fit in the Tiers of MTSS? How does your school district manage intervention K-8? How does that support your MLs/ELs? Stamford is in its 3rd year of implementing an MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) model. Please join us as we unpack what has worked and what continues to be developed. Let's learn from each other so we can all continue to support our MLs/ELs achieve academic success. This is an opportunity for educators to learn from each other no matter where a district is in their adoption of MTSS and how the unique needs of language learners can be met at all tiers of the intervention process. Participants will: 1. Engage in guided conversations that encourage colleagues to share their own experiences supporting MLs/ELs who need intervention. 2. Explore scenarios drawn from our work as MTSS coaches with deep backgrounds in language acquisition. 3. Participate in a fishbowl discussion model that invites reflection on personal experiences, observations, and approaches when working with multilingual learners requiring additional support.	Sandra Schwoerer and Dr. Monica Lahiri-Hoherchak
ASC 309	Building Inclusive, Accessible, and Representative Schools that Center Belonging Creating schools where every student feels valued and connected requires strong family-school partnerships. This session explores the core components of positive school climate and how inclusive Tier 1 practices support belonging for all students, with attention to the strengths and needs of multilingual learners. Participants will receive practical resources and an overview of recent Connecticut legislative updates related to school climate and student behavior. Participants will: 1. Understand the foundational elements of a systemic approach to creating inclusive, welcoming school environments. 2. Identify opportunities for meaningful family-school partnerships that promote belonging and student success. 3. Explore resources and recent legislative updates that support positive school climate and effective responses to student behavior.	Amanda Pickett

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 311	Empowering Skilled Educators: Making the Architecture of Language Expectations Visible, Viable, and Available During the session, participants will engage in activities that enable them to: This session deepens understanding of how Principle 1: Skilled Educators within the EL/ML Framework strengthens educator capacity by operationalizing the language expectations embedded in the Connecticut English Language Proficiency (CELP) Standards and the Content Area Standards. The session explores Bailey's Atomic Vocabulary View of Reading and its alignment with Connecticut's Science of Reading framework, as well as the ways the Atomic Vocabulary Strategy Map enhances instructional practice. Through guided analysis, the session examines how educators build capacity to meet diverse learner needs and highlights at least one evidence-based strategy that supports the linguistic development of English Learners and Multilingual Learners through effective, language-focused instruction. • Explain how Principle 1: Skilled Educators advances educator capacity by developing high-quality, well-prepared educators equipped with the knowledge and evidence-based practices needed to support ELs/MLs. • Describe how the architecture of language expectations embedded within the CELP and Content Area Standards, together with Bailey's Atomic Vocabulary View of Reading and Atomic Vocabulary Strategy Map, serve as a professional learning framework for strengthening educators' capacity to provide equitable access to rigorous, grade-level instruction through explicit language development. • Analyze how classroom educators, school leaders, district leaders, and state leaders each contribute to building a coherent system of continuous professional learning that promotes high expectations and improved outcomes for ELs/MLs. • Identify one evidence-based strategy from the Atomic Vocabulary Strategy Map that they can implement within their professional role to strengthen educator capacity and better support the linguistic needs of ELs/MLs. Participants will: 1. Build knowledge of how Principle 1: Skilled Educators develops high-quality, well-prepared educators equipped to support the linguistic development of English Learners and Multilingual Learners through continuous professional learning. 2. Grow a conceptual understanding of how Bailey's Atomic Vocabulary View of Reading clarifies the architecture of language expectations and how the Atomic Vocabulary Strategy Map operationalizes those expectations to strengthen instructional expertise and explicit language development. 3. Advance their systems thinking about how classroom educators, school leaders, district leaders, and state leaders collectively build educator capacity to improve outcomes for ELs/MLs. 4. Apply one evidence-based strategy that strengthens educator capacity and supports the linguistic needs of ELs/MLs within participants' professional roles.	Dr. Melissa Jenkins and Dr. Beryl Irene Bailey

Location/ Room Number	Session Title	Presenter(s)
ASC 326	Talk Data with the Performance Office This session will utilize state administrative data to describe Connecticut's English learner population and their change over the years. EdSight public and secure reports will be discussed, including the recently released EL/ML dashboard. A specific focus of this session will be on mastery/exit/reclassification criteria. Presenters will share recent research on mastery criteria across the country and explore alternative mastery criteria using Connecticut data. Attendee input and feedback will be welcomed. Participants will: 1. Build awareness on the reports and dashboards available to them through EdSight public. 2. Consider new ways to use data to better understand and support ELs/MLs in their roles as educators and leaders.	Dr. David Alexandro, Dr. Michael Sabados, Abe Krisst, and Ajit Gopalakrishnan
ASC 201 (2nd floor)	Ground Up Multiliteracy: A Brainstorming Workshop about AI and Literacy The rapid growth of GenAI tools in education creates new machine dependencies among learners that undermine traditional literacy skills (reading and writing). A short presentation will focus on the potential usefulness of small-scale multilingual literacy tasks that draw on the inherent linguistic skills and curiosity of learners to counterbalance AI dependency and promote critical thinking. Group activities that center on brainstorming multiliteracy solutions within classrooms will round out the workshop. Participants will: Define multiliteracy as a learning tool and design/advocate for classroom-based strategies to support multiliteracy in all.	Dr. Matthew Ciscel

Presenter Bios

Session 1

Dr. José Enriquez

Latinos in Action and The GRAD Partnership at Johns Hopkins University

Dr. José Enriquez is the Founder and CEO of Latinos in Action (LIA), a nationally recognized organization serving students in more than 13 states. Born in El Salvador and raised in East Los Angeles, he draws from his lived experience as a multilingual learner to inform his work in education, leadership, and systems change. He holds a Ph.D. and Master's degree in Educational Leadership and a Bachelor's degree in Spanish Education with an ESL minor from Brigham Young University (BYU). Dr. Enriquez has served as a teacher, assistant principal, and Director of Title III and Special Programs at the Utah State Office of Education.

The GRAD Partnership is a collaborative, national effort partnering with schools, districts and communities to use high-quality student success systems so that schools are empowered to graduate all students ready for the future. Our work represents the culmination of more than a decade of research and efforts to develop and validate student success systems. Learn more at gradpartnership.org.

Liliber "Lily" Cornielle-Cordero

Plainville Community Schools

Liliber "Lily" Cornielle-Cordero serves as the EL, Equity & Student Support Administrator at Plainville Community Schools, bringing over 22 years of dedicated experience in the field of education. Her extensive career has been devoted to championing the needs of diverse student populations, particularly in the areas of Language Acquisition and specialized student services. With experience across all educational levels; elementary, middle, and high school, Lily has taught Spanish and Special Education, always with a focus on fostering inclusive learning environments. Lily is committed to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed and advocates for a collaborative approach, working closely with administrators, teachers, parents, and students to enhance educational outcomes. Her vision emphasizes the importance of cross-training and partnership empowering all stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the success of every student, especially those from underserved communities.

Andrea Luna and Lorrie Tine

Connecticut Technical Education and Career System

Andrea Luna is a Multilingual Learner Instructional Specialist with more than 10 years of teaching and leadership experience supporting equitable linguistic needs across Chicago and Connecticut. Throughout her career, she has supported multilingual learners and their families across the entire educational spectrum, from preschool to the college level. Andrea's educational linguistic background as a Spanish biliterate educator includes serving as a K-6th grade Spanish Dual Language teacher, working as a district Multilingual Learner Coach, and teaching as a Hispanic Studies adjunct college instructor for bilingual Spanish speakers in Southeastern Connecticut.

Lorrie Tine has more than 15 years of instructional expertise supporting the South Central Connecticut communities. Lorrie is a veteran elementary and language educator who spent over a decade teaching K-6th grade students within Middletown Public Schools. She also dedicated five years to teaching ESL to adult learners at Middletown Adult Education.

In recent years, Andrea and Lorrie have enhanced their instructional focus within the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System like Automotive, Autobody, Bioscience & Environmental Tech, Culinary, Drafting, Digital Media, Electrical, Health Tech, Hairdressing & Cosmetology, IT, Plumbing, and Precision Machining to develop opportunities for the students' and staffs' funds of knowledge to be accessed. Through co-teaching with their trade educators, they model the importance and science behind lowering

affective filters for equitable linguistic support while emphasizing as an asset-based approach to encourage the empowerment of MLL students to use their full linguistic repertoire. At the same time, they embed sheltered instruction support for ALL learners making content accessible for ALL students from the onset creating equitable learning opportunities and empowering them as holistic learners.

Jennifer Michalek, Dr. Rachel Saunders, and Dr. Amanda Peterson

CSDE & Danbury Public Schools

Jennifer Michalek serves as Education Consultant for mathematics and computer science at the Connecticut State Department of Education. As a consultant, she provides leadership and support to over 169 districts across Connecticut in the areas of mathematics and computer science. She has developed and facilitated a variety of professional development learning opportunities at the school, district, and state level throughout her career. Prior to joining the state, Jennifer spent 18 years as a classroom teacher at the secondary level. She began her teaching career as a high school mathematics teacher in the Region 10 School System. From there she served Simsbury Public Schools as a teacher of both math and computer science. Jennifer concluded her classroom experience as a grade 8 math teacher for 13 years with the Bristol School System, being recognized in 2012 as Bristol's Teacher of the Year. Jennifer earned her B.S. in Mathematics and Computer Science with a minor in secondary education from Stonehill College in North Easton, MA. She went on to earn her M.A. in Special Education from Central Connecticut State University. Jennifer currently resides in Plainville with her husband and their three sons.

Dr. Rachel Saunders is the High School Math Department Head for Danbury Public Schools. She oversees 32 mathematics teachers across three schools while continuing to teach her own classes. Previously, she served as the 6-12 Mathematics Department Head, Middle School STEM Department Head, and as a middle school mathematics instructional coach. She began their career as a high school mathematics teacher, teaching courses ranging from Pre-Algebra through Algebra 2. Rachel has also worked in curriculum development, tutoring, and assessment writing. A longtime leader in mathematics education, Rachel has served on the ATOMIC Board since 2014 in roles including President, Middle School Representative, NCTM Representative, and Recording Secretary and she is currently the President of ATMNE. She has presented at ATOMIC and ATMNE conferences on topics including productive struggle, supporting multilingual learners, technology integration, feedback, and culturally and linguistically responsive practices. She also presented in June at the national BTC Conference. She has contributed to statewide mathematics reform efforts and most recently finished working on a collaboration with the REL-NEI and the Connecticut State Department of Education on supporting multilingual learners in middle school mathematics. Her leadership is grounded in research, collaboration, and a commitment to empowering educators. She completed her Doctorate in Instructional Leadership through WCSU in 2025. Rachel believes meaningful change happens when teachers are supported, respected, and provided with the tools and evidence needed to grow.

Dr. Amanda Peterson is an experienced mathematics educator committed to creating equitable and engaging learning opportunities for all students. She serves as Middle School STEM Department Head for Danbury Public Schools, supporting curriculum development, instructional planning, professional learning, and teacher mentorship. Throughout her career, she has served as a mathematics teacher, instructional coach, curriculum writer, and adjunct mathematics professor at the University of New Haven. Dr. Peterson is also an Illustrative Mathematics Facilitator, providing professional learning focused on mathematics curriculum, Universal Design for Learning, and Mathematical Language Routines. She has contributed to curriculum development at the district and state levels, including Connecticut's Algebra 2 curriculum. She serves on the board of the Associated Teachers of Mathematics in Connecticut (ATOMIC) and as a co-conference chair, supporting mathematics educators across the state. Her work focuses on mathematics instruction, multilingual learners, technology integration, student engagement, and equitable access to rigorous mathematics. She has presented at conferences, including NCTM, and earned her Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Western Connecticut State University. Her favorite quote captures this philosophy: "Noise isn't the enemy. Disengagement is. Give me laughter, questions, movement, and a little chaos, that's what learning feels like." (Dr. Rad Johnson).

Jean Borrup*Berlin Public Schools*

Jean Borrup is a TESOL educator for over 25 years, continually striving to improve student experiences and outcomes. She earned her MA in TESOL at CUNY Hunter College with the first several years of her career in the New York City Public Schools. She then taught for two years at Almaty International School in the Republic of Kazakhstan before returning to the U.S. She has spent the past 18 years as ESOL Teacher and K-12 ESOL Coordinator for the Berlin Public Schools here in Connecticut. She has provided various professional learning sessions on topics such as cultural competency, best practices for ELs/MLs, and vocabulary instruction. She has served on many committees at the district level representing the perspectives and needs of EL/ML students and families. She is an active member of CAPELL, contributing to a variety of action groups and currently serving her third term as a member of the executive board. She has also had the great privilege to participate in several projects in partnership with counterparts from other districts and CSDE leaders. Jean was a member of Connecticut's SLIFE Community of Action and is currently on NAEFLPA's LEA committee.

Samira Zuniga*Hamden Public Schools*

Samira Zuniga is a proud first-generation Latina and a dedicated ESL teacher at Hamden High School. She graduated from Southern Connecticut State University with a B.S. in Bilingual Elementary Education. During her time at SCSU, she successfully defended her thesis which focused on the strategies monolingual children use during foreign language acquisition in comparison to the linguistic transfer skills multilingual children employed during the same Turkish vocabulary lessons. Inspired by her research, as well as her personal journey, Samira pursued an M.S. in TESOL and has since dedicated her career to teaching, advocating, and empowering multilingual learners. Samira's academic background and firsthand understanding of the immigrant student experience has allowed her to foster an inclusive classroom culture where students' diverse identities are valued, honored, and celebrated. As a lifelong learner, Samira has expanded her expertise by pursuing a second Master's degree in Library and Information Science. With this additional qualification, her goal is to learn more methodologies to bridge literacy with equitable language access. Ultimately, Samira is driven to ensure that every multilingual learner maintains a strong connection to their native language while gaining the tools and resources to be successful in and out of the classroom.

Jennifer Hill and Johanna Robles*Hartford Public Schools*

Jennifer Hill is a Multilingual Specialist at Hartford Public Schools, where she supports multilingual learners at Milner Middle School and Weaver High School through sheltered instruction, co-teaching, and language services. As a CSDE Curriculum Teacher Leader Fellow, Jennifer co-leads the development of a sheltered ELA curriculum framework for grades 6-8, grounded in translanguaging theory, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and the SIOP Model. With nearly 20 years of Connecticut K-12 experience spanning AP and college-level English teaching, department leadership, instructional coaching, and TESOL specialist work, Jennifer brings both deep content knowledge and a practitioner's understanding of what multilingual learners need to access rigorous, culturally responsive curriculum. She holds Connecticut endorsements in ELA and TESOL, a Master of Arts in Writing and Publishing from Emerson College, a Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Connecticut and is completing her 092 Educational Leadership certification at Quinnipiac University. Jennifer believes that every multilingual learner carries a story worth honoring, and that when curriculum is designed with students' linguistic and cultural identities at the center, language becomes a bridge, not a barrier. She invites educators to join her in reimagining what is possible when multilingual learners see themselves in the stories they read and discover that their own stories have the power to connect, illuminate, and inspire.

Johanna Robles is the Director of Multilingual Learners at Hartford Public Schools. With 30 years of experience in education, she has dedicated her career to supporting students, families, and school

communities. Since 2022, she has served as the Director of Multilingual Learners for Hartford Public Schools. Prior to this role, she spent a decade in school administration, serving five years as a principal and eight years as an assistant principal. Her philosophy in education is simple yet powerful: treat all students as if they were your own children and strive every day to be the kind of educator you would want to teach your own child. Those standards drive everything she does to ensure multilingual learners receive the love, respect, and high-quality education they deserve. Outside of her professional life, she has been happily married to her husband for 33 years and are the proud parents of two children and the blessed grandparents of three wonderful grandchildren.

Brian Benavides

Curriculum Associates

Brian Benavides serves as National Director at Curriculum Associates, where he supports districts across the country on literacy, biliteracy, and dual language programs. His work sits at the intersection of curriculum, professional learning, and implementation. Before that, he spent more than a decade teaching bilingual education, ESL, literacy, and social studies across elementary, middle, and high school.

Marisa Russo

McGraw Hill

Marisa Russo is an accomplished McGraw Hill National Multilingual Senior Literacy Specialist and EL Development Specialist with over 30 years of experience in the field of education. She has worked globally and trained educators across all 50 states. Prior to her current role, Marisa served as an elementary school educator and literacy coach in Los Angeles, where she focused on supporting limited English speakers and at-risk students. Her dedication to education led her to earn a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, along with a TESOL certification, to better assist fragile learners. As a renowned keynote speaker, Marisa has presented at numerous conferences, including ILA, NABE, NCEA, ESEA (Title I), CRA in California, the Oregon Early Learning Conference, NASA (Nevada), CCIRA (Denver), Florida Literacy Conference, NY TESOL, and the Region 7 EL Conference in Texas.

Session 2

Dr. José Enriquez

Latinos in Action and The GRAD Partnership at Johns Hopkins University

Dr. José Enriquez is the Founder and CEO of Latinos in Action (LIA), a nationally recognized organization serving students in more than 13 states. Born in El Salvador and raised in East Los Angeles, he draws from his lived experience as a multilingual learner to inform his work in education, leadership, and systems change. He holds a Ph.D. and Master's degree in Educational Leadership and a Bachelor's degree in Spanish Education with an ESL minor from Brigham Young University (BYU). Dr. Enriquez has served as a teacher, assistant principal, and Director of Title III and Special Programs at the Utah State Office of Education.

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Caroline Messenger and Deirdre Savarese

Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success at CSDE

Caroline Gordon Messenger started her professional life as a journalist. After more than a decade, she earned her teaching credentials and has worked in education for 26 years. She has taught English/Language Arts in grades 6–8 before transitioning to work primarily with 9th and 10th grade students. She later took on the role of director of curriculum Pre-K through 12th grade for an Alliance District and

obtained her TESOL certification to better support all teachers in meeting the needs of all students. She has presented workshops regionally and nationally about literacy, adolescent literacy, and literacy across the disciplines and published several articles. She is currently an associate education consultant at the CSDE's Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success. She has two amazing children, a fabulous husband, and an adorable dog.

Deirdre Savarese has worked as a literacy professional for over fifteen years, initially as a reading specialist in urban charter schools and then as a literacy coach in an Alliance District. Deirdre joined the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success in 2023. In that role, she supports district and charter schools in improving all students' literacy outcomes through research- and evidence-based instructional practices. She is passionate about literacy, expanding access to rigorous educational experiences for all learners, and investing educators with evidence-based skills and strategies to fully support their students."

Dalia Assem

Central Connecticut State University

Dalia Assem has over 15 years as a teacher of multilingual learners in Canada, Saudi Arabia and the United States. As a second-generation Arabic-speaking multilingual learner herself, she has advocated for students and their families in her work as a teacher and statewide consultant. Dalia strongly believes in utilizing asset-based strategies to empower learners and their families and has focused her research on centering asset-based family engagement practices.

Lisanne Kaplan and Billie Shea

LEARN

Lisanne Kaplan is a Multilingual Learner Consultant with LEARN. With her years of experience as a TESOL teacher, ML District Coordinator, instructional coach, district administrator, and consultant, she works with Connecticut districts to build equitable systems and research-based, asset-focused multilingual learner programming. Lisanne creates and delivers professional learning in districts throughout Connecticut and at conferences and events across the United States. As a Fund for Teachers Fellow, she conducted an independent study of the resettlement of Syrian, Afghan, and North African asylum seekers in Malmö, Sweden. Through the Teach to Lead Summit, she co-developed a teacher leadership initiative which was the subject of an article in the December 2020 issue of Educational Leadership. Lisanne is committed to welcoming and engaging culturally and linguistically diverse students and families, ensuring access to all school opportunities, and lifting the cultural and linguistic assets of all multilingual students.

Billie Shea is the principal at Great Neck Elementary School in Waterford.

Donna Mauro

Hamden Public Schools

Donna Mauro began her elementary teaching career with New Haven Public Schools (1999–2004) before transitioning to Hamden Public Schools, where she has proudly served since 2004. Over her career, she spent 15 years teaching primary and intermediate grades (2nd, 3rd, and 6th) before earning a cross-endorsement in TESOL. For the past 11 years, Donna has served as Hamden's elementary (K–6) Multilingual Learner (ML) Specialist. Her academic foundation was built entirely at Southern Connecticut State University, where she completed her undergraduate degree, master's, 6th Year Certificate, and TESOL cross-endorsement coursework.

Over the last three years, her role has expanded into leadership as the Curriculum Leader for Hamden's ML Department. In this capacity, she facilitates professional development and leads the alignment of language acquisition standards with their Tier 1 ELA curriculum (Wit & Wisdom). Notably, she designed and delivered district-wide professional development for all 2nd and 3rd-grade teachers on the Picture Word Inductive Model (PWIM). Additionally, she served as a Fellow with the Connecticut State Department of Education's "A Leader's Journey to High-Quality Curriculum" initiative for the 2025–26 school year, an opportunity that allowed her to collaborate with and learn from educational leaders across the state.

Dr. Sophia Diamantis and Dr. Smita Worah*SERC*

Sophia completed a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and an M.S. in TESOL and Bilingual Education at Southern Connecticut State University. She has taught English as an additional language in Honduras, Poland, Vietnam, the Czech Republic, Russia and the US at all levels. Sophia was raised in two languages in the US by immigrant parents. From age 4 to 12, she attended a heritage language school to develop literacy skills in Greek. However, she experienced a monolingual approach in her education, where her bilingualism was affirmed but not engaged in learning. After learning about translanguaging theory, Sophia was empowered to resume communicating across languages. She has experienced meaningful connections with others and her cultural background because of multilingual communication. At SERC, Sophia enjoys working with educators to leverage multilingual students' full linguistic resources to extend learning.

Smita Worah's passion for working with students with disabilities is a result of her personal international experience as an educator and an individual with a disability. Smita is a dynamic and experienced special educator, researcher, and trainer whose goal is to assist policy makers, administrators, curriculum and technology developers, and educators in delivering programs, developing technologies, and implementing policies and procedures to support students with diverse needs.

Smita has created several resources for students with disabilities, educators, and family members in Connecticut and beyond, including developing linguistically and culturally appropriate symbols for non-speaking students who reside in the Indian subcontinent. From the start of her professional career Smita has worked with linguistically diverse students and is a strong believer that students need supports, and challenges to excel. The new and emerging AI technologies and tools, when utilized with caution, have the capability to transform education, making it a more dynamic, student-centric experience and provide individualization."

Hee (Clara) Choi*Hamden Middle School*

Clara Choi is currently an ESOL teacher at Hamden Middle School. She was born in South Korea and immigrated to the United States in 2008. As an English learner herself, she understands the challenges students may face when learning a new language and adapting to a new culture.

After completing her secondary education in the United States, she attended Southern Connecticut State University, where she earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Clara began her teaching career as a kindergarten teacher and spent five years helping young learners develop foundational language and literacy skills.

She is now in her third year as an ESOL teacher. Her experiences as both an immigrant and educator have shaped her passion for supporting multilingual learners. She is committed to creating an inclusive classroom environment where students feel valued, build confidence in their English skills, and achieve academic success.

Chelsea Rivera*Data Recognition Corporation (DRC)*

Chelsea Rivera, M.S.Ed., is a former educator of multilingual learners with over 6 years of experience teaching in Central New York and the Bronx. At DRC, she works as a Consultant in supporting LEA's with implementing Pre-K through adult learners assessments and using the data to support instruction through professional learning sessions.

Christina Schiano*Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication (ISAAC)*

Christina Schiano is a TESOL and Spanish educator currently serving as a Bilingual Coordinator and English Learner Assessment Coordinator (ELAC) at the ISAAC school in New London, Connecticut. She

holds a Master's degree in TESOL from the University of Saint Joseph and certifications in TESOL (K–12), Spanish, and bilingual education. She coordinates multilingual learner programming, oversees state language proficiency assessments, makes placement recommendations based on English language proficiency data, supports multilingual families, and provides professional development on language development, second language acquisition, and academic supports for multilingual learners. Her work centers on promoting equitable access and academic success for multilingual learners through collaboration with families, educators, and school leaders. She regularly administers and analyzes LAS Links data, monitors language growth targets, supports English learner exit decisions, and facilitates family engagement initiatives in both English and Spanish. Christina is passionate about helping families better understand language achievement data and celebrating multilingualism through initiatives such as Connecticut's Seal of Biliteracy.

Johannah Nikula and Kate Coleman

Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands (at Education Development Center)

Johannah Nikula co-leads the Connecticut Partnership to Strengthen English Learner/Multilingual Learner (EL/ML) Mathematics Outcomes through the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands (REL-NEI), which has been bringing together representatives from across multiple Connecticut organizations focused on mathematics and ELs/MLs in the state. REL-NEI is housed at the non-profit Education Development Center, where she is a Senior Project Director who works to ensure all students thrive in the mathematics classroom. Her experience includes leadership of numerous research and development projects, producing programs such as the Visual Access to Mathematics professional learning. She is an author of *Mathematical Thinking and Communication: Access for English Learners* as well as numerous articles and chapters about mathematics education, and has presented at conferences in New England, nationally, and internationally about mathematics teaching and learning and English learners/multilingual learners. She believes strongly in the value of collaboration and of bringing together educators' different expertise and experiences to best serve our students.

Kate Coleman co-leads the Connecticut Partnership to Support Multilingual Learner Mathematics Outcomes through the Regional Educational Laboratory–Northeast & Islands (REL-NEI), which is housed at the non-profit Education Development Center (EDC). As a Project Director at EDC, Kate focuses on curriculum development, instructional design, professional learning, and curriculum implementation to strengthen mathematics and computer science instruction for all learners. She brings more than 20 years of experience as an elementary teacher, instructional coach, and curriculum developer. Her current work includes supporting the development and implementation of the NSF-funded Math+CS project, which integrates programming and computational thinking into grades 2–5 mathematics, as well as serving as a professional learning coach for the Math for All program. She is a co-author of REL's *Mathematics Intervention Toolkit for Elementary Grades 3–6* and has presented at regional and national conferences on mathematics education and computer science integration. Across her work, she collaborates with educators, school leaders, and project partners to create practical, accessible resources that support all students.

Session 3

Dr. José Viana

Lexia Learning

Dr. José Viana is a Senior Education Advisor at Lexia Learning and a nationally recognized leader in multilingual education with more than 30 years of experience advancing educational opportunities for multilingual learners. Throughout his career, he has worked at the classroom, school, district, state, and federal levels, helping education leaders implement evidence-based practices that improve language, literacy, and academic outcomes.

Most recently, Dr. Viana served as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), where he helped shape national policy and initiatives supporting

English learners. Prior to his federal service, he directed North Carolina's Migrant Education Program and served as both a teacher of English learners in Miami-Dade County Public Schools and a school administrator in Durham Public Schools.

As a first-generation Cuban immigrant and former English learner, Dr. Viana brings both professional expertise and personal experience to his work. His passion is helping schools and districts create equitable, asset-based systems that recognize multilingualism as a strength while ensuring students achieve high levels of literacy and academic success. Through his leadership, speaking, and partnerships with educators nationwide, Dr. Viana continues to champion educational excellence and opportunity for multilingual learners."

Christine Butler, Susan Krauss and Maria Zampano

Shelton Public Schools

Christine Butler began her career as a classroom teacher in Fairfield before bringing her love of teaching to the Shelton Public Schools. There, she taught second and third grades for several years before accepting a position as a TESOL teacher. Christine, a SIOP trained educator, has loved teaching her kindergarten – fourth grade multilingual learners for the last 11 years! Christine is one of the active board members of the Excel Leadership Academy, a non-profit organization, designed to provide professional learning to educators about all things multilingual and multicultural and provide a pathway to TESOL certification through advanced coursework. Christine was Shelton's 2021 Teacher of the Year and was a semifinalist for the Connecticut Teacher of the Year award.

Susan Krauss is an experienced educator with a diverse background in supporting elementary learners. She began her career as an elementary special education teacher before transitioning to general education, where she taught students in grades 3, 4, and 5. She currently serves as a TESOL teacher in a K-4 school in Shelton, Connecticut, where she works to support multilingual learners' language development and academic success. Susan is trained in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model and is passionate about implementing effective instructional practices that make grade-level content accessible to all students. In recognition of her dedication to teaching and learning, she was named Shelton Teacher of the Year in 2005. Her broad experience across special education, general education, and TESOL provides her with a unique perspective on meeting the diverse needs of elementary learners and fostering inclusive classroom environments.

Maria Zampano is an educator in the Shelton Public Schools district with over 30 years of experience. A specialized ESOL teacher since 2005, Maria specializes in creating inclusive, high-engagement classrooms that empower multilingual learners. She was named Shelton's 2024 Teacher of the Year.

Caroline Calhoun

EdAdvance

Caroline C. Calhoun has 20 years of public-school teaching experience in upper elementary and middle school, focusing on Humanities-integrated Language Arts and Social Studies. She currently works for EdAdvance, one of Connecticut's six Regional Educational Service Centers, as an Attendance & Engagement Specialist supporting school districts in a variety of ways. Ms. Calhoun is wholeheartedly invested in helping Connecticut's students feel a sense of belonging in their schools and classrooms by helping shift educator mindsets and awareness. Her work in this arena includes a focus on family and community engagement, attendance, and culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy.

Elizabeth Lapman and Erica Torruellas

Hamden Public Schools

Beth Lapman and Erica Torruellas are educational leaders in Hamden Public Schools specializing in secondary world language instruction and multilingual program design. Beth, the Director of EL/ML and World Languages, brings extensive global and domestic expertise, having taught TEFL in Spain for several years before teaching Spanish in the United States. In her administrative role, she designs integrated pathways that support dual-language proficiency and continuous instructional growth.

Co-presenter Erica Torruellas is the 7–12 World Language Curriculum Leader for Hamden Public Schools, an instructional leader, mentor, and veteran educator with 15 years of experience teaching Spanish across secondary levels, including Heritage Spanish and AP Spanish Language & Culture. As a heritage speaker of Spanish with deep cultural and family roots in Puerto Rico, Erica infuses lived experience into her pedagogy and the development of asset-based heritage language pathways. Together, they have spearheaded Hamden's comprehensive Grades 7–12 Heritage Spanish pathway. Their combined backgrounds as language acquisition specialists, curriculum developers, and programmatic leaders equip them with unique insights into building rigorous, asset-oriented pathways. Driven by a passion for linguistic equity, Beth and Erica focus on designing sustainable systems that validate heritage students' native cultural and linguistic identities while systematically preparing them for state-level biliteracy recognition, rigorous post-secondary academic opportunities, and long-term career success.

Sandra Schwoerer & Dr. Monica Lahiri-Hoherchak

Stamford (CT) Public Schools

Dr. Monica Lahiri-Hoherchak is the MTSS Coach at Stillmeadow Elementary School in Stamford, CT. She manages the data, tiered instruction, and intervention (academic and other) for all students as well as the pathway towards Special Education identification if warranted. She is also an adjunct faculty member at Housatonic Community College teaching ESOL classes. Previously, she supervised the EL programs in the Stamford Public Schools serving over 3000 English learners. She has her doctoral degree from the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, with a dissertation entitled: *An Inquiry into the Identity of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)*.

Sandra Schwoerer is a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) for ML Student Support with Stamford Public Schools. During the 2025–26 academic year she served as the Interim MTSS Specialist at Scofield Magnet Middle School. She was previously an ESL teacher with Stamford (CT) Public Schools, an ESL instructor at UConn/Stamford and a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand. Upon completion of her service in Thailand, Sandy was awarded a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) Fellowship and earned an MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from Columbia University's Teachers College.

Amanda Pickett

Connecticut State Department of Education

Amanda Pickett is a certified School Social Worker and an Education Consultant in the Department of Education where her work centers around school climate and culture. Amanda is an endorsed PBIS trainer, an affiliate of Courageous Conversations about Race, and a licensed Restorative Practices trainer. She is an avid proponent of collaboration and bringing multiple voices and perspectives to the table.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins and Dr. Beryl Irene Bailey

CT State Department of Education and From Pages to Pedagogy, LLC

Drs. Beryl Irene Bailey and Melissa Jenkins are accomplished educators whose careers reflect a shared commitment to literacy, leadership, equity, and educational excellence.

Dr. Beryl Irene Bailey, retired educator and Founder and CEO of From Pages to Pedagogy, LLC, brings more than 40 years of service to children, families, educators, and leaders in Connecticut. An advocate for language and literacy development, she has designed and refined high-impact models of professional learning, instruction, and assessment that strengthen educator capacity and improve language and literacy outcomes for diverse learners. Her work is grounded in the belief that every child deserves qualified, committed, and caring educators.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins has devoted more than 30 years to public education as a teacher, ESL instructor, literacy leader, district administrator, university instructor, and Chief Turnaround Officer at the Connecticut State Department of Education. She holds a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), taught English as a Second Language in adult education, and leverages that expertise to advance equitable educational opportunities for multilingual learners.

Her work is grounded in ensuring that children from all backgrounds have access to high-quality educational opportunities and educators who believe in their potential.

Together, Drs. Bailey and Jenkins combine complementary expertise to advance educator capacity and improve outcomes for English Learners and Multilingual Learners.

Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Abe Krisst, Dr. David Alexandro, and Dr. Michael Sabados

Connecticut State Department of Education, Performance Office

Ajit Gopalakrishnan is the Chief Performance Officer of the Connecticut State Department of Education. He oversees the state's data collection, assessment, data warehouse, research, evaluation, and district/school accountability initiatives.

Abe Krisst is a Bureau Chief at the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) in the Performance Office, where the office's mission is to improve student outcomes through data and technology. He has worked at the CSDE for over 25 years. Abe's scope of work in the Performance Office includes large-scale assessments, data collection, data integration/reporting, research/analyses, and accountability.

Dr. Dave Alexandro is an education consultant in the Connecticut State Department of Education's Performance Office, where he conducts statewide research and develops data analyses and reporting tools to inform education policy and practice. His work draws on expertise in educational measurement, psychometrics, statistical modeling, and large-scale administrative data, with a particular interest in evaluating measures and criteria used to support educational decision-making. He holds a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology with a concentration in Research Methods, Measurement, and Evaluation from the University of Connecticut.

Dr. Michael Sabados, PhD is a Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) consultant serving in the Performance Office. His work focuses on the interpretation and analysis of assessment results and data to inform educational decisions, with a particular emphasis on English Learners/Multilingual learners (ELs/MLs).

Dr. Matthew Ciscel

Central Connecticut State University

Dr. Matt Ciscel is a Professor of applied linguistics and Chair of the English Department at Central Connecticut State University. He holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of South Carolina, Columbia. His research and publications have focused on language policy, instructed second language acquisition, and discourse analysis. The expansion of AI technologies has piqued his interest in multilingual literacy as a counterbalance to machine dependency.