ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

UPLIFTING THE ASSETS OF CALIFORNIA'S DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE EARLY YEARS:
PREPARING CALIFORNIA'S DIVERSE CHILDREN FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY.

POLICY BRIEF

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT US

Advancement Project is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization working on systems change. Our California staff in Los Angeles and Sacramento work to expand opportunities in our educational systems, create healthy built environments and communities, develop the connective tissue of an inclusive democracy, and shift public investments towards equity. Through our educational equity agenda, we aim to ensure access to quality education that unlocks every child's potential, and disrupts and addresses injustice.

We develop rigorous evidence-based solutions and innovate technology and tools with coalition partners to advance the field, build partnerships between community advocates and the halls of power, and broker racial and socioeconomic equity. For almost 20 years, *Advancement Project California* has collaborated with progressive community partners and leaders to transform the public systems impacting the lives of low-income people of color in California.

INTRODUCTION

California is home to the nation's largest population of children learning English in addition to their home language — dual language learners (DLL) or English learners (EL). The state's DLL/EL students enter the education system with linguistic, cultural, and intellectual assets that contribute to the rich diversity of California. However, disparities in academic outcomes indicate that their potential is not being realized. Within the last decade, growing research on DLL/EL education has illuminated the central role that home language development plays in English proficiency and overall student achievement. The research offers powerful evidence that not only are children capable of learning two or more languages successfully, but that there are also cognitive and social benefits to bilingualism.

Together with the research advances, a succession of policies has followed to uplift and build on the findings. This includes the California English Learner Roadmap, which enacted an assets-based policy for ELs from early childhood through grade 12, and includes a state-wide vision of biliteracy for all students. Given the large population of DLLs/ELs in the state, and the progress in research and policy for bilingual education, **California is uniquely positioned to lead the nation in advancing DLL/EL education policy and practice and create bilingual pathways for all students.**

Leadership at the state and local levels is vital to realize a vision of maximizing the full potential of our DLL/EL students, and to ensure that early care and education (ECE) and K–12 policy is effectively designed based on the assets of California's racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity. This policy brief provides an overview of the following: the state's DLL/EL population; the research on early language development, bilingualism, and language models; and key policies and recommendations that are aligned with research for state and local policymakers.

TERMINOLOGY

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNER (DLL)
Children, birth to five, learning two+ languages simultaneously or learning a second language while developing home language.

ENGLISH LEARNER (EL)
Students in K–12 education who have a home language other than English, and are learning English as a second language.

DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS
Programs that use both English and students' home languages and aim to develop both languages.
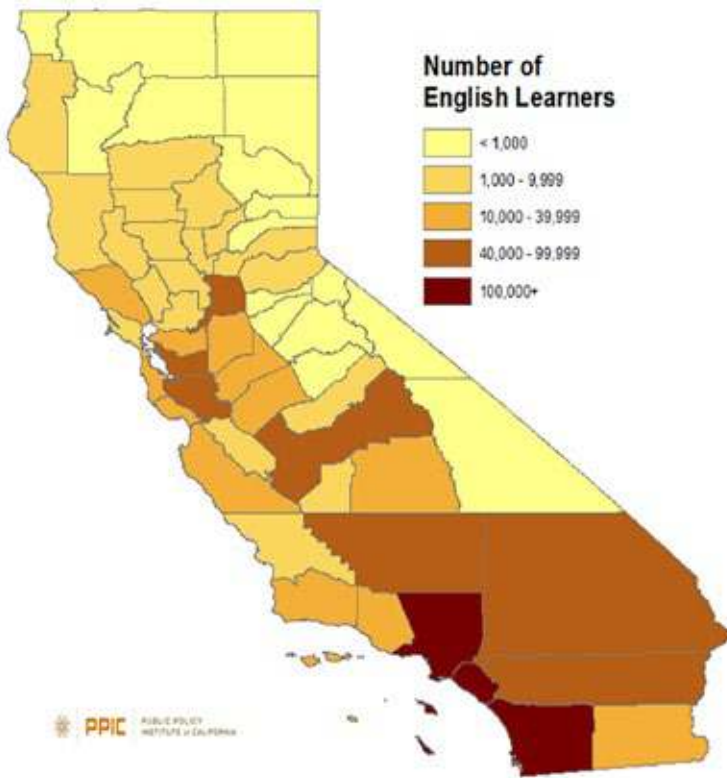
CALIFORNIA'S DLL/EL POPULATION

California is home to the largest population of ELs in the United States, with nearly a third (29 percent) of the nation's 4.6 million ELs being served in the state's public school system. Below are highlights of the EL population in California.

California's Vast DLL/EL Population: There are over 1.3 million ELs enrolled in public schools (or 21.4 percent of the total state's public school population).[1] About 43 percent of public school students live in homes where a language other than English is spoken.[2] Roughly 72 percent of ELs are in the elementary grades, from kindergarten to grade six.[3] Among California's youngest learners, 60 percent of children birth to five live in a household where English is not the primary language (DLLs).[4]

Diversity Among California's DLLs/Els: The DLL/EL population is culturally and linguistically diverse with varying levels of proficiency in their home language and English. The preponderance of ELs are native-born. National estimates show that 82 percent of ELs in K–5 and 55 percent of ELs in grades 6–12 are native-born.[5] California collects data for 65 language groups across the state, in which the vast majority of ELs speak Spanish (83.10 percent), followed by Vietnamese (2.14 percent), Mandarin (1.59 percent), Arabic (1.40 percent), and Filipino (1.31 percent).[6]

Number of English Learners

- < 1,000
- 1,000 - 9,999
- 10,000 - 39,999
- 40,000 - 99,999
- 100,000+

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DLLs/ELs Reside Across the State: DLLs/ELs are part of the education system in all 58 counties. Roughly, 42 percent of ELs are concentrated in three counties: Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego, which respectively have 25 percent, 9 percent, and 8 percent of the EL population.[7] However, there are also large numbers in counties such as San Bernardino and Fresno, and disproportionally large numbers of ELs in several smaller communities such as Imperial, Monterey, and Santa Barbara counties.[8]

High Poverty Rates for ELs: In California, the poverty rate for school-aged children is 21 percent. The poverty rates for ELs, however, ranges from 74 percent to 85 percent[9], which is three to four times the rate of the state.[10] Looking specifically at the preschool population, 45 percent of the roughly one million children ages 3–4 years in California reside in low-income families. The vast majority (73 percent) of these children living in poverty make up our DLL population.[11]

IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Early care and education (ECE) programs prepare our children for success in the K–12 system and help close the achievement gap as it first begins to form. The following offers an overview of the research on ECE and early language development.

DLLs Excel with High-Quality ECE: A vast body of research shows that children who attend high-quality preschool programs perform better on standardized tests in reading and math;[12] are less likely to be placed in special education or held back a grade; and are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college.[13] These outcomes can lead to substantial cost savings for school districts. While early learning addresses the educational opportunity gaps present prior to school entrance for all students, DLLs may benefit more from high-quality ECE programs relative to their monolingual peers, as they begin with lower levels of English comprehension.[14]

Home Language Supports Student Success: Research over the past two decades has provided tremendous insight into the brain, the language development process of young children, and the critical period of the first five years of life. Studies show that:

- the brain is most receptive to language learning in the earliest years of life;[15]
- children are not confused by learning multiple languages, rather, the brain is wired to learn any language in the world and is able to process multiple languages;[16] and
- for young DLLs, home language is central to developing proficiency in English and other languages, as well as cognitive and socio-emotional development, evolving sense of self,[17] and overall academic achievement.[18]
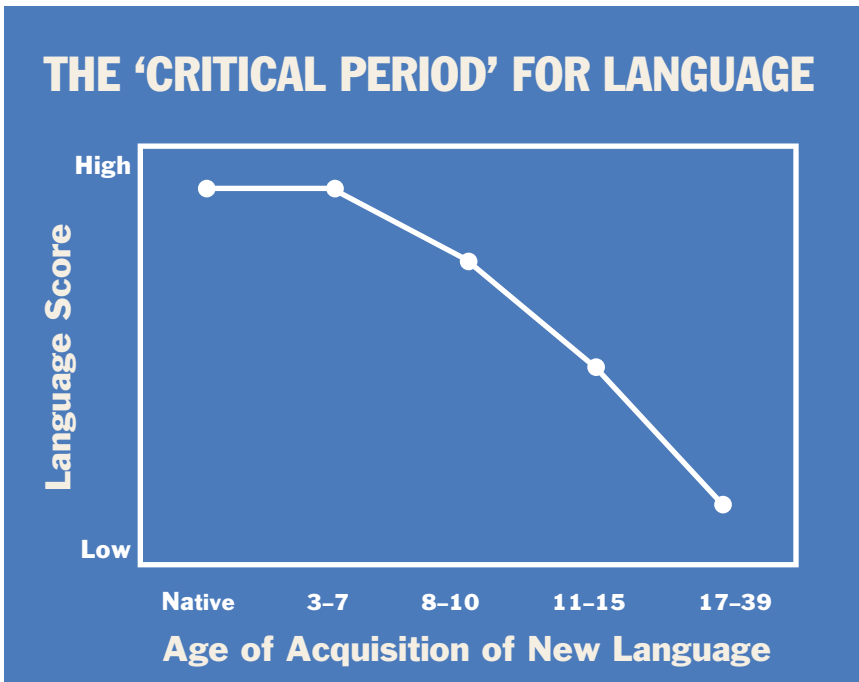
Source: Patricial K. Khul, 2011

This body of research also makes it clear that the quality and quantity of the language children are exposed to are important to first and second language development,[19] and that home language development does not compromise English language development.[20]

In 2017, these findings were verified by the **National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine** (NASEM), the prestigious scientific association that serves as the country's chief source of independent, expert advice on pressing challenges facing the nation. The NASEM report, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*, confirmed that when DLLs are provided with high-quality, early learning experiences that intentionally build their home language and English, students are set on a positive trajectory for school success.

ADVANTAGES OF BILINGUALISM

It is estimated that over half of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual.[21] Advances in neuroscience show that bilingualism and multilingualism in children and adults gives them a cognitive advantage.[22]

Studies show that as bilingual children and adults switch between two languages, their brains are very active and flexible. This helps them learn more easily, focus, and strengthens their memory, problem solving, and thinking skills, which are all important factors for college and career success.[23] Further, research shows that while ELs enrolled in a two-language program (English and their home language) "reclassify" from a EL status to a student who is proficient in English at a slower pace, they achieve "higher overall reclassification, English proficiency, and academic threshold passage by the end of high school."[24]

The bilingual advantage goes beyond school success as evidenced by a recent study that shows California employers value bilingual/multilingual candidates in the hiring process.[25] In today's interconnected and interdependent global economy, bilingualism is more important than ever. It is critical that our education system provides quality learning experiences for DLLs/ELs to thrive beginning in the earliest years, and more opportunities for all students to become multilingual.
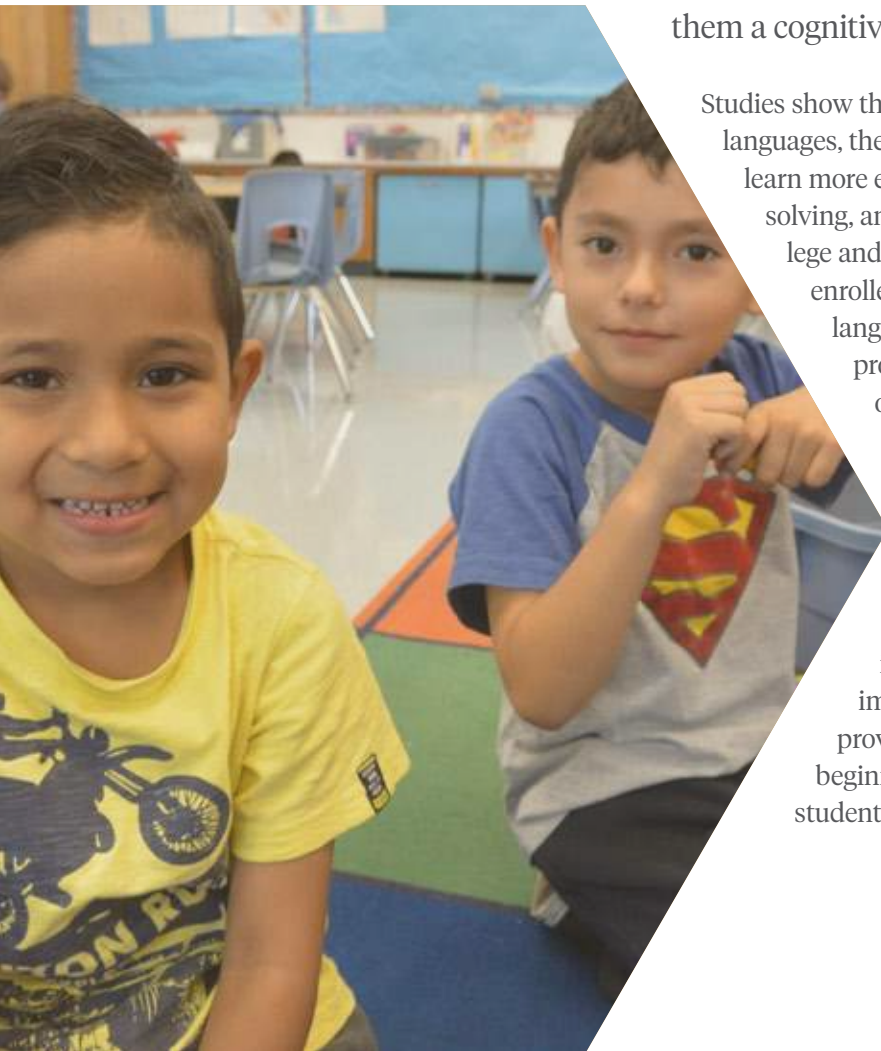
IMPORTANCE OF ONGOING AND INTENTIONAL SUPPORT FOR DLLS/ELS

Research shows it takes five to seven years[26] to become proficient in a new language. Assessment in both English and a student's home language is crucial to support annual academic growth and fully understand overall student progress.

Most ELs start school in transitional kindergarten (TK) or kindergarten and tend to be "reclassified" as a student proficient in English in late elementary or early middle school. In the upper grades, there is a smaller population of ELs either because their English proficiency increases over time and they are "reclassified"[27] out of the EL category, they drop out of school, or they move out of California. Students who remain as ELs for five or more years can become long-term English learners (LTELs).[28] While LTELs can converse socially and informally in English, often, their proficiency is at a basic level and they struggle with academic content due to low reading and writing skills. LTELs are not always placed in settings that meet their needs,[29] and of the DLLs who enter school at kindergarten, it is estimated that about 30 to 50 percent become LTEL students.[30]

Intentional supports designed around the specific needs of DLLs/ELs can ensure steady annual growth that leads to reclassification and enables them to access the core curriculum. It is also important to note that students should be "reclassified" as proficient in English only when they are ready. Removing supportive resources prematurely can have negative impacts on their academic achievement.

> "Assessment in both English and a student's home language is crucial to support annual academic growth and fully understand overall student progress."

SUPPORTING INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS OF DLLS

> "A child's home language serves as a strong foundation for English proficiency and overall academic achievement."

A child's home language serves as a strong foundation for English proficiency and overall academic achievement. DLLs/ELs need intentional and developmentally-appropriate instruction that meets their specific learning needs and supports both first and second languages. This includes:

- a focus on oral language development with opportunities to practice discussing what they are learning, thinking, and doing;[31]
- explicit focus on academic language development taught in context and used in different contexts;
- visual cues and interactive, engaging storybook reading in both languages;[32] and
- strategies that bridge student experiences and cultural reference points to new instructional material, boost comprehension and engagement, and build strong relationships between home and school.[33]

For ECE programs, two basic approaches are recommended for young DLLs:

1. **Dual Language Approach:** Instruction with varying proportions in the home language and English to support simultaneous development of both languages and promote bilingualism and biliteracy (e.g. 50 percent Mandarin and 50 percent English; 90 percent Spanish and 10 percent English, etc.).

2. **English with Home Language Support:** English is the main language of instruction with strategies to support DLLs' home languages while they are learning English (including some of the strategies mentioned above).

English-only instruction is not recommended for young DLLs.[34] Research shows that there are developmental risks related to home language loss, which can have negative long-term consequences for a child's academic, social, and emotional development, and family connection.[35]

Curriculum and instruction for DLLs/ELs is guided by several state resources including: Preschool English Learner Guide (2009); English Language Development (ELD) domains within the Preschool Learning Foundations (2008, 2010, 2012) and Curriculum Frameworks (2010); and Preschool Program Guidelines (2015), which include DLL teaching practices. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) also recognize the need for English language development during specific designated times of the day (designated ELD) and integrated across all instruction throughout the day (integrated ELD). The California Department of Education (CDE) calls on all local education agencies (LEAs) to meet their legal obligations to: 1) ensure ELs have full access to the core curriculum; 2) provide programs designed to overcome language barriers;[36] and 3) provide equal opportunities for ELs to participate meaningfully in all programs and activities (e.g. curricular, co-curricular, or extracurricular) – which includes equal access to pre-kindergarten.[37]

Assessments of DLLs/ELs inform teaching strategies and therefore need to take into account demonstration of students' skills and abilities across both languages that they are learning in: English and their home language. It is critical that screening, observations, and ongoing monitoring of DLLs/ELs are done in the home language and English with culturally, linguistically, and developmentally-appropriate and valid assessments by qualified assessors who are knowledgeable about DLL and EL education and language acquisition.[38]

LANGUAGE PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG DLLS

> **"Building on the growing body of research on DLL/EL education and the benefits of bilingualism, the ELALB model includes two types of approaches: English-Spanish dual language programs, and English with home language support."**

The following are examples of existing or newly launched ECE programs — post-Proposition 58 — that build bilingualism and biliteracy.

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD): SFUSD offers ten "Dual Language Learner pre-kindergarten" programs at early education sites: four in Cantonese and six in Spanish. The program is designed to ensure that both DLLs/ELs and English-proficient students develop high levels of English, a pathway for language proficiency and literacy, and academic competency.[39]

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD): In April 2017, LAUSD passed a resolution to establish an early childhood DLL pilot, which received great community support. In fall 2017, LAUSD opened a dozen dual language classrooms in early education centers, state preschool, expanded transitional kindergarten (Expanded TK), and transitional kindergarten (TK) classrooms. Most are English-Spanish programs and one is a Korean-English program. There is interest for expanding these opportunities to more schools and including other languages.

Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD): In fall 2017, in partnership with LBUSD, Educare Los Angeles at Long Beach (ELALB) became the 22nd Educare in the nation. Designed as a public-private partnership, Educare is known as one of the most effective ECE models in the country that serves as a lever for policy change. Building on the growing body of research on DLL/EL education and the benefits of bilingualism, the ELALB model includes two types of approaches: English-Spanish dual language programs, and English with home language support. During the 2016–2017 academic year, this site served 3- and 4- year old children across seven classrooms and in 2017–2018, the program also served infants and toddlers.

IMPORTANCE OF
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Family engagement is widely recognized as an important contributor to child outcomes and academic success. Strong school-family connections are particularly critical for families of DLLs for a number of reasons:

- Strong family-child bonds establish strong cultural identities that serve as a critical foundation for learning. Families can help their children bridge the diverse cultural worlds of home and school.[40]
- Teacher engagement with a child's family helps educators bridge cultural and linguistic differences and gain deeper understanding of a child's development.[41]
- These partnerships can support families in understanding student progress and the role that families can play in supporting their children's learning.
- Such engagement helps families recognize the importance of preserving the home language and culture.
- Strong partnerships provide parents opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns about programmatic issues and help determine ways families can be supportive in addressing these issues.

KEY POLICIES

Federal and state policies have evolved as research has brought clarity to the benefits of early education and bilingualism, the importance of language development in the early years, and the needs and assets of DLLs. The following highlights the recent policies that speak to this progress.

FEDERAL

Every Student Succeeds Act: In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) updated the K–12 federal education law. Significant policy changes include a larger emphasis on the importance of preschool and optimizing children's developmental and academic trajectories, and supporting alignment of the philosophies and goals of the ECE and K–12 systems. ESSA makes it clear that education funding (e.g. Title I, II, and III, and Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)) can be used to fund early learning initiatives.

Federal DLL Policy Statement: In 2016, a joint federal policy statement was released by the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education on supporting the development of DLLs in early childhood programs. This statement declares the vision that "all early childhood programs adequately and appropriately serve the diverse children and families that make up this country."[42]

Reauthorization of Head Start Program Performance Standards: In 2016, the Head Start Program Performance Standards were reauthorized with multiple provisions for implementing research-based practices specific to DLLs. It stipulates that programs must recognize bilingualism as a strength and notes the need for teaching practices to continue home language development.[43]

STATE

Seal of Biliteracy: In 2012, California established the Seal of Biliteracy, an official recognition of high school students who graduate with proficiency in English and a second language. The seal is awarded regardless of whether a student's home language is English or another language. For preschool through secondary school, similar "pathway awards" are encouraged to promote a rich school and family environment that supports the value of bilingualism and biliteracy in children. Following this lead, as of January 2018, Washington, DC and 31 other states have the Seal of Biliteracy with other states still in development.[44]

Local Control Funding Formula: In 2013, California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) made sweeping changes to the funding and governance structure of K–12 public schools. Notable changes include the allocation of specific funding for target populations including ELs, and bringing more decision-making to the local level on how best to meet the needs of ELs and the larger school community.

First 5 California DLL Pilot: In 2015, First 5 California announced its plans to develop and invest $20 million in a Dual Language Learner Pilot. This effort will build on existing research and best practices to pilot culturally and linguistically-effective strategies for DLLs, birth to five, in early learning settings to inform local and national approaches to meet the unique needs of DLL children.[45]

Proposition 58: LEARN Initiative: In 2016, 73.5 percent of California voters passed Proposition 58, recognizing the value of students graduating with proficiency in English and one or more other languages. Proposition

58 created opportunities for all students to learn another language, and also removed the 18-year mandate for a "one size fits all" approach to educating 1.3 million students learning English. As of July 2017, any 20 parents at a grade level or 30 parents at a school site can initiate the conversation and planning process for determining with educators the best language education approach to prepare all students for the 21st century.

English Learner Roadmap: In 2017, the State Board of Education unanimously passed the ***California English Learner Roadmap: Educational Programs and Services for English Learners***, enacting an early childhood through grade 12, assets-based policy for ELs. This sets a comprehensive policy that is in alignment with state priorities and research, and includes biliteracy as a statewide goal. The California Department of Education will provide a guidance document with the policy, resources, and examples of effective practices.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There has been incredible momentum in California that stems from advances in federal and state policies on DLL/EL education, as well as the current research on early language development, early care and education, and the benefits of bilingualism. California is uniquely positioned to lead the nation in DLL/EL education and to create bilingual pathways for all students. Below are policy recommendations that can be explored by education leaders and state and local policymakers.

Build from the California English Learner Roadmap: The EL Roadmap is the new state policy for DLL/EL education. As ECE and K–12 leaders strengthen DLL/EL education and increase programs that build biliteracy for all, their efforts should be done in alignment with the Roadmap's policy, research base, and guidance materials. State leaders should enact policies and investments that operationalize the Roadmap's vision and build a workforce with the skills and competencies to deliver quality DLL/EL education and bilingual programs.

Begin with Early Childhood: Building on the research highlighting the importance of early language development, education leaders should build articulated preschool, Expanded TK, and TK in new and existing K–12 dual language programs. See examples on page 10.

Build on Existing Capacity: With nearly 70 percent of bilingual teachers currently in English-only classrooms,[46] California has a bilingual workforce to build on. School leaders should survey teachers and paraprofessionals to identify the existing bilingual workforce that needs support to transition to bilingual classrooms.

Provide Professional Development for Administrators: District leadership also needs professional development to equip them to lead systemic change that brings the needs of DLLs/ELs across curriculum, instruction, assessment, workforce professional development, and community engagement. Districts can use funds such as Title I, II, III and LCFF and include ECE in workforce development.

Target EL and Underserved Communities: As the research shows that high-quality, early education has the greatest impact on DLLs and children in poverty, ECE and K–12 leaders should target expansion efforts for language programs in communities with high populations of ELs and low-income students. This would align with the LCFF goals to bring innovation to students of greatest need.

Build Awareness and Engage Families: Not all educators and families are aware of the advances in research and insight on the importance of home language, early language development, and bilingualism. Building awareness across the community can contribute to a mutual understanding and promote educational opportunities that support student success. It is critical to integrate family engagement training in professional development of teachers and administrators, and examine how to continuously involve parent/family leaders, District English Learner Advocacy Committee (DELAC) leaders, and community organizations.

Set Programs up for Success: Ensure students, teachers, and administrators are set up for success by: fully funding and supporting quality implementation and continuous improvement, providing ongoing professional development, and engaging in family outreach. Consider using funds such as Title I, II, III, and LCFF.

CONCLUSION

California is uniquely positioned to lead the nation in achieving greater educational equity, advancing DLL/EL education policy and practice, and creating bilingual pathways for all students.

The overwhelming support for Proposition 58 speaks to the value in the state for all students to have the opportunity to become biliterate and bilingual, and leverage their language advantage in a multilingual work-force. With the vast size of the DLL/EL population in California, and recent policy advances such as the English Learner Roadmap, the time is ripe for leadership and innovation to not only address the unique needs of our DLL/EL students, but to maximize the assets and innate abilities of all our students to learn and excel in multiple languages and achieve academic success.

This innovation must begin with early childhood, such as preschool, Expanded TK, and TK where the foundation of language development begins. This innovation must continue across elementary and secondary education to provide ongoing support to students to continue their multilingual education at each stage of their education. This innovation must be implemented systemically to ensure that educators and administrators are equipped with the current research and appropriate tools they need to support equitable student achievement, inclusive of DLLs/ELs, communities of color, and low-income communities.

State and local leadership is critical to continue the progress in DLL/EL education and to allocate the resources needed to support all students to thrive and achieve the state-wide vision of biliteracy for all. In continuing in this direction, California will serve as an important model for DLL/EL education and exemplify an education system that is designed to build on our country's rich racial, cultural, and linguistic strengths in a way that is aligned with science, and is simply good for all children in our nation.

RESOURCES

Build Initiative: Linda M. Espinosa and Miriam Calderon

- State Early Learning and Development Standards/Guidelines, Policies and Related Practices: How Responsive are they to the needs of Young Dual Language Learners? (2015)

California Department of Education

- California Preschool Learning Foundations (2008, 2010, 2012)
- Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning (2009)
- California Preschool Curriculum Frameworks (2010, 2011, 2013)
- Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts (2014)
- California Preschool Program Guidelines (2015)
- English Learner Roadmap (2017)

Californians Together, Laurie Olsen, Ph.D.

- Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California's Long Term English Learners (2010)
- Secondary School Courses Designed to Address the Language Needs and Academic Gaps of Long Term English Learners (2012)

First 5 California

- Dual Language Learner Resource Guide: Best and Promising Practices for Supporting Young Dual Language Learners in California (2018)
- First 5 California Dual Language Learner Pilot: What Constitutes High Quality Early Learning Experiences for California's Young DLLs (2017)

Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care

- California's Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners: Research Overview Papers (2013)

Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center

- Dual Language Learners Toolkit

DLL Framework, Heising-Simons Foundation, Marlene Zepeda, Ph.D.

- California's Gold: An Advocacy Framework for Young Dual Language Learners (2017)

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

- Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures (2017)

US Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education

- Policy statement on family engagement from the early years to the early grades (2016)
- Policy statement on supporting the development of children who are dual language learners in early childhood programs (2016)

For more information, please contact Advancement Project California at education@advanceproj.org.

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