



CREATING A NEW VISION FOR CALIFORNIA'S DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Carolyn Crolotte and Giannina Pérez



EARLY EDGE
CALIFORNIA



VISION

Every young child in California has access to high-quality Early Learning teachers and programs that provide them with the opportunity to become bilingual and biliterate.

The governor and policymakers can help lead California into a new era where all high school graduates are bilingual and biliterate. This work should include overhauling how we educate and support dual language learners¹ beginning in the earliest years of life.

INTRODUCTION

In California, 60 percent of children age 5 and under are dual language learners (DLLs).² Despite the assets associated with bilingualism (confidence, communication, and strong language and cognitive skills),³ DLL children tend to fall behind in school. Twenty-nine percent are in families below the federal poverty line, and the same proportion have parents without a high school diploma.⁴ They are less likely to attend high quality preschool than their peers,⁵ and they tend to enter kindergarten behind, particularly in the areas of language, literacy, and math.⁶ This group of children is also at risk of losing competence in their home language when they are exposed to English-only settings during their early years in school,⁷ which has been linked to poor long-term academic outcomes.⁸

This is an important time for dual language learners in our state. Bold reforms over the past two years have finally begun to recognize the value of biliteracy and bilingualism. After almost two decades of Proposition 227's mandate of English-only instruction, California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 58 in 2016, which repealed English-only laws and called on schools to expand bilingual programs.

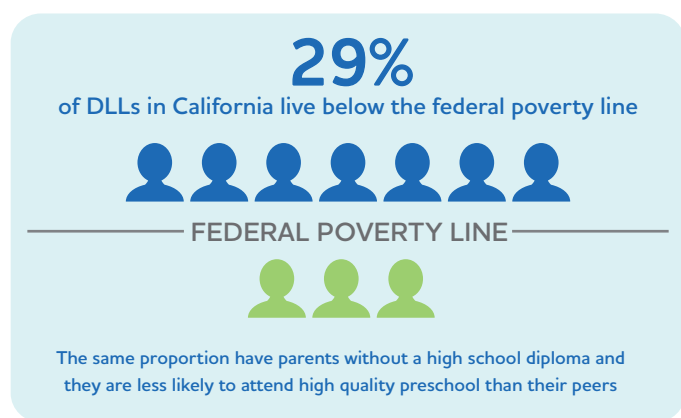
At the same time, the State Board of Education and the Department of Education created opportunities for schools and districts to recognize bilingual proficiency at high school graduation through the Seal of Biliteracy (2012). They also created guidelines for strengthening educational policies, programs, and practices through the California English Learner Roadmap (2017). In 2018, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction announced Global California 2030 which aims to triple the number of high school graduates who receive the State Seal of Biliteracy and quadruple the number of dual immersion programs by 2030.

These programs recognize what we know from the research: that bilingualism has enormous benefits. They include strengthened cognitive and memory processes, improved communication abilities, increased confidence, social and cultural benefits, and an advantage in the job market.⁹ For young children, being bilingual brings added cognitive benefits and improved language skills.¹⁰

The millions of children who are bilingual in our state are an incredible asset. Yet, research also shows California's young children need much more bold reform in order to make sure they succeed in school. There is great opportunity for gubernatorial and policy leadership on this issue which we outline below.

CHALLENGE: LIMITED TRAINING

The state's Early Learning system is not currently structured to ensure that California's children can become fully bilingual and biliterate. This is especially true for children who come from homes with limited or no English exposure. The majority of Early Learning teachers and caregivers are not sufficiently equipped to support children's dual language development. Teachers working in publicly funded Early Learning programs are not required to demonstrate competencies or receive DLL-focused training. Higher education programs in early childhood education lack DLL-focused coursework. Teachers also need additional and ongoing training in first and second language learning, linguistically and culturally relevant child assessment practices, and other best practices to support DLLs.





SOLUTIONS

For more of California's children to become fully bilingual and biliterate, in particular our DLL children, we recommend the following actions. Many of these recommendations are supported by key DLL stakeholders and experts in the field.¹¹

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Expand Early Learning Dual Language Immersion Programs

The state should expand bilingual programs for all young children in publicly funded Early Learning settings. Dual language learners who receive native language instruction in Early Learning programs consistently outperform children who attend English-only programs on academic achievement measures as they get older.¹² Children learning English advance more quickly in both English and their native language when teachers use both languages in Early Learning settings.¹³ They also do better in reading and math than their DLL peers who receive less native language support.¹⁴ Conversely, research shows that PreK settings that do not support home language maintenance and development can have a negative impact on DLLs.¹⁵

50 percent of the total instructional time is conducted in English and the other half in the target language. The pilot is underway in eight school sites to deliver Spanish/English or Korean/English instruction. The focus is on preschool, expanded transitional kindergarten, and transitional kindergarten programs. The goal is to ensure that children have continued access to bilingual programs when they transition into kindergarten.

The state should take a comprehensive, visionary approach to expanding dual immersion programs.

The legislature should commit to a multiyear investment to support start-up and expansion funding for dual language programs in early childhood and the TK–12 systems throughout the state. Creating special recognition for exceptional dual immersion programs would be another helpful effort to promote bilingualism. Since 1986, the California Department of Education has had a California School Recognition Program. The program awards exceptional schools in such areas as mathematics and science teaching, arts education, and career technical education. Developing an award for exceptional dual immersion and other bilingual programs would be a welcome addition to incentivize support for students that promotes bilingualism and biliteracy.



Many school districts in California offer dual language immersion and bilingual programs at the K–12 level but fail to begin the programs in the Early Learning years, missing an important language acquisition window. California should be inspired by New York City's recent commitment to expand dual immersion preschool programs. In the past few years, the city has more than doubled the number of programs to meet the growing demand from families.

Although there are few bilingual programs in California for children age 5 and under, Los Angeles Unified School District recently began implementing a 50:50 dual language Early Learning pilot program. Under the program,



RECOMMENDATION 2:

Strengthen Capacity of the Early Learning Workforce to Support DLLs



Currently, the Early Learning workforce is not adequately prepared to serve the growing population of DLLs and their families. Nor are they able to support all children in becoming bilingual and biliterate. Most Early Learning teachers have not received DLL-specific professional development,¹⁶ and research shows that without specific training, teachers are not adequately prepared to teach DLL children.¹⁷ **Funding is needed for teachers to learn DLL-specific best practices**

by participating in off-site professional development and onsite coaching and training.

The 2018 state budget included a \$5 million allocation—using federal Child Care Development Fund quality dollars—for Early Learning teachers and caregivers to participate in DLL-specific professional development. Although an important first step, this one-time allocation of funds is insufficient to meet the needs in the state. **We recommend an ongoing and dedicated state funding stream to develop an effective DLL professional development system.** The system should be based on the latest research and embedded in Early Learning programs, with ongoing coaching and additional supports for Early Learning teachers. This funding stream should be connected to the TK–12 system so all teachers have the opportunity to benefit from DLL-specific training. Professional development should be focused on early childhood developmental stages, appropriate practices, and first- and second-language acquisition.

Several California models already exist. For example, the Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) PreK–3rd Grade model provides a comprehensive, high-quality training program for teachers working with DLLs/English learners. The Fresno Language Project supports adults who care for DLL children before they enter kindergarten, including infants and toddlers, and their families.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Increase DLL-Specific Higher Education Coursework in Early Educator Programs

California's institutions of higher education, the state's primary source of early educator preparation, are not currently preparing the early care and education (ECE) workforce to meet the needs of the state's linguistically and culturally diverse population of young children.¹⁸ Few higher education institutions in California include DLL-specific courses as part of their early childhood course offerings. The Child Development Permit does not mandate any DLL-specific coursework for Early Learning teachers. In addition, only a few higher education institutions support the needs of students who are non-English speakers by offering courses in languages other than English. This limits the opportunities for individuals who could support children's home language in early childhood classrooms.

The state should create incentives for colleges and universities to include research-based DLL course content in the early childhood curriculum.

This coursework should include a strong emphasis on first- and second-language acquisition, linguistically and culturally relevant child assessment practices, and other best practices to support DLLs. In addition, the new California Online Community College should include DLL-specific ECE coursework as a flexible and affordable option for the workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Add DLL Competencies to California's Early Learning Workforce Qualification Requirements

As noted above, the required Child Development Permit does not require any competencies, training, or coursework for supporting DLLs. Teaching in elementary school and beyond, in contrast, requires that teachers have some special training in how to teach bilingual students. As a result, the knowledge gap is striking between teachers who work in Early Learning settings and those who work in the TK-12 system. The two must be better aligned.

The Child Development Permit is currently under review. **We recommend any revisions include an explicit focus on competencies for dual language teaching and learning, including the importance of supporting home language development, diversity, culture, and equity.** This will signal to the early childhood field that DLL knowledge and practice are core components of Early Learning. All ECE teachers and administrators should have a strong understanding of DLL research and best practices and, as they advance in their careers, they should have increasing levels of DLL knowledge.



To move this work forward, the governor should consider adding new commissioners to the Commission on Teacher Credentialing who have early childhood and DLL expertise.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Integrate Support for DLLs into California's ECE Quality Improvement Initiatives



The statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), now renamed Quality Counts California, is a promising model to ensure that quality is constantly improving across program settings. That said, in its current form, Quality Counts California does not sufficiently address the needs of DLLs, as there is no measure of quality related to supporting DLLs and their families. Some counties, such as Fresno and San Mateo, have taken it upon themselves

to include DLL-specific measures as part of their county's QRIS. The state and other counties should learn from their work and replicate it across California.

The state should include DLL measures of quality in the statewide QRIS system and integrate DLL best practices in the QRIS coaching and training for agencies and educational leads in state-funded child care programs.

The state should also consider awarding programs that excel in bilingual supports with a special badge of recognition.

In addition, California disburses early care and education quality improvement funds that support approximately 30 efforts across the state, ranging from professional development to consumer education for parents. To date, the state has not assessed the effectiveness of these efforts. Therefore, the California Department of Education should conduct a review of all 30 programs. The state, with stakeholder input, can then decide if the current programs need to be enhanced, and if DLL-specific programs should be added to the state's quality improvement initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

State Leaders Should Promote a Campaign on the Benefits of Bilingualism



Many people still hold common misconceptions about bilingualism and are unaware of its benefits, the importance of native language development, and the negative impact of native language loss. This leads many DLL families to stop using their native language and to choose an English-only instructional program for their children that results in rapid English acquisition at the expense of their home language.

For these reasons, the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine emphasizes the need to share information about the capacity of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to learn more than one language. It also promotes sharing information on the communicative,



social, cognitive, emotional, and employment advantages of bilingualism.¹⁹

California should launch an educational campaign to promote the benefits of bilingualism and elevate the needs of DLL children and their families. This can include promoting Bilingual Pathway Awards statewide. In addition to awarding a State Seal of Biliteracy, which signals mastery of two or more languages at high school graduation, schools and districts are also instituting Bilingual Pathway Awards.

PROMOTING BENEFITS OF BILINGUALISM

**Integrating DLLs' Home Language
in the Classroom Does Not Hobble
English Learning, New Study Finds**



**Expert: Bilingual students
more likely to succeed in
school, go to college**
Waco Tribune-Herald

**Babies who hear two languages at home
develop advantages in attention**



These awards recognize significant steps in developing biliteracy from preschool to high school. Students in Orange County, for example, can earn recognition at the end of preschool, transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, third grade, fifth grade, and eighth grade.

With strong gubernatorial and policy leadership, California can implement these six recommendations and enter a new era where more of our children will be on track to become bilingual and biliterate, starting in the early years.

- ¹ Dual language learners are children ages five and under who live in households where a language other than English is spoken.
- ² S. Holtby et al., "Families with Young Children in California: Findings from the California Health Interview Survey, 2011-2014, by Geography and Home Language" (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2017), http://healthpolicyucla.edu/publications/Documents/PDF/2017/Child_PB_FINAL_5-31-17.pdf.
- ³ T.G. Halle et al., "The Social-Emotional Development of Dual Language Learners: Looking Back at Existing Research and Moving Forward with Purpose," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29, no. 4 (2017): 734-49.
- ⁴ L. Santibañez and I. Umansky, Getting Down to Facts II Research Brief, "English Learners: Charting Their Experiences and Mapping Their Futures in California Schools." (Palo Alto: Stanford University, 2018).
- ⁵ M. Park, A. O'Toole, and C. Katsiaficas, "Dual Language Learners: A Demographic and Policy Profile for California" (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2017).
- ⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, "Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children who are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs" (Washington, DC: DHHS and DOE, 2017), https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/dll_policy_statement_final.pdf.
- ⁷ L.M. Espinosa, "PreK-3rd: Challenging Common Myths about Dual Language Learners—An Update to the Seminal 2008 Report" (New York: Foundation for Child Development, 2013).
- ⁸ R.E., Slavin and A. Cheung, "A Synthesis of Research on Language of Reading Instruction for English Language Learners," *Review of Education Research*, 75(2) (2005): 247-281.
- ⁹ D.A. Porras et al., "Employer Preferences: Do Bilingual Applicants and Employees Experience an Advantage?" in *The Bilingual Advantage: Language, Literacy, and the US Labor Market*, eds. R.M. Callahan and P.C. Gándara (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2017) pp. 234-57.
- ¹⁰ E. Bialystok, "Second-Language Acquisition and Bilingualism at an Early Age and the Impact on Early Cognitive Development," in *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* [online], ed. R.E. Tremblay, R.G. Barr, and R. Peters (Montreal: Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development, 2008), pp. 1-4, http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/documents/BialystokANGxp_rev.pdf.
- ¹¹ The experts and stakeholders include those who participated in a convening led by Early Edge California and the Advancement Project California. They also include the author of the 2017 report, "California Gold: An Advocacy Framework for Young Dual Language Learners," Dr. Marlene Zepeda. The author proposes additional recommendations related to workforce development, curriculum and instruction, assessment, and an aligned PreK to Third Grade system.
- ¹² V.P. Collier and W. P. Thomas, *Educating English Learners for a Transformed World* (Albuquerque, NM: Fuente Press, 2009). In particular, studies examining dual immersion models in preschool programs indicate that DLL children in such programs do as well or better on English language skills and significantly better on home language skills, than their peers in English-only settings. See V. Vitello, J. Downer, and A. Williford, "Preschool Classroom Experiences of Dual Language Learners: Summary Findings from Publicly Funded Programs in 11 States," in *Dual Language Learners in the Early Childhood Classroom*, ed. C. Howes, J. Downer, and R. Pianta (Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 2011), pp. 45-68.
- ¹³ L.M. Espinosa, "PreK-3rd: Challenging Common Myths about Dual Language Learners—An Update to the Seminal 2008 Report" (New York: Foundation for Child Development, 2013).
- ¹⁴ M. Burchinal et al., "Instruction in Spanish in Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms and Child Outcomes for English Language Learners," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27(2012): 188-97.
- ¹⁵ D. C. Castro et al., "Dual language learners: Research informing policy." (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, 2013).
- ¹⁶ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment and California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, "California Early Care and Education Workforce Study: Licensed Child Care Centers and Family Care Providers, Los Angeles County" (Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley, 2006).
- ¹⁷ National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017).
- ¹⁸ D. Boyd et al., "Teacher Preparation and Student Achievement.," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31, no. 4 (2009): 416-40, <http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/preparation%20and%20achievement.pdf>.
- ¹⁹ National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017).