

THE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNER POLICY PLATFORM:

Informing California's Early Learning
and Care Policies and Investments in
2020–21 and Beyond

Executive Summary

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INTRODUCTION

“DLLs are the youth of our state. They are a large percentage of the students in our schools, and an increasing number of kids in our state. It would be an enormous gift to California if we invest properly in their future.”

- Laurie Olsen, Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) Founding Director

California is home to the nation's largest population of dual language learners (DLL)¹, as 60 percent of children under age six are from homes in which languages other than English are spoken. An estimated 30–50 percent of DLL children entering kindergarten will not acquire the necessary English skills needed for academic participation after six years or more of instruction. Given the rich diversity of California, it is critical that children of color and DLLs are central to major policy and budget decisions that define and support high-quality early learning. Without this intentionality, the state will design a system that does not serve the majority of its youngest learners.

The Master Plan for Early Learning and Care (ELC) is an important opportunity to include DLLs when building a high-quality early learning system. The political climate in the state today favors bilingualism and multiculturalism, as policies such as Proposition 58² and California English Learner (EL) Roadmap demonstrate. The EL Roadmap, a comprehensive policy that declares biliteracy as a state goal and strongly promotes multilingual proficiency, should be a guide for the Master Plan and other ELC state legislation and budget priorities.

To support policymakers in their efforts to strengthen the ELC system, we present a DLL Policy Platform with a set of short- and long-term recommendations to:

- align the ELC system with the California EL Roadmap State Policy;
- promote high-quality ELC programs for DLLs; and
- support California's ELC workforce to build on the strengths and meet the needs of DLLs.



¹ Dual Language Learners are children exposed to two or more languages as young children or young children who learn a second language while continuing to develop their first.
² California Education for a Global Economy initiative

POLICY AREA I: ALIGN THE ELC SYSTEM WITH THE CALIFORNIA EL ROADMAP STATE POLICY

“All the research, from birth to age 21, tells us that in order [for DLLs] to succeed in English, we have to support that first language. That is going to be the foundation upon which the second language will flourish.”

– Dr. Linda Espinosa,
National DLL Expert



Key Recommendations:

- In developing the Master Plan and cradle-to-career data system:
 - include DLL experts;
 - provide opportunities for meaningful DLL parent engagement; and
 - incorporate the asset-based framework and principles for DLLs found in the EL Roadmap state policy.
- Include and prioritize programs that serve infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children in EL Roadmap implementation funding allocations.
- Expand early childhood dual language programs in communities with large populations of children of color, DLLs, and low-income students, by providing seed funding to local educational agencies.
- Educate families about the importance of bilingualism with a statewide campaign that leverages state leadership and public-private partnerships.

“Other professionals, such as doctors and adult school teachers, will tell parents to only speak English so as not to confuse their child. We need a public relations campaign on the value of maintaining the home language.”

– Paula Merrigan, Transitional
Kindergarten Teacher (Bay Area)

POLICY AREA II: PROMOTE HIGH-QUALITY ELC PROGRAMS FOR DLLS



“You have to make sure DLLs are embedded into the system, in our case in the Quality Counts local requirements, which helps support the streamlining of this effort to make systemic change.”

– Lupe Jaime, Senior Director of
Early Care and Education,
Fresno County Superintendent
of Schools

The California Quality Counts (QC) initiative is the state's flagship effort to improve early learning quality. However, the QC statewide matrix, a set of criteria to evaluate program quality, has minimal content specific to DLLs and fails to comprehensively acknowledge the role of language and culture in pedagogical practice. For continuous improvement, the state must also collect more data on languages spoken in classrooms. Currently, there is no consistent and uniform process for defining and collecting information on DLLs across the ELC system.

Key Recommendations:

- Develop a uniform process to identify DLLs across the ELC system.
- Ensure that DLLs are meaningfully included in the QC system requirements, including the rating framework, incentive system, and professional development provisions. Provide financial incentives for capacity building to ensure quality improvement includes a focus on DLLs.
- Require that program assessors have the appropriate linguistic and cultural competence to fairly and adequately assess DLLs.
- Fund resource and referral (R&R) agencies to provide training and technical assistance on DLLs to providers in home-based settings.
- Provide funding to evaluate the effectiveness of a locality's approach in general and specifically for DLLs.

POLICY AREA III: SUPPORT CALIFORNIA'S EARLY LEARNING AND CARE WORKFORCE TO BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF DLLS AND MEET THEIR NEEDS

“All the research, from birth to age 21, tells us that in order [for DLLs] to succeed in English, we have to support that first language. That is going to be the foundation upon which the second language will flourish.”

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A well-prepared and supported workforce is essential to quality. Given the diversity of California's child population, it is likely that all educators, including home visitors, will serve children whose home language and culture they may not know. Currently, California does not require any education or training specific to DLLs.

Key Recommendations:

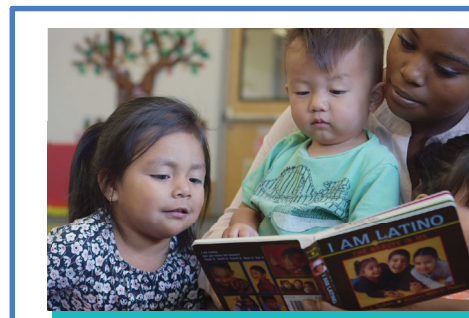
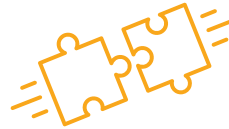
- Revise the Child Development Permit to include explicit competencies for serving DLLs and develop a bilingual authorization for early educators working in dual language programs.
- Appoint a commissioner to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing with expertise in early childhood and dual language learning.
- Augment and sustain funding for professional development focused on capacity-building in early learning and care programs to serve DLLs.
- Dedicate a portion of AB 212₃ funds for DLL coursework and professional development.
- Fund demonstration projects to train and build the DLL capacity of faculty at colleges and universities.



CONCLUSION: DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS ARE CENTRAL TO QUALITY

We are at a pivotal moment in developing an equitable ELC system that builds on the strengths of California's rich multicultural and multilingual diversity. With the infusion of additional resources and development of a Master Plan, the state can extend and improve the benefits of ELC to DLLs and their families. Doing so sends a clear message that these children are California's children, and in their destiny lies our future prosperity.





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