

COVID-19 RAPID RESPONSE: URGENT NEEDS OF DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Executive Summary

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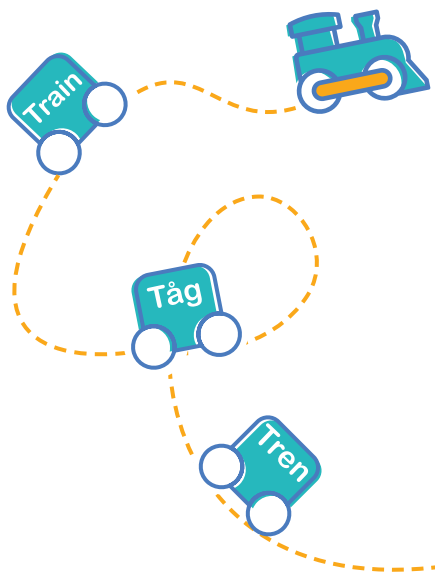


INTRODUCTION



California is home to the nation's largest population of Dual Language Learners (DLLs): 60% of children under age 6 are from homes in which non-English languages are spoken.² A child's home language and culture are central to their healthy growth and development. Going forward this truism must be reflected in our policies and practices. As COVID-19 complicates and exacerbates existing inequities to children's full access and participation in high-quality early learning and care (ELC), support for DLL families' cultural and linguistic strengths should not be viewed as optional. Rather, such opportunities will determine whether the majority of California's young children equitably receive high-quality education and are set on the path to success.

In February 2020, Advancement Project California and Early Edge California released the **Dual Language Learner (DLL) Policy Platform**, which presents a set of policy recommendations to support a greater focus on DLL children in California's ELC system. Since that time, the profound financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the state to rethink what it can do to sustain current access and support quality in ELC settings. As the entire cradle-to-career education system is now under extreme duress, the momentum of policy gains from the **California English Learner Roadmap and Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education** may lose salience. The following policy recommendations describe urgent actions and relevant long-term measures that need to be taken to ensure fair and equitable treatment of DLLs and their families and the dedicated early educators³ who work to support them.



1 Dual language learners are children birth to age five learning two or more languages simultaneously or learning a second language while developing their home language. Although Spanish is the most commonly occurring first language, there are over 59 other languages spoken in California including indigenous languages such as Mixteco, Triqui, and Zapotecco.

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, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2017), http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publications/Documents/PDF/2017/Child_PB_FI-NAL_5-31-17.pdf.

3 Early educators refers to teachers and administrators of any ELC setting serving children birth through age five.



A. RESPONDING TO IMMEDIATE NEEDS

- 1. Provide Immediate Financial Support for Home-based and Center-based early educators** who are adapting to the rapidly changing health and safety guidelines in light of COVID-19. A significant number of the youngest and most vulnerable populations of DLL children are served in home-based settings (Family, Friend, and Neighbor and Family Child Care Homes), and many center-based programs also serve DLLs and their families.
- 2. Provide funding and regulatory flexibility during distance learning** to equip early educators, coaches, and families with culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate tools and training to teach DLLs.
- 3. In any COVID-19 funding, the California Department of Education and the Department of Social Services should provide clear guidance for every ELC program** about the importance of socioemotional support for DLL children and mental health support for DLL families and early educators.

B. STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

- 1. Ensure that the needs of DLL children and their families are addressed in any ELC policy efforts**, starting with the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the implementation of the Preschool Development Grant. **Data shows the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color**, particularly Black, Latinx, Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander, and low-income populations — many of whom are DLL families.
- 2. Prioritize resources for quality “improvement” in Quality Counts funding for embedding DLL content in their Professional Development strategy framework**, alongside concrete support for coaches and mentors on best practices for working with DLLs and their families.
- 3. Strengthen workforce capacity for serving DLLs and their families** in the required pre-service foundational coursework and professional development initiatives.
- 4. Develop an Early Childhood Integrated Data system** that includes the home language and linguistic profile of the child.
- 5. Prioritize the expansion of dual-language programs** across the early childhood period, including for infants and toddlers.
- 6. Partner with philanthropy to build a statewide educational campaign** on the advantages of learning and communicating in two or more languages starting from the youngest years.



CONCLUSION

As we respond to our current state of emergency and its aftermath, DLLs should be brought to the center of our policy development and systems change. It is clear that without ensuring access to care designed for DLL children and families, the state is not meeting the basic needs of all children. The fact remains that the majority of our youngest are DLLs, many of whom come from low-income and immigrant families least able to weather the hardships associated with income and learning loss arising as a result of COVID-19. This crisis presents a pivotal moment to protect and strengthen the elements of an equitable ELC system that builds on California’s rich multicultural and multilingual diversity.