

Recommendations to Strengthen the Early Learning Workforce Supporting English Learners

An excerpt from:

**Texas Early Childhood English Learner
Initiative Policy Roadmap**



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High-quality, well-equipped, and supported educators are the backbone of the Texas education system. As the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, Texas child care and school district educators are essential workers for the Texas economy and to Texas families. Children's experiences during the rapid brain development of the first eight years of life serve as the foundation for their future success inside and outside the classroom, but for that potential to be realized, educators in these years must be well-prepared and supported.

Texas faces several challenges and opportunities regarding the workforce that educates English Learners (EL) in child care and early grades. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there is a longstanding shortage of certified bilingual teachers in Texas pre-k through 12th grade.¹⁶ During our research, school districts, educators, and other stakeholders reported that this shortage hinders appropriate bilingual education program implementation now as well as the expansion of quality programs. Additionally, responses to our survey indicate that current certification requirements do not properly prepare educators to meet the needs of young children who are EL and/or have disabilities or developmental

delays. Furthermore, child care programs struggle to recruit and retain a quality workforce at all, due to minimum wage salaries, lack of benefits, insufficient training and support, and unmanageable classroom environments and class sizes.

For Texas educators to help guide young EL children to meet their promise, they need the tools and resources to meet the task. By pursuing the recommendations outlined in each section of this report to better support ELs in early childhood through the early grades, Texas can help to grow future generations of bilingual educators. But Texas must also take steps to strengthen the current bilingual educator workforce and put the proper supports in place for future generations of educators.

Texas Legislature Recommendations

Create a certification in Bilingual Special Education. Very few individuals in educational settings are fully equipped to understand how to properly address student disabilities and delays in culturally and linguistically responsive ways. Currently, neither Bilingual Education certificates nor Special Education certificates provide the needed preparation to serve

EL children with disabilities. As a result, many EL children do not receive the proper interventions to meet their developmental needs, leading to an over or under representation of ELs in special education programs. The creation of a certificate in Bilingual Special Education would build a pipeline of school leaders who are equipped to serve the specific linguistic, cultural, and academic needs of English Learner children with disabilities and developmental delays in pre-k through 12th grade.

Reduce programmatic barriers for educators and pre-service teachers to access bilingual education certification programs.

The Legislature should take steps to prepare, certify, recruit, and retain effective bilingual education teachers. Steps include expanding teacher preparatory programs' partnerships with local districts and developing certification pathways to attract, train, and retain bilingual members of school communities as certified teachers.

In order to train more bilingual certified educators, it is also important to revise the bilingual education teacher certification exam. Multiple experts and practitioners report the test contains bias against native Spanish

speakers and requires high fees that prohibit bilingual speakers from pursuing teaching. We can maintain rigor and quality while expanding access to the bilingual education teaching field by revisiting the certification exam and associated fees.

Provide greater support for bilingual certified educators, including additional loan repayment assistance. In order to address challenges in recruiting and retaining quality bilingual educators, Texas should facilitate greater support to the bilingual workforce, including additional loan repayment assistance, stipends, higher salaries, increased access to teacher aides, and more.

Improve Early Childhood-Grade 3 and Early Childhood-Grade 6 teacher certification programs to include more culturally responsive content on educating EL children. Regulated by the State Board for Educator Certification, the EC-3 and EC-6 certifications allow educators to teach students up to grade 3 and grade 6 respectively. The Legislature created the EC-3 certification in 2017 to address the specific needs of the early childhood population that were not well represented in the EC-6 certification. While an important step forward, we should ensure the EC-3 and the EC-6 certification programs sufficiently prepare educators to meet the needs of EL children. The Legislature should update the requirements for these certification programs to include greater content associated with providing a culturally responsive, bilingual

early education to ensure Texas educators are well-prepared to serve a diverse set of children in schools and child care programs.

Create a state strategic plan to cultivate bilingualism across all early learning systems and set clear benchmarks to increase the number of bilingually certified teachers, the number of students who are bilingual or multilingual, and the availability of high-quality dual language immersion classes in pre-k through 12th grade. As noted above, in 2018 the State of California launched *Global California 2030*, formally setting the goal to double the amount of bilingual teachers by 2030 and guide three out of four students to be proficient in two or more languages by 2040.¹⁷ Texas should embrace this challenge and establish its own plan to meet and exceed these goals with a coordinated statewide strategy that brings together the state legislature, state agencies, higher education institutions, and school districts to set and meet the established goals. Addressing the bilingual teacher shortage with well-prepared, certified teachers trained in culturally-responsive pedagogies and instruction

would be a critical component of this goal.

State Agency Recommendations

Texas Education Agency, Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Provide culturally and linguistically responsive training for educators, administrators, and coaches. For policies and practices impacting EL children to succeed, all faculty and staff need better training to execute these practices in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner. This training will better equip staff to confront racial and cultural discrimination, improve interactions between teachers and students, and provide a greater respect for different cultures and ethnic backgrounds present in early childhood classrooms. With better training and preparation, staff will be able to become authentic and accessible partners with families in serving childrens' educational needs.

“All teachers need a strong understanding of linguistics. Bilingual teachers need a strong foundation in biliteracy development. Currently, teacher candidates receive much more semester credit hours in literacy but receive very little on biliteracy. Literacy development is not synonymous with biliteracy development.”

— Dr. Iliana Alanis, UTSA

Community Recommendations

Child Care Programs, School Districts, and Charter Schools

Work to recruit, hire, retain, and promote bilingual and multilingual staff who speak and understand the culture of the population served. All children benefit from a diverse educational workforce, but particularly children of color and EL children. Schools and child care programs must demonstrate an active effort to recruit and retain a well prepared, diverse workforce and provide a pathway for those educators to rise up into leadership positions if they desire. This change is sorely needed in Texas, whose overall student population is 53 percent Hispanic¹⁸, compared to only 28 percent of educators.¹⁹ All children will benefit from the diverse perspectives and lived experiences these staff can offer.

School Districts and Charter Schools

Seek grants from the Texas Education Agency Grow-Your-Own teacher program to develop local teacher preparation pathways. The TEA Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 includes grants to local education agencies seeking to develop grow-your-own (GYO) teacher programs. These programs, which can begin at the high school level, aim to recruit and retain educators from the local community. As GYO teacher programs develop local leaders, they focus especially on diversifying the teacher workforce.





Texas Early Childhood English Learner Initiative

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