



March 2017

Governance Brief

English Learners in Focus, Issue 4

Expanding Bilingual Education in California after Proposition 58

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Background

All public schools are required to provide English learners with instruction that promotes their fluency in the English language and provides access to the same subject matter content as their peers. An education that results in English language fluency and academic achievement in the full range of subjects that is on par with their fluent English peers, is particularly important in California, where nearly on quarter of K-12 public school students are English learners. California public schools serve 1.4 million English learners: one-third of the nation's total. For more information on California's English learners, see [*English Learners in Focus, Issue 1: Updated Demographic and Achievement Profile of California's English Learners*](#).

How California schools can and should educate English learners has been a political football for many years. One result of this was the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998, which limited district options for the instruction of English learners. The passage of Proposition 58 on Nov. 8, 2016 by an overwhelming 73.5 percent of California voters, overturns Proposition 227 restrictions and places the decision of how to educate English learners back in the hands of county offices of education, school districts, schools, and communities.

Advantages of Dual Language Programs

Dual language or bilingual programs include all programs that use English and the home language of the English learner for instruction (see next page for a more detailed definition of types of dual language programs). Extensive research supports the advantages of dual language instruction. For example, a national study of bilingual education programs found that participating students outperformed their peers who were in English-only programs, in both English literacy and achievement in other academic subjects. In addition, participation in

This brief will answer the following questions:

- » What does the research say about dual language instruction?
- » What is the impact of Proposition 58?
- » How can boards leverage the new law to improve student achievement?
- » What additional resources are available from CSBA and other organizations?

dual language immersion programs — an instructional approach with the goal of bilingualism and biliteracy — was more strongly associated with achievement than was socioeconomic status, suggesting that these programs were able to overcome the negative academic effects associated with economic disadvantage.¹

Within California, two recent studies add to the already extensive research base. These two longitudinal analyses of English learners from a large, diverse, and urban school district found that students in dual language programs (transitional bilingual, developmental bilingual, and dual language immersion) have better long-term academic success than their peers in English immersion programs. The first analysis of about 5,500 Latino English learners from fall 2000 through spring 2012, found that while reclassification (meeting the criteria to be considered English language proficient) took longer for students enrolled in dual language programs, by the end of high school, these students had higher reclassification rates, greater English proficiency, and better academic success.² The second analysis of almost 14,000 English learners entering kindergarten between 2001-2002 and 2009-2010, found that students enrolled in dual language programs had equal or greater growth

through middle school in English language arts and math, than their peers in English-only immersion program.³

Impact of Proposition 58

Proposition 58 expands learning options for the state's English learners by removing current barriers to dual language programs. This change brings California law into greater alignment with a strong research base on the benefits of dual language programs for English learners and non-English learners alike. Moreover, in a globally connected world, the expansion of programs that allow all students to graduate from high school fluent in two or more languages is integral to the goal of preparing them for college, career, and civic life in the 21st century.

Proposition 58 takes effect on July 1, 2017, and includes the following key provisions (some quoted verbatim below):

Defines Dual Language Programs as "Language Acquisition Programs"

These programs must provide instruction on the California content and English Language Development (ELD) standards, be informed by research, and "lead to grade level proficiency and academic achievement in both English and another language." In addition, the new law defines the following three types of language acquisition programs, although others that meet the above requirements are allowed:

1. **Dual language immersion programs** "provide integrated language learning and academic instruction for native speakers of English and native speakers of another language, with the goals of high academic achievement, first and second language proficiency, and cross-cultural understanding." These programs are also known as two-way immersion programs. For more information see *English Learners in Focus, Issue 2: The Promise of Two-Way Immersion Programs*.
2. **Transitional or developmental programs** exclusively serve English learners and "provide instruction to pupils that utilizes English and a pupil's native language for literacy and academic instruction and enables an English learner to achieve English proficiency and academic mastery of subject matter content and higher order skills, including critical thinking, in order to meet state-adopted academic content areas." These programs are also known as transitional bilingual programs and can include developmental bilingual programs, which have the added goal of bilingualism and biliteracy.

Proposition 227 (1998)

This proposition mandated all English learners receive instruction in English-only programs, making it more difficult for schools to implement dual language programs. Exceptions could be made if adequate numbers of parents or guardians submitted waivers requesting a dual language program. However, before starting any dual language program, English learners had to spend at least 30 days in English-only immersion, and a new waiver had to be submitted every year. The net result of Proposition 227 was a steep decline in the numbers of English learners participating in dual language programs from approximately 30 percent in 1998 to only 5 percent by the 2010-11 school year.⁴

3. **Structured English immersion programs** provide "nearly all instruction...in English, but with the curriculum and a presentation designed for pupils who are learning English." While these programs will remain similar to those in place before Proposition 58, the use of the English learners' home language to check for understanding and provide clarification will now be allowed.

Empowers Parents or Guardians to Request Specific Language Acquisition Programs

When the parents or guardians of 30 or more students within a school or of 20 or more students within a grade request a specific language acquisition program, the school "shall be required to offer such a program to the extent possible." While the statute does not clarify what is meant by "to the extent possible," it is clear that the intent of the law is for schools to be responsive to the preferences of parents or guardians in their decision-making process. Additionally, the law mentions "all" parents or guardians, that is, the parents or guardians of English learners and non-English learners.

The law also removes the requirement that all parents or guardians sign an annual waiver for their children to participate in dual language programs, and that English learners begin their first year in school with 30 instructional days of structured English immersion.

Considerations for Board Members

The passage of Proposition 58 gives school districts and county offices of education an opportunity to implement new dual language programs or expand existing ones. As

evidenced by the research, when implemented effectively and with the support of the community, teachers, staff, and school district and county office of education leaders, these programs can produce better outcomes for English learners and expand opportunities for all students to become fluent and literate in two languages.

“With the overwhelming passage of Proposition 58, California voters have made it clear that they support opportunities for our students to learn more than one language. Multi-literacy is a valued skill in the increasingly global economy, and science makes clear the cognitive and health benefits of knowing more than one language. School boards across the state have a great opportunity to invest in quality dual language programs for all students through thoughtful planning and stakeholder engagement.”

Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez, President of the California Latino School Boards Association, President of Californians Together, and Board Member at Azusa Unified School District

As with all programs, effective implementation is key to reaching their promised potential. Board members should focus on the following priorities to ensure that any expansion and implementation of new dual language programs is of the highest quality:

Engage Stakeholders

Under Proposition 58, school districts and county offices of education must “solicit input on...effective and appropriate instructional methods, including but not limited to, establishing language acquisition programs” as part of the parent and community engagement process for their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) development. School districts and county offices of education should also consult with school personnel such as administrators and teachers to get additional feedback.

Engagement with stakeholders should also involve ongoing education and communication about county office of education and school district efforts to serve English learners. Board members can support the superintendent and staff in communicating the goals and purpose of programs. This includes communicating the benefits of dual language programs to the parents and guardians of both English learners and non-English learners.

Provide Adequate Planning Time and Resources

While staff will be responsible for the implementation and day-to-day operation of programs, board members can support them by providing ample time and resources to plan for and run these programs effectively. The California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) and Californians Together recommend at least one year of planning. This time can be used to collect more information on dual language programs, including visiting quality programs, engaging and communicating with stakeholders, and recruiting and training the necessary staff.

Request Data on Current Programs

Before any action is taken, board members should understand the types of language acquisition programs currently offered by their county office of education or school district and in each of their schools, the numbers of students served, and the academic success of students in each program. Academic indicators should focus on progress toward reclassification and reclassification rates as well as the achievement of English learners and reclassified fluent English proficient students (former English learners) in English language arts, math, and other subjects. This information will help to identify if there is a need to expand or implement new programs.

In addition, data on the resources required to expand or implement new programs will be critical. Resource information can include start-up and ongoing costs and the availability of credentialed bilingual teachers and other qualified staff required to support dual language programs. This information will help board members, along with county office of education and school district leaders, to determine the feasibility of any new expansion and a reasonable timeline for such an expansion.

Recruit and Develop Qualified Bilingual Teachers and Staff

Staff capacity is one of the most important factors in the expansion and implementation of any program that serves English learners. This includes the recruitment, training, and retention of teachers, school leaders, and support staff. According to a report by the Learning Policy Institute and CSBA, 83 percent of surveyed school districts with the highest concentration of English learners reported experiencing teacher shortages, compared to 64 percent of school districts with the lowest concentration.⁵

California will also need to specifically increase the pool of bilingual teachers. After the passage of Proposition 227, the number of bilingual teachers declined steadily, largely due to the decrease in demand. According to the Learn-

ing Policy Institute, California granted more than 1,800 bilingual authorizations in 1994-95, when bilingual education was at its peak. This number decreased dramatically by 2015-16, when fewer than 700 bilingual authorizations were granted.⁶ Adding to this challenge, only 31 of the 81 public and private institutions that offer single and multiple subject teacher preparation programs, also offer bilingual authorizations.⁷ With an upward trend in demand likely to continue due to the passage of Proposition 58 and the preferences of many parents or guardians and community members for these programs, finding ways to increase the numbers of highly trained bilingual teachers will need to be addressed both statewide and locally.

To address this challenge, county offices of education and school districts should consider efforts to recruit teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, reduce financial barriers to entry into the profession, provide teachers with quality professional development and collaboration time, and promote bilingualism for teachers and staff as a core competency that can lead to career advancement. Another consideration should be the predominant language spoken at home by students in each school, school district, or county office of education. For example, while 84 percent of English learners speak Spanish, there are 31 other languages spoken by at least 1,000 students in California, and these are often concentrated in certain areas.⁸

For more information on strategies and solutions for school districts and county offices of education to recruit and develop qualified bilingual teachers, see *English Learners in Focus, Issue 3: Ensuring High-Quality Staff for English Learners*.

Ask Questions

Board members are responsible for setting priorities and goals for their county offices of education or school districts. In determining how to best leverage the new law to improve instruction for English learners, we recommend that board members consider the following questions:

1. How many English learners are served in the school district or county office of education, and in what types of programs are they enrolled?
2. What are the results of the current language programs, including in:
 - » progress toward attainment of English language proficiency;
 - » reclassification rates;
 - » short- and long-term academic success for English learners; and

- » short- and long-term academic achievement for former English learners?
3. How many teachers with bilingual certification are employed by the school district or county office of education? Are staff levels sufficient for existing programs? How many teachers employed by the school district or county office of education are bilingual and would be interested in obtaining the appropriate credential?
 4. Are there effective programs that should be considered for expansion to serve more students? In expanding these programs, what are the personnel and financial requirements?
 5. Are there effective programs from other schools, school districts, or county offices of education that should be considered for implementation? If so, what arrangements can be made to visit these programs? What are the staff and financial requirements for implementation and ongoing operation of these programs?
 6. Are there any programs that parents, guardians, and community members are requesting to implement or expand in their schools?
 7. For any program expansion or implementation, what is the timeline? Is the timeline sufficient to build staff capacity and to engage parents and guardians?
 8. In the annual LCAP process, what is the engagement strategy for families of English learners? Does the school district or county office of education have clear goals to communicate with parents, guardians, and the community?

Conclusion

The freedom to expand existing or implement new dual language programs provides an opportunity that can benefit all public school students in California. The benefits of dual language programs to both English learners and non-English learners are well-supported by the research and extend beyond academic achievement: being bilingual and biliterate is a significant advantage in the 21st century workplace and life. As leaders in their communities, board members play an important role in determining the vision and effectiveness of instructional programs that can help ensure that these potential benefits are realized.

Resources

CSBA Resources

- » *English Learners in Focus, Issue 1: Updated Demographic and Achievement Profile of California's English Learners*
- » *English Learners in Focus, Issue 2: The Promise of Two-Way Immersion Programs*
- » *English Learners in Focus, Issue 3: Ensuring High-Quality Staff for English Learners*
- » Report by the Learning Policy Institute and CSBA. *California Teacher Shortages: A Persistent Problem*
- » Sample Policies and Administrative Regulations. *GAMUT Online (Subscribers Only)*
 - » AR 4112.22 – Staff Teaching English Language Learners
 - » BP/AR 6174 – Education for English Language Learners

External Resources

- » Fact sheet by the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) and Californians Together. *Prop 58 Has Passed! Now What?*
- » Fact Sheet by the Learning Policy Institute. *Bilingual Teacher Shortages in California: A Problem Likely to Grow*
- » Report by Californians Together. *The California Campaign for Biliteracy*
- » *California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) Resource Center*

Endnotes

- 1 Thomas, W., Collier, V. (2002). A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2mmsckh>
- 2 Umanski, I., Reardon, S.F. (2014). Reclassification patterns among Latino English learner students in bilingual, dual immersion, and English immersion classrooms. *American Education Research Journal*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2mwaDuR>
- 3 Valentino, R.A., Reardon, S.F. (2014). Effectiveness of four instructional programs designed to serve English learners: variation by ethnicity and initial English proficiency. Stanford University Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from <http://stanford.io/2mmwiZR>
- 4 Analysis of data from: California Department of Education. El services, reclassification, & waivers, 2010-11. Downloaded February 1, 2017 from <http://bit.ly/2lr8i3l>
- 5 Podolsky, A., Sutchter, L. (2016). California teacher shortages: a persistent problem. Learning Policy Institute and California School Boards Association. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2kn0peT>
- 6 Carver-Thomas, D., Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Bilingual teacher shortages in California: a problem likely to grow. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2kn0peT>
- 7 Analysis of data from: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Commission-approved educator preparation programs. Downloaded February 14, 2017 from <http://bit.ly/2mD8sF2>
- 8 California Department of Education. English learner students by language by grade, 2015-16. Downloaded February 21, 2017 from <http://bit.ly/2mCVvey>

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