Advancing Achievement Through Biliteracy

Brief #2: State Policy Levers to Support a Strong and Sustainable Bilingual Teacher Workforce in California

February 2026

California's Global 2030 vision calls for universal bilingualism and biliteracy, grounded in evidence that bilingual instructional models are among the most effective strategies for improving literacy and long-term academic outcomes for both Multilingual Learners and monolingual students. Expanding access to these programs is therefore not an enrichment goal—it is central to the state's strategy for accelerating student achievement.

Realizing the state's vision requires a strong and sustainable bilingually authorized (BLA) teacher workforce. Districts cannot sustain or expand bilingual instructional programs without effective systems in place to prepare, place, and retain BLA educators.

To understand the systemic conditions needed to grow this workforce, WestEd conducted a *statewide analysis* of BLA workforce supply, demand, and assignment trends and a *regional BLA workforce planning pilot* in Kern County (see box). Together, the analysis and pilot efforts illuminate the structural barriers that limit bilingual workforce growth and the conditions required to meet broad demand for bilingual programs.

> This is the second brief in the Advancing Achievement Through Biliteracy series. The findings from a statewide BLA workforce analysis, which are referenced throughout this brief, are described in greater detail in the first brief.

> The **regional BLA workforce planning pilot** brought together county, district, and educator preparation program partners in Kern County for a series of planning workshops in 2025 to examine recruitment and retention data and identify workforce strategies for strengthening the BLA workforce in support of implementing and scaling bilingual instructional programs.

This brief summarizes key points learned from the statewide analysis and the regional pilot. The brief then identifies state policy levers that can be used to strengthen data systems, understand and address BLA educator recruitment and retention barriers, and build sustainable infrastructure to support the bilingual educator workforce that California needs in order to expand access to bilingual programs that improve student achievement.

Key Learning From State and Regional Efforts

1. The fragmentation of California's educator data systems limits state and regional leaders' ability to fully assess the return on investments in the bilingual educator workforce and address educator shortages that undercut student achievement.

State learning: Teacher workforce data are dispersed across state agencies and are reported inconsistently, with limited reporting that is specific to bilingual teacher preparation, assignment, or retention. As a result, state leaders cannot readily assess the full impact of recent investments or monitor progress toward biliteracy or bilingualism goals that directly advance student learning. (See the Appendix for a table detailing the relevant data that are available at the state and regional levels.)

Regional learning: In the pilot, regional partners confronted the same fragmentation. Answering basic questions about bilingual workforce supply, shortages, or retention required manually collecting and reconciling data from multiple state and local systems such that essential workforce insights remained out of reach, even with extensive effort and technical support.

Impact: Without current, connected data, districts and educator preparation programs cannot forecast bilingual teacher demand, align preparation with local needs, or plan for sustainable program growth. Producing actionable BLA workforce insights is unduly burdensome—leaving local leaders without the means to plan effectively for bilingual program growth and limiting expansion of potentially high-impact bilingual programs that advance student achievement.

2. California does not publicly report data to show whether recent growth in BLA credential attainment is translating into more bilingual classrooms or to understand BLA workforce recruitment or retention trends—a critical statewide blind spot in understanding return on investment.

State learning: While the state is nearing the Global 2030 target of 2,000 new bilingual authorizations annually, publicly available statewide data linking bilingual authorizations to classroom assignments have not been updated since 2018–19, and statewide data from the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) indicate that the rates of vacancies and instances of educators without the required BLA credential in bilingual classrooms persisted from 2020 through 2023, signaling continued unmet demand for BLA educators. Without current assignment data or any retention data for BLA educators, state leaders cannot determine whether workforce investments result in increased bilingual program capacity, nor can they (a) support strategic placement of bilingual educators in roles that will impact student learning most or (b) fully understand and strategically address BLA educator shortages.

Regional learning: Regional partners' investments also resulted in exponential growth of enrollment in and completion of BLA credential programs, but the outcomes of these investments face parallel uncertainties. Local data revealed that some BLA educators were not choosing to serve in bilingual instructional roles, and others were leaving bilingual roles even while remaining in the same school or district. Without data that link preparation, assignment, and retention or qualitative data regarding teachers' pathway or role decision-

making, regional partners do not know why BLA educators opt out of bilingual positions or what conditions support them to stay.

Impact: The state invested $1.5 billion in educator workforce initiatives in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and school systems spend roughly 80 percent of their budgets on staffing. Unfortunately, education leaders face a statewide blind spot in understanding both unmet need and untapped bilingual capacity. This data gap limits the state's ability to assess whether its workforce investments are achieving their intended outcomes and its ability to design effective incentives, supports, and working conditions to strengthen BLA educator recruitment and retention.

3. Structural and fiscal conditions may jeopardize the long-term sustainability of California's bilingual teacher pipeline and the bilingual instructional programs it supports.

State learning: While Multilingual Learner enrollment has declined over the past decade, the demand for bilingual instructional programs persists—intensifying the need for a stable, regionally accessible BLA educator pipeline. Despite recent growth in bilingual authorizations, the number of BLA teachers remains a small share of the total workforce, and declining K–12 enrollment and budget pressures risk undermining efforts to expand access to bilingual programs and increase BLA workforce capacity.

Regional learning: Regional partners identified additional structural challenges that affect bilingual program continuity. Under the Local Control Funding Formula, class-size incentives end after grade 3. As student cohorts advance to grade 4, class sizes increase and smaller residual groups make it difficult to maintain funding for full bilingual classes. When faced with a choice, some families stay at their current school rather than transfer to another campus to remain in a bilingual program, causing unintended program attrition. This issue is most acute in smaller or partial-site programs in which limited enrollment and staffing flexibility make it difficult to maintain seamless K–8 bilingual pathways even when demand remains strong. Constraints in higher education funding also create fiscal sustainability and capacity challenges for regional BLA educator preparation programs.

Impact: These dynamics create sustainability risks for bilingual educator preparation and instructional program expansion. Without sustainable funding models and staffing policies that support continuity across grade levels, districts struggle to maintain and grow bilingual instructional programs—constraining the state's ability to meet ongoing demand for biliteracy and bilingualism.

Creating Systemic Conditions for a Thriving Bilingual Teacher Workforce in California

The two aligned efforts—WestEd's statewide analysis and the regional pilot—point to several **state policy levers for addressing systemic barriers and creating enabling conditions** for local leaders to attract, support, and retain the BLA workforce that is necessary for scaling high-impact bilingual programming that improves outcomes for learners (see "State Levers for Advancing Achievement Through Biliteracy" exhibit).
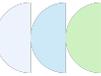
State Levers for Advancing Achievement Through Biliteracy

Lever 1. Modernize educator data systems to generate actionable insights on bilingual and other teacher shortage areas and understand the impact of workforce investments.

- **Integrate California Department of Education (CDE), CTC, and local K–12 and educator preparation data** to create a linked, longitudinal system that connects preparation, credentialing, assignment, and retention.

- **Ensure regional and local access to timely, actionable workforce data** so local leaders can (a) forecast workforce demand as bilingual programs grow, (b) map teacher supply pipelines to anticipated workforce needs, and (c) target resources and support accordingly.

The CTC's recent release of enhanced assignment monitoring and educator workforce dashboards represents an important step toward improved educator workforce data specific to BLA educators—and the state's forthcoming Cradle-to-Career Teacher Training and Retention Dashboard may also include some of these important data.

Lever 2. Analyze the extent to which credentialed bilingual educators are entering and staying in bilingual classroom roles, and address the conditions that shape those decisions.

- **Further analyze recently released credential and assignment data** from the CTC to identify where BLA teachers are placed, where gaps or credential misalignment exist, and where bilingual capacity is not being used strategically. Consider contributing factors such as regional access to BLA educator preparation programs and ways in which district leaders may prioritize assignment of BLA teachers to address competing shortages.

- **Examine the design of bilingual teaching roles**—including workload, credential affordability, scheduling, compensation, and assignment practices—to identify systemic barriers that influence whether teachers pursue or remain in BLA roles.

- **Use these insights to guide** targeted incentives, compensation structures, and district and collective bargaining strategies that support educators to enter and stay in bilingual instructional roles.

Lever 3. Build sustained state and regional infrastructure to support scalable, fiscally viable bilingual instructional programs and BLA workforce growth.

- **Sustain and replicate regional collaboratives such as the regional BLA workforce pilot in Kern County and the EL-WIN initiative as scalable, replicable proof points.** These regional bright spots demonstrate how districts, counties, and preparation programs can jointly analyze and coordinate supply and demand to address critical workforce needs.

- **Strengthen regional capacity to measure, improve, and communicate the return on investment for bilingual teacher preparation and instructional programs amid declining enrollment and declining revenues.** This includes understanding and streamlining program costs, engaging in strategic cost sharing, and communicating the impact of quality bilingual preparation and instructional programs to key audiences.

- **Sustain and institutionalize the California State Educator Workforce Collaborative** as the statewide mechanism for aligning agencies, supporting regional planning, and creating the enabling conditions for long-term bilingual workforce and instructional program growth.

Closing

California has made a bold commitment to biliteracy and has invested in growing its educator workforce to expand access to high-impact bilingual programs. Translating this vision and investment into improved outcomes for students will require strengthening the data systems, workforce conditions, and regional infrastructure necessary for ensuring those investments achieve their desired impact.
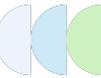
Appendix: Overview of Publicly Available Bilingual Teacher Workforce and Bilingual Instructional Program Data

Data metric	Statewide data: Publicly reported in database	Statewide data: Time horizon availability	Local data: Data availability for regional pilot partners
Educator preparation			
• Enrollment and completion numbers for BLA educator programs	Yes (CTC)	Most recent year only (no trend data)	Pilot program collects data internally; 2019–20 to present
• New BLA and English Learner authorizations	Yes (CTC)	2013–14 to present	Pilot program collects data internally; 2019–20 to present
Educator workforce			
• Number and characteristics of teachers serving English Learners, including BLA credential status	Yes (CDE)	2012–13 through 2018–19 only	Varied[a,b]
• New BLA teacher hires	No (the CDE reports for "ML Educators," not BLA-specific)	Most recent year only (no trend data)	Varied[a,b]
• Annual counts of BLA teachers	Yes (CDE)[c]	2012–13 through 2018–19 only	Varied[a,b]
• BLA teacher misassignment data	Yes (CTC)[d]	2020–2023	Varied[a,b]
• Credentialing institution for current teachers	No	N/A	Varied[a,b]
• Retention and mobility	No	N/A	No
Student enrollment and bilingual programs			
• English Learner and Fluent English Proficient enrollment trends	Yes (CDE)	2011–12 to present	Yes, reported to state
• Student enrollment (including demographics) in bilingual programs	No	N/A	Varied[b]
• Student-to-staff ratios for bilingual programs	No	N/A	Varied[b]
• Number of schools with multilingual instruction	Yes (CDE)	Most recent year only (no trend data)	Varied;[b] public information about programs varies
• Type of bilingual program models in operation	No	N/A	Varied;[b] public information about programs varies

[a] The regional pilot county office of education collects these data for some but not all districts and reports the data on an internal data dashboard. [b] Pilot districts have access to these data internally, with varied district-level collection practices. [c] The CTC reports more recent data on educator counts by classroom setting but does not disaggregate for bilingual settings. [d] The CTC and the CDE report misassignment data. The CTC disaggregates for bilingual classroom settings. The CDE does not disaggregate for BLA credentials. See the CTC's definitions.

Acknowledgments

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