



Expanding Equitable Access to Bilingual Education in California's Silicon Valley

Analysis and Recommendations

March 2026

Expanding bilingual educational opportunities in California is central to the state's strategy for accelerating student achievement and closing gaps in English Learner achievement, yet bilingual programs remain in low supply. Increasing this supply depends on investment in and attention to bilingualism through a range of program conditions critical to the success of any program for students who are English Learners.

This paper reports on a study gathering new information about the extent of bilingualism in Silicon Valley schools. It summarizes the study's findings and recommendations for strengthening access to bilingual programs and opportunities for English Learner students, aiming to help the region move toward equitable access at scale.



Key Findings and Recommendations

Improving the Design of English Learner Programs

Local education agencies (LEAs) in the region typically do not offer bilingual educational opportunities outside of bilingual programs.

LEAs commonly invest in instructional coaches, program coordinators, and other staff who are well positioned to influence English Learner program design and implementation.

LEAs vary in their readiness to build bilingual opportunities because the resources they allocate to English Learner programs range in type and scope.

Recommendations:

1. **Improve English Learner access to existing bilingual programs.**
2. **Integrate bilingualism into all instructional settings.**
3. **Strategically deploy and expand bilingual instructional staff beyond bilingual programs.**

Expanding School-Based Support for Multilingual Families

Successful family engagement rests on trusting relationships built through shared language and cultural understanding.

Community organizations and public agencies in the region rarely have formal partnerships, but nearly half of those interviewed reported engaging in collaborative vision setting.

Family liaisons provide essential bridges between LEAs and multilingual families.

Recommendations:

1. **Support school staff in building external relationships with families.**
2. **Invest in external partnerships to bring relevant noneducational public services and programs into schools.**
3. **Refine school and district policies to facilitate service access and navigation through schools.**





Background and Approach

Expanding bilingual educational opportunities in California is embedded in and promoted by several recent statewide initiatives, including Global California 2030, the California EdGE Initiative, and the English Learner Roadmap. WestEd's 2024 [*Strategic and Economic Analysis of English Learner Programs in California*](#) also focused on this goal, making recommendations focused on bringing these bilingual programs for English Learners to scale in California (Jacobson et al., 2025).

This reflects a recognition 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 (Porter et al., 2023).

Expanding access to these programs is therefore not just an enrichment goal—it ought to be central to the state's strategy for accelerating student achievement. Research on the current offerings of bilingual programs can signal the extent to which these aims are coming to fruition and the ways in which these initiatives are falling short of their intended outcomes.

While there are several evidence-based instructional approaches for students who are English Learners, bilingual program models are the most effective, improving student academic performance overall and student achievement on English language proficiency tests (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Steele et al., 2017; Umansky & Reardon, 2014; Valentino & Reardon, 2015). In general, bilingualism itself, an outcome of these programs, has been shown to have a range of cognitive benefits for all students (Bialystok & Craik, 2010; Fan et al., 2016; Greenberg et al., 2013; Luk & Bialystok, 2014).





Key Terms

- **Bilingual program/education:** a group of instructional delivery methods that support the development of English and another language in addition to academic content. For example, **dual language immersion**, one type of bilingual education, integrates native English speakers and native speakers of another language to support language and academic proficiency in both languages. These programs in California are also sometimes referred to as “multilingual programs.”
- **Bilingual educational opportunity:** a range of conditions that are critical to the success of all educational programs for students who are English Learners and that support readiness to launch or expand bilingual programs. These conditions include the elements of school culture that drive interactions between adults and students and the program design features that can influence instructional settings and teaching practices.

In addition to improving academic outcomes and cognitive skills, bilingual programs have been found to support the economic mobility and long-term life outcomes of students—increasing, for example, postsecondary outcomes and estimated earnings (Saiz & Zoido, 2005; Santibañez & Zárate, 2014). This is an important reflection of the role education plays in broader efforts to increase upward mobility and help communities thrive. This important role of education is reflected, for example, in the [Urban Institute's Upward Mobility Framework](#), in which high-quality education is viewed as critical to economic and social mobility.

Despite the well-recognized benefits of bilingual programs, the supply of these programs in California is inconsistent and generally low, being found in only 16 percent of schools statewide, according to state data, and enrolling only 10 percent of students who are English Learners, based on a recent analysis by Public Profit (Blom & Wolitzer, 2025). Moreover, there are large up-front costs to launching bilingual programs that likely stymie their growth. This includes, for example, the cost of purchasing and/or integrating bilingual curriculum and instructional designs into the general education curriculum, the cost of



recruiting and training new bilingually authorized instructors, and the cost of selecting and administering partner language assessments (Howard et al., 2007).

Though bilingual programs are typically viewed as stand-alone, with their unique goals around bilingualism and biliteracy, many of the conditions that support their success are also important to the success of any program for students who are English Learners. These conditions for success include the assignment of bilingual instructors, which is a requirement for bilingual programs and increases support for English Learner students in any type of program (Loeb et al., 2014). Further, staff who respect and value other languages and cultures; learning opportunities that support student language use, including by being in their home language; and meaningful partnerships with multilingual families are all critical (California Department of Education, 2020). Integrating and fostering these conditions within any English Learner program can add value to that program and, if it is not part of a formal bilingual program, can create the conditions for increasing English Learner students' access to formal bilingual programs.

Fast Facts: English Learner Students in Silicon Valley

- There are 57 traditional LEAs; 64 charter LEAs; and a total of about 680 schools in Santa Clara, San Mateo, and southern Alameda counties (i.e., the Silicon Valley region).
- In the region there are approximately 173,000 students who are Multilingual Learners, including English Learner and Fluent English Proficient students, roughly 50 percent of all students. Average LEA-level Multilingual Learner enrollment share in the region is 54 percent, notably higher than the state average of 38 percent.
- There are currently bilingual educational programs in 24 percent of Silicon Valley LEAs (88 schools), compared to 16 percent of LEAs statewide.
- In 2024, the average LEA current expense of education per average daily attendance in Silicon Valley was \$23,361, slightly higher than the statewide average of \$22,567, with a range from \$15,073 to \$40,730.
- In 2025, the region's A–G completion rate, or the share of the 4-year adjusted graduate cohort meeting University of California/California State University



entrance requirements, also varied. The regional rate for all students was 56 percent, compared to 47 percent statewide. In contrast, the regional rate for English Learner students was 22 percent, compared to 23 percent for this population statewide.

(Sources: California Department of Education, n.d., 2024, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d)

The Silicon Valley region is a vibrant hub of linguistic diversity, creating a unique opportunity to study bilingual programs and related conditions of success.¹ Although not all of the region's LEAs have high percentages of students who are English Learners (see [Figure 1](#)), residents of Silicon Valley are more likely to be multilingual than residents of the state overall, with just over half speaking a language other than English (8 percentage points higher than for Californians overall). The languages spoken by multilingual residents of Silicon Valley are also incredibly diverse, with a relatively large percentage of speakers of Asian or Pacific Island languages—double the share in the state overall (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

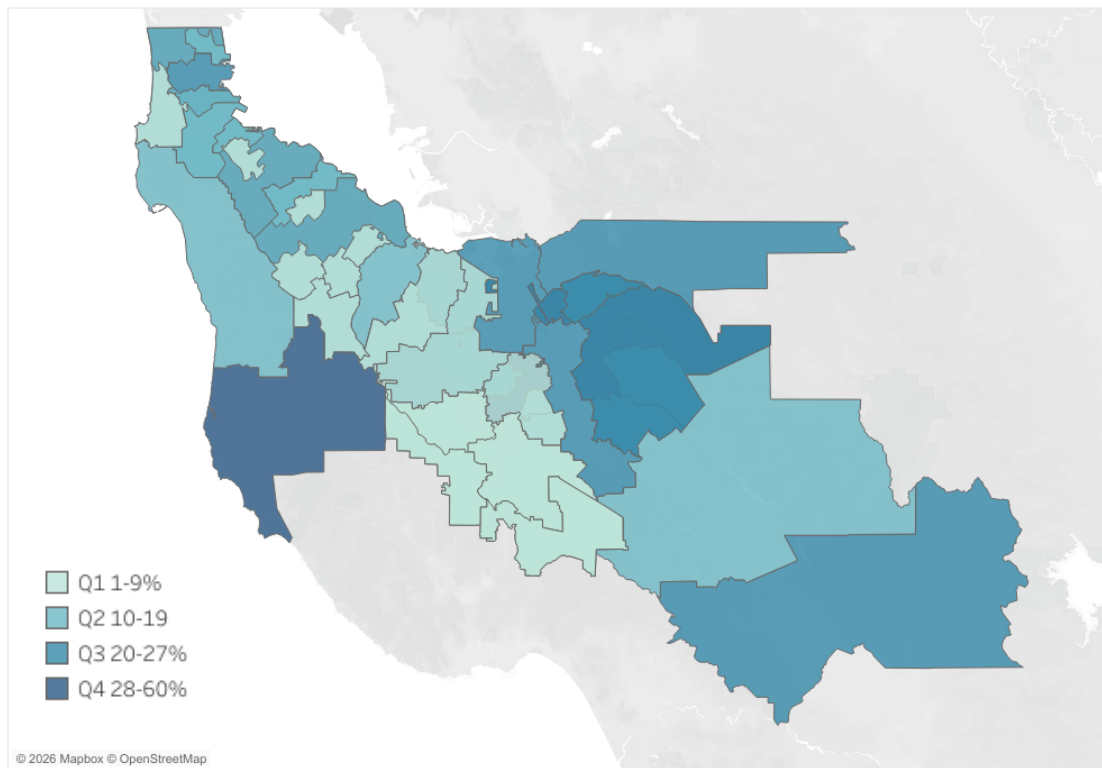
Finally, the region's workforce is also diverse, with immigrants making up 42 percent of the population and 51 percent of workers in Santa Clara County, the highest share in the state (Johnson & Baldassare, 2025). Relatedly, Silicon Valley parents of various backgrounds, particularly in Latino families, put a strong emphasis on cultivating the bilingual skills of their children. This includes specifically parents in the Silicon Valley region, as exemplified by a Sunnyvale parent who, as quoted in a 2025 paper by Williams and colleagues, articulated the key benefits of bilingualism as follows:

¹ This study defines the Silicon Valley region as including Santa Clara County, San Mateo County, and southern Alameda County (specifically, unincorporated Hayward and San Lorenzo).



“[Bilingual adults have] more opportunities in work, to study. It will be easier because knowing one language, it changes your brain. It makes you see things differently when you learn more languages. ... When you have more than one language, your cognitive capacity changes. And it makes it so that some tasks or learning is just easier.” (Williams et al., 2025, p. 3)

Figure 1. The Percentage of Students Classified as English Learners Ranges by School District in the Silicon Valley Region



Source: California Department of Education, 2025a. A data table for this figure is in [Appendix A](#).

Key Objectives

Despite the potential for bilingual programs to accelerate student achievement, and despite strong community interest and linguistic diversity in Silicon Valley, there is only



limited publicly available information about bilingual programs or related conditions for success in the region. There is also limited information available on the extent of equitable access to these educational opportunities or the readiness of LEAs to grow them over time.

To understand the situation further requires comprehensive information, as yet uncollected, about the implementation of English Learner programs, including the personnel and nonpersonnel resources currently invested in these programs. For example, to what extent do teachers in the region integrate languages other than English into their instruction of students who are English Learners? Do LEAs include bilingualism as part of their strategic goals and vision for success? Do LEAs invest in the key staff roles that are best positioned to support expanding these opportunities? Understanding the extent of conditions for bilingual program success in Silicon Valley also requires a deeper understanding of the diverse communities of multilingual families in the region and what is most important to them. How can educators more effectively engage and support these families? What types of support are most needed, and how does meeting this need support access to bilingual programs and related educational opportunities?

The study summarized in this report seeks to address these and related questions and to identify recommendations for strengthening support for students who are English Learners in order to help move Silicon Valley toward equitable access to bilingual education at scale.

Study Methods

The study team used multiple methods to gather new information about bilingual programs and related conditions for success in Silicon Valley. Findings and recommendations are based on information from interviews, surveys, public data, and documents. Interviewed LEAs include those in specific priority communities, of which about 50 percent participated. LEAs outside of these communities were invited to complete a survey, and 18 percent ultimately participated. LEA participants tended to be smaller and have higher English Learner percentages and fewer bilingual programs than the population overall. The community organizations and county agency staff invited to participate in an interview were selected purposively to reflect a range services in communities across the region. Ultimately, 93 percent of the community organizations



and 88 percent of invited county staff participated. More details are available in the Methodology box at the end of the report.

The study team also convened an advisory committee to incorporate the input of regional and statewide organizations with expertise in supporting students who are English Learners and their families. Throughout the research process, the study team solicited input from this committee, incorporating their knowledge of the topic and regional context to ensure the study results were well grounded in the Silicon Valley context and relevant to a range of interest holders in the region. The advisory committee also supported the process of recruiting participants for interviews and encouraging survey participation.

Findings and Recommendations: Improving the Design of English Learner Programs

Many of the conditions critical to the success of English Learner programs reflect broad attention to and investment in bilingualism. For students whose home language is not English, educational programs are inherently bilingual in nature. Research demonstrates that successful programs embrace additive bilingualism—an approach whereby students acquire English while maintaining and developing their home language (Howard et al., 2007). The cognitive, academic, and social benefits of simultaneous home language and English language development are well documented (Genesee et al., 2006; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee 2010). Such bilingual educational opportunities are critical to all programs for students who are English Learners, though these opportunities are often associated primarily with formal bilingual program models.

While these bilingual educational opportunities are essential for all English Learner programs, not just formal bilingual models, their expansion depends on two factors: program design (including goals, instructional settings, and student grouping) and resource allocation (including staffing, curricula, and materials). WestEd's 2024 [*Strategic and Economic Analysis of English Learner Programs in California*](#) identified strategic personnel for expanding bilingual programs: program coordination staff and instructional coaches (Jacobson et al., 2025). These roles, when supported by leadership, can drive consistent and systematic expansion of bilingual opportunities across educational systems.



Given what is already known about the conditions for successful bilingual programs, this study examined how such bilingual educational opportunities are currently reflected in English Learner programs and resource allocation across Silicon Valley.

LEAs in the region typically do not offer bilingual educational opportunities outside of bilingual programs.

A fundamental condition for English Learner success—particularly in bilingual programs—is integrating bilingualism and multiculturalism into LEA strategic goals and instructional practices (Castellón et al., 2015). The study's interview and survey data indicate that the extent of such integration is limited across Silicon Valley.

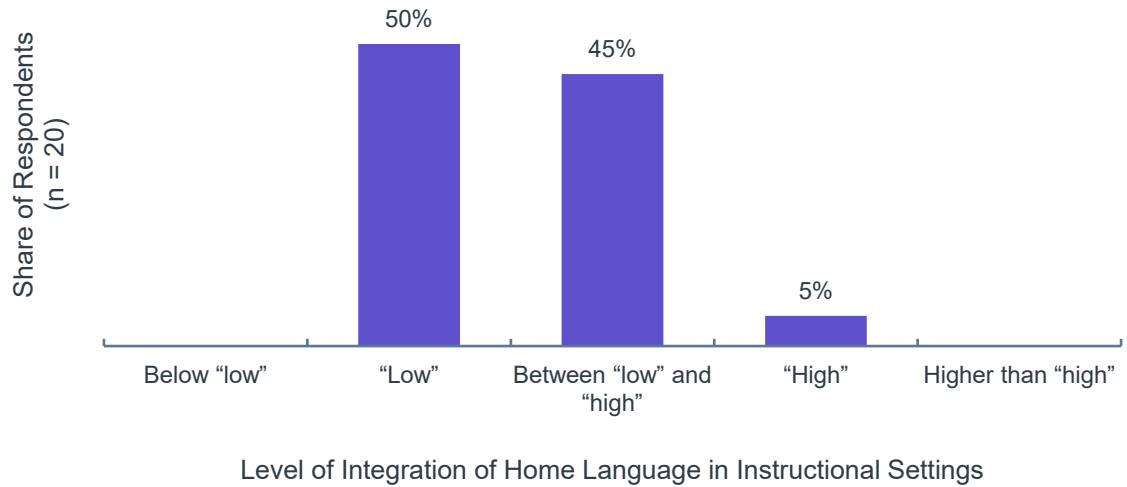
Among LEA staff participating in the interview or survey, 43 percent offer bilingual programs—a higher rate than the region overall. Dual language immersion represents the most common model, at 29 percent.²

LEAs reported minimal integration of home languages in academic instruction outside of formal bilingual programs. When asked to compare their own programs to an example in which bilingualism is reflected only in the occasional use of individual words or phrases or translation tools, half of the LEA respondents considered their programs to be similar (see [Figure 2](#)). Notably, even respondents from LEAs with formal bilingual programs reported mostly moderate levels of home language integration in academic instruction.

² Dual language immersion is a program model that integrates native English speakers and native speakers of another language to support language and academic proficiency in both languages. This study's survey instrument uses the CDE's definition for dual language immersion: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/multilinguaedu.asp>.



Figure 2. Most Respondents Described the Level of Integration of Home Language in Instructional Settings as Low in Their LEA



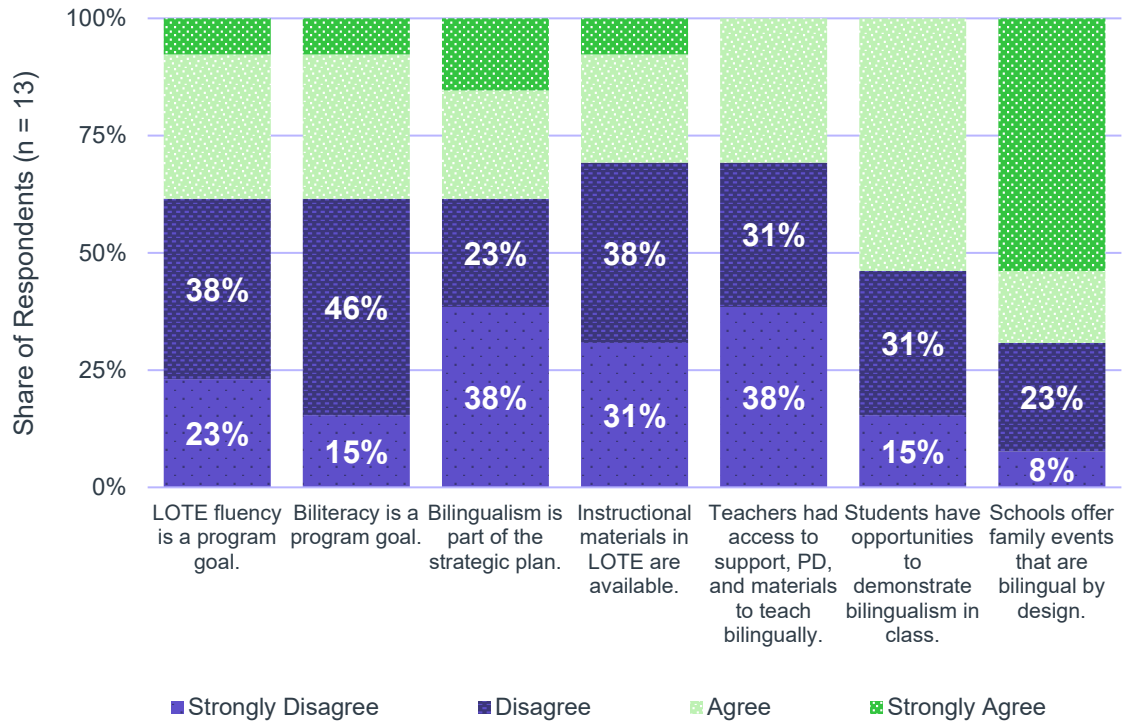
Source: Authors' analysis of primary survey and interview data.

Related LEA practices and conditions confirm this pattern of limited bilingual support (see [Figure 3](#)). Survey respondents generally reported that their LEAs lack key bilingual infrastructure: Sixty-nine percent indicated that instructional materials in languages other than English were unavailable, and the same percentage reported that teachers lacked access to bilingual teaching support, professional development, and materials. Sixty-one percent also indicated that bilingualism and biliteracy are not typically goals of their English Learner programs or part of their strategic plans.

However, respondents reported two areas of strength: LEAs consistently design family events to be bilingual, and students have opportunities to demonstrate bilingualism in classroom settings.



Figure 3. For Strategic Goals and Most Key Resources, Respondents Reported That Bilingualism and Biliteracy Are Typically Not Identified or Supported



Note. LOTE refers to *language other than English*; PD refers to *professional development*.
Source: Authors' analysis of primary survey and interview data.

Respondents also reported a range of levels of integration of academic content with English language development, though most (60%) reported “low” or below “low” levels integration. Conversely, respondents ranked themselves highly in terms of integration of students who are English Learners with their non-English Learner peers, with 90 percent reporting at least “high” integration.

LEAs commonly invest in instructional coaches, program coordinators, and other staff who are well positioned to influence English Learner program design and implementation.

Instructional coaches and program coordinators are positioned to drive systematic expansion of bilingual opportunities. Instructional coaches can help all teachers—not just specialists—integrate home language and English language development into their practice. Program coordinators can introduce materials in languages other than English and advocate for systemic changes in program design.



Most respondents (67%) indicated that their LEA employs instructional coaches as part of their English Learner programs, and 88 percent of the LEA interviewees indicated that their LEA has program coordinators supporting English Learner programs.

Interviewees reported that these roles serve multiple functions. Instructional coaches provide professional development to strengthen both English language development instruction and content delivery for students who are English Learners while sometimes also supporting program monitoring and data collection. Program coordinators manage curriculum selection, organize training, oversee the administration of the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California, and often supervise bilingual family liaisons.

Unfortunately, given their strategic importance, these positions are vulnerable. Multiple LEAs that were interviewed reported that recent federal and state funding uncertainty led to forthcoming reductions or consolidation of these roles, suggesting they are not viewed as essential to the LEA's core mission and are particularly susceptible to budget constraints.

LEAs vary in their readiness to build bilingual opportunities because the resources they allocate to English Learner programs range in type and scope.

Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) provide information, though limited, on English Learner program investments regionwide. These plans detail how LEAs allocate state Local Control Funding Formula resources to support specific student groups through both targeted and shared actions. Silicon Valley LEAs reported investing an average of \$1,700 per English Learner student for actions aimed exclusively at English Learner students, though, notably, 30 percent of LEAs reported no such targeted investments.

Based on interview responses about resource use specific to English Learner programs, the study team estimates that participating LEAs have economic costs for program personnel of between \$1,670 and \$5,000 per English Learner student annually (see [Figure 4](#)).³ This range reflects primarily variation in program design and scale. For example, some interviewed LEAs invest substantial staff time in instructional coaches, while others allocate only minimal time. Further, LEAs with relatively few students who

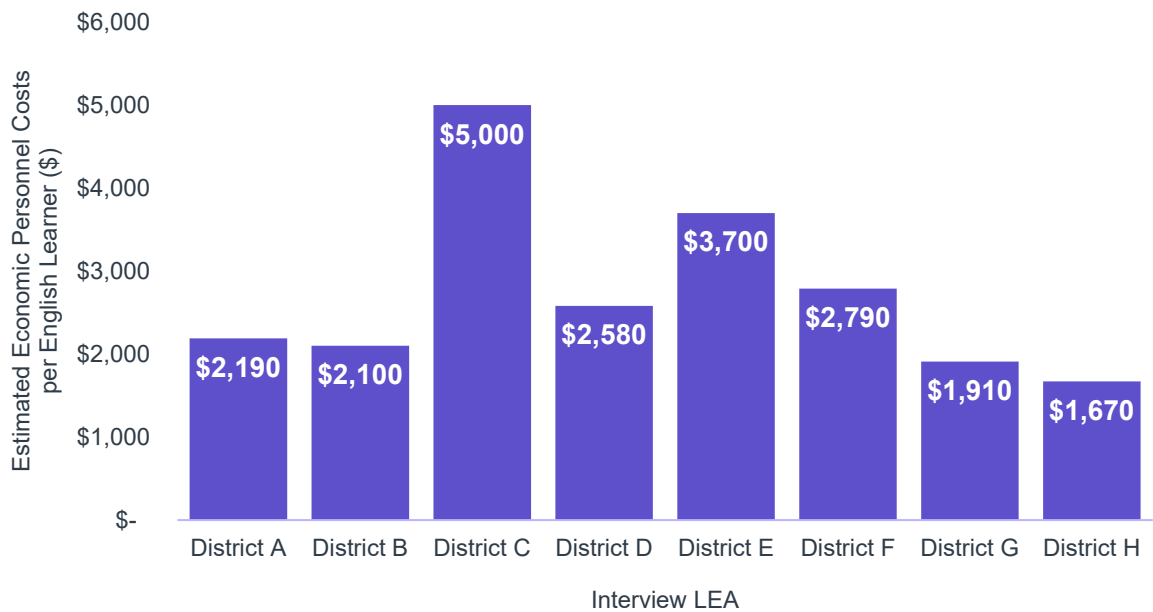
³ "Economic cost" refers to the dollar value of the quantity of allocated resources at its price on the open market. This contrasts with, for example, the amount of spending reported for specific resources.



are English Learners must invest more funds per student to maintain a comparable level of support.⁴ Due to these factors, the estimated economic cost of instructional coaches varies from approximately \$120 to \$500 per English Learner student. For similar reasons, the cost of program coordinators ranged from approximately \$70 to \$380 per student.

Investments in materials to support students who are English Learners also vary considerably. Six of seven interviewed LEAs reported purchasing English Learner–specific curriculum or materials, but the scale differed substantially. Some LEAs made minimal investments in supplemental English Language Development (ELD) lessons and consumables such as worksheets and headphones. Others purchased comprehensive curricula in languages other than English and vendor-provided professional development specific to English Learner students.

Figure 4. Estimated Economic Costs for English Learner Program Personnel Range From \$1,670 to \$5,000 per Student, Reflecting Variation in Program Design and Scale



Source: Authors' analysis of primary survey and interview data.

⁴ The higher per-student investment in smaller programs reflects the fact that staff time typically cannot be allocated in exact proportion with the number of students served. A school with 10 students per grade will need similar instructional staffing and instructional coaching as a school with 20 students per grade, so the first school will pay roughly twice as much per student.



Recommendations

The findings suggest that bilingual educational opportunities in Silicon Valley remain limited to a minority of the state's English Learner students, only those who are in formal bilingual programs. LEAs lack consistent integration of bilingual practices beyond those formal programs. Few among the study's sample have adopted bilingualism as a districtwide goal, provided instructional materials in languages other than English, or supported teachers in teaching bilingually.

However, existing staffing structures offer untapped potential. The instructional coaches and program coordinators already employed by participating LEAs could expand bilingual opportunities beyond formal program models, though the current estimated economic costs reflect the varied levels of current investments in these and other critical resources.

The recommendations therefore focus on leveraging and building upon existing resources to strengthen bilingual opportunities systemwide. This approach could support improving services for English Learner students in all types of programs and create the foundation for expanding formal bilingual programs.

Recommendations

Strengthening English Learner programs and expanding bilingual opportunities depend on broad attention to and investment in *bilingualism* as an asset or feature of students, schools, and communities. Advancing this goal can be supported by taking the following actions:

1. **Improve English Learner access to existing bilingual programs.** Where bilingual programs exist, explicitly prioritize English Learner access to these programs.
2. **Integrate bilingualism into all instructional settings.** Promote the use of primary languages in instructional settings through districtwide professional learning and in-service coaching.
3. **Strategically deploy and expand bilingual instructional staff beyond bilingual programs.** Across all instructional models, bilingual or not, prioritize strategic assignment of existing bilingually authorized staff; support existing



staff to become bilingually authorized; and, where possible, recruit new bilingual instructional staff.

How can interest holders take action to support these recommendations?

Local and Regional Education Leaders

School and district leaders shape local educational policy and guide staff in evolving their practice. In districts with bilingual programs, leaders can monitor enrollment and remove barriers that hinder English Learner access to bilingual programs—for example, by enacting policies that balance linguistic skills in English and partner languages. More broadly, leaders can support integrating multilingual families' perspectives and priorities into program design.

District and county office of education leaders can organize training on integrating bilingualism across all instructional settings. This could include establishing bilingualism as an explicit goal, aligning professional development accordingly, and working with instructional support staff to embed these practices into regular training cycles. There are reasons to increase these instructional practices even if having all students become bilingual is not the goal, at least initially. A foundational step would be to make space for the bilingualism that already exists as an asset that students can use to support their learning and sense-making.

Leaders can also take steps to maximize existing bilingual capacity. They can, for example, ensure that bilingually authorized teachers are supported and encouraged to leverage bilingualism in classrooms as an asset generally, through how they engage and interact with students, and can help bilingual teachers without authorization complete the certification process. Leaders can also invest, when possible, in the expansion of the bilingual workforce by analyzing staffing data, setting strategic hiring goals, and identifying set-aside funds for increasingly costly barriers such as visa sponsorship costs. This can include systematically documenting who is bilingual among the teaching staff and in the wider school community regardless of whether they have a bilingual authorization or are explicitly teaching in or with their additional languages.



Community-Based Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are well positioned to act as bridges between schools and the broader community, helping identify and cultivate local bilingual talent and reach multilingual families. This might include collaborating with districts to reach linguistically diverse families, helping the families to understand the advantages of bilingual education and navigate enrollment.

This could also include hosting information sessions in families' primary languages, coaching families through application processes, and advocating for the removal of systemic barriers in their community. These barriers might include confusing requirements for program applications or the isolation of programs in specific neighborhoods in the community. CBOs can also serve as trusted feedback channels, sharing family needs and concerns with schools to inform program improvement.

Local and Regional Education Policymakers

Policymakers have the authority to set local or regional priorities and help practitioners access sustainable and well-targeted resources for expanding bilingual education. This could include, for example, crafting policy to require more robust collection of data on bilingual hiring and learning or to support strategic planning and providing funding to incentivize and support teachers in obtaining bilingual authorizations.

Policymakers can also provide funding to expand bilingual education through, for example, increasing bilingual staff. This may also include establishing clear targets and accountability standards for English Learner participation in bilingual programs and requiring district leaders to report on progress toward these targets. Policymakers can also enact policies requiring or incentivizing routine professional learning on bilingual instructional practice for all educators, not just those in bilingual programs.

Findings and Recommendations: Expanding School-Based Support for Multilingual Families

Research illustrates the power of meaningful family engagement to support student success (Glick & White, 2004; Sibley & Dearing, 2014). Moreover, while families are often supportive of bilingual programs in general, support for enrolling their child in a specific



program requires a level of trust that it will meet their child's needs (Williams et al., 2025). Family engagement is, therefore, a critical strategy for increasing English Learner access to bilingual programs.

However, as is well documented in the *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (Howard et al., 2007), multilingual families frequently encounter substantial barriers to traditional approaches to family engagement. Specifically, these barriers can include a sense of alienation or distrust on the part of families and, in some cases, insufficiently accessible information about school programs and procedures. Unfortunately, another barrier can come from school staff perceptions that ethnic minority or language minority families are less supportive of their child's school experience than other families are. In the face of these and other barriers, the potential benefits of historical or traditional approaches to family engagement may not be realized as easily for multilingual families.

Nonetheless, there are key strategies for overcoming these barriers, including the important role of a family liaison who, for an English Learner program, is responsible for developing and supporting ongoing relationships with the families of students who are English Learners.

Given the importance of engaging the families of English Learner students, and the potential for this engagement to support access to bilingual programs, the study team engaged CBOs and county agency staff to identify ways to improve relationships with and increase support for multilingual families.

Successful family engagement rests on trusting relationships built through shared language and cultural understanding.

Most CBO and public agency representatives identified language skills, cultural competency, and long-term relationships as essential for serving multilingual families. While the literature commonly cites participation incentives and hiring from the communities served as success factors, this study's interviewees mentioned these strategies less frequently. Instead, they described leveraging close client relationships to encourage participation and tailor offerings. In the current climate of increased government distrust, their role as trusted messengers has proved especially critical for reaching families who are hesitant to seek assistance.



These findings reveal an important challenge: While there is clear agreement on what facilitates engagement, the most effective strategies require complex, time-intensive relationship building rather than simpler interventions such as providing food or child care. Schools seeking to engage families in bilingual opportunities must therefore invest in the long-term work of developing relationships grounded in shared language, cultural understanding, and trust.

“I don't want to undervalue the trust we've worked really intentionally to cultivate and that everything else is built on top of. Our staff [holds] that trust so precious, and we have some incredible staff leading this program that care ... about these community connections and trust and really hearing from their community more than most other things, which helps us maintain that [trust].”

Community organizations and public agencies in the region rarely have formal partnerships, but nearly half of those interviewed reported engaging in collaborative vision setting.

As was noted by a handful of interview respondents, education leaders often have a limited capacity to partner with community organizations. While they may want to bring valuable community programs into schools, follow-through often proves challenging. The challenge intensifies when multiple organizations independently approach the same district, creating competing demands on leaders' time. In contrast, community organizations that collaborate around a shared vision and offer a coherent collective partnership model can better address this issue.

CBOs and county agencies in Silicon Valley participating in the study collaborate frequently, with every interviewee describing interorganizational relationships that improve service delivery and information sharing. Yet these collaborations are primarily informal—commonly involving referrals and cross-marketing rather than formal partnerships through



memorandums of understanding or contracts. Some interviewees noted that the informal nature of collaboration limits how effectively organizations can complement each other to better meet the needs of the families they serve.

However, many organizations also reported having structured engagement on community goals and vision—for example, quarterly or monthly meetings with other service providers or regular collaborative community vision-setting activities to shape their shared network of programs and services. In fact, nearly half of the study's sample reported engaging in this sort of community vision setting. So, while formal partnerships are not common, efforts to establish a shared vision for success and networking are more typical. Such efforts can serve as a foundation for the growth of closer, formal partnerships and may as a result contribute to the expansion of successful partnerships with education leaders.

“We have also partnered with immigration rights and services organizations, too. Because I think we've built so much trust with the families that they feel comfortable sharing what the needs are in the community. And with our leverage we're able to bring in partnerships in real time to respond to what the needs are.”

Family liaisons provide essential bridges between LEAs and multilingual families.

More than half (57%) of LEA respondents in the region indicated that they employ dedicated staff to be family liaisons as part of their English Learner programs. This role delivers critical services: organizing community events, hosting workshops on language development and home language literacy, sharing information with parents, and helping families navigate district procedures like course registration and health forms. At least one LEA leader interviewed for the study has created a specialized newcomer family engagement role that oversees student intake, coordinates with social workers, and monitors newcomer student progress.



In some LEAs, the family liaison role is an informal one. In one district, a dual immersion administrator whose primary program duty was translation had their role expanded to include broader family engagement work, leveraging their language skills and longstanding community relationships. This example demonstrates how staff members who can build trust and relationships become invaluable connectors between schools and multilingual families. It also underscores the importance of formally compensating and supporting the important work these staff take on.

“Her role was specifically intended for our [bilingual program]. But because she is someone that’s very familiar on campus ... she has established connections and relationships. It was just very natural for her to also support the broader school site community.”

Recommendations

The findings suggest the need for expanding and deepening engagement with multilingual families through relationships based on a shared language and a common understanding of culture, and they suggest an opportunity to build on the foundation created by existing school-based family liaisons, CBOs, and regional agencies. The presence of family liaisons among participating LEAs indicates that key resources are available to support implementation of this approach.

Based on these supporting conditions and key staff roles, the study team is recommending specific actions to support meaningful school-based multilingual family engagement, including investing in partnerships with organizations that can provide other noneducational services.



Recommendations

Supporting students who are English Learners and their families in ways that help them thrive requires meaningful, ongoing relationships with families and partnerships with organizations that have earned the trust of the community. Advancing this goal can be supported by taking the following actions:

- 1. Support school staff in building external relationships with families.** Invest in the development, especially among family liaison staff, of skills and competencies critical for establishing and maintaining trusting relationships with multilingual families.
- 2. Invest in external partnerships to bring relevant noneducational public services and programs into schools.** Prioritize coordination and partnership with community organizations and regional public agencies that serve multilingual families in other sectors and already have ongoing, trusting relationships.
- 3. Refine school and district policies to facilitate service access and navigation through schools.** Identify and remove barriers to supporting multilingual families in accessing and navigating noneducational services through school-based infrastructure and staff.

How can interest holders take action to support these recommendations?

Local and Regional Education Leaders

School-based practitioners—principals, teachers, counselors, and family liaisons—directly engage multilingual families. To strengthen this engagement, districts and schools should expand communication channels and create multiple engagement opportunities that accommodate families' varying levels of English literacy and familiarity with American schools.

Schools can build trust by maintaining consistent community presence, including through home visiting programs. Regional and district leaders should establish formal



partnerships to bring noneducational services into schools while streamlining communication, registration, and volunteer procedures to reduce barriers for families.

Community-Based Organizations

CBOs can extend their reach and impact through formal school partnerships, ensuring that school staff work as part of a communitywide network rather than in isolation. These partnerships can enable CBOs to provide services directly on campus, share expertise with school staff, and codevelop tools and outreach strategies that help families navigate systems. Such collaboration can create seamless services that respect family contexts and build community trust.

Local and Regional Education Policymakers

Policymakers can prioritize funding and policies that provide all school staff with opportunities for professional development on family engagement. Support includes dedicated funding for family liaison positions and training for educators, technical assistance on trust-building strategies, and streamlined requirements for school–CBO partnership agreements.

Conclusion

Focusing on bilingual educational opportunities in Silicon Valley and pathways for expanding access for students who are English Learners, the study team interviewed and surveyed LEA leaders, representatives from community organizations, and county agency staff in the region and reviewed relevant data and documentation.

The findings reveal that bilingual educational opportunities remain largely concentrated within formal program models rather than integrated across all settings serving students who are English Learners.

The study also identified existing capacity that can support expanding access to these opportunities. Many LEAs already employ instructional coaches, program coordinators, and family liaisons—positions that, with the support of leadership and sufficient capacity, can drive systematic expansion. CBOs have established trusted relationships with multilingual families and are key potential partners for education leaders in these efforts.



The recommendations in this report offer actionable steps for local education leaders, community organizations, and policymakers to take to strengthen existing efforts and create new pathways for growth.

- **Local education leaders** can prioritize English Learner access to existing programs, integrate bilingual instructional practices into professional development, and establish formal partnerships with community organizations.
- **CBOs** can collaborate with schools to support family engagement and program enrollment navigation.
- **Education policymakers** can establish data collection requirements, provide targeted funding for key positions and initiatives, and support the creation of streamlined pathways for school–CBO partnerships.

Realizing equitable access to bilingual education at scale is likely to require sustained coordination among these interest holder groups and strategic development of the infrastructure, partnerships, and professional capacity identified in this study. Leaders in the region have an opportunity to work together to build on the region's strengths and create the conditions for all English Learner students to access and thus benefit from bilingual educational opportunities.





Methodology

This study analyzed primary data from LEA staff, community organization representatives, and county agency staff, alongside secondary data from public sources.

LEA Staff Interview and Survey Data Analysis

The study team collected information about English Learner program implementation, design, and resource use through engaging LEA staff in interviews and a survey between May and September of 2025. LEA staff participating in the study completed either two semistructured, 1-hour interviews or a distinct but complementary survey gathering information about the design of programs for English Learner students and the associated resources supporting their implementation.

Interview invitations were limited to 17 LEAs within communities that are a priority for Sobrato Philanthropies; about 50 percent (8/17) participated, including a charter network with multiple schools for which a single interview was conducted. These LEAs are similar in size and English Learner percentage to the regional population but have fewer bilingual programs. All of the other 72 LEAs and charter networks in the region were invited to complete the survey. Eighteen percent (13/73) completed surveys. As with the interviews, charter networks with multiple schools completed a single survey. Survey respondents are generally smaller and have higher English Learner percentages and fewer bilingual programs than the regional population.

Given the response rates, interview and survey data cannot be assumed to reflect the region overall, especially survey data for which the sample is most notably distinct from the overall population.

Community-Based Organization and County Agency Staff Interviews

Staff from community organizations and county agencies participating in the study completed a semistructured, 1-hour interview gathering information about their organization's or office's programs, populations served, and perceptions about conditions for successfully engaging multilingual families and about the most notable gaps in programs for this population.

The organizations and staff who were invited to be interviewed were those partnering with or engaged by Sobrato Philanthropies in the region. This included 15 community organizations (14 participated, for a 93% response rate) and 8 county program staff (7 participated, for an 88% response rate). These high response rates suggest that the sample reflects this population well. However, the population is purposive and not necessarily representative of all community organizations and county programs regionwide.



Public Data Analysis

Public data analyzed for this study includes student enrollment, student demographic data, and LEA directory data maintained and published by the CDE. The study team also extracted information about educational investments from LCAPs for LEAs in the region, including the number of contributing actions and level of associated funding specific to students who are English Learners. In the context of an LCAP, “contributing actions” refers to actions taken by an LEA to increase or improve educational services for students in the foster system, students who are English Learners, and/or students in families with low income.

Overall, this included 120 LCAPs. From each of these, the research team extracted data from the Total Expenditures Table and the Contributing Actions Table. Finally, some limited census data from the American Community Survey were also analyzed and reported.

Economic Cost Analysis

The LEA interviews collected detailed information about English Learner program staffing, including distinct personnel roles, time allocations, and minimum qualifications. Using this information, the study team estimated the economic cost of reported resources. Each resource was assigned a market price using publicly available salary data for specific personnel roles, and costs were calculated as the product of quantity and price. Finally, the study team divided the total estimated cost by the number of English Learner students to generate a per-pupil estimate.

Analysis Limitations

While the findings in this study, and the data that underlie them, provide new and relevant information about LEAs and other organizations in the Silicon Valley region, they should not be interpreted as reflecting what is true for all such entities in the region as a whole. Some of the information gathered is perceptual by nature and thus subject to the biases of respondents participating in the study. Even information of a factual nature, such as the type and number of staff supporting English Learner programs, is subject to potential, if unintended, errors in reporting by respondents or errors of interpretation by the research team. As such, this information, primarily reflected in the findings related to economic costs, should be viewed as imperfect estimates rather than officially documented expenditures.

Additional information about the study methodology and findings is available from the authors upon request.



References

- Bialystok, E., & Craik, F. I. M. (2010). Cognitive and linguistic processing in the bilingual mind. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 19, 12–23.
- Blom, H., & Wolitzer, J. (2025). *Multilingual education data deck for the Emerging Bilingual Collaborative* [PowerPoint slides]. Public Profit.
- California Department of Education. (n.d.). *California school directory*. Retrieved November 26, 2025 from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/schooldirectory/>
- California Department of Education. (2020). *Improving education for Multilingual and English Learner students: Research to practice*.
- California Department of Education. (2024). *Current expense of education* [2023–24 current cost of education]. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/fd/ec/currentexpense.asp>
- California Department of Education. (2025a). CALPADS UPC Source File (TK/K–12). [CALPADS UPC Source File 2024-25]. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filescupc.asp>
- California Department of Education. (2025b). *English Learners by grade and language*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/fileselsch.asp>
- California Department of Education. (2025c). *FEP students by grade and language*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesfepsch.asp>
- California Department of Education. (2025d). *Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesacgr.asp>
- Castellón, M., Cheuk, T., Greene, R., Mercado-Garcia, D., Santos, M., Skarin, R., & Zerkel, L. (2015). *Schools to learn from: How six high schools graduate English language learners college and career ready*. Carnegie Foundation.
- Fan, S. P., Liberman, Z., Keysar, B., & Kinzler, K. D. (2016). The exposure advantage: Early exposure to a multilingual environment promotes effective communication. *Psychological Science*, 26, 1090–1097.
- Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K. J., Saunders, W., & Christian, D. (2006). *Educating English language learners*. Cambridge University Press.



- Glick, J. E., & White, M. J. (2004). Post-secondary school participation of immigrant and native youth: The role of familial resources and educational expectations. *Social Science Research*, 33(2), 272–299.
- Greenberg, A., Bellana, B., & Bialystok, E. (2013). Perspective-taking ability in bilingual children: Extending advantages in executive control to spatial reasoning. *Cognitive Development*, 28, 41–50.
- Howard, E. R., Lindholm-Leary, K. J., Rogers, D., Olague, N., Medina, J., Kennedy, B., Sugarman, J., & Christian, D. (2007). *Guiding principles for dual language education*. Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Jacobson, A., Porter, L., Hadley, L., Alcalá, L., & Willis, J. (2025). *Strategic and economic analysis of English Learner programs in California: Project brief*. WestEd.
<https://www.wested.org/resource/strategic-and-economic-analysis-of-english-learner-programs-in-california-brief/>
- Johnson, H., Baldassare, M. (2025). *Policy Brief: California's immigration landscape and current public opinion*. Public Policy Institute of California.
- Lindholm-Leary, K., & Genesee, F. (2010). Alternative educational programs for English language learners. In California Department of Education (Eds.), *Improving education for English learners: Research-based approaches* (pp. 323–382). CDE Press.
- Lindholm-Leary, K. J., & Block, N. (2010). Achievement in predominantly low SES/Hispanic dual language schools. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 13, 43–60.
- Loeb, S., Soland, J., & Fox, L. (2014). Is a good teacher a good teacher for all? Comparing value-added of teachers with their English learners and non-English learners. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 36(4), 457–475.
- Luk, G., & Bialystok, E. (2014). Bilingualism is not a categorical variable: Interaction between language proficiency and usage. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 25, 605–621.



- Porter, L., Vazquez Cano, M., & Umansky, I. (2023). *Bilingual education and America's future: Evidence and pathways*. The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA.
- Saiz, A., & Zoido, E. (2005). Listening to what the world says: Bilingualism and earnings in the United States. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 87, 523–538
- Santibañez, L., & Zárata, M. E. (2014). Bilinguals in the U.S. and college enrollment. In R. M. Callahan & P. C. Gándara (Eds.), *The bilingual advantage: Language, literacy, and the U.S. labor market* (pp. 211–233). Multilingual Matters.
- Sibley, E., & Dearing, E. (2014). Family educational involvement and child achievement in early elementary school for American-born and immigrant families. *Psychology in the Schools*, 51(8), 814–831.
- Steele, J. L., Slater, R. O., Zamarro, G., Miller, T., Li, J., Burkhauser, S., & Bacon, M. (2017). Effects of dual-language immersion programs on student achievement: Evidence from lottery data. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54, 282S–306S.
- Umansky, I. M., & Reardon, S. F. (2014). Reclassification patterns among Latino English learner students in bilingual, dual immersion, and English immersion classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51, 879–912.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Language spoken at home: American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1601* [Data set]. U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved December 18, 2025, from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S1601?q=S1601&g=040XX00US06>
- Valentino, R. A., & Reardon, S. F. (2015). Effectiveness of four instructional programs designed to serve English learners: Variations by ethnicity and initial English proficiency. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37, 612–637.
- Williams, C., Marcus, M., & Escobedo, M. (2025). *What families want: New data on public demand for bilingual education*. The Century Foundation.



Appendix A

Table A1. Supporting Data for Figure 1: The percentage of students classified as English Learners ranges by school district in the Silicon Valley region.

District name	Percentage of students who are English Learners
Alum Rock Union Elementary	43%
Bayshore Elementary	32%
Belmont-Redwood Shores Elementary	11%
Berryessa Union Elementary	22%
Brisbane Elementary	13%
Burlingame Elementary	14%
Cabrillo Unified	15%
Cambrian	11%
Campbell Union	29%
Campbell Union High	9%
Castro Valley Unified	12%
Cupertino Union	19%
East Side Union	20%
Evergreen Elementary	20%
Franklin-McKinley Elementary	44%
Fremont Union High	10%
Gilroy Unified	27%
Hayward Unified	31%



District name	Percentage of students who are English Learners
Hillsborough City Elementary	2%
Jefferson Elementary	35%
Jefferson Union High	15%
La Honda-Pescadero Unified	33%
Lakeside Joint	8%
Las Lomas Elementary	10%
Loma Prieta Joint Union Elementary	4%
Los Altos Elementary	10%
Los Gatos Union Elementary	8%
Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High	2%
Luther Burbank	49%
Menlo Park City Elementary	8%
Millbrae Elementary	19%
Milpitas Unified	20%
Moreland	28%
Morgan Hill Unified	16%
Mount Pleasant Elementary	40%
Mountain View Whisman	23%
Mountain View-Los Altos Union High	8%
Oak Grove Elementary	24%
Orchard Elementary	40%



District name	Percentage of students who are English Learners
Pacifica	8%
Palo Alto Unified	12%
Portola Valley Elementary	4%
Ravenswood City Elementary	56%
Redwood City Elementary	34%
San Bruno Park Elementary	26%
San Carlos Elementary	5%
San Jose Unified	22%
San Lorenzo Unified	33%
San Mateo Union High	11%
San Mateo-Foster City	28%
Santa Clara Unified	21%
Saratoga Union Elementary	8%
Sequoia Union High	13%
South San Francisco Unified	23%
Sunnyvale	28%
Union Elementary	15%
Woodside Elementary	2%



Acknowledgments

This project was made possible by the generosity of Sobrato Philanthropies, and the WestEd team would like to thank them for their financial support and thought partnership on this project.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the partnership and advice provided by a wide range of experts in the improvement of English Learner programs and other services to multilingual families in the Silicon Valley region who participated in our Advisory Committee.

We are grateful for the donation of their time and the thoughtful input and feedback they provided on the project work throughout the process.

That said, the work of this project is entirely that of the WestEd team. All errors are our own.

Finally, the authors would like to acknowledge Lorna Porter for her early and critical contributions to the project.

2026 WestEd. All rights reserved.



Suggested citation: Jacobson, A., Hadley, L., & Faulkner-Bond, M. (2026). *Expanding equitable access to bilingual education in California's Silicon Valley: Analysis and recommendations*. WestEd.

WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that aims to improve the lives of children and adults at all ages of learning and development. We do this by addressing challenges in education and human development, increasing opportunity, and helping build communities where all can thrive. WestEd staff conduct and apply research, provide technical assistance, and support professional learning. We work with early learning educators, classroom teachers, local and state leaders, and policymakers at all levels of government.

For more information, visit [WestEd.org](https://www.wested.org). For regular updates on research, free resources, solutions, and job postings from WestEd, subscribe to the *E-Bulletin*, our semimonthly e-newsletter, at [WestEd.org/subscribe](https://www.wested.org/subscribe).