UCLA
English Learners

Title

Building a Robust Bilingual Teacher Workforce for California: Teacher Preparation for Dual Language Immersion Programs

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6wb442ms

Journal

CTS Website

Authors

Santibañez, Lucrecia
Pina, Nicole
Ferraez, Alicia

Publication Date

2026-06-10

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Building a Robust Bilingual Teacher Workforce for California:

Teacher Preparation for Dual Language Immersion Programs

Lucrecia Santibañez, Ph.D.
Nicole Pina, M.A.
Alicia Ferraez

UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools

Table of Contents

3 Acknowledgments

4 Executive Summary

6 Introduction

7 Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of high-quality DLI preparation, and how does this differ from the current requirements for bilingual authorization in California?

10 Research Question 2: How Many Teachers are Required for the 2030 Bilingual Education Expansion?

12 Research Question 3: Is There a Misalignment Between BILA Teacher Supply and Demand?

15 Policy Implications: Challenges and Opportunities

18 Recommendations

20 References

23 Appendix A: Methodology

24 Appendix B: Teacher Workforce Growth Estimations

25 Appendix C: Bilingual Authorizations Issued by CTC, by Credential and Emergency, 2013–2024

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Sobrato Philanthropies for providing grant funding to support this work. All opinions expressed are the authors' own.

SOBRATO Philanthropies

Suggested Citation: Santibañez, L., Pina, N., and Ferraez, A. (2026). *Building a robust bilingual teacher workforce for California: Teacher preparation for dual language immersion programs*. Center for the Transformation of Schools, School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Global California 2030 initiative sets an ambitious goal: Ensuring that half of all K–12 students participate in programs leading to proficiency in two or more languages. The recent growth in Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs statewide represents progress toward this goal, but there are concerns among educators, scholars, and policymakers that the existing bilingual teacher pipeline in California may not be sufficient to staff all new and expanding programs with well-prepared teachers.

This policy brief synthesizes findings from literature reviews, credential data analysis, geographic mapping, and interviews with district administrators and university program leaders across the state to address three central questions about the state's capacity to meet rising demand for DLI programs: (a) what are the characteristics of high-quality DLI preparation, and how does this differ from the current requirements for bilingual authorization in California; (b) how many teachers are required for the 2030 bilingual education expansion; and (c) is there a misalignment between the Bilingual Authorization (BILA) program's teacher supply and demand?

We conclude by discussing the challenges and opportunities as the state moves toward achieving ambitious goals in multilingual education. To answer the first question, we conducted a literature review of research on bilingual teacher preparation and the current landscape in California. In addition, we interviewed a small number of school district administrators across the state who oversee bilingual programs, as well as university-based administrators. To answer questions two and three, we analyzed public data on teacher credentials and emergency permits, as well as the geographic distribution of both bilingual and teacher-preparation programs.

Our analysis reveals a nuanced picture of the dual-language teaching landscape. First, quality concerns persist both in the literature and among district administrators, despite new and improved state teacher preparation standards. Some districts report hiring teachers whose perceived language and other skills fall short of classroom demands, a perception that is echoed in the broader literature on bilingual teacher preparation. After being introduced in 2021, the new Bilingual Authorization (BILA) program standards and expectations took effect during school year (SY) 2025–26. These new standards have the potential to significantly improve bilingual teacher preparation, but their effects will take more time to become apparent.

In addition, while California appears to have enough bilingual-authorized teachers to staff a growing number of DLI programs, there are still significant numbers of bilingual educators teaching with emergency credentials, suggesting many districts are unable to fill vacancies with fully-authorized teachers. There is a geographic misalignment between the supply and demand for bilingual-certified teachers, a pattern evident for at least a decade (Jacobson et al., 2025). Geographic disparities result in "teacher preparation deserts" in rural, border, and inland regions (Mathews et al., 2024). In some areas of the state, particularly areas with a high concentration of teacher preparation programs, there appears to be an oversupply of BILA teachers, and many of them are not teaching in bilingual programs; in other areas of the state, there is significant current and potential demand for bilingual programs, but not enough BILA teachers to staff them. Lack of publicly available or restricted data on the number of BILA teachers

teaching in multilingual programs or teaching ELs severely hampers efforts to understand and forecast supply and demand considerations.

Recent growth in the number of DLI programs suggests California is on track to realize Global California 2030's vision, but meeting numeric targets alone will not ensure high-quality education for all students if DLI teachers are inadequately prepared and supported. The recently reformed 2021 Bilingual Teacher Preparation Standards establish a stronger quality framework. Increasing the number and availability of multilingual offerings will require sustained investment in the bilingual teacher pipeline and better coordination among existing programs. Because teachers are often trained far from where they are needed, building a robust pipeline may require partnerships between districts and university-based programs, as well as hybrid and other instructional modes that meet teachers where they are. Existing research, however, is limited and inconclusive as to whether alternative (district-based) programs prepare bilingual teachers as effectively as traditional (university-based) programs. More research is needed to ensure that these partnerships and alternative pathways can increase access to BILAs without compromising quality. Policy recommendations include addressing preparation deserts through hybrid delivery and other models, and university-district partnerships; expanding grow-your-own pathways along with better in-service teacher support; strengthening the field-experience infrastructure; developing DLI-specific quality-assurance systems; and improving the availability of data to monitor and evaluate program implementation.

INTRODUCTION

California's Global 2030 vision and other statewide efforts, such as the "Multilingual Education for All" campaign, have set ambitious goals for the continued growth of dual-language immersion programs in the state.[1] DLI programs are well-liked by parents who see clear benefits for heritage language development and/or preservation, especially among Latinx families (Hsin et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2025). DLI has shown to provide academic benefits for all students and linguistic proficiency benefits for students designated as English Learners (EL)[2] (Bibler, 2021; Steele et al., 2017; Steele et al., 2024; Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

The success of DLI education is no different from that of any educational program: It depends on the competence of teachers delivering instruction in two languages. Research consistently highlights the need for culturally responsive educators with high proficiency in the target language, as well as ongoing professional development in biliteracy and bilingual pedagogy (Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). These teachers must possess not only linguistic fluency but also specialized pedagogical knowledge about how children acquire two languages simultaneously and how to support students at varying levels of language development. In 2021, the state undertook significant changes to the certification process for bilingual teachers as part of its overhaul of literacy instruction (see SB 488).

Since Proposition 58 (2016) eased restrictions on bilingual education in the state, school districts have been motivated to grow DLI programs by strong parent demand, positive impacts on diverse student populations, and practical considerations, including the ability of DLI programs to help curb enrollment declines and counter charter school growth (Darriet & Santibañez, 2024). This expansion has created urgent demand for qualified, bilingual teachers across the state. Despite significant investment in bilingual education in California, uncertainty remains about whether current teacher preparation programs can support the significant scale-up underway in DLI programs.

This study examines how district and university officials design and implement teacher preparation programs for DLI educators, how these programs align with state bilingual authorization requirements, and the challenges and opportunities stakeholders identified. The study draws on literature reviews, document analysis, public credential data from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) and California Department of Education (CDE), and interviews with seven district administrators and three university program leaders representing urban, suburban, and rural contexts (see Appendix for a more detailed description of the methodology used in this study).

1 Global California 2030 is an initiative introduced in 2018 by the California Department of Education. It seeks to develop world language skills in California students by expanding opportunities for dual-language immersion programming and other bilingual experiences for students in K-12. See: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/documents/globalca2030.pdf. A different vision, "Multilingual Education for All", sets even more ambitious goals by making multilingualism a defining feature of California's K-12 public school system. See: https://www.mle4all.org/.

2 We acknowledge the deficit implications of this term and retain it only because it is the official federal and state designation and appears as such in educational data and documentation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

01 What are the characteristics of high-quality DLI preparation, and how does this differ from the current requirements for bilingual authorization in California?

Defining Excellence in DLI Teacher Preparation

Research on effective preparation for DLI teaching identifies several essential competencies that preparation programs must develop (Lopez & Santibañez, 2018). First, DLI teachers require a high level of proficiency in the target language. Second, they need to know how to teach the target language and content simultaneously—something that teachers can struggle with and that teacher preparation programs often fail to adequately address (Domke et al., 2022). Beyond linguistic competence, effective DLI teachers demonstrate a deep understanding of bilingual pedagogy, including theories of language acquisition, translanguaging practices, and culturally sustaining approaches to instruction (Cho & Johnson, 2020; Domke et al., 2022; Mueller & File, 2015).

Effective preparation extends beyond coursework to include extensive, supervised teaching experiences in DLI classrooms. Access to experienced mentor teachers is critical for providing consistent feedback and guiding candidates in leveraging students' cultural and linguistic assets (Domke et al., 2024). Current preparation programs across the nation still struggle to develop candidates' sociocultural competence and academic language skills due to limited program length and reduced classroom experience, highlighting the need for extensive in-service professional development opportunities (Domke et al., 2024).

Research generally finds small average differences in K-12 student outcomes between traditional (i.e., university-based) and alternative pathways, such as grow-your-own district programs or programs that train paraprofessionals or working professionals from other fields[3] (Whitford et al., 2018), but higher instructional knowledge and self-efficacy in traditional programs (Jang & Horn, 2017). There is substantial variation across specific programs and program design, especially high-quality, sustained clinical practice and supports, which likely matters more than the setting. We found no research that examines the outcomes of traditional versus alternative preparation for university- and district-based BILA programs.

Current Bilingual Authorization Requirements

California statute requires that every teacher providing instructional services to English Learners be authorized to deliver specialized instruction. For DLI settings, teachers must obtain a Bilingual Authorization (BILA) in addition to their base teaching credential.[4] Credentialed teachers can add a bilingual authorization onto their credential by demonstrating target language proficiency through CSET World Languages examination or a degree

3 Alternative programs include grow-your-own district programs, programs that train paraprofessionals or working professionals in other fields, or programs that take alternative routes to a teaching credential such as "Teach for America" and that have different requirements than traditional university-based preparation programs.

4 To obtain a Bilingual Authorization, candidates must: hold a valid California teaching credential (emergency permits do not qualify); demonstrate English Learner authorization through CTEL exam, CLAD Certificate, or equivalent; demonstrate target language proficiency through CSET World Languages examination or a degree from an institution where the target language was the primary language of instruction; and complete a CTC-approved bilingual authorization program consisting of at least two courses and accompanying fieldwork addressing contexts of bilingual education, instructional methods, differentiated instruction, assessment practices, and culture.

from an institution where the target language was the primary language of instruction and completing a CTC-approved bilingual authorization program consisting of at least six units (2-3 courses) and accompanying fieldwork addressing contexts of bilingual education, instructional methods, differentiated instruction, assessment practices, and culture. Until 2021, the field experience was optional, but a minimum of 20 hours is now mandatory (see below). Some teacher preparation programs offer Dual-Language Instruction (DLI) certificates or specializations that place greater emphasis on DLI and require more hours of exposure to DLI content.

In 2021, the CTC comprehensively revised its Bilingual Authorization Program Standards and Bilingual Teaching Performance Expectations (BTPEs), with new standards taking effect in the 2025–26 academic year.[5] These reforms align with the California Teacher Residency requirement and directly support the state's goals toward enhanced multilingual teaching and learning. They represent significant enhancements over previous requirements.[6] The most consequential change is the introduction of mandatory field experiences.[7] Programs must now provide at least twenty hours of supervised clinical practice in bilingual settings. The new standards also require candidates to demonstrate understanding of English Learner typologies and different bilingual program models, including one-way immersion, developmental bilingual, and dual-language immersion programs.

The revised standards explicitly address translanguaging as a pedagogical approach, including expectations for its strategic use of translanguaging during instruction. Candidates must demonstrate knowledge of linguistic repertoires and registers across contexts in both English and the target language. The standards also introduce a transnational lens, requiring candidates to design activities that promote learning through connections across languages and cultures.

The new reform also strengthens assessment mechanisms. Programs must evaluate candidates' implementation of bilingual instructional methods, their ability to differentiate instruction based on students' language proficiency, and their use of formative assessments that monitor language and content learning. Candidates must receive ongoing coaching and mentorship throughout the program.

Gaps Between Standards and Practice

Despite strengthened standards and assessments, significant gaps remain between policy requirements and classroom realities. Because of California's highly decentralized education system, there is wide variation in how teacher preparation programs deliver BILA instruction, including how they implement clinical practice components. Despite enhanced opportunities to assess bilingual instruction through formative assessments, there are no formal, external assessments to ensure teachers completing a BILA program have met all standards; it is up to each program to certify successful completion of all program requirements and provide evidence to accrediting bodies. Once a teacher receives a BILA, district-level enforcement remains inconsistent; none of the districts we studied offer customized assessments specifically designed to evaluate the quality of DLI teaching.

5 See here: https://docs.ctc.ca.gov/Document/Download/30413

6 https://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/newsroom/stories/2024/2024-04-bilingual-teacher-expectations

7 https://regulations.justia.com/states/california/title-5/division-8/chapter-5/article-2/section-80615-3/

Program Specifics

While CTC sets content and performance standards, BILA programs vary in how they deliver instruction. These modes of delivery include differences in online versus in-person formats, program intensity and duration, field experiences, and course content emphasis. Securing adequate field placements was a challenge reported by program administrators. Even in urban areas with numerous DLI programs, significant effort is required to identify schools willing to host interns and teaching professionals who can serve as mentors. As one university-based program leader explained:

"We want all these candidates to complete the whole student teaching experience in a DLI classroom. Currently, we're not there for many reasons, just logistics. We don't have enough clinical coaches, we don't have, you know, supervisors..." (HE1)

Both university and district administrators noted insufficient numbers of bilingual field supervisors and mentors with DLI experience. Another university-based program leader said that district coordinators are "not well supported, they are suffering in silence" (HE1).

There are concerns in the literature about how teacher credential and authorization programs prepare bilingual teachers. The limited duration and exposure of some programs mean that teachers often lack the tools and capacity to teach the target language and content simultaneously (Domke et al., 2022). One district administrator described being "surprised when we're doing walkthroughs that we see, you know, English [being spoken/used] during Spanish [class time], you know, the language model not being followed" (DB1).

Districts employ preventative screening measures, including interviews conducted entirely in the partner language, written prompts, and demonstration lessons. One innovative district provides all professional development for DLI teachers in Spanish: "We realized that [the] cognitive workload of them having to use academic language in that professional learning setting was really helping to amplify the Spanish that they were then transferring into the classroom" (DB4).

02 How Many Teachers are Required for the 2030 Bilingual Education Expansion?

The Global California 2030 vision calls for expanding from approximately 1,200 current DLI programs to 1,600 programs statewide. Most DLI programs in the state are in grades K-3, and are expected to add new grades every year. Are there enough certified BILA teachers to meet this demand? To answer this question, we would need to estimate (1) the stock (supply) of BILA teachers and (2) the number of BILAs the CTC can issue in the future.

Existing Stock of BILA Teachers

There is no publicly available data in California to estimate the number of DLI programs or the number of classrooms/teachers in each program. Publicly available CTC data indicate that, in the past decade, it issued approximately 9,500 BILAs–1,400 in 2024 alone. This is the initial number of BILA teachers that, in theory, could staff existing DLI classrooms. If we assume that, on average, the 1,200 DLI programs currently operating have three grades per program (K-2) with either one teacher per grade (a conservative assumption) or two teachers per grade (a more progressive assumption), these DLI programs employ between 3,600 and 7,200 bilingual teachers. Based on these crude figures, there would be a potential excess supply of at least 2,000 BILA teachers that could staff new DLI programs.

These numbers contradict much of prior research and also the fact that the CTC continues to issue emergency permits and waivers for bilingual positions. Averages can mask geographical variance. Jacobson and colleagues (2025) found, for example, that some areas of the state with high potential demand for BILA-trained teachers have a low supply of these teachers, while other areas have an excess supply (Jacobson et al., 2025).

There are several reasons to believe that these numbers are either overly optimistic or inaccurate for some areas of the state. First, the CTC publishes data on the "mismatch" of BILA teachers to positions showing aggregated county-level totals (by school type) as well as the number of vacancies of several subject specializations.[8] These data suggest that each year, hundreds of teachers in bilingual/primary language classrooms lack the required certifications. Every year, counties report vacancies (assignments without a certificated employee permanently assigned as of the census date). To counter these misalignments, the CTC issues hundreds of emergency permits and waivers every year (see Figure C1 in the Appendix). In absolute terms, the mismatch and vacancy numbers are small: 754 misassigned teachers to bilingual/primary language classrooms in 2023 and 131 vacancies across all counties and grade levels. They provide strong evidence, however, that many districts cannot find enough BILA teachers to fill vacancies, despite having far more teachers with BILA certifications than there are of DLI program positions.

Other reasons complicate these estimates and likely explain this contradiction. The stock numbers are based on assumptions about the number of DLI classrooms in schools, which could be imprecise: one DLI school could have three grades and two classrooms per grade offering DLI (a total of six DLI teachers), and another DLI school could offer one DLI grade and one classroom per grade (a total of one DLI teacher). The number of BILAs issued also includes many teachers who are assigned to English-only classrooms. Lastly, we do not have a good grasp of teacher retention among bilingual teachers.

What can be concluded from these estimates is that the CTC is likely training sufficient numbers of BILA teachers to fill all vacancies and positions in some areas of the state, but not others, and that these numbers are probably not enough to sustain significant expansion in DLI going forward.

8 See here: https://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/reports/dashboards/california-educator-assignment-monitoring/

BILA Teachers Needed to Staff New and Expanding DLI Programs

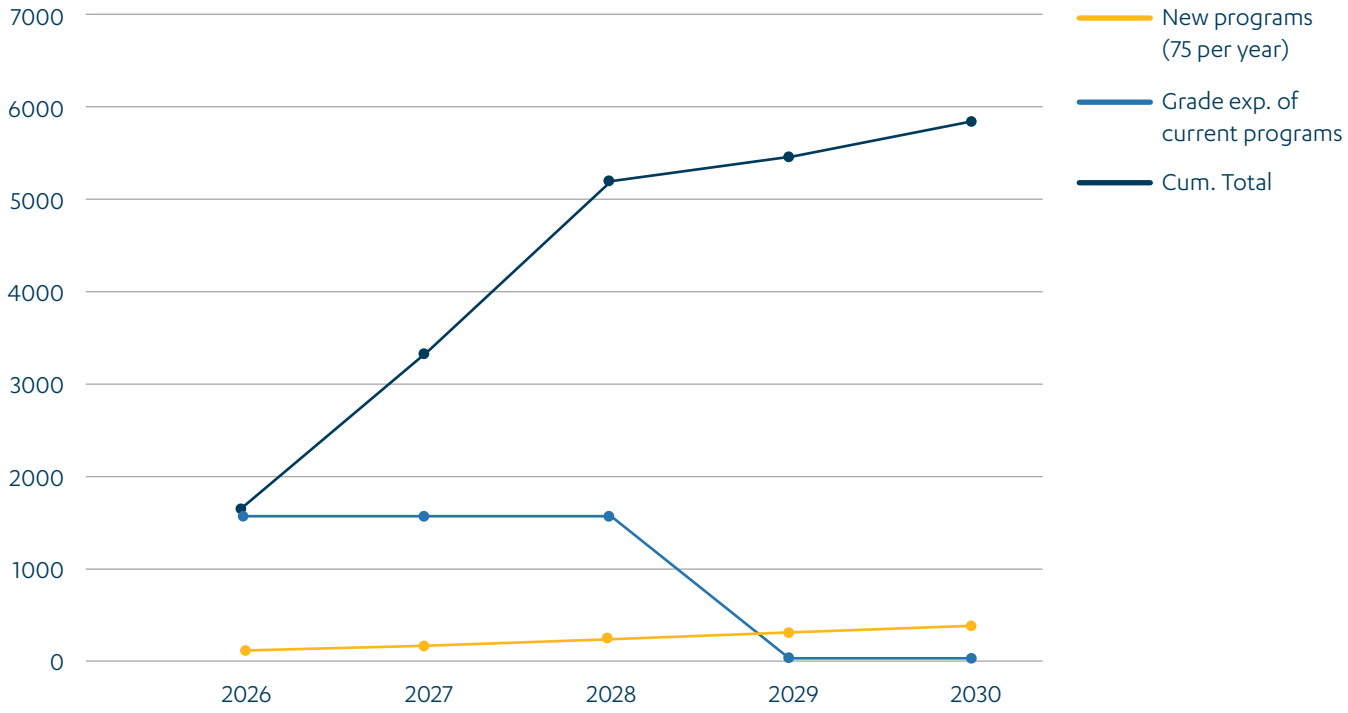
The demand for BILA teachers for DLI programs comes from new programs and new grades/classrooms added to existing programs. To grow the current stock of DLI programs from approximately 1,200 operating programs to the 2030 vision of 1,600 requires LEAs to create 400 new programs over the next five years (assuming that a school offers even just one grade with DLI instruction, it is a DLI school). If each of these new programs adds one grade each year (over five years) and staffs each grade with one teacher, they would need to hire about 1,130 new BILA teachers (see Appendix B for a detailed table of calculations and all assumptions).

BILA teachers are also needed to add new grades to existing programs. Assuming that, on average, existing programs offer three grades (K-2) and add an additional grade each year until they reach fifth grade (i.e., three additional grades per school), the expansion would require hiring nearly 4,800 new BILA teachers.

Adding up the teachers needed for the new programs and those needed to expand current programs yields an estimate of about 6,000 new bilingual teachers by 2030 (see Figure 1) — or about 1,200 new BILA teachers annually.

This is likely to be a conservative estimate. As previously discussed, many teachers elect not to enter the profession, leave after only a few years, or take positions in non-DLI schools. In addition, some schools could expand existing DLI programs by more than one classroom or grade per year, significantly increasing this estimate. Under less conservative scenarios, where schools expand at a higher rate than more than one grade/one teacher per year or if schools lose teachers every year, the current pace of BILA will not be sufficient. Either more BILA teachers currently working in non-DLI programs would have to be convinced to move to DLI schools, or the state would need to expand the size and reach of current BILA programs.

Figure 1. *Bilingual Teacher Needs by 2030*



Note: This assumes that 375 programs will be needed by 2030 and will grow at a rate of 75 new programs per year, with one grade/one bilingual teacher. Grade expansion of current programs assumes, on average, that current programs offer three grades (K-2) and expand to an additional three grades (3-5) at a rate of one teacher per grade.

03 Is there a misalignment between BILA teacher supply and demand?

For years, multiple reports have documented a bilingual teacher shortage in California (Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Martinez & Sapien, 2022; Mathewson, 2024; Language Magazine, 2025). Our own analysis suggests that the pace of BILA certifications and unequal access to preparation in some teacher labor markets may not be enough to support a significant expansion of DLI program offerings in the state. In this section, we examine the geographic misalignment between bilingual teacher preparation and areas of need. In addition, we explore whether this misalignment could be hampering efforts to grow DLI programs to the level aspired to by Global California 2030, Multilingual Education for All, and other policy- and advocacy-led initiatives.

Bilingual Teacher Preparation "Deserts"

Figure 2 overlays multilingual school programs with teacher preparation programs offering bilingual authorizations.[9] The map suggests that most multilingual programs are located in areas already served by teacher preparation programs, particularly large metropolitan regions such as the Bay Area and the Los Angeles–San Diego corridor (see Figure 2 and the accompanying interactive map). By contrast, multilingual programs in the Central Valley, border regions, and rural northern California are farther from BILA programs and from teacher preparation programs more generally, so districts in these areas may be less able to hire fully bilingual-certified teachers to fill open positions. LEA-based programs, which districts can offer at a fraction of the cost and time required for university-based programs, are also concentrated primarily in Southern California. As a result, the supply of BILA teachers may be more constrained in other parts of the state, which could limit the expansion of multilingual programs in those regions.

In addition, not all programs offer BILAs in all existing (and future) partner languages. The vast majority of bilingual authorizations are in Spanish; in certain areas, programs may not issue enough BILAs to staff positions in Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, or other languages, leading districts to seek emergency permits for these positions.

The notion that these "shortages" are not statewide, but concentrated in some areas of the state, was echoed in interviews. University administrators uniformly report that current institutions of higher education can prepare sufficient teachers to support DLI expansion. Some programs even operate at or slightly below capacity, meaning they are in a position to issue even more BILAs than they currently do. In fact, some of our interviewees reported that, even though there is strong state policy and parent interest in DLI programs, the pace of growth is not enough to absorb all new authorizations. Several interviews reported that not all of their BILA graduates can actually find placements in DLI programs. When this happens, teacher candidates weigh the financial and time demands of the BILA against the likelihood of obtaining a DLI placement and decide whether it's worth it. When teachers don't believe they will receive a bilingual teaching position after completing the authorization, the additional cost and effort of the BILA become less attractive.

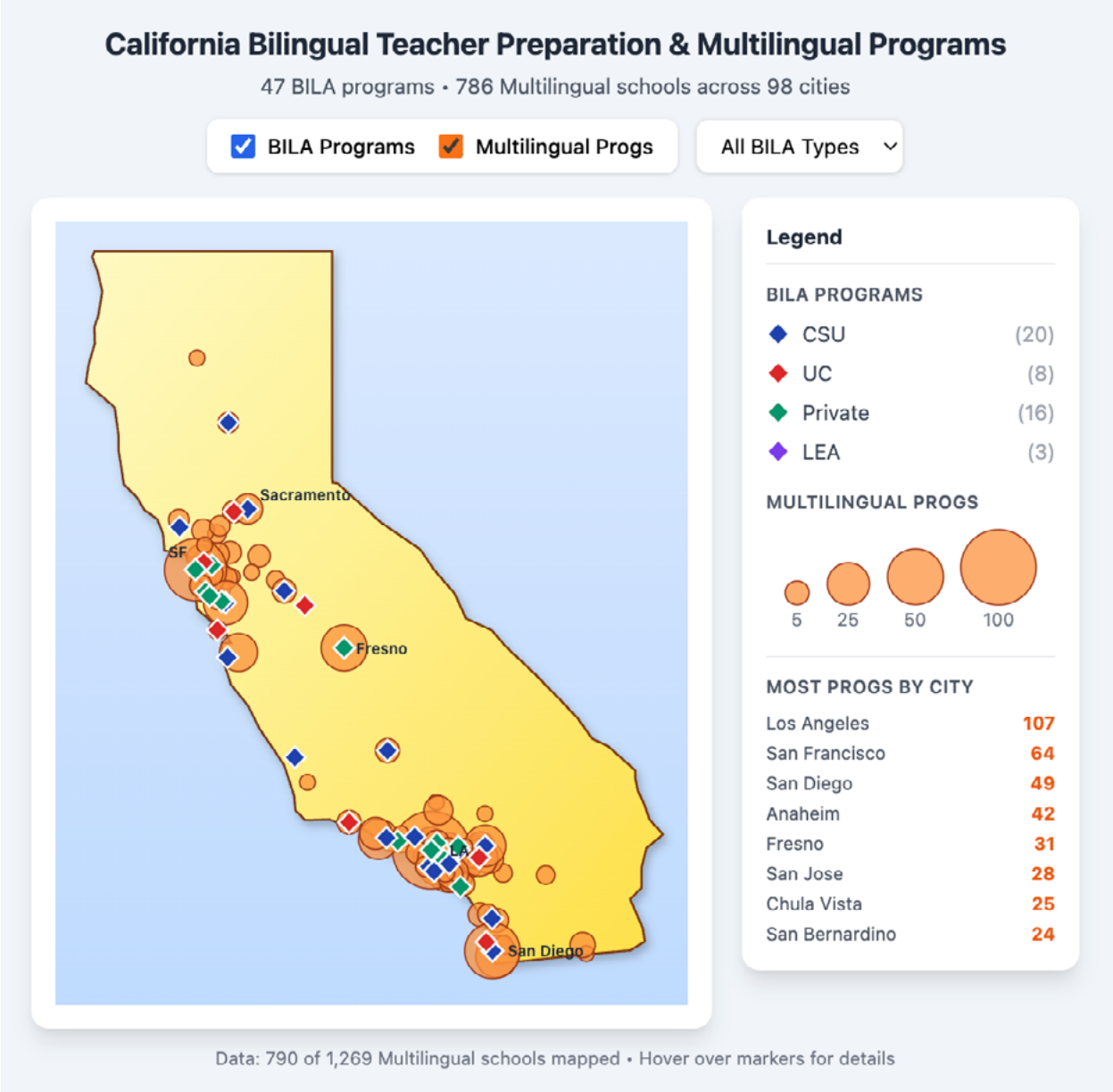
University-based BILA programs face strong competition from less costly alternatives. Grow-your-own programs offered by districts often waive credentialing fees and allow candidates to earn wages while completing training. District BILA

9 Schools were counted as DLI if they enrolled 10 or more students in a multilingual program. These programs include dual-language immersion, developmental bilingual, one-way immersion, transitional bilingual, heritage or Indigenous language programs, and other multilingual models designed either to develop proficiency in two languages or to support English development through the use of a primary language (Olsen et al., 2020). Although the dataset does not distinguish dual-language immersion from other multilingual models, evidence from LA Unified (the largest district with the most DLI programs) suggests that most of these are likely dual-language immersion (Darriet & Santibañez, 2024).

pathways reduce costs and offer better assurance of employment. This not only reduces the financial barrier to entry but also reduces risk, an incentive that is particularly compelling for candidates who cannot afford to forgo income while completing their preparation (Herman, 2023).

To increase access, many university-based programs rely on state grants and other funding to cover students' fees while they receive their BILA. One interviewee from the Central Valley suggested that the district's commitment to providing funding for teachers enrolled in a university-based BILA program

Figure 2. *BILA Teacher Preparation Programs by Multilingual Programs (2024–25)*



Note: There are several types of multilingual programs in California. The main distinguishing characteristics are whether they are geared toward developing proficiency in a foreign language (foreign-language immersion, one-way immersion), to develop proficiency in two languages (dual-language immersion or two-way immersion), or to primarily develop proficiency in English while using the primary language as a transitory support (developmental bilingual, native speakers' courses). For more information, see Olsen et al. (2020) available at: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/documents/mleleducation.pdf.

was the limiting factor for growing the stock of BILA teachers in their region:

"We have a great idea about what the content of bilingual teacher preparation in the 21st century is. I think that we have quite a solid consensus...But then, when it comes to how to sustain the system, it could be a ... It's a policy problem." (HE1)

For most heritage language speakers in California, particularly heritage Spanish speakers, financial support is essential to their pursuit of the BILA (SEAL, 2018). DLI teachers are required to complete additional training, but do not always receive additional compensation. While some districts offer salary bonuses to bilingual teachers, not all do (San Diego Unified is one example).[10]

However, given the budgetary constraints many universities and districts face, it is unclear whether they can continue to provide extensive financial support to aspiring DLI teachers. One rural district administrator described a creative effort their district made to help interested individuals attain their credential and authorizations:

"We have a non-profit that's linked to the school district that actually started a scholarship. The idea is to keep around people who are already established in our community and in our school district and have already expressed an interest in education, helping support them on that pathway. So [through] the District Educational Foundation, which is our non-profit, we gave scholarships to I think 4 or 5 individuals to help support them on that teaching journey..." (DP1)

Other Sources of Friction in DLI Teacher Assignment

In addition to supply and demand challenges, another factor complicates adequate staffing of DLI programs: teacher re-allocation. When schools adopt a DLI program, they must either hire new (BILA) teachers to staff the new program or reassign existing teachers in their school according to union rules and seniority provisions. Recall that most new DLI programs are "two-strand," meaning they are housed in current

English-only schools. In addition, many districts open DLI programs in schools experiencing enrollment declines or facing tough competition from charter schools (Darriet & Santibañez, 2024). When schools decide to turn certain classrooms into DLI, they cannot displace existing teachers who lack bilingual authorization. Principals and district administrators face allocation challenges that can generate friction. As one administrator explained,

"It's the teachers at the school sites that don't have the B-CLAD [Bilingual, Crosscultural, Language and Academic Development certificate]. Where we would have to recruit a new teacher coming from the outside with their B-CLAD ... there might be some resistance." (DB5)

Because district (and school) leaders cannot easily reassign or transfer teachers without a BILA, this presents a significant barrier to further dual-language program expansion. The challenge is particularly pronounced at the secondary level. At this level, the need to account for multiple subject areas (each with its own credential requirements) while ensuring adequate exposure to the partner language adds further complexity. As a result, expanding DLI by converting existing schools or district programs may require substantial long-term planning and coordination.

10 Some districts offer bonuses to bilingual teachers. See here for an example: https://inewsource.org/2023/12/05/dual-language-program-teacher-credentialspipeline-san-diego-unified/

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

California's ambitions for multilingual learners, embodied in Global California 2030 and Multilingual Education for All, call for a substantial scale-up of DLI programs. It is unclear whether the state's bilingual teacher preparation pipeline can support that growth in ways that benefit all students: access to training is uneven across regions, and additional frictions in preparation and staffing further constrain how teachers reach the classrooms that need them.

California has moved toward stronger standards for bilingual teacher preparation and is producing BILA teachers at a pace that, in the aggregate, approximates the pace required by the 2030 expansion. But aggregate adequacy obscures three problems that will determine whether expansion succeeds: a geographic mismatch between where teachers are prepared and where DLI programs are growing, a financial structure that makes university-based pathways inaccessible to many of the heritage speakers best positioned to enter the profession, and staffing rules within schools that generate friction even when certified teachers are available. Closing these gaps will require more than producing additional BILAs; it will require partnerships that bring preparation to underserved regions, sustained financial support for candidates, and district-level structures that ease the transition of English-only schools into DLI programs.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Teaching in two languages presents unique challenges for teacher preparation. The literature indicates that bilingual teaching programs often struggle to train teachers in teaching language and content simultaneously. The limited duration of most bilingual preparation programs and the lack of sufficient clinical experience are challenges. The new requirement of 20 field experience hours is a step in the right direction, but more research is needed to understand its impact. District administrators reported persistent concerns about candidates' academic language proficiency (in the partner language), even among those holding bilingual authorizations.

2. Teacher preparation standards have improved, but evaluation and enforcement have not kept pace. Beyond formal accreditation of BILA programs, California's teacher preparation system has limited accountability mechanisms to ensure BILA teachers have acquired all the required linguistic and pedagogical skills to teach in DLI schools. There are no external assessments to verify program quality, and district-level enforcement of DLI teaching quality is inconsistent. Issues highlighted by our interviewees include challenges in finding suitable DLI field experience placements for candidates, even in urban areas, and insufficient bilingual field supervisors and mentors with DLI experience. The 2021 CTC reforms

strengthened BILA requirements meaningfully, most notably with mandatory clinical practice, an explicit treatment of translanguaging, and a transnational lens, but the state and the CTC should undertake a comprehensive, rigorous evaluation of preparation reforms to understand the reach and impact of recent reforms and make any necessary adaptations.

3. Bilingual teacher shortages are geographic, not statewide. Stock numbers mask real shortages. Roughly 9,500 BILAs issued over the past decade suggest a surplus on paper, but the CTC continues to issue emergency permits and waivers every year, and counties consistently report misassignments and vacancies in bilingual classrooms; strong evidence that nominal supply does not match placement reality. At the same time, university-based programs in certain regions report they can prepare enough teachers to meet demand, and some even operate below capacity. This indicates geographic imbalance in access, as well as localized labor markets that make a BILA attractive (for future employment) in some counties but not in others. Some areas of the state, such as the Central Valley, border regions, and rural northern California, are "preparation deserts" where supply is genuinely constrained, and BILAs in non-Spanish languages (Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese) are especially scarce. The misalignment between supply and demand in some regions means that even if the total number of BILA teachers statewide were "enough", it would still be insufficient to support DLI program growth across the state.

4. University- and district-based teacher preparation pathways face different pressures. District-based grow-your-own programs are less costly, pay candidates during training, and offer better employment assurance by making them attractive, particularly to low-income heritage speakers. University programs face cost and risk barriers and depend heavily on grants and district commitments to remain accessible. Whether either sector produces equivalently prepared bilingual teachers is an open empirical question.

5. Staffing friction is structural, not just numerical. Most new DLI programs are housed in existing English-only schools, where union and seniority rules constrain reassignment. Even with an adequate supply of BILA teachers, districts often turn to emergency permits to resolve these allocation conflicts.

6. Sustainable funding remains a persistent concern. Districts struggle to fund professional development, curriculum materials, and program expansion. In the view of one university official, the real obstacle to expanding DLI programs and training teachers to staff them is not capacity but political will — whether the state will sustain the support districts need to grow existing programs and launch new ones. Grant-based funding has advantages: it targets funds to LEAs committed to DLI that have the capacity to use them well. But it also disadvantages smaller districts that lack the infrastructure to put together competitive applications, and it pushes districts to make significant staffing and programmatic changes without assurance that funding will continue beyond the grant term.

7. California cannot accurately assess progress toward its multilingual education goals because key data are not publicly available. State agencies do not publish information on bilingual certifications, the number and types of bilingual programs, DLI positions and hires (overall and by language), or the share of English Learners served by different program types. Without this information, policymakers and researchers cannot plan effectively for DLI expansion or ensure that programs reach the students who would benefit most. The lack of data also impedes evaluation of the new BILA teacher preparation standards, limiting what we can learn about the impact and reach of these reforms.

HOW STAKEHOLDERS ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

The challenges facing DLI expansion fall into three broad areas: building teacher supply, ensuring teaching quality, and allocating teachers across schools and classrooms. Districts and universities have developed strategies to address each, though with uneven coverage.

Building supply. Districts and universities have created multiple pathways into the bilingual teaching profession. Large districts have developed grow-your-own programs that allow aspiring teachers to earn their credentials and BILAs while working in the district, often with fees waived and wages paid during training. Some rural districts have created scholarship programs through nonprofit foundations to support established community members pursuing a teaching credential, helping retain talent in regions far from university programs. Universities, in turn, offer hybrid options that combine in-person and remote coursework for candidates who live in "preparation deserts," and many rely on state grants and district funding commitments to cover candidate fees, preserving access for low-income and heritage-speaker candidates who would otherwise be priced out of university-based pathways.

Ensuring teacher preparedness. In the absence of external assessments to verify BILA program outcomes, districts have developed their own screening mechanisms at the point of hire, including interviews conducted entirely in the partner language, written prompts, and demonstration lessons. Some districts have also rethought in-service support: at least one district delivers all DLI professional development (PD) in Spanish, on the rationale that the cognitive load of working with academic language in PD strengthens what teachers can transfer to the classroom. These strategies could compensate for what some district officials see as inconsistent enforcement of teaching preparedness across programs, but they remain district-by-district responses rather than systemic solutions.

Allocating teachers. Staffing friction at the school level has fewer well-developed solutions. When schools convert from English-only to DLI programs, union and seniority rules prevent districts from displacing existing teachers who lack a BILA, and recruiting bilingual teachers from outside can generate resistance among current staff. Districts most often resolve these conflicts by issuing emergency permits, a workaround that fills positions in the short term but does not build sustainable bilingual capacity in the schools where DLI is expanding.

Taken together, these strategies show meaningful innovation in expanding the supply of bilingual teachers, more limited progress on assuring quality, and the fewest tools for resolving the allocation challenges that arise when DLI programs expand within existing schools. Closing these gaps will require coordinated action across the state, universities, and districts — not just additional pathways into the profession, but stronger quality-assurance mechanisms and structural changes in how schools transition into DLI. Coordinated actions should include practitioners in the policy conversations. Multiple administrators emphasized, "We have the expertise across all the [partner languages], and we want to be there. Our voice sometimes is not there. We're an afterthought" (HE2).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in this report point to a set of policy levers that, if pulled together, could meaningfully strengthen California's capacity to meet its multilingual education goals. The recommendations below are organized around the three challenges that emerged from our analysis — supply, quality, and allocation — and are directed primarily at state agencies, with implications for districts and universities as partners.

1. Address geographic gaps in teacher preparation. The state should invest in expanding access to BILA programs in areas of the state that are less well served by existing offerings. This could take the form of state-funded incentives for universities to develop hybrid BILA pathways, partnerships between universities in well-served regions and districts in underserved ones, and grants for district-based grow-your-own programs in areas where no university option is reasonably accessible. Targeted investment in non-Spanish BILAs, particularly in Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, and other partner languages where issuance falls short of demand, should be a parallel priority.

2. Sustain financial support for candidates, especially heritage speakers. Until the compensation for bilingual teachers offsets the cost of obtaining a BILA (as well as the additional demands once on the job), the authorization will remain a significant barrier for low-income and first-generation candidates. These candidates include most heritage Spanish speakers in the state who are best positioned to enter bilingual teaching. Districts should be encouraged or required to offer compensation bonuses for bilingual teachers, recognizing the additional training BILA holders complete and improving retention in DLI classrooms. In the absence of this differentiation, the state should establish a stable, long-term funding stream, rather than relying on episodic grants, to cover credentialing fees, living stipends, and tuition for candidates pursuing a BILA.

3. Move from grant-based to formula-based DLI funding. A multilingual education system for all students requires funding that matches the state's ambitions. Grant-based funding rewards districts with the capacity to apply, disadvantages smaller and rural districts, and creates uncertainty that discourages long-term investment in staffing and program design. The state should consider a formula-based funding mechanism that supports DLI program operation and expansion in proportion to need, allowing districts to plan multi-year staffing and avoid negative effects associated with grant cycles.

4. Build a quality-assurance infrastructure for BILA programs. The 2021 standards represent a meaningful improvement, but their effects cannot be evaluated without external assessments and consistent data. The CTC should develop or adopt a common assessment of BILA program outcomes — administered independently of the programs themselves. In addition, the state should seek to **strengthen the infrastructure for field experience and clinical preparation.** This includes funding mentor teacher stipends, bilingual clinical supervisor positions, and placement coordination staff to support consistent, high-quality field experiences. Strengthening clinical preparation will help ensure that bilingual credentials reflect demonstrated instructional competence and readiness to serve multilingual learners.

5. Close the publicly available data gap. State agencies should regularly publish data on BILAs issued by language, the number and types of bilingual programs at the district and school-DLI program-level, DLI positions and hires by language, and the share of English Learners served by each program type. Without this information, policymakers, researchers, and advocates cannot accurately track progress toward the 2030 or other goals or identify where targeted intervention is needed.

6. Provide districts with tools to manage staffing transitions. The state should work with district leaders, principals, and teacher associations to develop sanctioned approaches that allow schools to expand DLI without relying on emergency permits as the default solution.

7. Fund research on bilingual teacher preparation pathways. This study found no research comparing outcomes between university-based and district-based BILA programs, despite their different cost structures, candidate populations, and instructional models. The state should fund rigorous evaluation of these pathways so that future investment is guided by evidence about what works for whom — particularly for the heritage-speaker candidates the state most needs to recruit and retain, and for funding hybrid or remote options in underserved areas of the state.

Taken together, these recommendations reframe the challenge from one of producing more BILAs to one of building the infrastructure — financial, evaluative, geographic, and structural — that allows California's bilingual teacher workforce to grow where it is needed, to prepare teachers to teach at the level that students deserve, and in conditions that support teachers' careers and retain them in DLI classrooms.

REFERENCES

Bibler, A. (2021). Dual language education and student achievement. *Education Finance and Policy, 16*(4), 634–658. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00320

CA Bill Attempts to Address Bilingual Teacher Shortage. *Language Magazine*. https://languagemagazine.com/2025/09/05/ca-bill-attempts-to-address-bilingual-teacher-shortage/

California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (n.d.). *Approved institutions and programs* [Data dashboard]. Retrieved April 14, 2026, from https://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/reports/dashboards/approved-institutions-and-programs/

California Department of Education. (2018). *Global California 2030*. https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/documents/globalca2030.pdf

California Department of Education. (2025). *California school district areas, 2024–25* [Data set]. https://data-cdegis.opendata.arcgis.com/search?tags=school%2520district%2520area

California Proposition 58, English Proficiency. *Multilingual Education. Initiative Statute* (2016). In California Secretary of State, *Official voter information guide: California general election, November 8, 2016*. https://vig.cdn.sos.ca.gov/2016/general/en/pdf/text-proposed-laws.pdf

Cho, H., & Johnson, P. (2020). Preservice teachers' transformative learning through field experience with emergent bilinguals in a dual language school. *Reflective Practice, 21*(6), 819-833.

Christian, D. (1996). Two-way immersion education: Students learning through two languages. *Modern Language Journal, 80*(1), 66–76. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1996.tb01139.x

Darriet, C., & Santibañez, L. (2024). Examining two-way dual language program dispersion in the context of neighborhood change, charter school expansion, and enrollment decline. *American Journal of Education, 131*(1), 55–91. https://doi.org/10.1086/732395

Domke, L. M., May, L. A., Cerrato, M. A., Sanders, E. H., Kung, M., & Bingham, G. E. (2024). How dual language bilingual education preservice teachers draw upon and develop students' sociocultural competence. *Foreign Language Annals, 57*(3), 797–817. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12744

Domke, L. M., May, L. A., Kung, M., Coleman, L., Vo, M., & Bingham, G. E. (2022). Preservice teachers learning to integrate language within content instruction in dual language classrooms. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 45*(9), 3712–3728. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2117817

Figueroa Briseño, A. (2023) "Dual language teachers are key to making more California students bilingual. Few seek the job." Inewsource.org. December 5, 2023. Available at: https://inewsource.org/2023/12/05/dual-language-program-teacher-pipeline-san-diego-unified/

Herman, K. (2023). What we know now: Urban teacher residency models, teacher shortages, and equity. *Issues in Teacher Education, 32*(1), 56–73.

Hsin, L., White, L., Anthony, J., Brodziak de los Reyes, I., Holtzman, D., Martin, A., Manship, K., & Quick, H. (2022). *Research brief: Engaging dual language learner families in their children's early education*. American Institutes for Research. https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/DLL-Family-Engagement-Brief-2022-508.pdf

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/

Jang, S. T., & Horn, A. S. (2017). *The relative effectiveness of traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs: A review of recent research* (MHEC Research Brief). Midwestern Higher Education Compact. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED587431

Learning Policy Institute (2017) Bilingual Teacher Shortages in California: A Problem Likely to Grow. Learning Policy Institute: Palo Alto, CA. Fact Sheet. Feb, 2017. Available at: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Bilingual_Teacher_Shortages_California_FACTSHEET.pdf

López, F., & Santibañez, L. (2018). Teacher Preparation for Emergent Bilingual Students: Implications of Evidence for Policy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 26*(36).

Martinez, M. I. & Sapien, C. (2022). Building the Supply of Bilingual Teachers in California: Evidence from State Investment Shows Districts Should Look Closer to Home for Bilingual Teacher Candidates. SEAL, June 2022. Available at: https://edpreplab.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/SEAL-BTPDP-Policy-Brief-FINAL.pdf

Mathews, K., Huang, H., Yagi, E., Balfe, C., & Bishop, J.P. (2024). *California's teacher education deserts: An overlooked & growing equity challenge*. Center for the Transformation of Schools, School of Education & Information Studies, UCLA.

Mathewson, T. G. (2024) "California finally ended a ban on bilingual education. Now it can't find enough teachers for these classes." The Hechinger Report. December 9, 2024. Available at: https://hechingerreport.org/california-finally-ended-a-ban-on-bilingual-education-now-it-cant-find-enough-teachers-for-these-classes/#:~:text=California%20colleges%20are%20not%20producing,bilingual%20teachers%20%E2%80%94%20across%20all%20languages.

Mueller, J. J., & File, N. K. (2015). Teacher preparation in changing times: One program's journey toward re-vision and revision. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 36*(2), 175–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2015.1030521

Olsen, L., Martinez, M., Herrera, C. B., & Skibbins, H. (2020). Multilingual programs and pedagogy: What teachers and administrators need to know and do. In California Department of Education (Ed.), *Improving education for multilingual and English learner students: Research to practice* (pp. 115–188). California Department of Education. https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/documents/mleleducationch3.pdf

Romo, H. D., Thomas, K. J. A., & García, E. E. (2018). Changing demographics of dual language learners and English learners: Implications for school success. *Social Policy Report, 31*(2), 1–35. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2379-3988.2018.tb00028.x

S.B. 488, 2021–2022 Reg. Sess., ch. 678 (Cal. 2021). https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB488

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*(1_suppl), 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*(5), 879–912. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214545110

Whitford, D. K., Zhang, D., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). Traditional vs. alternative teacher preparation programs: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 27*(3), 671-685.

Williams, C. P. (2025, February 18). *Making California public schools better for English learners: Lessons from Texas*. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/making-california-public-schools-better-for-english-learners/

Williams, C. P., Marcus, M., & Escobedo, M. (2025, November 12). *What families want: New data on public demand for bilingual education*. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/what-families-want-new-data-on-public-demand-for-bilingual-education/

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

This study examines both current state policy and regulations concerning bilingual teacher preparation as well as the body of literature that touches upon a) high-quality teacher preparation programs and b) high-quality DLI teaching and learning.

Alongside the research on effective DLI pedagogy, this report incorporates publicly available geographic data from the California Department of Education (CDE) on public school district boundaries and district-level demographic data (n =1,071), particularly the number and distribution of English Learners (ELs). Using these data, a heat map was produced to highlight all of the districts where the proportion of ELs suggests a heightened need for DLI program implementation. The percentage of ELs was used to determine need for several reasons. ELs represent a large and growing share of the K–12 population in California, and they vary widely in their home languages, cultural backgrounds, prior schooling, and levels of English proficiency. Their linguistic and cultural assets are key to the success of DLI models where different levels of proficiency in the target language are expected (Christian, 1996; Romo et al., 2018; Wright & Baker, 2017). Most importantly, knowing where these students are located can also reveal inequities in access to bilingual programs, highlighting where expanded services are currently most needed.

Finally, 45-minute interviews were conducted with district (n = 7) and university program administrators (n = 3) across California to understand how they have experienced and responded to challenges related to bilingual teacher recruitment and retention. Specifically, interviews took place with university program administrators who oversaw aspects of their institution's bilingual authorization pathway, as well as administrators at the district-level who supervised their district's DLI program. Many of the participants represented districts and universities located in both urban, suburban, and rural contexts. In these interviews, administrators were asked about the current state of their programs, their approaches to recruiting teachers, the resources and supports available to candidates and current educators, and their perspectives on policies guiding the expansion of DLI programs under the Global California 2030 initiative. Using an iterative process, the interviews were then coded according to their relevance to each of the research questions. The researchers looked for trends based on administrators' responses to questions about state policy, teacher hiring, competence, teacher support, and DLI expansion in the state.

APPENDIX B: TEACHER WORKFORCE GROWTH ESTIMATIONS

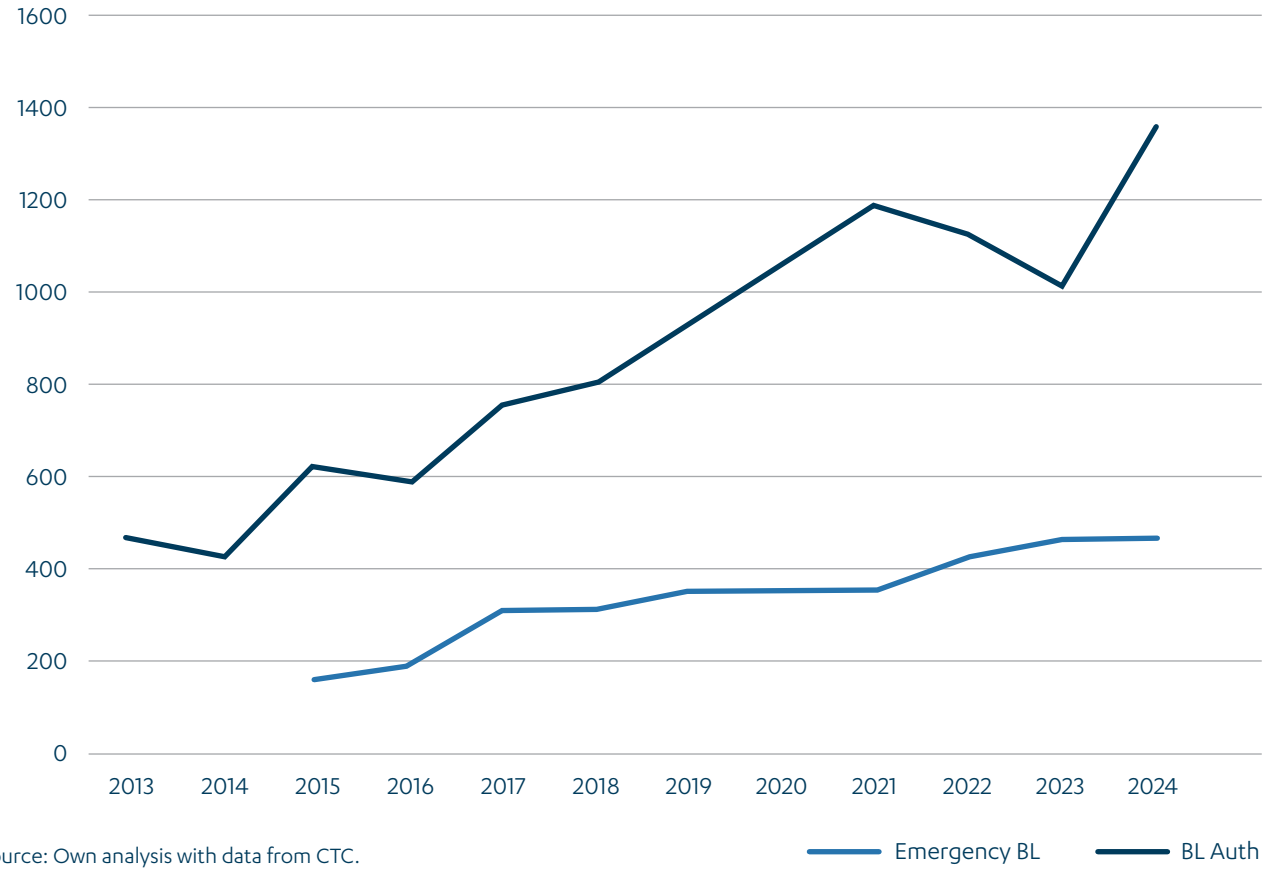
Assumptions:

- Current programs offer three grades, K-2. Expansion means adding three more grades (3-5)
- New programs expand at a (conservative) rate of one grade/teacher per program per year.
- New programs expand uniformly: 75 programs per year (for a total of 376 new programs needed)

New Growth	**2026**	**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**2030**	**Total teachers needed**
New programs	75	75	75	75	76	
Grades offered	1	2	3	4	5	**380**
		1	2	3	4	**300**
			1	2	3	**225**
				1	2	**150**
					1	**75**
						1130
Current Program Expansion	**2026**	**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**2030**	**Total teachers needed**
Existing programs	1600	1600	1600	1600	1600	
Grades offered (expansion)	1	1	1	0	0	**1600**
	grade 3	**grade 4**	**grade 5**			**1600**
						1600
Total expansion teachers needed						**4800**
TOTAL new teachers needed						**5930**
	2026	**2027**	**2028**	**2029**	**2030**	**Total teachers needed**
New programs (75 per yr)	75	150	225	300	380	**1130**
Grade exp. of current programs	1600	1600	1600	0	0	**4800**
Total (cumulative)	**1675**	**3425**	**5250**	**5550**	**5930**	**5930**
New teachers needed each year	**1675**	**1750**	**1825**	**300**	**380**	**5930**

APPENDIX C: BILINGUAL AUTHORIZATIONS ISSUED BY CTC

Figure C1. *Bilingual Authorizations Issued by CTC, by Credential and Emergency, 2013–2024*



Source: Own analysis with data from CTC.