

# Systems Framework to Support Dual Language Learning in Early Care and Education Settings



Professional Development and Workforce  
Support for Dual Language Learning



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**  
Early Childhood Development



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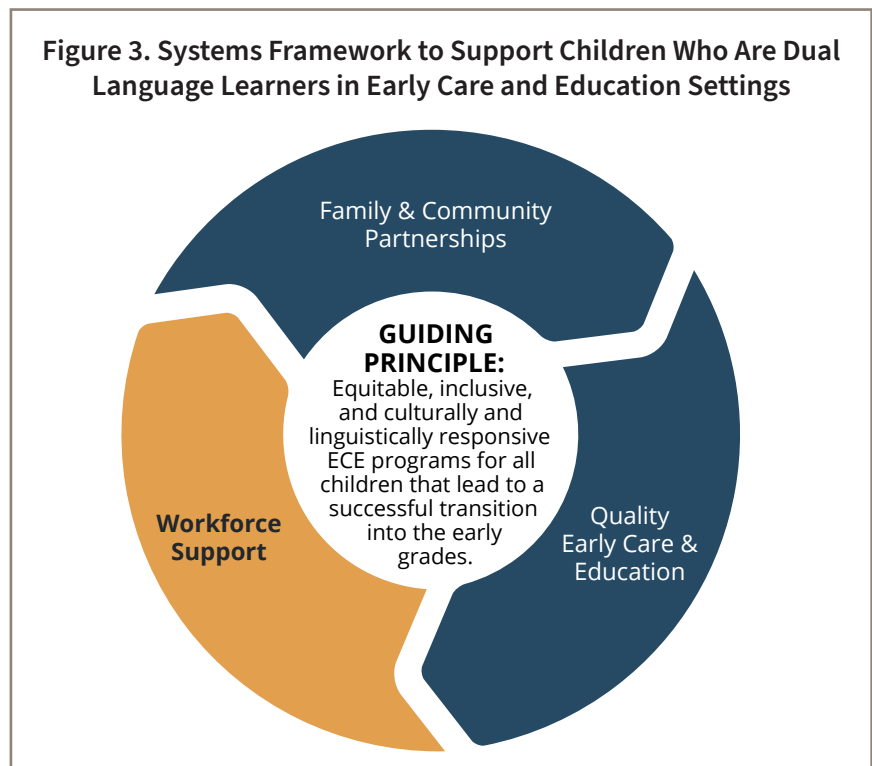
## Introduction

The ECE workforce can serve children who are DLLs more effectively when there is investment and support for the workforce. Greater access to professional preparation and in-service learning opportunities would enable early educators to develop cultural competence and practices that meet the unique needs of children who are DLLs. In addition, by recruiting and retaining more multilingual early childhood educators, the field would better reflect the growing diversity of children and families served in ECE programs and settings.

The ECE workforce is significantly more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and languages in comparison to K–12 educators. Nearly 40 percent of early childhood educators are people of color, whereas only 20 percent of K–12 teachers are people of color (Whitebook et al., 2018). Also, a significant share of early childhood educators consists of first-generation families, with 31 percent speaking a home language other than English (McLean et al., 2021). However, the ECE workforce in general faces significant barriers to accessing professional development or higher education, including time, cost, and sometimes language barriers (Pierson et al., 2021; Warner-Richter et al., 2020; Lieberman et al., 2020), and these barriers can be even more significant for educators and caregivers of varying racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds (Paschall et al., 2020). This leaves early childhood educators lacking opportunities to improve skills and practices that are critical to supporting children who are DLLs.

States can partner with communities to expand credential and training opportunities that focus on dual language development. Developing realistic pathways of entry and advancement can further build a workforce that is reflective of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of children while emphasizing the importance of multilingualism. Moreover, states and territories can develop and implement professional development plans using Child Care and

**Figure 3. Systems Framework to Support Children Who Are Dual Language Learners in Early Care and Education Settings**



Development Fund (CCDF) quality funds.<sup>1</sup> These plans are one mechanism to ensure the inclusion of professional development and support for gaining linguistic and cultural competence.

This brief focuses on recommendations and resources for ECE systems and program leaders to consider to address the current challenges discussed above and effectively support the ECE workforce.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

#### **Provide high-quality professional development and coaching to the workforce on dual language learning and cultural and linguistic competence.**

All ECE staff, including administrative, instructional, and support staff—whether monolingual or multilingual—should have the knowledge, competencies, and support needed to foster the learning and development of bilingual and multilingual children and engage their families. States, territories, and tribes can ensure that core competencies for early childhood educators include specific research-based knowledge and skills related to promoting linguistic, cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development in children who are DLLs.

A National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine committee synthesized the core knowledge and skills into five areas:

- experience with language diversity,
- beliefs and attitude toward linguistic diversity,
- knowledge related to dual language learning,
- knowledge about English language acquisition among DLLs, and
- skills for promoting content and language instruction (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

Professional development opportunities and qualification requirements for the ECE workforce should reflect these competencies and include training on cultural and linguistic competence, dual language development, and strategies that support the development of DLLs (Zepeda et al., 2011). States, territories, and tribes could also consider including DLL-targeted professional development requirements, including coaching or other classroom-embedded support in their quality improvement systems.

#### **Helpful Resources:**

- **Professional Learning Guides to Support Children Who Are Dual Language Learners.** This is a series of professional learning guides that program leaders from Head Start and other ECE programs can use as professional development resources to support the full and effective participation of children who are DLLs and their families.
- **Young Dual Language Learners: Strengthening Early Childhood Education Systems and Practices.** ED's Office of English Language Acquisition, in collaboration with the Institute of Education Sciences' Regional Educational Laboratory West, hosted this webinar on research-based instructional practices, funding streams, state policies, and resources for caregivers and early childhood educators that support young DLLs.

<sup>1</sup> Additional information about defining and reporting on CCDF Direct Services and CCDF Quality Improvement Activities is available in the instructions to the ACF-696 Financial Reporting Form for the CCDF state and territory lead agencies at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/policy-guidance/ccdf-acf-pi-2021-05> and the ACF-696T Financial Reporting Form for the CCDF tribal lead agencies at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/policy-guidance/policy-guidance/financial-reporting-tribes-ccdf-acf-pi-2023-05>.

- **Effective Literacy Instruction for Multilingual Learners: What it is and What it Looks Like.** ED's Office of English Language Acquisition, in collaboration with the National Committee for Effective Literacy and the National Association of English Learner Program Administrators, hosted this webinar that discussed best practices and leadership actions that promote literacy for multilingual learners.
- **Planned Language Approach.** The Planned Language Approach is a research-based approach developed by the Office of Head Start to help Head Start and Early Head Start programs develop and implement practices and services that ensure optimal language and literacy development for both children who speak English and those who are DLLs. The suite of resources includes the research base about DLLs, the role of home language support, strategies to support DLLs, program-level policies and systems that support effective DLL instruction, and a discussion of the "Big Five" skills that are critical to early language and literacy development.

### State and Local Highlights:

- The **Nuestros Ninos School Readiness (NNSR) Professional Development Program** (Castro et al., 2017) is designed to improve instructional practices in early learning programs and promote language, literacy, social-emotional development, and mathematics learning in pre-K Spanish-English DLLs. NNSR integrates several evidence-based professional development approaches over 2 years, including training institutes, consultation and coaching, and professional learning communities.

These professional development experiences target five specific instructional strategies:

- ongoing and frequent assessments,
- use of small-group activities,
- explicit vocabulary instruction,
- development of academic English language, and
- focus on social-emotional development.

A randomized controlled trial involving 56 preschool teachers and 340 DLL children in California, Florida, and North Carolina found that NNSR had significant positive impacts on both teacher practice and child outcomes. Specifically, teachers who participated in the program achieved greater gains in the quality of instructional support and specific practices that support language and literacy development in children who are DLLs. They also used more basic and complex language interactions with students in Spanish. Preschoolers whose teachers participated in NNSR showed greater gains in early math skills, writing, alphabet knowledge, and receptive vocabulary when assessed in both Spanish and English. The also had greater expressive vocabulary in English.

- The **Montana Early Childhood Tribal Language Summit** is an annual event organized in partnership with tribal leaders, educators, tribal colleges, nonprofit advocacy organizations, and state education leadership. The Summit provides an opportunity for early childhood educators, faculty, and other interested parties to share and discuss best practices and challenges in implementing culturally and linguistically sustaining strategies in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

### RECOMMENDATION 2:

#### **Recruit and retain multilingual professionals in all ECE program roles.**

Given the growing need and existing shortages of bilingual early educators and leaders, states, territories, and tribes should develop strategies to recruit bilingual or multilingual individuals into the ECE profession and retain those who are already in the field. Some strategies intentionally provide these individuals with compensation to recognize their unique value and skill, as well as equitable access (e.g., linguistic support, funding, coaching) to career advancement opportunities, including professional preparation, in-service

training, higher education programs, and technical assistance activities. These opportunities should expand to include multilingual aides, paraprofessionals, support staff, those with ECE experience and credentials from abroad, and other members of the community such as parents, grandparents, elders, tribal leaders, and high school students through apprenticeships.

Many of these individuals already play important roles in supporting families and children in their communities. Their cultural and linguistic expertise should be valued and supported as assets in advancing the ECE field. States and communities should develop plans targeted at ensuring that more of these individuals have opportunities to pursue an accessible career pathway, starting with an entry-level credential, and that they are offered technical assistance and supports to affordably further their professional advancement (HHS & ED, 2016).

States, territories, and tribes can work to develop pathways for entry and advancement for immigrant workers who reflect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of children in their respective communities. The hiring of state-level professional development providers, the technical assistance workforce, and higher education faculty will also need to become more diverse and reflective of the diversity in the populations served.

### Helpful Resources:

- **Who Are Bilingual Educators?** This brief focuses on bilingual education, bilingual educators, and addressing the bilingual teacher shortage in the United States. Further, it describes the main responsibilities of teachers and paraprofessionals in bilingual settings across the United States.
- **Successful Inclusion of Family Child Care Providers in Higher Education Degree Programs and Courses: A Research-to-Practice Guide.** This guide provides strategies, tips, and resources on how to successfully include family child care providers in higher education degree programs and courses in early childhood education.
- **Selected State and Local Policies to Support Immigrant and Limited English Proficient (LEP) Early Care and Education Providers.** This resource offers policies, strategies, and examples that help immigrant ECE providers, especially those who are English language learners, access professional development and career advancement opportunities.
- **Apprenticeship Programs Are a Promising Solution to Bring More Multilingual Workers into Early Childhood Field.** This article discusses ways that Registered Apprenticeships can intentionally identify and recruit multilingual individuals into the ECE workforce.

### State and Local Highlights

- **New Mexico's** Early Childhood Education and Care Department supports certified bilingual/multilingual early childhood educators, including indigenous language speakers, through its bilingual incentive program. The one-time payment of \$1,500 is available to early childhood professionals who provide direct support to children ages birth through five and meet the [requirements](#) established by the state (e.g., currently work at a New Mexico licensed or registered child care setting, tribal child care, pre-K, Head Start, home visiting, early intervention program).
- **PICA**, a Head Start and Early Head Start program in **Minnesota**, provides a number of parent training programs to help parents in their community gain new skills and hands-on experience that can lead to employment opportunities. One of these programs provides child development training that allows parents to work inside a PICA classroom while learning about how young children learn and develop. Graduates of this program can take part in the Professional Development Internship program, which gives them an opportunity to earn a Child Development Associate credential and gain more hands-on experience.

PICA also provides English as a Second Language and General Educational Development classes for those who may need more foundational skills. More than half of PICA's staff members (including non-teaching staff) are current or former Head Start parents. According to their website, this "Grow Your Own" (GYO) strategy has allowed them "not only to hire and retain a staff that is highly representative of the children and families we serve, but also to become the number one trainer of teachers of color in the state of Minnesota."

- **The Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training (I-BEST) program** from **Washington State** is designed for adult students, especially those in Adult Basic Education or English as a Second Language programs, who are interested in attaining college-level occupational credentials or degrees but have trouble passing basic skills courses. The program combines job training and basic skills in reading, math, and English in the same course. It also provides advisors and financial support. Colleges across the state have adapted the I-BEST model for several career pathways, including early childhood education.

I-BEST programs in three colleges have been evaluated. While none of the evaluated programs included students in ECE, the [evaluation](#) showed that students who participated in I-BEST were more likely to attain a workforce-related credential that took less than a year to complete. They were also more likely to enroll in college credit-bearing coursework and attain more credits than students who did not participate in IBEST. Despite that, they were not more likely to attain degrees or credentials that took more than a year to complete (Martinson et al., 2021).

- The **University of the District of Columbia Community College** created [a bilingual associate degree program in early childhood education for Spanish-speaking students](#) with a focus on infant-toddler development. The program is designed for part-time students so that they can keep their jobs while studying. To tailor the curriculum to the learning needs of the target population, this program offers ECE content courses in Spanish first, then a set of courses that are taught in both languages, and finally a series of general education courses in English. Also, students learn in cohorts, and most of them receive financial support.

The university holds information sessions to build awareness of the program and recruit students. They also provide translated materials and hands-on help throughout the application and financial aid process. Finally, they provide training and support to the Spanish-speaking faculty so they have the necessary knowledge, skills, and teaching tools to be effective instructors.

[Miami Dade College](#) in **Florida** and [Southwestern College](#) in **California** have similar bilingual programs that lead to an entry-level credential.

- **Thrive by 5**, an initiative of the Children's Trust in Miami-Dade County in **Florida**, offers scholarships for the translation and evaluation of foreign transcripts to help immigrants with ECE experience attain credentials, receive college credit, and demonstrate eligibility for other scholarships and wage incentive programs.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

#### **Support partnerships with higher education institutions with degree programs that support dual language development and cultural competence.**

States, territories, and tribes can partner with institutions of higher education to ensure that associate, bachelor's, and advanced degree programs for ECE professionals include content in dual language development and cultural and linguistic competence as well as relevant practicum experiences to ensure that knowledge gained translates to practice. Content related to children who are bilingual or multilingual

should not be exclusively contained in one or a small group of courses; rather, the content should be woven throughout all courses.

States, territories, and tribes could also partner with minority-serving institutions, including Hispanic-serving institutions and tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), to help strengthen ECE programs in their communities. These partnerships may help states, territories, and tribes increase their pool of early educators who are qualified in early childhood development, speak the language(s), and share the cultural background(s) of children who are DLLs in the community.

### Helpful Resources:

- **Understanding Many Languages: Preparing Early Educators to Teach Dual Language Learners.** This brief discusses the limited capacity of ECE training programs in institutions of higher education to prepare early educators to teach children who are DLLs and proposes recommendations to address this challenge.
- **Preparing Teachers for Diverse Schools: Lessons from Minority Serving Institutions.** This report discusses promising strategies for supporting teacher candidates of color in teacher preparation programs based on lessons learned from minority-serving institutions.
- **Grow Your Own Teachers.** This report describes state and local efforts to develop GYO programs that involve partnerships between school districts, higher education, and community-based organizations. It includes a discussion about how GYO programs can increase the supply of multilingual educators.
- **Cultural Practices.** These resources address how the skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways of children, families, and communities can be integrated into Head Start curricula, learning experiences, and school readiness goals.

### State and Local Highlights:

- **Improving Preschoolers' Acquisition of Language through Coaching Teachers and Professional Development (IMPACT-PD),** a partnership between the University of **Alabama** at Birmingham and the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, provides preschool educators with the tools they need to help children who are DLLs develop language skills early in life. The project focuses on four goals:
  - host online professional development modules, which makes training more accessible;
  - host English language learning opportunities, providing opportunities beyond the classroom;
  - create professional development and outreach activities for parents, families, and community engagement; and
  - enhance educator preparedness to teach ELs through coursework.
- Many states use PDG B-5 funds to engage with **WIDA** (World Class Instructional Design and Assessment) through participation in their network, a training workshop, or cohort attendance. WIDA is an organization that develops evidence-based curricula to train teachers in culturally and linguistically responsive instruction in order to maximize the educational experience for students who are English language learners. **Michigan** joined the WIDA Early Years network using their PDG B-5 grant and gained access to the supports and professional development modules available through WIDA.
- The Administration for Children and Families provides grants to develop **Tribal College and University Head Start (TCU-HS) Partnership Programs.** Since 2020, these grants have supported

the first cohort of TCUs, which includes Navajo Technical University in New Mexico, Salish Kootenai College in Montana, Stone Child College in Montana, Cankdeska Cikana Community College in North Dakota, White Earth Tribal and Community College in Minnesota, and Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in Minnesota, to develop partnerships with Head Start programs to increase the number of qualified American Indian and Alaska Native educators in tribal communities.

A second cohort of additional TCU-HS Partnership Programs was funded in 2023, which includes Bay Mills Community College in Michigan, Salish Kootenai College, and College of Menominee Nation in Wisconsin, to expand access to early childhood degrees in Head Start American Indian and Alaska Native Programs in tribal nations. Through these partnerships, existing early childhood educators and new recruits have an opportunity to attain ECE credentials and degrees, with comprehensive support from the TCUs, such as academic support and counseling, financial aid, and mental health support.

To make it possible for students to attend classes, courses are often offered online and on evenings or weekends. The curriculum also includes classes and experiences that increase students' cultural and linguistic competence.

- **North Seattle College** in **Washington** developed a cohort model that has trained early educators through a Spanish immersion cohort model. The college also provides multiple pathways for educators who are English language learners with classes taught in Somali, Arabic, Spanish, and Oromo.



## Glossary of Terms

**Bilingual education:** An educational program in which two languages are used to provide content matter instruction. As with the term bilingualism, bilingual education is “a simple label for a complex phenomenon.” An important distinction is between those programs that use and promote two languages and those where bilingual children are present, but bilingualism is not fostered in the curriculum.

**Bilingualism:** Put simply, bilingualism is the ability to use two languages. However, defining bilingualism is problematic since individuals with varying bilingual characteristics may be classified as bilingual. There may exist distinctions between ability and use of a language; variation in proficiency across the four language dimensions (listening, speaking, reading and writing); differences in proficiency between the two languages; variation in proficiency due to the use of each language for different functions and purposes; and variation in language proficiency over time. People may become bilingual either by acquiring two languages at the same time in childhood or by learning a second language sometime after acquiring their first language.

**Biliteracy:** The ability to effectively communicate or understand thoughts and ideas through two languages’ grammatical systems and vocabulary using their written symbols.

**Dual language development:** The development of two languages; same as bilingual language development.

**English learners:** Students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English.

**First language:** See also **native language**.

**Heritage language:** The language a person regards as their native, home, and/or ancestral language. This covers indigenous languages (e.g., Navajo) and immigrant languages (e.g., Urdu in the United States).

**Home language:** The language a student speaks at home, with family. See also **first language** and **native language**.

**Indigenous language:** According to the United Nations, “Indigenous languages are not only methods of communication, but also extensive and complex systems of knowledge that have developed over millennia. They are central to the identity of Indigenous peoples, the preservation of their cultures, worldviews and visions and an expression of self-determination.” Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their languages, oral traditions, writing systems and literatures.” [United Nations Backgrounder Indigenous Languages](#). See also **heritage language**.

**Limited English proficient:** Term used for parents and guardians who do not speak, listen, read, or write English proficiently because it is not their primary language.

**Multilingualism:** Use of multiple languages. See also **bilingualism**.

**Native language:** The language a person acquires first in life or identifies with as a member of an ethnic group.

**Second language:** This term is used in several ways and can refer to:

- the second language learned chronologically,
- a language other than the native language,
- the weaker language, or
- the less frequently used language.

Second language may also be used to refer to third and further learned languages.

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