

A Civil Rights Agenda for the Next Quarter Century



# Bilingual Education and America's Future: Evidence and Pathways

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## About the Series

### *A Civil Rights Agenda for the Next Quarter Century*

The Civil Rights Project was founded in 1996 at Harvard University, during a period of increasingly conservative courts and political movements that were limiting, and sometimes reversing, major civil rights reforms. In 2007 the Project moved to UCLA. Its goal was—and still is—to bring together researchers, lawyers, civil rights advocates and governmental and educational leaders to create a new generation of civil rights research and communicate what is learned to those who could use it to address the problems of inequality and discrimination. Created a generation after the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, CRP’s vision was to produce new understandings of challenges and research-based evidence on solutions. The Project has always maintained a strong, central focus on equal education and racial change.

We are celebrating our first quarter century by taking a serious look forward—not at the history of the issues, not at the debates over older policies, not at celebrating prior victories but at the needs of the next quarter century. Since the work of civil rights advocates and leaders of color in recent decades has often been about defending threatened, existing rights, we need innovative thinking to address the challenges facing our rapidly changing society. Political leaders often see policy in short two- and four-year election cycles but we decided to look at the upcoming generation. Because researchers are uniquely qualified to think systematically, this series is an attempt to harness the skills of several disciplines, to think deeply about how our society has changed since the civil rights revolution and what the implications are for the future of racial justice.

This effort includes two very large sets of newly commissioned work. This paper is the second in the series on the potential for social change and equity policies in the nation. The other set of studies focuses on California, a vast state whose astonishing diversity foretells the future of the U.S. and whose profound inequality warns that there is much work to be done. All these studies will

initially be issued as working papers. They will be brought together in statewide conferences and in the U.S. Capitol and, eventually, as two major books, which we hope will help light the way in the coming decades. At each of the major events, scholars will exchange ideas and address questions from each other, from leaders and from the public.

The Civil Rights Project, like the country, is in a period of transition, identifying leadership for its next chapter. We are fortunate to have collaborated with a remarkable network of important scholars across the U.S., who contributed to our work in the last quarter century and continue to do so in this new work. We are also inspired by the nation's many young people who understand that our future depends on overcoming division. They are committed to constructing new paths to racial justice. We hope these studies open avenues for this critical work, stimulate future scholars and lawyers, and inform policymaking in a society with the unlimited potential of diversity, if it can only figure out how to achieve genuine equality.



Gary Orfield



Patricia Gándara

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## Foreword

The United States, a nation of immigrants in which nearly one in five students arrives at school from a family that speaks a language other than English, is among the most parochial of countries with respect to nurturing foreign languages. These students have routinely been seen by the schools as problems—or, at least challenges—rather than assets. For more than half a century politicians and educators have battled over language policy for these students. This included the banning of bilingual education in some states as well as simply failing to fund second language instruction in others. Those who have opposed bilingual instruction cited “research” that purported to show that educating students in any language other than English was harmful to their academic development. Supporters of such instruction have argued that educating students in their native language was beneficial to their social and psychological development, and at worst did not harm their acquisition of English. Unfortunately, for every study that backed up one side of an argument another study could be found to refute it. Notably, these battles have gone on with little attention paid to the fact that most nations instruct their students in more than one language with no evidence that it is academically harmful. Moreover, given many Americans’ lukewarm feelings about immigrants, American public schools largely eschewed bilingual instruction in favor of English-only classes, notwithstanding that this strategy routinely resulted in poor scores on tests of English.

Much of the research that provided the justification for restrictive language policy across the nation failed to meet the most basic research standards of the field. These studies often included biased samples, uncontrolled factors that affect students’ performance and too little time for any instructional method to have an effect. But much more careful and sophisticated studies have been produced over the last couple decades, consistently finding that bilingual education yields numerous advantages for the students who are fortunate enough to receive it. More recently, bilingual instruction, often maligned in the past, has become popular with many parents—both English-only

as well as speakers of other languages—who compete for limited seats in programs in communities across the country. Today, bilingual programs are more limited by availability of trained teachers than by any concern for the potential value of bilingual instruction *for all students*. Educators and parents increasingly decry the failure of the public schools to provide their students with the now-known advantages of multilingualism, which it is important to note includes *literacy* in another language. Our research, and that of many others, shows that being able to read and write a language confers the greatest long-term benefits in both education and employment. While “bilingual education” is understood to include instruction in more than one language, literacy in both languages should be the goal. The authors of this groundbreaking paper review the most solid evidence, consider the pros and cons of various policy options, and ultimately propose that all levels of educational governance move forward with the infrastructure needed to provide bilingual instruction for all students who seek it within the next 25 years.

It appears that the federal government, consistent with the aims of this paper, is now poised to assist in providing the opportunity for more American students to become multilingual and multi-literate. As Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona promised recently, “bilingualism and biculturalism is a superpower—and we at the Department of Education will work to help our students become multilingual” (February 23, 2023, Portland, Oregon). This paper provides a roadmap for achieving that goal.

*-Patricia Gándara*

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## Executive Summary

As the U.S. looks towards a twenty-five-year vision for education and social policy, a critical goal is strengthening educational services and supports for students classified as English learners (EL). EL-classified students are a protected class of students building their bi- or multilingualism while receiving services to support their access to the general curriculum and English language development. EL-classified students bring expansive assets to their educational experiences yet enroll in schools that often do not provide full, equitable access to core content, nor the opportunity to develop bilingualism and biliteracy. Given strong evidence on the benefits of bilingual education, as well as a commitment to education policymaking that addresses barriers to opportunity experienced by EL-classified students and values students' assets, this paper makes the case that *now* is the opportune moment to be laying the policy foundation towards bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students, rather than the exception.

The call for more expansive access to bilingual education is grounded in a comprehensive synthesis of evidence on the benefits of bilingual education, bilingualism, and biliteracy for students and the larger social fabric. Many studies find that access to bilingual education programs has a medium to large positive impact on students' academic achievement, while also supporting a higher likelihood of being reclassified out of EL status to fluent English proficient. Importantly, the benefits of bilingual education and bilingualism go beyond academic and English language outcomes, with benefits for students' home language development, cognitive functioning, social-emotional and sociocultural outcomes, and students' future employment and earnings.

Our argument for bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students is also built on a recognition that the current policy and educational climate can support more expansive access to bilingual education. States are reversing restrictive language policies towards policies that allow and support bilingual education, while communities, districts, and schools across

the country are engaging in grassroots bilingual program development and expansion. As interest in bilingual education across audiences grows, the resources and knowledge available to support implementation has grown in parallel. There is a heightened awareness that bilingual programs can be compromised if they are implemented in ways that do not center the experiences of linguistically diverse and immigrant families, with critical guidance for implementing programs that do. There are also more expansive options for curricula, professional learning, and assessments that support bilingual, biliterate instruction. The policy agenda of today can build from this momentum, looking towards a future where bilingual education is the standard service for EL-classified students, when feasible.

In recognition of the challenges that stand between the current landscape of services for EL-classified students and more expansive bilingual education services, this piece also outlines incremental federal, state, and local policy actions to build towards bilingual education as the standard for EL-classified students, as well as critical considerations to support the policy goal. The federal government has the opportunity to invest in supporting and sustaining a multilingual educator workforce as well as to provide guidance on designing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality bilingual education programs focused on fully developing bilingualism and biliteracy while also providing resources to do so. State governments can also play a critical role in supporting multilingual educators, as well as supporting local education agencies in building strong, locally responsive bilingual education programs. Local education agencies can partner with other agencies to support multilingual educators on their pathway to teaching, as well as invest in developing programs that center linguistically diverse students and families in their community. Throughout, current policy examples and opportunities for replication, adaptation, and expansion are described.

We also outline key considerations for the implementation of bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students, recognizing that such a policy will come with complex

negotiations between what can be, and what is. We outline how the policy can balance local flexibility to adapt programs to community assets with strong enough policy parameters to ensure students are provided with high-quality programs, while also recognizing that full bilingual, biliterate programs may not be feasible in all contexts. We outline challenges in sustaining bilingual programs through secondary school and ensuring sufficient resources are provided to sustain all bilingual programs. We raise critical issues around segregation of students, accountability, and a U.S. climate in which issues of language and immigration are heavily charged. For all considerations, we offer evidence, policy examples, and guideposts for navigating the implementation of more expansive bilingual education with these considerations in mind.

As EL-classified students continue to experience barriers to opportunity, the need to improve services and supports for EL-classified students becomes increasingly urgent. Despite a history characterized by swings towards and away from more expansive bilingual education, a federal policy that positions bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students when possible is a viable goal as we look twenty-five years into the future—if federal, state, and local policy begin taking steps towards this goal in the immediate.

# *Bilingual Education and America's Future: Evidence and Pathways*

Lorna Porter, Manuel Vazquez Cano and Ilana Umansky

## **Introduction**

Students classified as English learners (EL) bring important academic, linguistic and cultural strengths to their education, their communities, and the nation (Gándara & Acevedo, 2016; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Valenzuela & Rubio, 2018). Yet, despite these assets, EL-classified students underperform on an array of educational outcomes as compared to their non-EL peers (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). Much of this comparative underperformance is driven, not by differences in student skill or ability, but instead by systematic inequities in EL-classified students' access to high quality educational content. As we look forward to a twenty-five-year vision for education and social policy, addressing these academic disparities becomes increasingly urgent. A critical way through which these disparities can be addressed is strengthening language instructional policy. Given strong evidence on the benefits of bilingual education, as well as a commitment to education policymaking that addresses barriers to opportunity experienced by EL-classified students, we advocate that over the next twenty-five years federal policy change such that bilingual education becomes the standard service for EL-classified students, rather than the exception.

EL classification is designed as a support—designating a protected class of students with core rights to English language development instruction and accessible core content instruction (Office of Civil Rights, 2020). Federal legislation requires that states have standardized processes for classifying students as EL and reclassifying students from EL to fluent English proficient, along with yearly assessment of English language proficiency (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). However, the design and implementation of services for EL-classified students is largely left up to state and local education agency discretion, guided by two cases, *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981). As a result of the Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), school districts are

required to take action to support equitable educational access, regardless of a student's English language proficiency. How to do so was clarified through *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), a 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals case that required programs to be grounded in theory or research, implemented with appropriate resources, and demonstrate effectiveness over time. While these criteria provide a foundation for understanding allowable EL services, ambiguity remains in how to structure instruction for EL-classified students, resulting in a wide variety of program models at the state and local level (Zehler, et al., 2003). While variation in local education policies and practices is inevitable and necessary, current ambiguity surrounding EL services, alongside shifting political stances on bilingual education, may inhibit the ability of schools and districts to provide optimal, or even appropriate, instruction for EL-classified students.

There is evidence that EL-classified students' rights are not always met. EL-classified students experience racial, linguistic, and economic segregation (Gándara, 2010). With inadequate resources and support, schools struggle to provide the appropriate services for EL-classified students (Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003; Martínez & Spikes, 2020; Rumberger & Gándara, 2004). EL classification in English-only instructional environments, for example, has been found to foreclose access to core content, as well as to rigorous and college preparatory coursework (Callahan, 2005; Dabach, 2014; Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Umansky, 2016a). In addition to weak implementation of services to meet EL-classified students' core rights, recent legal cases have jeopardized the ability of the courts to hold districts accountable to federal EL education law. The *Horne v. Flores* (2009) ruling, which upheld Arizona's policy of placing EL-classified students into four-hour daily blocks for English language development instruction despite evidence of segregation, unequal access to content, and academic harm, illustrates how the federal courts have chipped away at EL-classified students' legal rights (Gándara, Moran, & García, 2004; Martinez-Wenzl, Pérez, & Gándara, 2010)

As EL-classified students' core rights are not always met, and other structural factors further constrict their education opportunities, there are persistent disparities in outcomes for EL-classified students as compared to non-EL peers. With relatively few EL-classified students having access to bilingual programs, EL classification has been shown to negatively impact students' academic, graduation, and postsecondary outcomes (Carlson & Knowles, 2016; Johnson, 2019; Umansky, 2016a, 2016b). Teachers hold lowered perceptions of EL-classified students' ability than non-EL students in English-only environments (Umansky & Dumont, 2021); and schools often fail to recognize EL-classified students' assets, including emergent multilingualism (Valenzuela & Rubio, 2018). EL classification negatively impacts student self-efficacy (Lee & Soland, 2020), and can lead to a loss of home language proficiency (Anderson, 2012). Studies exploring the effects of EL classification in bilingual settings, by contrast, do not find negative impacts (Umansky, 2016b; Umansky & Dumont, 2021). Together, this evidence points to an urgency to use existing policy tools to improve instruction for EL-classified students, reducing potentially penalizing and stigmatizing effects of EL classification, with bilingual education as a promising way forward.

Bilingual education was, at one point, more central to federal education policy. Through both the Bilingual Education Act (1968) and the Lau remedies (1975), the federal government took the position of supporting bilingual education (Ovando, 2003). The passage of the Bilingual Education Act (1968) was a critical moment in which the federal government formally recognized that students not yet proficient in English faced unique challenges in U.S. schools, and that the federal government had a role to play in addressing these challenges (Gándara, 2015). The Bilingual Education Act (1968) allocated funding for EL programs and led to an emergence of state-level legislation in support of bilingual education (García & Sung, 2018). This position, however, met challenges. Vague language, limited funding, political backlash, and the lack of support for capacity-building all compromised the Bilingual Education Act's (1968) promise (Gándara, 2015; Gándara &

Escamilla, 2017). Further, in the following years, there was a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment with an accompanying objection to bilingual education (García & Sung, 2018). Over time, bilingual education was withdrawn from federal policy, and states took a more central role in determining EL services while bilingual education debates continued (Hakuta, 2011). Enrollment in bilingual education, which had risen significantly after the Bilingual Education Act's (1968) passage, declined dramatically in the wake of its weakening and the rise of state-level restrictive language policies (García & Sung, 2018). As U.S. education policy became increasingly dominated by conversations around standards and accountability in recent decades, bilingualism was conspicuously ignored, creating what Lyons (2014) described as the “one-language educational standard” (p. 41). While bilingual programs are once again on the rise through both local and state efforts (Steele, et al., 2017), a recent survey found that a minority of EL-classified students have access to bilingual education (Redford, 2018).

Despite a history characterized by steps forward and backward regarding bilingual education (Gándara, 2015), after decades of debate, the case for positioning bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students becomes increasingly grounded in rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of bilingual education and the benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy. There has been an explosion of interest in the expansion of bilingual education, through which we have learned extensively about how to create, implement, and sustain effective programs (Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008; Brisk, 2006; de Jong, 2016; García & Kleifgen, 2010). We have more resources and infrastructure to sustain these programs, such as target language assessments, curricula, and teacher preparation programs (Baker, 2011; Escamilla & Hopewell, 2010; NASEM, 2017; Naqvi, McKeough, Thorne, & Pfitscher, 2013; WIDA, 2021). Support for immigrant students in the U.S. is stronger than in decades past (Gallup, 2021) paralleling the wider diversification of the U.S. population (Frey, 2020) and a larger political movement towards recognizing and addressing the role



that U.S. policies and systems play in the marginalization of linguistically and racially diverse communities.

As we look towards the education policy agenda of the next decades, establishing bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students is a cornerstone for improving education policy for linguistically diverse students. It is both possible and urgent that we set this goal of bilingual education as the standard, then begin to work towards this goal through a series of incremental policy steps focused on strengthening the foundation for robust, expansive bilingual, biliterate education programs. This change, and the incremental policy steps we make the case for, would move forward goals central to a more equitable education for EL-classified students. These goals include recruiting and training high-quality bilingual or multilingual educators, facilitating meaningful learning opportunities, supporting biliterate development, providing culturally sustaining instruction (which promotes students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy), engaging families and communities, and removing structural barriers (Cervantes-Soon, et al., 2017; Howard, et al., 2018; Palmer, Cervantes-Soon, Dorner, & Heiman, 2019). Bilingual education provides a pathway through which to fulfill legal promises of access to learning for a group of students long underserved, as well as provides more widespread benefits for students and the nation, including bilingualism and biliteracy.

In the next section, we synthesize research on the benefits of bilingual education, bilingualism, and biliteracy. We then argue that this is an opportune moment to expand bilingual education and build a stronger foundation for bilingual, biliteracy programs. We next outline key incremental policies to support the expansion of bilingual education, as well as considerations for a federal policy positioning bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students.

## Benefits of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education provides students direct access to the same curriculum that monolingual, English-speaking students are given, as well as the opportunity to develop proficiency in more than one language. As we describe in this section, there is strong evidence that bilingual education provides immediate benefits to students by boosting academic growth, supporting multilingual development, and creating learning environments that promote positive identity development. A less robust, yet growing number of studies indicate that bilingual education supports students' longer-term outcomes, including core content access, postsecondary enrollment, and eventual earnings and well-being. Ultimately, the benefits of bilingual education translate to wider social benefits.

### Core Features of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education in the U.S. is an instructional approach that uses a partner language alongside English to deliver content instruction (Baker, 2011). Bilingual education programs come in a range of models, and within these models there is wide variation in program features across schools and contexts (Boyle, August, Tabaku, Cole, & Simpson-Baird, 2015). Acknowledging this variation, however, there are key factors that differentiate commonly employed bilingual program models<sup>1</sup> from one another (Baker, 2011; Blackburn, 2018; Sugarman, 2018). First, the length of time that a non-English partner language is used to support instruction varies across bilingual models. Some approaches will cease the use of a partner language in early or mid-elementary grades, while other forms extend the use of a partner language as far up as through secondary school. Second, the extent to which a partner language is used for instruction varies. Some models maintain an even split of English and the target language for instruction while others vary the proportion of instruction in

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<sup>1</sup> Forms of bilingual education are typically categorized into four program models: transitional, developmental, heritage language, and dual immersion programs. While variation in implementation exists within program models, each of these models reflects a different combination of the main programmatic factors outlined. For descriptions of program models see Baker (2001) and Sugarman (2018).

each language by grade or subject area. Third, teacher and student composition may be organized differently. Some models rely on one teacher to deliver content instruction in both English and a partner language while others will adopt a co-teaching approach. Some programs are composed exclusively of EL-classified students or of speakers of the target language, while others integrate target-language speakers with monolingual English speakers. Lastly, bilingual education models can have different values and goals (Flores & Beardsmore, 2015; Palmer, et al., 2019). Some programs approach linguistic development with the primary purpose of English proficiency, using bilingual education to temporarily teach content as students transition to full English instruction. Others have the goal of full bilingualism and biliteracy, viewing proficiency in a partner language, in addition to English proficiency, as the end goal. Finally, some, especially in the context of heritage and indigenous education programs, are primarily focused on developing target language proficiency, since students in these programs typically enter with English proficiency already established (Boyle, et al., 2015). Beyond language development goals, bilingual programs also vary in the extent to which the pedagogy and curriculum centers on the culture and experiences of students from the target language.

In the following sections, we synthesize research on the benefits of bilingual education, highlighting evidence on if and how effects differ based on the axes of variation described above. The majority of this research is drawn from Spanish bilingual education programs, an important context for understanding the current research base, as well as opportunities for more expansive research on programs that draw on other languages.

### **Academic Benefits**

Despite a contentious history in which the effectiveness of bilingual education has, at times, been broadly lauded and at other times called into question, a wide body of research concludes that bilingual education has academic benefits for EL-classified students. This conclusion has emerged,

in part, thanks to methodological and data access advancements in the past decade. Specifically, recent research leverages longitudinal data that follows individual students over long periods of time, as well as rigorous methodological approaches that support causal inference. As a result, the evidence of bilingual education's benefits is more credible than ever, with additional insights into longer-term benefits.

Bilingual education supports academic achievement by allowing students to learn academic content initially in their own language instead of placing EL-classified students in classrooms with a linguistically- or academically-simplified curriculum, or placing students in English-only, mainstream classrooms without appropriate instructional supports or modifications. Despite commendable efforts by educators to develop academically rigorous curricula adapted for EL-classified students and delivered in English, prior studies document that English immersion classrooms are typically less rigorous and cover less content (Dabach, 2014; Lillie, Markos, Arias, & Wiley, 2012). Other work finds that, when EL-classified students are integrated into English core content classrooms but schools fail to put in place appropriate supports, teachers struggle to adapt their materials and instruction and students may be excluded from participation (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2016; Reeves, 2004; Verplaetse, 1998). Academic instruction provided in a student's primary language, when delivered by trained, supportive bilingual educators, is a clear mechanism for increasing EL-classified students' meaningful access to grade-level, challenging academic content.

A large body of quasi-experimental and descriptive studies finds that bilingual education contributes to higher academic achievement in both English Language Arts (ELA) and math, with many finding moderate to large benefits (Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2008; Steele, et al., 2017; Watzinger-Tharp, Swenson, & Mayne, 2016). While some have found weak or null effects of bilingual education on academic outcomes, none have found evidence of negative effects. (Chin, Daysal, & Imberman, 2013; Esposito & Bauer, 2019; Lopez & Tashakkori, 2006; Slavin, Madden,

Calderon, Chamberlain, & Hennessy, 2011). Evidence of different effects may be related to methodological differences across research studies, or it may reflect differences in bilingual education models or implementation. To grapple with variation in these findings, multiple meta-analyses and reviews have statistically synthesized research on the relationship between bilingual education and student academic achievement—with the conclusion that bilingual education is as or more effective as a program model for supporting students' academic development than comparable EL programs (August & Shanahan, 2006; Cheung & Slavin, 2012; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Greene, 1998; Rolstad, et al., 2008). Recent meta-analyses conclude that bilingual education increases students' standardized ELA outcomes by 0.14 to 0.21 of a standard deviation (*SD*), and math outcomes 0.12 to 0.17 *SD* (Cheung & Slaving, 2012; Greene, 1998; Rolstad, et al., 2008). Contextualized within effect sizes found in other education interventions, these would be considered medium to large effects (Kraft, 2020). There is also evidence that bilingual education models with longer exposure to the partner language have larger positive impacts (Rolstad, et al., 2008; Steele, et. al., 2017).

Within the wide body of literature that explores the relationship between bilingual education and student academic outcomes, a growing subset of research utilizes experimental and longitudinal designs to strengthen the evidence that bilingual education translates into improved achievement outcomes for EL-classified students. Leveraging a lottery system to randomly select dual immersion participants, Steele and colleagues (2017) evaluated the impact of Portland Public School District's two-way dual immersion programs.<sup>2</sup> The authors found that students assigned to participate in the dual immersion program beginning in kindergarten performed significantly better on 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA assessments, as compared to students who entered the lottery but did not enroll in dual

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<sup>2</sup> Two-way dual immersion programs often refer to bilingual educational models that serve both target language speakers and English monolingual students with the goal of both groups of students learning both languages.

immersion programs. Valentino & Reardon (2015) examined the trajectories of multiple cohorts of students using growth modeling and accounting for family program preference, finding that academic achievement for EL-classified students in transitional bilingual programs<sup>3</sup> grew faster in both ELA and math compared to EL-classified students in English immersion programs, while students in the district’s other bilingual education models grew at least as fast compared to those in English immersion programs. Benefits for Latino EL-classified students, whose outcomes often suggest large achievement gaps compared to non-Latino EL peers, were higher than those for students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

### **English Language Development Benefits**

Bilingual education also supports English language development, including the likelihood and timing of reclassification, or exit, from EL services. While early critics hypothesized that home language instruction would inhibit English language development, research shows the opposite—that home language literacy supports English development (Reese, Garnier, Gallimore, & Golderberg, 2000; Sparks, Patton, Ganschow & Humbach, 2009; Uchikoshi & Maniates, 2010).

Rigorous studies find bilingual education has a positive impact on English language development. Steele, et. al. (2017) found that participation in a dual immersion program resulted in a higher likelihood of reaching English proficiency thresholds and reclassifying out of EL services. Umansky & Reardon (2014) examined the trajectories of multiple cohorts of Latino EL-classified students from kindergarten through high school and found that students in bilingual programs made slower initial progress toward English proficiency compared to their peers in all-English instructional settings but caught up with and surpassed their peers by the end of elementary and

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<sup>3</sup> Transitional bilingual programs often refer to shorter duration bilingual education which typically ends midway through elementary grades.

beginning of middle school, with higher overall reclassification rates than students in other program models.

### **Home Language Development Benefits**

A critical benefit of bilingual education is the development of home language proficiency and literacy. U.S. schools have largely prioritized assessing English language development and focused less on students' home language development, making it difficult to identify the effects of bilingual education on students' home language development (Arteagoitia & Yen, 2020). Recently, however, there has been an increased focus on the development and use of assessments to measure target language proficiency (NASEM, 2017). For example, California is in the process of developing an assessment to measure students' proficiency in Spanish language arts. With these new assessments comes evidence that bilingual education programs support students' home language literacy and proficiency (Burkhauser, et al., 2016; Murphy, 2014). Compared to multilingual students that participate in predominantly English instruction, students in bilingual education programs develop home language proficiency at faster rates (Durán, et al., 2013), and bilingual programs that focus on developing full biliteracy are more effective at supporting students' home language development (Murphy, 2014).

### **Social-emotional and Sociocultural Benefits**

In addition to the academic and linguistic outcomes listed above, there is a growing body of work that finds that bilingual education supports social-emotional and sociocultural outcomes for EL-classified students. Key social-emotional benefits include positive identity development, encompassing a valuation of oneself and one's bilingualism, as well as a sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and confidence. Additionally, bilingual education supports sociocultural assets such as intergenerational communication, and connection to family and culture.

EL-classified students in English immersion programs enter stigmatizing spaces where they are defined by a language deficit (Dabach, 2014; Thompson, 2015); and this stigma can hurt positive identity development, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and confidence. Often, in these English-only environments, EL-classified students receive messages that undervalue their linguistic assets, especially in classrooms that position English as a necessary skill for accessing learning opportunities (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006). Students also may doubt their own academic ability because they internalize their placement in English language development classes as a negative signal about their intelligence (Dabach, 2014). Teachers in English-only instruction can contribute to the negative messaging that EL-classified students receive by holding lower expectations of EL-classified students (Umansky & Dumont, 2021; Murphy & Torff, 2019). In contrast with English-only environments, bilingual education can help buffer the stigma associated with EL classification by reinforcing the value of EL-classified students' linguistic, cultural, and familial assets.<sup>4</sup> Bilingual classrooms are more likely to be staffed by teachers who have received training on the importance of bilingualism and have shared experiences of being bilingual; these teachers can build trusting relationships with both EL-classified students and their families (Hopkins & Schutz, 2019; Flores & Smith, 2008; Nieto, 2017; Ocasio, 2014; Jimenez-Silva, Ruiz, & Smith, 2021).

In a study on the impact of EL classification on teacher perceptions of student ability, Umansky & Dumont (2021) found that bilingual settings buffer against negative perceptions of student ability. Moreover, survey and qualitative research find that EL-classified students who participate in bilingual education expressed positive sentiments towards bilingualism (Lindholm-Leary, 2016; Block & Vidaurre, 2019), and positive sentiments were higher in bilingual programs that

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<sup>4</sup> Bilingual education programs have also been critiqued for creating stigmatizing environments by separating EL-classified students from their non-EL peers. These critiques should inform program design to prioritize integration, valuation of students' home language, and providing appropriate resources to support high-quality facilities and programs (de Jong, 2006; DeNicolò, 2016; Gándara, 2020). We further discuss this in the implementation section.



prioritized students' development of full biliteracy (Lopez & Taskakkori, 2006). Other studies have found that dual immersion programs support students' sense of comfort and confidence in school, such as their attitude towards public speaking (Block & Vidaurre, 2019). Students in bilingual programs may feel a strong sense of belonging in school (de Jong, Coulter & Tsai, 2020) and develop self-efficacy and confidence in their academic and linguistic performance (Block & Vidaurre, 2019). By communicating that the partner language is valuable, bilingual education programs reinforce students' linguistic assets and valuation of their bilingual identity.

Programs that provide instruction on a student's primary language may also promote intergenerational communication, including building positive relationships between students and their families and communities (Mueller, Howard, Wilson, Gibson, & Katsos, 2020), as students develop the language skills to support broader communication with their family and community members (Lao, 2004; Wyman et al., 2010). Further, these programs may support students in developing a stronger connection with their culture and identity by integrating culturally responsive and sustaining education practices into the curriculum that connect to students' cultural heritage (Smallwood, et al., 2009). Family members may enroll their students in bilingual programs to avoid generational language loss, seeing bilingualism as an important way to maintain connection with their family and cultural heritage (Chaparro, 2019).

### **Benefits for Family Engagement in School**

Beyond direct benefits to students, the benefits of bilingual learning environments may extend to family engagement in school and students' education. There are a number of structural barriers that have been found to constrict or inhibit familial engagement in school for families of EL-classified students (Olivos, 2006). Bilingual education and shifts in school practices that come with offering instruction and services in students' home languages can help to address these barriers and facilitate increased engagement.

Families from households with a home language other than English face linguistic barriers to engaging with schools, such as attending parent-teacher conferences (Barrueco, Smith, & Stephens, 2016; Park & McHugh, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009) and supporting students' content learning in English-only classrooms (Farruggio, 2010). Many teachers do not have the linguistic assets or training to work with linguistically diverse families, which can negatively impact families' sense of agency and belonging in schools (Barrueco, Smith, & Stephens, 2016). Bilingual learning environments can remedy linguistic barriers that limit family engagement, as bilingual teachers are more likely to communicate with linguistically diverse families and often help peer monolingual English teachers communicate with families (Hopkins & Schutz, 2019). Bilingual teachers' assets are critical to creating inclusive school and family partnerships where linguistically diverse families can meaningfully participate in their child's education (Newcomer & Puzio, 2016).

Multilingual families may be better positioned to engage and support their child if their child is enrolled in a bilingual program, as research finds that parents feel better able to support their child's content learning at home if they understand their child's language of instruction (Farruggio, 2010). Families of students in bilingual programs report high rates of home practices to support academic development such as reading at home, as well as school engagement, and sense of belonging (Ramos, 2007).

### **Secondary School and College Readiness Benefits**

While the majority of bilingual education research focuses on outcomes in elementary school, there is also evidence that bilingual education can support students' academic opportunities and achievement in secondary schools, as well as their graduation and college readiness outcomes. Additionally, emerging research finds that students in bilingual programs may be more likely to enroll in formal postsecondary education.

Using a quasi-experimental design, Vega (2014) found that students in dual immersion programs maintained higher achievement in high school compared to peers not in dual immersion. EL-classified students who participated in bilingual education programs focused on full biliteracy were also found to have higher scores on college entrance exams than EL-classified students in other programs (Garza-Reyna, 2019; Vega, 2014). Further, students who maintained higher levels of bilingualism had a lower likelihood of dropping out of high school and a higher likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education (Rumbaut, 2014; Santibañez & Zárate, 2014). Latino students from immigrant families who maintained and developed their primary language to high levels were more likely to go to four-year, as opposed to two-year, colleges, where their chances of completing a bachelor's degree were higher (Santibañez & Zárate, 2014). This is especially critical as Latino students are less likely to complete a bachelor's degree as compared to almost all other racial/ethnic groups (McElrath & Martin, 2021).

There are multiple mechanisms that may contribute to the positive impacts of bilingual education on secondary and postsecondary outcomes. Bilingual education offered in secondary grades may provide EL-classified students with the opportunity to access courses that they would otherwise not have. Prior research demonstrates that secondary EL-classified students are disproportionately excluded from core content courses or placed in lower track courses, limiting opportunities to learn (Callahan, 2005; Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Morita-Mullaney, Renn, & Chiu, 2020; Umansky, 2016a). Instead of waiting for students to reach a certain level of academic proficiency in English, bilingual education allows for EL-classified students to complete core content courses in their own language. Additionally, bilingual education increases the likelihood of reclassification from EL services (Umansky & Reardon, 2014), which often opens up learning opportunities. While the impact of reclassification likely depends on contextual factors (Robinson-Cimpian & Thompson, 2016), quasi-experimental studies find that earlier reclassification positively

impacts the likelihood of being on track for graduation (Johnson, 2019) and graduating from high school (Carlson & Knowles, 2016). Earlier reclassification also opens up space in students' schedules, as reclassified students can access other courses needed for high school graduation and postsecondary opportunities instead of English language development coursework (Estrada, 2014).

### **Economic and Well-Being Benefits**

Ultimately, important outcomes of public education are to provide students with tools and skills to open economic opportunities and support their long-term well-being. Recent research finds that bilingual education benefits individuals' labor market outcomes and supports long-term health and well-being.

There are multiple ways that linguistic capital can translate into economic benefits. First, language is a form of social capital that can help increase social connections, which is likely rewarded in the marketplace. Second, bilingualism allows individuals to access a greater source of information, and in turn, knowledge, which can be rewarded in the market. Lastly, bilingualism can also be translated to “credentials” that signal value in the marketplace (Polanco, 2019). For example, bilingual individuals can list bilingualism on a resume or earn an official certification like the Seal of Biliteracy. As the U.S. grows increasingly diverse (Vespa, Lauren, & Armstrong, 2018), the demand for a bilingual workforce is also growing (Hamautel & Vilter, 2018). The number of individuals who speak a language other than English at home has more than tripled since 1980 and immigrants represent nearly one trillion dollars in spending power (New American Economy, n.d.; Zeigler & Camarota, 2019). The U.S. economy is increasingly intertwined with the forces of globalization, ensuring that economic activities integrate individuals from around the globe (Lyons, 2014; O'Rourke, 2019). Unsurprisingly, employers increasingly seek to hire bilingual individuals across occupations (New American Economy, 2017) and report a preference for bilingual candidates (Gándara & Acevedo, 2016).

Together, this evidence suggests that bilingualism is an asset that holds economic value. Individuals who maintain a higher level of bilingualism are more likely to be employed full time (Agirdag, 2014) and enter a higher prestige occupation (Rumbaut, 2014) compared to other linguistically diverse students who did not maintain proficiency in a second language. Agirdag (2014) used longitudinal data to explore how bilingualism is related to earnings while taking into account other important confounding factors, finding that individuals with high proficiency in two languages earned two to three thousand more dollars annually than English dominant individuals and individuals with more limited bilingual skills, a finding that has been echoed in other research (Cappellari & Di Paolo, 2018; Polanco, 2019; Rumbaut, 2014). As immigrant families tend to earn lower wages than non-immigrant families (Bernstein & Vilter, 2018; Joo & Reeves, 2015), it is important that education systems support practices that can boost economic well-being for immigrant families, such as bilingual education.

Beyond economic benefits, bilingual education also supports other benefits that contribute to individuals' quality of life and well-being. A body of research finds that bilingualism provides a range of cognitive benefits for young children (Adesope et al., 2010; Bialystok, 2018) as well as older children and adults (Barbu & Poncelet, 2020; Chung-Fat-Yim, Himel, & Bialystok, 2019). These cognitive benefits include improved executive functioning, such as working memory, metalinguistic awareness, and cognitive flexibility, all of which are associated with more efficient learning. There are also health benefits to bilingualism. In a meta-analysis of the relationship between bilingualism and Alzheimer's disease, Bialystok (2011) found that bilingualism is protective against Alzheimer's disease, and Fox and colleagues (2019) found that bilingualism delays the onset of dementia.

### **Public Benefits and Benefits Beyond EL-Classified Students**

Individual education and economic benefits tied to bilingual education can also provide wider societal benefits. For example, because bilingual education supports higher rates of college

completion for Latino students, and because bilingualism has been linked to higher wages, bilingual education and the development of a bilingual workforce can translate into higher tax revenue for local communities (Gándara & Acevedo, 2016). Higher educational attainment is also associated with other outcomes that have implications for society, including lower unemployment rates, increased civic engagement, and lower incidence of smoking (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013). By supporting the development of a bilingual workforce, bilingual education can also support national economic production. Having more bilingual employees may help to create more accessible systems for linguistically diverse populations, including those here in the U.S. who can benefit from being able to access goods, services, and information in their home language (Lyons, 2014), as well as those traveling from abroad (Gándara & Acevedo, 2016). Recent legislative changes that eliminate English-only policies in certain states were shaped, in part, by changed perceptions of the economic and social benefits of bilingualism for the country (Kelly, 2018).

This report focuses specifically on bilingual education as a service to support EL-classified students, but it is important to note that other groups of students also benefit from bilingual education. These include monolingual English-speaking students, bilingual students already proficient in English, and English-dominant speakers with a non-English heritage language. For example, in addition to the benefits of learning a new language, bilingual education has a positive effect on English monolingual students' academic achievement (Steele, et al., 2017). In addition to academic outcomes, bilingual education brings English-dominant students together with a linguistically diverse population, addressing linguistic segregation (Lindholm-Leary, 2016).

## Opportunity for Bilingual Education Expansion

It has been established that bilingual education is an effective service to support an array of outcomes for EL-classified students. Yet, policymakers and practitioners often struggle to translate evidence into sustainable change at the school and classroom level. Bilingual education itself is an example of this—as the implementation of high-quality, culturally sustaining bilingual education has faced political challenges (Hakuta, 2011; Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; Ovando, 2003), institutional racism (Flores & García, 2017), and insufficient resources (Gándara, 2015; Palmer, Henderson, Wall, Zuniga, & Berthelson, 2016). However, the current political and social moment has created a context where setting a goal of having a federal policy that establishes bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students within the next two and a half decades can draw on support from policymakers, educators, families, and students. In what follows, we describe key areas of opportunity for bilingual education expansion.

### **Bilingual Education Momentum and Policy Support**

Bilingual education opportunities are expanding across the U.S. in response to state and local actions, signaling momentum and policy support. States are prioritizing bilingual education through legislation (Boyle, et al., 2015; Kelly, 2018) and districts are engaging in grassroots efforts to expand their bilingual education offerings (Bernstein, Alvarez, Chaparro, & Henderson, 2021). While the roots of bilingual education are firmly established in the communities of those who immigrated to the U.S. and encountered linguistic barriers (Flores, 2016), current expansion is driven by the interests of both English-only and linguistically diverse communities (Cervantes-Soon, et al., 2017). There is diverse stakeholder support for the expansion of bilingual education offerings (Dorner, 2011, 2012; López, 2013). Asserting bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students can capitalize on this momentum, while being mindful of steering expansion towards ensuring that bilingual education is not only accessible for EL-classified students, but that programs

are designed and implemented with the goals of EL-classified students and their families at the forefront (Cervantes-Soon, et al., 2017; Flores & García, 2017; Palmer, et al., 2019).

Multiple states that once had restrictive language policies have reversed course in recognition of the benefits of bilingual education. This includes the overturn of Proposition 227 in California, supported by over 70% of California voters, and the repeal of English-only laws in Massachusetts (Mitchell, 2019). Further, bilingual mandates are already in effect in some states. Numerous states, such as Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Texas, stipulate that, in certain contexts, EL-classified students must be provided with the option to participate in a bilingual education program (Boyle, et al., 2015). These requirements are typically structured such that bilingual education is required when there is a concentration of EL-classified students in a specific grade with the same home language. The movement away from restrictive language policy and towards requiring bilingual education signals political feasibility and will.

The Seal of Biliteracy's widespread adoption also indicates support for, and valuation of, bilingualism and biliteracy. The Seal of Biliteracy, awarded to students proficient in two or more languages by the end of high school, is offered or in the process of being offered in all 50 states and Washington D.C. (Chou, 2020). Education's most important stakeholders, students themselves, have accessed the Seal of Biliteracy at an increasing rate (Chou, 2020). Students share that the award is important in the context of future economic and education opportunities, as well as connecting to their culture and heritage (Castro Santana, 2014; Davin & Heinke, 2018).

There are also shifts at the federal level that signal more support for bilingual education. The current secretary of education, Dr. Miguel Cardona, is a former EL-classified student whose doctoral research focused on educational equity in EL education. He has discussed the importance of bilingualism as part of his personal identity, building on earlier support from the previous secretary, John King (Cardona, 2011; Carey, 2021). During the 2023 National Association for Bilingual



Education conference, Secretary Cardona’s remarks included a statement focused explicitly on the U.S. Department of Education’s stance on multilingualism, stating “we at the Department of Education will work to help our students become multilingual” (Cardona, 2023), while also advocating that research on the positive impacts of bilingual education inform the expansion of bilingual programs. Secretary Cardona outlined key activities being undertaken at the federal level to support the expansion of bilingual education, including increased Title III funding, providing grants focused on supporting multilingual educators, and increasing the recognition that comes with the Seal of Biliteracy (Cardona, 2023).

There has also been a broader focus from the federal government on educational equity, with proposed policies to address educational disparities and support teacher diversity, including increased investment in bilingual education credentialing (Biden for President, 2021). This comes as the U.S. is facing a historical moment of recognition—with pressing calls for government accountability for policies that marginalize and oppress linguistically and racially diverse communities. Within these calls, education has been centered as a key equity lever to support students, families, and communities of color and those from immigrant-origin backgrounds.

### **Bilingual Education Pedagogy, Curricula, and Assessment**

As bilingual education efforts expand, there has been parallel investment in the development of materials to support biliteracy and bilingual programs. This includes bilingual curricula, materials, and texts, which have been developed with a focus on rigorous, culturally responsive materials (Dúran, Gorman, Kohlmeier, & Callard, 2016; Escamilla & Hopewell, 2010; Pérez Rosario & Cao, 2015; Rodríguez, 2014). Recent years are also marked by advancements in pedagogical concepts and skills in bilingual education. For example, there has been a growing understanding that translanguaging—encouraging fluid language use from across a student’s linguistic repertoire to

support learning—can support students linguistically, academically, and socioemotionally in bilingual classrooms (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Flores & García, 2013; García, 2020).

There has also been advancement in assessment in the context of bilingual education, which can support both formative and summative assessment practices. The field has moved towards assessing students not from a monolingual lens, but rather one that allows students to demonstrate their bilingual development (McClain, Oh, & Mancilla-Martinez, 2021). More assessments have been developed for use in bilingual environments (Durán, et al., 2019; Sugarman & Villegas, 2020), and educators in bilingual classrooms can adapt formative assessment processes that allow students to use their full linguistic skillset to inform instruction (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018).

### **Increasing Diversity**

A critical barrier towards bilingual education expansion has been a shortage of qualified, bilingual educators (Boyle, et al., 2015; Gándara & Escamilla, 2017). However, the U.S. is becoming increasingly multilingual, and therefore the pool of potential bilingual educators is growing. This represents an opportunity to address this shortage and, in turn, increase educator diversity (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017; Zeigler & Camarota, 2019). With increasing diversity has also come more attention towards creating pathways to bilingual teaching credentials. For example, districts in eleven states and Washington DC have developed grow your own bilingual educator programs (Garcia, 2020). We discuss the bilingual teacher pipeline in more depth in subsequent sections.

## **Policy Steps to Strengthen the Foundation for Bilingual Education as the Standard Service for EL-Classified Students**

Establishing bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students will require thoughtful attention towards incremental policy steps if such a shift is to be sustainable and result in improved outcomes for EL-classified students. Previous federal efforts to expand bilingual education opportunities have been compromised by a lack of attention to capacity and sustainability,

as well as by vague objectives (Escamilla, 2018; Gándara, 2015). In this section, we outline key federal, state, and local actions that will be integral to supporting the expansion of bilingual education, and ultimately the goal of establishing bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students through federal policy.

### **Federal Policy**

At the federal level, we advocate that key immediate or near-immediate steps focus on guidance for state and local education agencies, as well as investments in the multilingual educator pipeline. One step that can be taken is issuing non-binding guidance identifying biliteracy education as the strongest way to meet EL-classified students' core rights. Doing so can draw on the rich evidence outlined above, and will help those working in state and local education agencies make decisions about how to best support their EL-classified students. Such guidance can also include evidence-based steps for developing and sustaining programs, drawing on research as well as legal frameworks for evaluating EL instruction to support state and local education agencies in implementing bilingual programs.

A key cornerstone to supporting the expansion of bilingual education will be strengthening the multilingual educator pipeline. Currently, federal resources come through Title III and the National Professional Development Program (Office of English Language Acquisition, n.d.) to support bilingual teacher recruitment, development, and retention through funding partnerships between local education agencies and higher education institutions. The National Professional Development grants have supported innovative professional development supports focused on EL instruction across the country. Examples of programs have included EL-focused training and credentialing for pre- and in-service teachers, creating networked professional development supports, and supporting bilingual paraprofessionals in accessing their bilingual teaching credential (Casteel & Ballantyne, 2010). Expanding these federal resources will be a critical piece in supporting

the widespread expansion of bilingual and biliteracy education programs. As another important piece, the term “English learner” can be re-examined for an alternative label that more appropriately categorizes students by their potential for bilingualism and multilingualism.

### **State Policy**

As with federal policy, state policy can play a key role in strengthening and expanding the multilingual educator pipeline. One important step may be to examine current state bilingual credentialing pathways and identify constriction points such as program costs, logistical hurdles, or teacher compensation that can be addressed through policy action (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Torre Gibney, Kelly, Rutherford-Quach, Ballen Riccards, & Parker, 2021). For example, state agencies can work with teacher training institutions to start or expand affordable, accessible bilingual credentialing programs, while also working to streamline the process. Washington state provides an example of the teacher credentialing state agency partnering with higher education institutions to approve alternative pathways to a teaching credential for nontraditional teacher candidates (Rutherford-Quach, et al., 2021). Another key step is providing funds that local education agencies can access to support bilingual educators. Examples of current state programs include California’s Bilingual Teacher Professional Development program (California Department of Education, 2020) and Washington’s Bilingual Educators Initiative grants (Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board, 2017). Another way states can support multilingual educators is the provision of service scholarships or loan forgiveness programs, which provide financial support to offset or cover the costs of obtaining teaching credentials (Carver-Thomas, Kini, & Burns, 2020; Jimenez-Silva, et al., 2021; Torre Gibney, et al., 2021). Students who receive a Seal of Biliteracy may be a population to focus on for scholarships and/or loan forgiveness programs if they are interested in teaching, as is done in Washington state (Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board, 2017).

The state can also take steps to provide more robust resources and supports for local bilingual program expansion and development. Just as the federal government plays a role in developing guidance, states can work with districts to design and adapt bilingual and biliteracy education programs to meet local needs and build on local assets. Some examples of important elements to include are: incorporating staff, familial, and student input in the program design and goals, providing high-quality professional development, structuring program features to ensure that EL-classified students' core legal rights are met, and highlighting effective instructional practices, materials, assessments, and other resources (Fitzsimmons-Doolan, Palmer, & Henderson, 2017; Wall, Greer, & Palmer, 2019). States could also facilitate networked learning opportunities across districts focused on bilingual education. Such opportunities could come through regional education agencies, professional learning funds, and conferences. Beyond districts, states also have the opportunity to work with Indigenous stakeholders to adapt bilingual credentialing programs and curricula to ensure that there are also bilingual programs and credentialing pathways focused on heritage language development for Indigenous communities. An example here comes from Washington, as the First People's teaching certification program is a bilingual credentialing pathway overseen by the tribal government (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.).

There is also a need to intentionally integrate bilingual education into the broader framework of state policymaking. All the complex elements that comprise general education policy, such as accountability, academic standards, assessment, professional development, and funding, have important ramifications for bilingual services (Menken & Solorza, 2014). States can take steps to ensure that the structures of state education agencies align with, rather than undermine, bilingual education. Important steps are including bilingual education experts in conversations around general education policy decisions, ensuring there are dedicated roles for supporting bilingual education and

policy, and developing structures focused on addressing implications for bilingual education that stem from general education policy decisions.

Other ways in which the state can support more expansive bilingual education include funding opportunities for new or existing bilingual programs, developing formative and summative language proficiency assessments across multiple languages, investing in high-quality bilingual, biliterate curricula, and using data to analyze and improve bilingual education programs.

### **Local Policy**

We also advocate that districts and schools make important policy changes to foster bilingual program development. Given the wide-ranging local contexts, districts and schools have a large role to play in creating bilingual policies and programs adapted to their unique contexts. As a clear step towards bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students, local education agencies can engage in stakeholder-led bilingual program planning and implementation. Integrating multiple perspectives into policy design can help to create policies responsive to students, families, and educators (Boyle, et al., 2015; Fitzsimmons-Doolan, Palmer, & Henderson, 2017), while failing to do so may result in program models that do not reflect the goals and interests of diverse stakeholders (Sampson, 2019).

A key piece will be engaging the families of EL-classified students and encouraging buy-in. This can be done, in part, through an information campaign to connect with the families of EL-classified students to provide robust information on the structure and benefits of bilingual education, as well as solicit input into program design and implementation. Some families may be wary of bilingual programs, wanting to ensure that their children will be able to develop English language proficiency, and concerned about schools using their children as language models for English-dominant students (Ee, 2018; Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Information should be disseminated widely and through accessible, relational channels such that parents have full knowledge of the

benefits of bilingual and biliteracy education. Additionally, there should be opportunities for continual feedback that is set up to ensure programs prioritize the perspectives of multilingual families and communities. Requiring that schools and districts engage meaningfully with families is not unprecedented, as current federal legislation mandates the formation of parent committees to access Title VI funding (ESSA, 2015, § 6114[c]). We also encourage continual data use to ensure that programs are supporting EL-classified students' access and outcomes.

Echoing federal and state recommendations, local education agencies have a role to play in fostering a multilingual educator workforce. This may include investing resources or participating in local pathways to teaching, such as grow-your-own programs which support local community members through the process of becoming a credentialed educator (Carver-Thomas, et al., 2020; Torre Gibney, et al., 2021). Examples of grow-your-own programs focused on bilingual educators can be found in Washington (García, Manuel, & Buly, 2019) and Oregon (Garcia, 2017), where districts partnered with universities to support bilingual paraprofessionals and community members in securing a teaching credential. Chicago provides an example of a bilingual teacher residency program, through which a cohort of residents work with a mentor teacher while taking courses towards a teaching credential and Masters degree, receiving a salary from Chicago Public Schools, a zero-interest loan, and discounted tuition (Garcia & Garza, 2019). Local schools and districts can also focus on improving working conditions for educators to attract and retain bilingual educators by providing sufficient resources, training, and opportunities for collaboration (Torre Gibney, et al., 2021).

## **Bilingual Education as the Standard Service: Key Considerations**

In this section, we move from incremental policy goals to a focus on implementing a federal policy that establishes bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students. We highlight key implementation considerations and challenges. This includes the topics related to

policy design, resources, segregation, sustaining programs through secondary school, low-incidence contexts, accountability, and navigating the social and political context.

## **Policy Design**

There is incredible diversity in the EL-classified student population. Some districts serve thousands of EL-classified students, while others serve very few. While Spanish is by far the most prevalent language spoken by EL-classified students nationally, in many locales other languages are as or more prevalent (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). There are also differences in state and local infrastructure. Some locales have a long history of serving EL-classified students and providing bilingual education opportunities, while others are experiencing rapid demographic changes (Hopkins, Lowenhaupt, & Sweet, 2015). Thus, as we look towards a federal policy that would establish bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students, a “one size fits all” policy will not work for each state, district, and school. Instead, such a policy should recognize that every context will be unique, and therefore be flexible enough to work at the local level, while not compromising the educational opportunities of EL-classified students in the name of local control. Further, such a policy should provide context-responsive incentives for districts and states to encourage high-quality programs.

This means that there will need to be space for districts and schools to adapt current bilingual and biliteracy models, programs, curricula, and supports in response to their current capacity, student population, and community, potentially even reimagining bilingual education outside of the program models that have often driven uptake. Policy can, and should, also anticipate that programs will grow and mature alongside capacity building efforts, meaning that some programs may start out less expansive, but grow into more robust bilingual education services. While being flexible, however, it is important that the policy design, and accompanying incentives and supports, ensure that bilingual education services are not reduced to programs that “check the



box”—but are high-quality, designed to meet the core rights of EL-classified students, culturally-sustaining, and to the extent possible, focus on goals of full bilingual and biliterate proficiency.

Creating a policy that is flexible, but also clear in its goals and with enough accountability, will require a balance of what Hakuta (2011) describes as “carrots and sticks”—identifying “carrot” policy levers that encourage bilingual and biliteracy education and “sticks” that regulate and mandate. There are multiple examples of state policies that require bilingual education in certain contexts; such policies may provide a logical launching point for a broader federal policy. As discussed earlier, many states require bilingual education to be offered when there are a specific number of EL-classified students in a grade who speak the same language. Legislative examples can be found in Illinois (810 Ill. Comp. Stat. § 5/14C), New Jersey (N.J. Rev. Stat. § 6A:15-1.4), New York (New York Education Law § CR Part 154), Texas (Tex. Bus. & Com. Code § 89.1201), and Wisconsin (Wis. Stat § 115.95). A similar design can help to balance the federal priority of making bilingual education the standard service for EL-classified students with local constraints.

Importantly, if using a threshold design to guide where programs are required, there should be careful consideration as to how the policy frames instruction in contexts where bilingual education is not feasible. This language will be important and should address how to determine if providing bilingual education is feasible, and how to provide effective instruction when it is not yet feasible.

In cases where bilingual education is not yet feasible, instruction should be guided by evidence on effective instruction for EL-classified students. This includes the provision of home language supports, leveraging students’ experiences and linguistic strengths, and, critically, ensuring students are provided with access to the same grade-level content as peers and the necessary supports to meaningfully engage (Brooks & Karathanos, 2009; Goldenberg, 2008; 2013). In such contexts, incentives can still be utilized to encourage these practices, perhaps through funds

specifically earmarked to support locales where bilingual education is not yet feasible given the student population characteristics.

Other policies draw more from the “carrot” design. States such as Delaware, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Utah offer grants to support bilingual education programs, although the scope of these programs varies and may be limited (Boyle, et al., 2015). Texas takes a different tact, offering extra funding for each student enrolled in a bilingual program (House Bill 3, 2019). Federally, financial incentives can be provided through Title III, similar to how funds were previously allocated under the Bilingual Education Act (1968) to support programs, or under Title V of No Child Left Behind (2001) through the now-discontinued Foreign Language Assistance Program (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, n.d.).

## **Resources**

The implementation of wide-scale bilingual education will require resources. Former and current bilingual programs have struggled to sustain their programs due to insufficient resources (Gándara, 2015; Palmer, et al., 2016; Valle, 1998). There are likely start-up, and to a lesser extent, ongoing, implementation costs tied to staffing, materials, and professional development (Lara-Alecio, Galloway & Mahadevan, 2010; Sugarman, 2016). However, it is well-established that all programs that adequately support EL-classified students require funds above and beyond that of non-EL classified students, and current funding levels are largely considered inadequate (Gándara & Rumberger, 2008; Jimenez-Castellanos, & Topper, 2012). Therefore, the investment that would be needed to support the expansion of bilingual education opportunities is arguably an overdue response to chronic underfunding of EL education. Additionally, there is little evidence to support the claim that bilingual education would be significantly more expensive to provide than other EL program models once implemented (Crawford, 2008; Steele, et al., 2018). Many of the reoccurring costs associated with bilingual education, such as staff salaries and facilities, are the same as costs

associated with other EL programs. Different costs, such as additional professional development, materials, and administrative costs, will likely be higher in the implementation period (Lara-Alecio, Galloway & Mahadevan, 2010; Steele, et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, the expansion we advocate for would require an investment of resources, especially to support implementation efforts. The federal government can work with state and local education agencies to provide appropriate resources to strengthen existing bilingual education programs and support the implementation of new programs. Doing so would entail identifying existing funding streams through which funds specifically allocated to EL education could be used to provide bilingual education and creating new opportunities to access funding for program development and sustainment. Policy can turn to research to identify the necessary elements to support implementation. Examples include knowledgeable school leaders (Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008; Menken & Solorza, 2015), trained bilingual staff who represent the diversity of students and are supported in their work (Amos, 2016; Téllez & Varghese, 2013), high-quality instructional materials (Lara-Alecio, et al., 2010), and resources to support family engagement (Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008; Howard, et al., 2018; Collier & Thomas, 2004).

### **Avoiding Segregation While Centering EL-Classified Students**

A tension inherent in some bilingual and biliteracy education programs is that programs exclusively serving EL-classified students with a specific home language may exacerbate within or between school segregation (Garver, 2020). EL-classified students already experience segregation along racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic dimensions (Gándara, 2010), and we advocate that bilingual education be provided in ways that minimize segregation. Two-way dual immersion programs are a potential way to integrate linguistically and racially diverse students (Gándara, 2020). However, tensions may arise if these programs, by virtue of serving English monolingual students and families, are less centered around the needs and experiences of EL-classified students. Thus,

questions remain—how to implement bilingual and biliteracy education programs as the standard service for EL-classified students without creating or exacerbating segregated environments, while also ensuring that services and programs are centered on the needs and experiences of EL-classified students and families?

This will necessarily look different across locales. In contexts where two-way dual immersion models are feasible, such programs can help to address segregation by being located at multiple schools that are accessible to students from a variety of neighborhoods. In cases such as these, and similar contexts, schools and districts should center the voices of EL-classified students and families in program development and sustainment (Wall, et al., 2019). Districts will also need to select locations to host programs, either as whole school programs or as programs within a school, with potentially only one program each at the elementary and secondary levels. Careful consideration should guide decisions around program location, transportation, and ensuring that sufficient resources are allocated. In contexts where bilingual programs are only provided for EL-classified students and other heritage language speakers within a larger, non-bilingual school, there can be efforts to create integrated experiences throughout the day—through, for example coursework and recreation (de Jong, 2006; DeNicolo, 2016). Further, bilingual programs should not be sequestered to certain parts of campus in ways that feel exclusionary, nor set up in ways that create stigmatizing experiences for students (DeNicolo, 2016).

### **Sustaining Bilingual Education Through Secondary School**

Another key tension arises when thinking about how bilingual education can be sustained through secondary school, which is critical for bilingual programs that aim for full bilingualism and biliteracy. A key concern that may arise is the stability of funding streams. Those in districts and schools may express concern that, as students are reclassified (which is increasingly likely as they progress from elementary to secondary school) critical funds for EL services may dry up, creating

potentially unstable funding streams. A second concern is the nature of secondary school coursework, where there is more differentiation by level and interest than elementary school. It may seem difficult to structure bilingual education services that allow students to access a range of opportunities, such as advanced coursework or enrichment opportunities, while in bilingual education programs (Morita-Mullaney, et al., 2020). Finally, there may be open questions as to how to best navigate staffing challenges.

Funding concerns can be addressed through funding bilingual and biliteracy services through dedicated funding streams and not tying funds to EL classification. Given federal requirements around allowable uses, bilingual programs are already likely to be funded primarily through sources other than Title III (Sugarman, 2021). Further, as discussed earlier, additional costs are likely not significantly higher than for other programs. With regard to coursework, one way to support the integration of bilingual education with rigorous or specialized coursework may be drawing upon the International Baccalaureate program structure, which positions multilingualism as a key goal alongside rigorous instruction (Aldana & Mayer, 2014; Lew, 2020). Staffing needs will be complex, yet can be planned for and addressed. Again, we note the importance of supporting a robust pipeline of bilingual educators. Additionally, it may be necessary to further incentivize educators to become secondary school bilingual teachers in subject areas facing shortages, such as science and math, to facilitate bilingual opportunities across a range of courses and the development of biliteracy.

### **Contexts with Few EL-Classified Students or Many Home Languages**

It will not always be feasible, given the variability in EL-classified student populations, to create and sustain full biliteracy education programs in every district, although this can be a focal goal as programs develop. Two such contexts are those where there are relatively few EL-classified students in a district, and those where there is not a concentration of EL-classified students with the same home language. Of note, EL-classified students are, in large part, clustered in a subset of

districts and schools. In 2014-15, of all EL-classified students nationally, 46% were in districts where 20% or more of students were EL-classified, and 61% were in schools where 20% or more of students were EL-classified (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

Nevertheless, there will be many districts where EL-classified students represent a smaller proportion of students, where there are students whose guardians chose not to enroll them in bilingual education, or there will not be a sizeable group of EL-classified students who speak the same home language. There will need to be explicit guidance for these contexts, including how to determine if it is feasible to implement and sustain a bilingual or biliteracy program. If it is not feasible, guidance can focus on providing evidence-based, appropriate services instead, as well as identifying a pathway towards eventually providing bilingual and biliteracy education. As we discuss above, evidence-based practices that draw from the spirit of bilingual education, while not being full programs, can both signal a valuation of students' home language and support engagement and learning. Such practices include the provision of home language supports and materials and leveraging students' experiences and linguistic strengths (Brooks & Karathanos, 2009; Goldenberg, 2008, 2013). Other instructional practices include making explicit connections to students' home language during instruction and drawing upon home language skills to scaffold learning (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2009; Walqui & Bunch, 2019). Beyond these supports, however, two-way dual immersion programs may be a good fit for lower-incidence contexts, as programs serve both EL-classified and non-EL students.

### **Accountability**

Accountability is a hallmark of the modern U.S. public education system, and the metrics used to evaluate school performance, such as standardized assessments, can shape local level teaching practices (Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). These changes may not always be beneficial for EL-classified students. In particular, bilingual education programs have been constricted or

watered down in response to high-stakes testing for accountability purposes, which rely on standardized assessment scores from English-administered assessments (Menken & Solorza, 2014). As research suggests that those in bilingual education programs initially see slower growth in English-administered assessments and longer time to reclassification (Umansky & Reardon, 2014), schools or districts may fear penalization for not meeting expected accountability benchmarks.

This may represent an opportunity for more expansive change, moving from accountability indicators that research has found to be unreliable for EL-classified students (Abedi, 2004) towards indicators that capture meaningful information on students' opportunity to learn. For example, creating new accountability indicators such as enrollment rates in grade-level or advanced core content coursework can help to better understand inequities in access to curricula, which may be more informative for ensuring equal access to learning opportunities. Additionally, including bilingualism and biliteracy as accountability metrics, through target language proficiency on language arts assessments or Seal of Biliteracy uptake, may incentivize local investment in bilingual instruction and ensure primary language instruction is not positioned as less valued than English language development. Formative assessment may be of particular importance when supporting EL-classified students and can become more prominent in accountability policy moving forward (Heritage, Walqui, & Linqunti, 2013). This will require investment in the development of language arts assessments in non-English languages.

### **Navigating Larger Social and Political Challenges**

As policymakers and educators grapple with implementing a policy that centers bilingualism, biliteracy, and multilingualism as an asset in a country that has seen bitter debates over immigration and language, it is critical to ensure that cultural and political stigma do not, from the start, stall out bilingual education expansion, nor threaten the sustainability of such expansion. As we've argued above, the political conditions of today are more favorable to the expansion of high-quality,

equitable bilingual education. The population of EL-classified students is much larger, and present in far more districts and states than before, with support for immigrants, bilingualism, and biliteracy evident. However, making the full shift we are advocating for will require that policymakers and key stakeholders work together to address the cultural stigma that surrounds bilingual education (Hakuta, 2011). Further, it will require coordination across different departments, agencies, and organizations to adapt different elements in the education system to reflect the new context. Garnering support will be critical to guide efforts that are unified, focused on evidence, and recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as integral to an inclusive education for EL-classified students.

Bilingual education alone is not a panacea for the barriers that have long excluded EL-classified students from equitable opportunities. Critical conversations with stakeholders who study and work in bilingual education programs can highlight existing challenges and inform implementation. These challenges include, but are not limited to, the imposition of language and racial hierarchies that marginalize linguistically diverse students within and outside of bilingual education programs (Cervantes-Soon, et al., 2017; Flores & García, 2017) and under-resourcing of EL services (Palmer, et al., 2016; Valle, 1998). The majority of EL-classified students face barriers related to poverty and segregation and are clustered in struggling schools (Gándara, 2010). These are critical barriers that bilingual education alone cannot address, although equity-oriented bilingual education programs that both recognize and address these critical social issues can be part of a system-wide shift towards more equitable schooling for linguistically diverse students.

## **Conclusion**

In this piece, we make the case that the education and social policy agenda for the next twenty-five years include establishing, through federal policy, bilingual education as the standard service for EL-classified students. This case is substantiated by a wide body of literature that identifies the benefits of bilingual education for EL-classified students. The political and social



context, now and looking forward, represents a convergence of factors that makes this the opportune moment to support the widespread expansion of bilingual and biliteracy education programs, moving towards bilingual education as the standard service, rather than the exception, for EL-classified students. Not only are the conditions favorable, but there is an urgency to do so. There is evidence that, with little access to bilingual education (Zehler, et al., 2003), EL-classified students are underserved. Core rights are unmet, and linguistic assets that, when supported, can turn into social and economic benefits, are overlooked in favor of a focus on English acquisition. EL-classified students are likely facing multiple challenges, including poverty, segregation, and discrimination. As Agirdag (2014) notes, “...linguistic assimilation policies do not merely *steal* from people, they steal from those who already have *less*” (p. 457). It is time to shift away from linguistic assimilation policies and towards language instructional policies that recognize and nurture multilingualism and multiliteracy.

We advocate that the federal government establish bilingual education as the standard program of instruction for EL-classified students, where possible and under appropriate conditions. In recognition, however, of the groundwork that will need to be done before such a policy can be passed and implemented, we also advocate for a set of incremental federal, state, and local policies that focuses on strengthening guidance and the multilingual educator workforce as we look toward bilingual education as the standard. As these steps move forward, they will require establishing or bolstering funding streams to support capacity building, investment in the development of guidance tailored to a variety of contexts, a keen policy focus on training, recruiting, and retaining bilingual educators, and ongoing research and development activities related to effective curricula, materials, instruction, and assessment.

For the promise of bilingual and biliteracy education to result in improved outcomes for EL-classified students, thoughtfully designed policies will be critical, building in flexibility to adapt to

local contexts, but with strong enough guideposts to ensure that EL-classified students have access to robust bilingual, biliteracy education programs. Policy can incentivize implementation efforts that focus on developing and sustaining programs that support students' bilingual and biliterate development, engage families, support educators, and ensure that all EL-classified students have access to rich, meaningful learning opportunities. The result, we believe, will be a policy agenda driven by rigorous evidence that highlights the numerous benefits of bilingual education, biliteracy, and bilingualism, while signaling clear valuation for EL-classified students' linguistic and cultural heritage.

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