



FACT SHEET

California's Bilingual Teacher Shortage

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Introduction

California has set visionary goals and established strong policies to increase access to bilingual programs for all students, especially multilingual students who already speak languages other than English at home.¹ With California TK-12 public schools enrolling more than 2.1 million multilingual students, neglecting this linguistic asset that students bring to school means that students may not become biliterate, missing out on the advantages biliteracy provides as they develop and transition into postsecondary education and the workforce.

California should lead the nation in multilingual student access to bilingual programs. This is part of the vision that Californians Together has set with the [Multilingual Education for All \(MLE4ALL\)](#) campaign, “a statewide campaign designed to build the conditions, policy commitments, and public will needed to make multilingualism a defining feature of California’s P-12 education system.” However, expanding and establishing bilingual programs hinges on the foundation of having the necessary bilingual teacher workforce.

This fact sheet aims to once again shed light on the bilingual teacher workforce needs in California, providing an update since the California Budget & Policy Center last published in May 2023, [***Bilingual Teacher Shortage Threatens Students’ Bilingual Opportunity***](#). The data can help state, county, and district leaders understand the bilingual teacher needs while the recommendations can be a starting point to develop state and local actions to one-day make California the national leader in access to bilingual education.

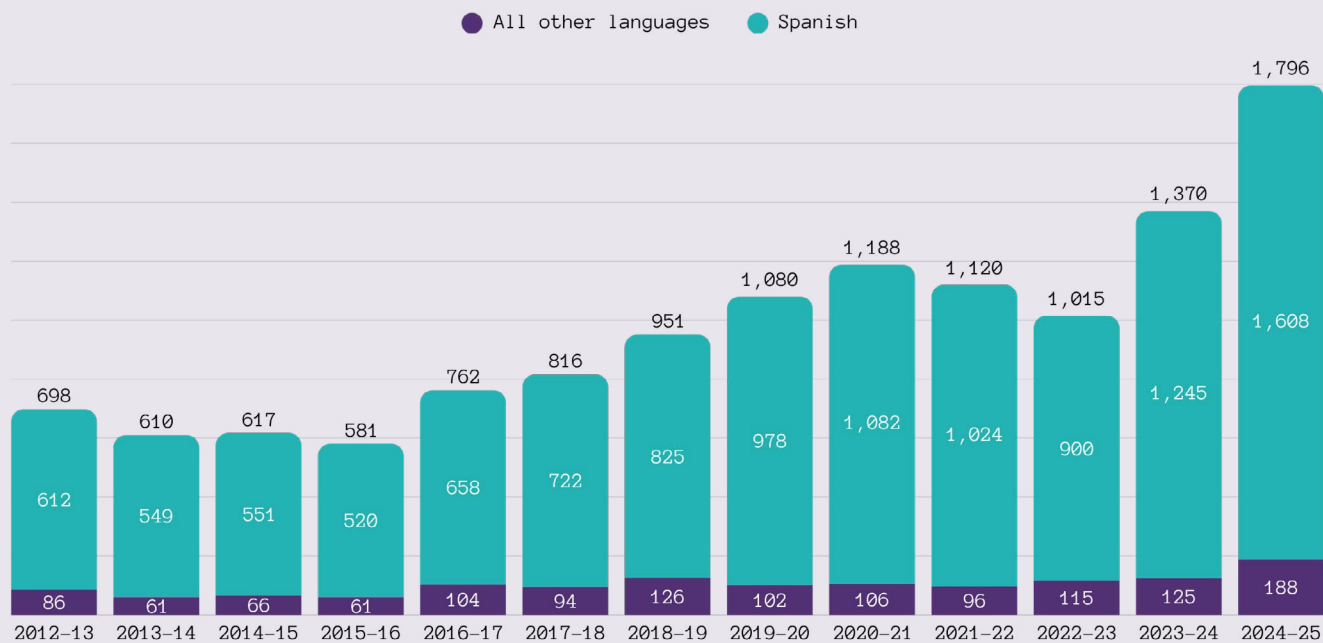
1 For the purposes of this publication, multilingual students are students who are identified as coming from a home where another language other than English is spoken. This includes 925,907 English learner, 900,599 reclassified fluent English proficient, and 273,770 initial fluent English proficient students during the 2025-26 school year.

The Bilingual Teacher Shortage

Since 2016-17, California has had an increase in the number of adequately trained bilingual education teachers. The chart below shows the number of bilingual authorizations issued each year since 2012-13. Bilingual authorizations in Spanish have by far driven the growth in authorizations, especially accelerating after 2017-18, when the Bilingual Teacher Professional Development Program was initially implemented. Authorizations in other languages have also seen growth but at a much slower rate.

There are also some unique patterns by credential type. Out of the 12,604 bilingual authorizations over the period, the majority (nearly 70 percent) were issued to teachers working in the elementary grades (multiple subject teaching credentials) and about 30 percent to teachers in middle and high school (single subject teaching credentials). The number of authorizations issued on other credential types are much smaller; for example, authorizations on the recently created PK-3 early childhood education (ECE) specialist credential total 22 from 2023-24 to 2024-25. To improve on this growth and support students to achieve biliteracy, California must continue to address the shortage of adequately trained bilingual education teachers.

New Bilingual Authorizations Rising, with Spanish Growing Fastest



Note: The chart reflects the number of bilingual authorizations issued on a certificate or credential during each fiscal year, not a cumulative total of all authorizations.

Source: [Bilingual Authorizations Issued on a Certificate/Credential](#) from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), as well as data requested from CTC for the years prior to 2020-21.

Despite growth, the number of new authorizations pales in comparison to the number of multilingual students in the state. The magnitude of this shortage can be measured by looking at the number of teachers who have been authorized to teach bilingually over the last decade and comparing it to the number of multilingual students. The ratios below show a large imbalance between 1) the number of students who live in homes where one of the top ten languages is spoken and 2) teachers who earned an authorization to teach in those languages from 2014-15 to 2024-25. This imbalance is much larger in some languages. For example, Filipino shows a student-to-bilingual authorization ratio of nearly 15,000, a language that has had only three authorizations between 2014-15 and 2024-25. Others such as Punjabi have not had a single authorization during this same period with over 22,000 students across the state.

New Bilingual Authorizations Rising, with Spanish Growing Fastest

Language	Students from Homes Where a Language Other Than English Is Spoken	Total Authorizations Issued Between 2014-15 and 2024-25	Student-to-Bilingual Authorization Ratio
Spanish	1,902,965	10,113	188.2
Vietnamese	73,085	57	1,282.2
Mandarin	66,601	639	104.2
Cantonese	44,785	68	658.6
Filipino	44,277	3	14,759.1
Arabic	32,268	12	2,689.0
Korean	32,201	157	205.1
Punjabi	22,590	0	N/A
Russian	22,289	3	7,429.7
Farsi	19,237	2	9,618.4

Note: Student-to-authorization ratios are calculated using average annual enrollment of multilingual students and total new bilingual authorizations issued from 2014-15 to 2024-25.

Source: Budget Center Analysis of California Department of Education and Commission on Teacher Credentialing data.

Recommendations

The bilingual teacher shortage is a significant obstacle for California students to achieve biliteracy. Investments in professional development such as the Bilingual Teacher Professional Development Program, have contributed to progress in addressing this gap. However, there is still a significant need for state and local action.

State Recommendations: Invest in the Expansion of Bilingual Teacher Pathways

Addressing the bilingual teacher shortage must focus on the recruitment and preparation of new educators and in supporting teachers currently in the profession. The state can:

- **Continue to invest in proven programs** such as Bilingual Teacher Residencies and the Bilingual Teacher Professional Development Program.
- **Incentivize pathways starting from middle and high school.** Leverage current funds (such as Career Technical Education Pathway) and invest in new grants to help districts establish pathways with a focus on encouraging students on the path to the State Seal of Biliteracy to participate and then support their enrollment in bilingual teacher preparation programs.
- **Lower costs for teacher candidates** by providing grants such as the Golden State Teacher Grant and expanding four-year integrated pathways into teaching.
- **Support credentialing programs** to expand their capacity to meet and prepare bilingual teacher candidates by supporting and hiring bilingual faculty. Recommendations from a May 2026 brief by Californians Together and California Association for Bilingual Teacher Education ([*Toward 2030: A Grounded Call for Action to Strengthen California's Bilingual Teacher Pipeline*](#)), include:
 - » Formally recognize and resource the role of the Bilingual Authorization Coordinator.
 - » Establish a tiered, sustained funding architecture for bilingual teacher preparation programs.

Local Recommendations: Build Partnerships to Address the Bilingual Teacher Pipeline

Local leaders can create partnerships between county offices of education, school districts, colleges and universities, and other partners in order to recruit current staff and students who are bilingual into the teaching profession. The following are several opportunities that local leaders can seize upon to improve and accelerate the local recruitment of bilingual educators:

- **Expand bilingual teacher residencies.** Teacher residency programs in California address teacher shortages by combining university coursework with hands-on training in high-need subjects. These programs can offer additional opportunities to ensure that candidates receive a bilingual authorization.
- **Establish pathways starting with middle and high school students.** Local leaders can create pathways to the teaching profession (and other high-need fields where bilingual staff are needed) for students that are on the path toward the State Seal of Biliteracy. This can be done by leveraging partnerships between teacher preparation programs and school districts in order to motivate and inform students about the needs and benefits of becoming a bilingual teacher and what a career in education looks like. If just five percent of the over 75,000 students who earned the State Seal of Biliteracy in 2025 were recruited and supported to become bilingual teachers, that would be 3,750 new teachers shrinking the shortage statewide.

Conclusion

Building the bilingual educator workforce required to provide access for California’s 2.1 million multilingual students requires sustained commitment, strategic investment, and collaborative action. The data and insights presented in this fact sheet are intended to inform state and local education leaders about the urgent needs facing our schools and to serve as a conversation starter regarding what is truly possible when policy aligns with vision.

Ultimately, addressing the bilingual teacher shortage is the cornerstone of realizing a future where high-quality bilingual education is not an exception, but the default standard for English learners and other multilingual students across the state. California has both the opportunity and the responsibility to become the national leader in access to bilingual education, setting a benchmark for multilingual equity and achievement. By acting on these recommendations today, state and local leaders can turn this vision into reality—ensuring that every multilingual student develops the biliteracy skills needed to thrive in higher education, the workforce, and beyond.

This report was co-authored by **Erik Saucedo**, Senior Policy Analyst at the California Budget & Policy Center; and **Manuel Buenrostro**, Policy Director at Californians Together.

The **California Budget & Policy Center** (Budget Center) is a nonpartisan research and analysis nonprofit advancing public policies that expand opportunities and promote well-being for all Californians. **Californians Together** is a coalition championing the academic success and wellbeing of California’s multilingual learners. Working at the intersection of research, advocacy, practice, and policy, we dismantle historic inequities and build an education system where linguistic and cultural diversity is recognized as a strength.

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