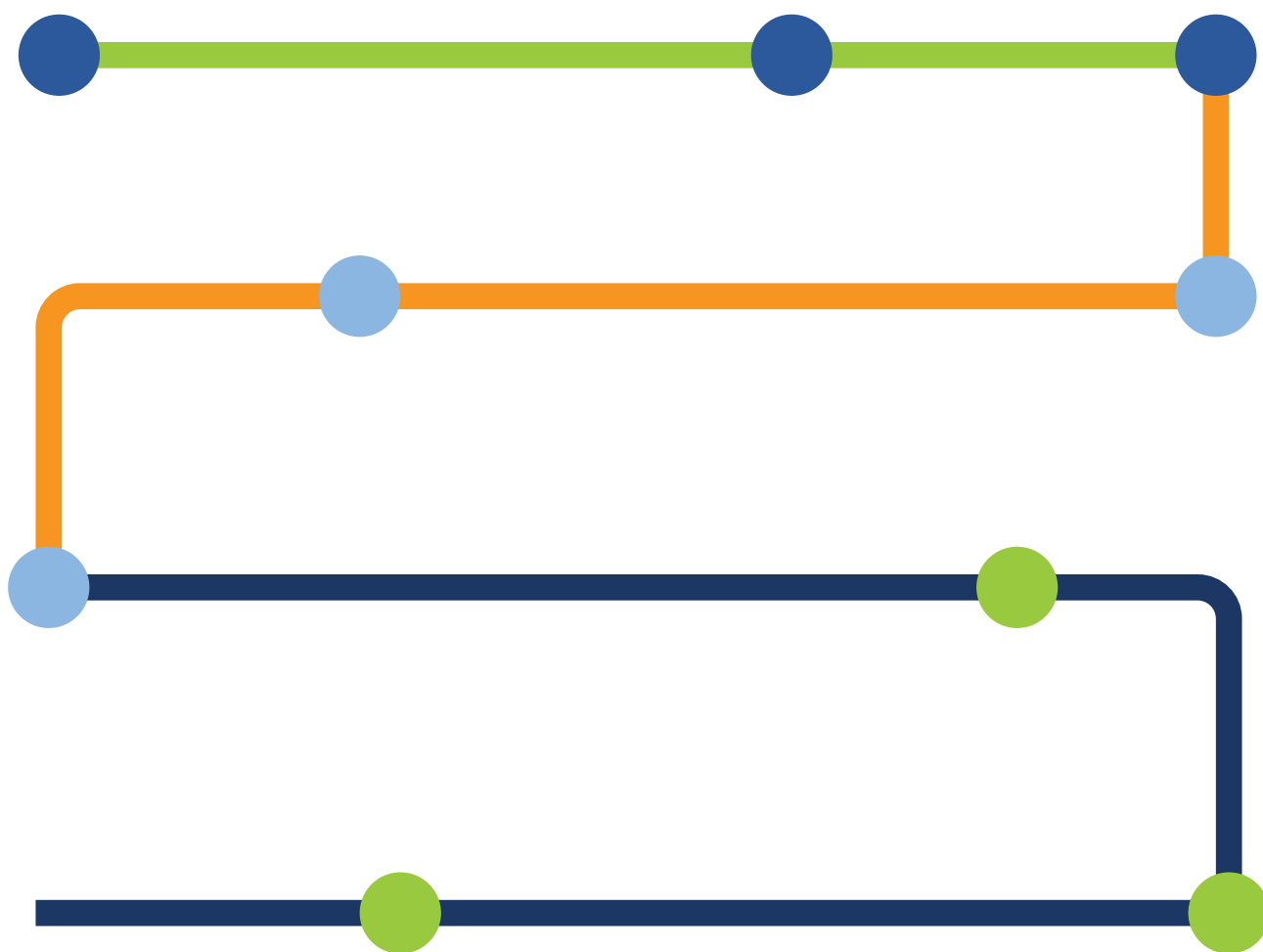


Teach Plus California Emergent
Bilingual Change Agent Network:

Lessons Learned from Teacher-Led Implementation of the California English Learner Roadmap



Teach Plus launched the California Bilingual Change Agent Network (EBCAN) under the premise that no one knows better than teachers the potential in all our students, particularly those for whom English is not their home language. Teachers see first-hand the social, cultural, and linguistic assets these students bring to their classrooms, as well as the barriers that many of them face in succeeding academically. The challenges of the COVID-19 crisis and distance learning have shone a bright light on, and in some cases exacerbated, the barriers our emergent bilingual students are facing.



In 2017, California adopted the [California English Learner Roadmap: Strengthening Comprehensive Educational Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners \(EL Roadmap\)](#) that focused on supporting our large population of English learners, which now accounts for more than 1.1 million students in California. The EL Roadmap includes principles intended to guide all levels of the system towards a coherent and aligned set of practices, services, relationships, and approaches to teaching and learning that together create a powerful, effective, 21st century education for our English learners (ELs). But having guiding principles is not enough. The most impactful way to close opportunity gaps for emergent bilingual learners is to bring awareness and training rooted in the principles of the EL Roadmap directly to classroom teachers.

To make this goal a reality, Teach Plus launched the EBCAN Network in 2021. We selected highly effective teacher leaders from across California to serve as Change Agent Fellows. The Change Agents' goal was to identify and lead specific schoolwide change at their individual sites that would better support the needs of their Dual Language Learners (DLL) and/or ELs. We also strengthened and amplified the impact of the Change Agent Fellows by connecting them to one another and cultivating a network of strong teacher leaders who, together, work on shared problems of practice and respond to additional leadership opportunities as they arise. EBCAN's work resulted in a cadre of DLL/EL teacher leaders equipped and empowered to continue leading change on behalf of their students and their families.

By identifying teacher leaders who had the greatest proximity to the needs of our learners, providing them with support and necessary skill-building, and strengthening a distributed leadership model, we leveraged untapped talent to accelerate the pace and model best practices of serving English learners in schools. We believe that only with dynamic, well-prepared teachers in the lead will schools be able to serve the students with the greatest need.

LESSONS FOR EDUCATION LEADERS: EBCAN NETWORK REFLECTIONS

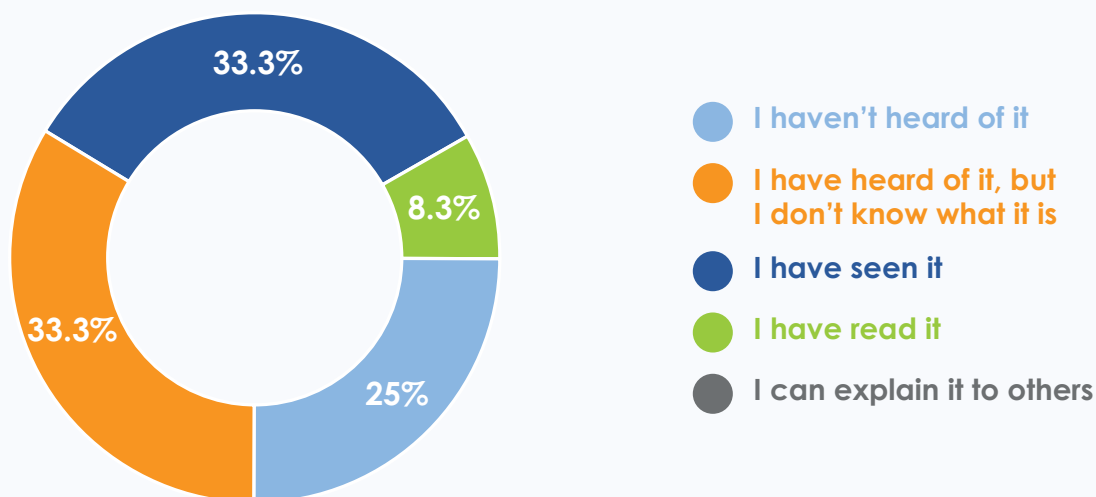
At the same time that the Change Agents were able to elevate the principles of the EL Roadmap to improve opportunity for students within their school communities, their work also uncovered systemic needs that must be addressed if the principles of the EL Roadmap are to be successfully realized in schools across the state.

1. Many California educators are unaware of or unfamiliar with the EL Roadmap:

While the majority of the Change Agents wanted to lead a project aimed at implementing one or more elements of the EL Roadmap, what quickly emerged was the need to make their colleagues aware of the EL Roadmap first. The Change Agents gathered both quantitative and qualitative data which made it abundantly clear that although the EL Roadmap was adopted in July 2017, the majority of educators have never heard of it, had heard of it by name but had no insight into its contents, or had a very superficial introduction to its contents. Change Agent [Erika Padilla Bair](#) surveyed her colleagues in an effort to quantify the need for an investment in professional development around awareness and implementation of the EL Roadmap and found that only 8.3 percent of her colleagues had read it and the majority hadn't heard of it or had heard of it but didn't know what it is.

How familiar are you with the EL Roadmap?

12 Responses



2. If schools do not address Principle One of the EL Roadmap and ensure schools are responsive to different EL strengths, needs, and identities, it is very difficult to address the other three principles:

After making colleagues and stakeholders aware of the four guiding principles of the CA EL Roadmap, some Change Agents then emphasized the specific element tied to their initially stated problem of practice. Since most projects focused on curriculum, instruction, and meaningful access, that means focusing on Principle Two. However, before getting to that principle, the Change Agents learned that skipping the intentional analysis and customized realization of Principle One on their respective campus prior to implementation of any other principle or element led to lack of impact in making meaningful change.

Principle One: Assets-Oriented and Needs-Responsive Schools

Pre-schools and schools are responsive to different EL strengths, needs, and identities and support the socio-emotional health and development of English learners. Programs value and build upon the cultural and linguistic assets students bring to their education in safe and affirming school climates. Educators value and build strong family, community, and school partnerships.

Principle One of the EL Roadmap addresses the conditions, mindsets, asset-oriented culture, and inclusive classroom and campus environments necessary to root change in a sustainable manner. Principle One is first for a reason. Its elements should take precedent and our Change Agents lived and learned that valuable lesson. For example, Change Agent [Jamey Olney's](#) project initially focused on the development and integration of quarterly EL formative assessments and was stymied by the chaos of teaching in the midst of a pandemic. She pivoted to bring Principle One of the California EL Roadmap to life on her campus, knowing that it would be the foundation by which the eventual implementation and data collection around the formative assessments would become meaningful. In alignment with a district-wide literacy task force, she was able to plant the seeds of change that will have a positive impact on all students, but especially the emergent bilingual student population. In hindsight, she sees the course correction COVID forced her to take as an asset since the foundational cultural mindsets Principle One foster are the backbone of sustainable change.

The realization of Principle One is, in fact, the only way California can truly eradicate the lingering legacy of Proposition 227. Although its English-only rhetoric was overturned with the passage of Proposition 58 in 2016, the decades in which it was the law of the state, coupled with the way in which its lack of appreciation for bilingualism was integrated into California's culture and political landscape, means that educators and students continue to grapple with the aftermath. It is by starting with the foundational cultural mindsets articulated in Principle One that we will build an environment conducive to emergent bilingual access, opportunity, and empowerment and work collectively toward a future where bilingualism is truly celebrated.

3. Educators lack tools to identify and support students from many of the diverse EL profiles:

Teachers see their students as more than numbers. Yet, too often the efforts educators pour into student “success” are only measured in graduation rates and test scores. Change Agent [Jose Rivas](#) knows the EL Roadmap is right in declaring “there is no single EL profile and no one-size-fits-all approach that works for all English learners.” Jose led his team on a reflective process of designing a STEM curriculum accessible to the diverse EL students on their campus. During the process, the team found little to no curriculum or supplementary resources to scaffold STEM for students at the early phases of English proficiency. Jose’s team, as well as many other EBCAN teams throughout the state, drew similar conclusions from their project implementation experience. They believe that if teachers are to meet diverse EL profiles within their classrooms, especially at the secondary level where the disconnect between grade level mastery and beginning emergent bilingual English proficiency cause tremendous challenges, they should be provided with the curriculum, professional development, and logistical support to continue to deliver meaningful access to their subject matter while being conduits of foundational language acquisition (a skill for which their credential program did not prepare them).

4. Teachers, who are most proximate to bilingual students, families, and communities, are best positioned to create the conditions necessary for the successful implementation of the EL Roadmap:

Change Agent [Martha Alba-Gonzalez](#) aimed to accomplish great things with her initial problem of practice, mostly centered in EL Roadmap professional development and the identification of instructional best practices for the emergent bilingual students in the classroom of the teachers she coached. Implementing this project in the midst of distance learning, and then the re-entry to in person learning, proved to be a monumental task when the teachers at her school were already spread thin. In addition, the teacher leadership time at department and staff meetings she was promised understandably needed to be redirected toward updated health and safety practices.

With a “whatever it takes” spirit of commitment to the EL Roadmap, Martha realized she could bring its elements to life on her campus without overwhelming her colleagues who were in survival mode. She made the decision to advertise the opportunity to join an after-school Ballet Folklorico troop to the diverse students of her elementary school. Not only did she get a tremendous response from the Latino community, she also got interest and participation from all other demographics on campus. Mothers and grandmothers thanked her for making them feel the sense of belonging they’d yearned for. Bilingualism is being celebrated, culture is being honored, and the campus became connected to the community they serve in ways no curriculum or teaching strategy could have fostered. None of this would have happened without Martha’s willingness to leverage her leadership in service of the emergent bilingual community, even when factors outside of her control forced her to consider a new path. Now more than ever, teachers want to collaborate with someone who “knew what it was like” or “know what it is like now” since enduring distance learning, hybrid instruction, re-entry to the “new normal” and the pressure to compensate for learning loss. Educators who used to default to experts for advice are now turning inward for support and advice if that expert does not have that experiential context to frame their advice around.

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding that teacher-led change is essential to realize the promise of the EL Roadmap, Teach Plus will continue to develop and support Change Agents at schools around the state. At the same time, we hope that district and state leaders will learn from the teachers in the EBCAN Network and invest in systemic solutions for making the vision of the EL Roadmap a reality: English learners fully and meaningfully access and participate in a twenty-first century education from early childhood through grade twelve that results in their attaining high levels of English proficiency, mastery of grade level standards, and opportunities to develop proficiency in multiple languages.

With several significant, discretionary grant programs at their disposal, like the \$7.9 Billion [Learning Recovery Emergency Fund](#) and the \$3.6 Billion [Arts, Music, & Instructional Materials Discretionary Block Grant](#), district leaders have the opportunity to invest in strategies that change the conditions of learning and outcomes for the more than 1.1 million emergent bilingual students in our state. Recommendations for school and district leaders to consider as they invest these funds include:

- 1. District leaders should invest in teacher-led professional learning for educators to not only increase their awareness of the EL Roadmap but to truly understand how the guidance of the Roadmap principles can shape the experience of emergent bilingual students in their classroom.**

[EL Rise](#), an initiative funded by the California Department of Education, provides support and training for county offices of education to better understand the EL Roadmap. We urge local leaders to take advantage of those offerings as a starting place for professional learning. Building on the offerings from EL Rise, local school and district leaders should also invest in building the capacity of classroom educators to understand and embody the principles of the EL Roadmap for their emergent bilingual students. Awareness is an essential but insufficient first step. Educators also need to understand how to apply the principles with their particular students. By empowering and equipping the best and brightest teachers to shape the programming, schools not only foster a more trusting and sustainable learning environment for teachers, but also enable educators to more directly respond to the unique needs and assets of their community.

- 2. District leaders should ensure that their professional learning plans include an intentional strategy to begin with Principle One and the focus on the conditions, mindsets, asset-oriented culture, and inclusive classroom.**

As district leaders craft professional learning plans, whether utilizing existing funds, the new discretionary grant programs, or the [Educator Workforce Investment Grant \(EWIG\)](#) program, it is critically important that their plans focus on ensuring schools are responsive to different EL strengths, needs and identities. Teach Plus Change Agents found that skipping the intentional analysis and customized realization of Principle One prior to implementing any other principle or element led to lack of impact in making meaningful change. At the heart of this need is a recognition that our school environments reflect language-related biases. We as a state have made a commitment to creating anti-racist schools, including the allocation of [\\$20 million for anti-bias education and training](#). By prioritizing professional learning rooted in Principle One, school and district leaders will also prioritize combatting biases against our multilingual communities.

3. District leaders should also invest in reflective processes to design curriculum and materials that are accessible to the diverse EL students in disciplines and topics where they do not exist.

Educators are hard pressed to find curriculum or supplementary resources to scaffold topics like STEM, particularly at the secondary level, for students at the early phases of English proficiency. District leaders have a unique opportunity to use the new grants for instruction and materials to address the dearth of curriculum, professional development, and logistical support for secondary teachers to continue to deliver meaningful access to their subject matter while being conduits of foundational language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic placed a spotlight on the inequities emergent bilingual advocates have been giving voice to for years. Addressing those inequities should be more urgent now than ever. With the EL Roadmap as a guide, distributive leadership among administration and teachers, and the inclusion of authentic and intentional community voice, there is no time like the present to come together in closing opportunity gaps and celebrating the assets of the emergent bilingual students throughout the state of California.

ABOUT TEACH PLUS

Teach Plus is a national non-profit organization operating in 11 states. The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key practice and policy issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. Teach Plus has a ten-year track record of partnering with school districts to leverage teacher leadership to improve teacher and student performance.

teachplus.org

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