



ENSURING EQUITY:

Recommendations for Full Implementation
of the English Learner Roadmap from
Teach Plus California Policy Fellows



INTRODUCTION

According to the California Department of Education, California has the largest population of English learners (ELs) in the country. During the 2022-23 academic year, one in five students was identified as an EL. Despite this large number, California has historically faced challenges in serving these students and supporting the professionals who assist them in their journey to multilingualism. This places many students at risk of becoming long-term English learners (LTELs), defined as EL students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for at least six years. Many high school LTEL students are trapped in remedial coursework that excludes them from college preparatory and career technical pathways. This is a continuous challenge that is imperative to solve if we are to meet the needs of our students and the professionals serving them.

We are a group of K-12 grade educators serving as Teach Plus California Policy Fellows, advocating for students and educators supporting ELs across the state. We believe EL students deserve a high-quality, meaningful, and accessible education where they are supported and empowered by their teachers, administrators, and community. Through our diverse experiences across different grade levels and areas of expertise, we are intimately aware of the challenges our state faces in supporting English learners, such as the lack of appropriate teacher training and awareness about resources available to serve students effectively.

Our work and research has centered on the California English Learner Roadmap (ELR). In 2017, the California State Board of Education set a potentially transformative vision and framework for supporting multilingual learners, when it adopted the ELR. And yet, we have not seen that transformative potential realized for most of our students. In 2024, the Legislature considered AB 2071 and AB 2074 to invest in district and state support systems to implement the EL Roadmap. Excited by the promise of this legislation, we wanted to help inform how state and local education leaders can prepare teachers to serve EL students. By analyzing the work of teachers who have been leading the way in bringing the ELR to life in supporting their students, we have developed a set of recommendations to ensure all educators are equipped to meet the needs of their EL students:

1. District leaders should establish clear structures and invest resources to foster systems and instructional change in support of ELR implementation at school sites and throughout the district.
 - a. District and school administrators should appoint teacher leaders or coaches at each site to guide implementation of the ELR.
 - b. Administrators must provide time for teachers to evaluate how best to scaffold instruction to meet the needs of their diverse populations.
 - c. District administrators must ensure that collaboration can occur within the varying programs of the school and also within the school district as a whole.
2. School and district administrators must develop a family engagement plan to foster a shared understanding of the needs and opportunities for multilingual learners and the ELR.
3. State leaders must provide funding, resources, and guidance for district and school leaders to carry out these integrated approaches to implement the ELR.

We believe that serving students with such diverse needs merits high-quality training and support to help EL students attain English proficiency. When educators are trained and have tools to support ELs, they can better assist students and empower them in their journey to multilingualism and reclassification.

BACKGROUND

California has approximately 1.1 million EL students representing 19 percent of the public school population.¹ To support these students academically and linguistically, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have implemented a range of specific programs, including English Language Development (ELD), transitional bilingual education, and dual language programs. Additionally, some schools offer newcomer programs and language-acquisition support. While these programs are a good start, there has been minimal guidance, oversight, and support for the teachers working with these students.²

Despite the existence of such programs, EL students continue to face considerable hurdles in academic achievement compared to their English-proficient peers.³ Despite the fact that EL students are faced with the reality of simultaneously acquiring a new language (English) and learning new content, California's expectation is that all EL students should be able to reclassify as English proficient within six years of receiving ELD instruction. Data shows that this expectation is not being realized. During the 2022-23 school year, there were 226,535 long-term English learners and 144,190 at-risk LTELs (AR-LTELS), with 165,293 Title III immigrant students (newcomers) enrolled in California schools during the same school year.⁴ ELs' four-year graduation rate was 70 percent for the 2022-23 school year, significantly lower than the statewide average.⁵ Additionally, 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that ELs score lower than their peers, with only eight percent of 4th grade ELs and two percent of 8th-grade ELs achieving proficiency in English language arts.⁶ These outcomes underscore the need to find solutions to support an already vulnerable population.

The [ELR](#) embodies a vision and framework for guidance in improving the outcomes of these underserved students. The ELR provides comprehensive guidelines to support EL students' educational success, emphasizing rigorous academics, meaningful access to the curriculum, and effective teaching practices.⁷ The ELR's principles are:

- + [Principle One](#): Assets-Oriented and Needs Responsive Schools
- + [Principle Two](#): Intellectual Quality of Instruction and Meaningful Access
- + [Principle Three](#): System Conditions that Support Effectiveness
- + [Principle Four](#): Alignment and Articulation Within and Across Systems

The roadmap recommends that we recognize the diverse profiles of EL students and do not use a one-size-fits-all approach to placement, curriculum, strategies, and pathways for EL students. The same argument could be made for the data by which we measure EL students' progress and proficiency. Despite this guiding policy, the achievement gap between EL and non-EL students persists, highlighting the urgent need for streamlined support and guidance. Although the ELR has been in place since 2017, it has not been implemented consistently across California's classrooms, and educators struggle to provide a cohesive and strategic support system for students to bridge the academic and linguistic gap.⁸

To help educators provide the support their students need, we must address the central question: **What specific actions should state and district leaders take to effectively implement the ELR?** To answer, we analyzed the experiences and reflections of educators who have been leading site-based efforts to implement the ELR to delineate the strategic interventions and systemic reforms required to ensure that the ELR's comprehensive guidelines are fully operationalized across California's educational landscape.

METHODOLOGY

To develop accurate and actionable recommendations for the effective implementation of the ELR, we first needed to understand challenges and successes within the field and practice. The Teach Plus California [Emergent Bilingual Change Agent Network \(EBCAN\)](#), a group of dedicated practitioners and equity experts, created a series of case studies to inform this work. This cohort of teacher leaders implements school-based projects rooted in the ELR and aimed at enhancing teacher practices and student outcomes for emergent bilingual students.

Over three years starting in 2021, 40 teacher leaders from across California participated in EBCAN, leading change projects at their schools and districts to advance opportunities for multilingual learners. At the end of the first year of their projects, each of the teacher leaders produced a report reflecting on their successes, challenges, and needs for sustainability. To generate preliminary recommendations for school leaders and teachers aiming to implement the ELR framework effectively in their schools and classrooms, we conducted a deeper analysis of EBCAN's successful projects using the project reports of the first two cohorts.

Each of the [28 project reports](#) was reviewed by two peer reviewers who analyzed the project's impact on actualizing the four principles of the ELR, as well as the challenges the projects encountered.⁹ The peer reviewers coded each of the projects based on the impacts aligned to each of the four ELR principles and challenge areas, and then identified emerging themes and patterns among the projects. Findings based on the identified themes are detailed further in the results section of this report. The goal was to use the experience of the EBCAN projects to equip teachers and school leaders with actionable insights for implementing the ELR throughout schools and districts in California.

While there are powerful lessons to be learned from analyzing the data from the EBCAN research, there are some constraints in the study. With a small sample size of only 28 California schools or districts, the analysis does not fully represent the range of schools in California working on the ELR implementation. The self-reporting nature of the data may introduce biases or omit critical information. Additionally, the short-term nature of the project reports limits the ability to analyze long-term sustainability and impacts comprehensively. Nonetheless, even with these limitations, the analysis generated themes that can inform strategies for improving the sustainability and implementation of the ELR in California.



Overall, the analysis showed that EBCAN's teacher-led projects did have a positive impact on EL students. The findings reflect those positive results and highlight challenges faced in the implementation of the ELR.

1. The success of EBCAN projects showed that intentional, teacher-led efforts focused on the implementation of the ELR can lead to very real improvements in opportunities and outcomes for multilingual learners.

Many projects realized an improved school culture with teachers, parents, and students developing a positive partnership. The heart of the partnership grew out of Principle 1, as schools recognized and valued student identities and cultures. Parents and students felt welcomed on campuses and saw representation of their cultures in library books, posters around campus, and the highlighting of home languages. Other projects showed real improvement in student outcomes, as reclassification and English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) scores increased in the schools where the EL Roadmap was implemented. For example, out of 165 ELs at Washington Academic Middle School in Sanger, California, 69 scored a 4 on the ELPAC in 2023. Not only did EL students see an increase in their ELPAC level, but the number of high school students meeting both A-G and Career Technical Education (CTE) requirements also improved.

2. Schools that made a concerted effort to financially support teachers who spent extra time to collaborate and engage in community outreach saw sustainable, positive results.

Successful projects provided teachers the time and resources to look closely at the students they teach. When administrators targeted funding to increase collaboration time and developed focal points for staff to identify support and strategies to increase student academic achievement, the effective teaching and learning shifts became more sustainable. As staff considered their schools, they questioned how their EL students were being taught and the expectations placed upon them. And colleagues did it together, identifying the limitations of the system through formal and informal collaboration and in some situations, creating supports that helped students and families access the educational system.

As teachers reviewed their schools using the ELR, their empathy for their community blossomed. Teachers who understood their students and community were likely to be proactive in ensuring change for their students. This was made possible when administrators supported critical staff members by giving them time and financial resources to create a collaborative environment not only for staff but also for parents and students. For example, Oxnard High School in Oxnard implemented a SLIFE (Students With Limited and Interrupted Formal Education) program, working with counselors to develop an intake questionnaire to ensure students who meet the criteria are able to take part in appropriate academic courses. This helped to improve the climate and experiences for many students at this school.

3. It is difficult to fully implement the ELR without district and administrative support enabling a long-term vision for its execution and clear communication amongst all community partners.

Successful implementation of the ELR was most effective when districts and administration identified a specific lead teacher to facilitate ongoing teacher collaboration. The schools that realized positive growth in EL redesignation and teacher implementation of the ELR were in LEAs with clearly articulated expectations, targeted resources, and a commitment from their administrators to invest in systemic changes so that each EL student could reach their full academic potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS



We recommend the following for a successful and sustainable implementation of the ELR:

- 1. District leaders should establish clear structures and invest resources to foster systems and instructional change in support of ELR implementation at school sites and throughout the district.**
 - a. District and school administrators should appoint teacher leaders or coaches at each site to guide the implementation of the ELR. A designated staff member should lead targeted professional development for teachers about the ELR. This staff member would provide training, mentorship, and support for school staff as they implement the ELR, as well as act as a liaison between the school district and administration to develop a plan of action to put the ELR into practice.
 - b. Administrators must provide time for teachers to evaluate how best to scaffold instruction to meet the needs of their diverse populations. Students have different barriers that hinder their ability to be successful, and the ELR provides guidelines and tools that can be adjusted to meet the needs of individual schools and districts. Administrators must provide teachers with the time to collaborate and develop a strategic and concentrated effort to meet the needs of their EL students and families. Providing teachers with sufficient time to thoroughly assess the needs of their students will help ensure that a plan is developed to provide each student with the necessary resources and support.
 - c. District administrators must ensure that collaboration can occur within the varying programs of the school and also within the school district as a whole. EL students qualify for a variety of programs and services, including special education enumerated in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Teachers who serve these students need opportunities to collaborate so that they can meet the multiple needs of each student and ensure their success. Districts must also provide a bridge between schools so that students can progress within the school system. As we know from our own experience, educators who engage in collaborative efforts are better positioned to deliver rigorous, scaffolded instruction that is essential for these students' academic success.

2. School and district administrators must develop a family engagement plan to foster a shared understanding of the needs and opportunities for multilingual learners and the ELR.

Families must be empowered with the necessary resources to effectively support their children's educational journey. It is imperative that all parents are equipped to advocate for their children's success, and that schools work synergistically with families to bridge the gap between home and school. Schools must provide regular updates to families, including the significance of their child being identified as an EL student, the process for reclassification, and the implications of being identified as an LTEL. Schools must also provide family-friendly guides to understanding the annual EL assessment and the monitoring procedure for reclassified students. Teachers and staff must evaluate their school sites to ensure they are culturally sensitive to the communities they serve. Schools should organize workshops and information sessions for families and community partners to educate them on the value of biliteracy and reclassification, as well as how they can support their children's education.

3. State leaders must provide funding, resources, and guidance for district and school leaders to carry out these integrated approaches to implement the ELR.

Teacher leaders identified many local challenges to advancing their efforts to bring the ELR to life, noting many districts and schools lack the capacity and resources for full implementation. Teachers are often expected to come up with their own resources, resulting in a piecemeal approach to bandage linguistic and academic gaps. The state must provide key resources and guidance to districts on how to do this important implementation. The state can address these gaps by providing high-quality instructional materials that include guidance on the ELD standards and use of the ELD Framework in English language development curriculum to meet the diverse needs of EL students.

CONCLUSION

When California enacted the EL Roadmap in 2017, we were hopeful that it would transform the experience of the more than one million EL students. The first glimmers of that transformation are evident in examples of schools and districts leading change, like those in the Teach Plus California EBCAN Network. We hope that we can learn from these bright spots to shape a comprehensive framework for educators to deploy advanced tools and strategies tailored to meet the specific needs of the EL student population throughout the state.

Unfortunately, because of the state's fiscal challenges, the investment we had hoped for in the legislation state leaders were considering will not be realized in 2024. We hope this report can help shape further efforts. By building upon the foundational principles established by the ELR, educators and policymakers will be better positioned to refine and enhance strategies that cater to the complex needs of EL students, ultimately resulting in improved academic outcomes and equitable educational opportunities. The key to moving forward lies in identifying and implementing the measures that will translate the ELR from policy to practice, thereby fostering the academic achievement of EL students and narrowing the persistent achievement gap.

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ABOUT TEACH PLUS

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. In pursuing our mission, Teach Plus is guided by our Student Opportunity Mandate: All students should have the opportunity to achieve their potential in an education system defined by its commitment to equity, its responsiveness to individual needs, and its ability to prepare students for postsecondary success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning for students.



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ENDNOTES

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