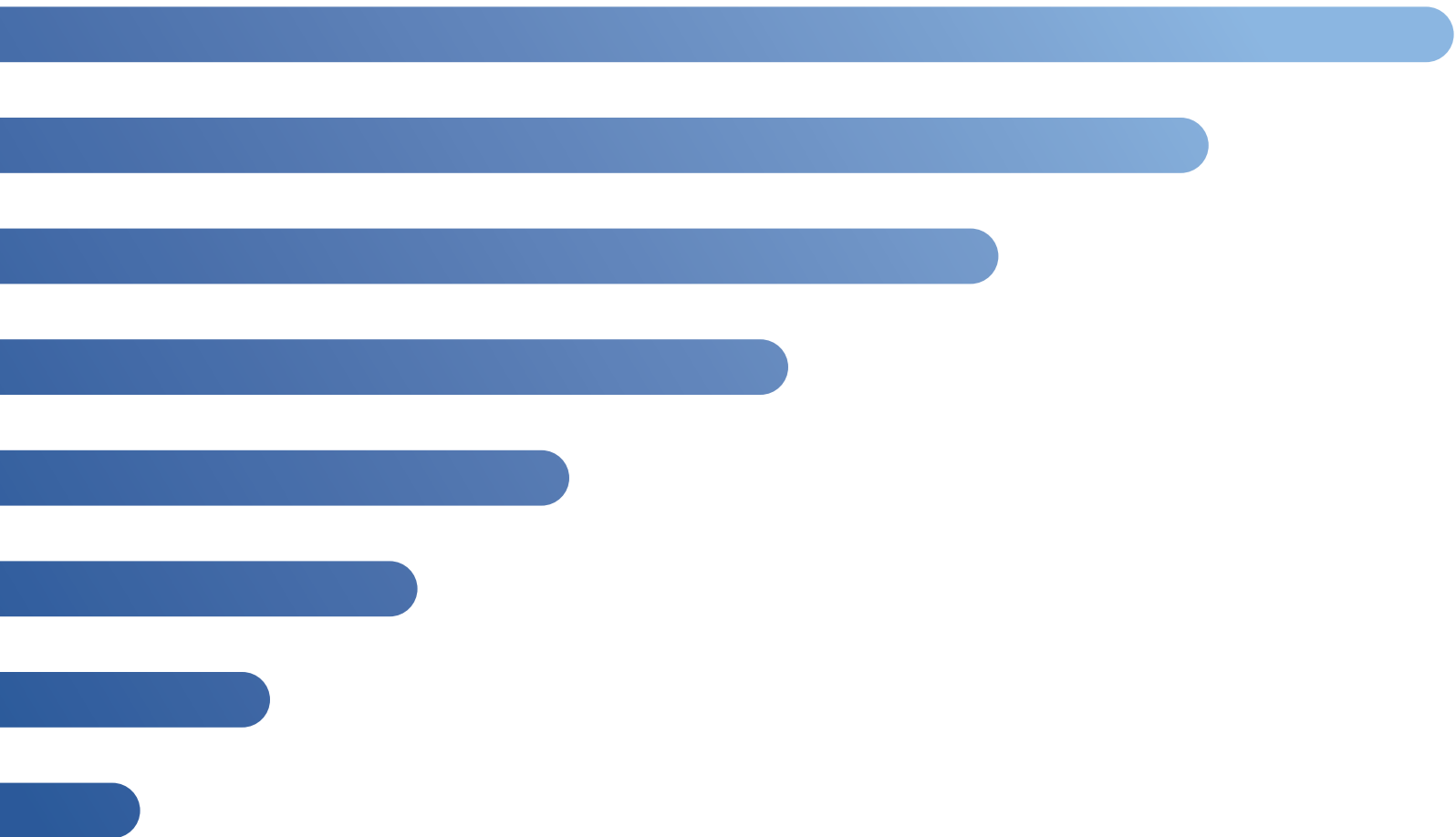


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Multilingual Learner Outcomes Require Aligned Funding and Accountability Across Colorado

Recommendations from Teach Plus
Colorado Policy Fellows



Who We Are

We are Teach Plus Colorado Policy Fellows and classroom educators focused on examining policy challenges affecting multilingual (ML) students in Colorado public schools. This brief highlights system-level challenges in accountability, funding alignment, and student English proficiency outcomes—issues educators directly observe and experience in their classrooms.

Systemic Gaps Create Unnecessary Barriers

Funding: In Colorado, strengthening ML outcomes will require improved alignment among funding mechanisms, accountability expectations, and evidence-based instructional support. Across the state, there are currently 120,846 MLs, representing nearly 14 percent of all K-12 learners, yet current outcomes suggest systemic barriers to fully supporting their academic and language development. During the 2024-25 school year, only [72.6 percent of ML students](#) graduated high school—13 percentage points below the state's four-year average of 85.6 percent. At the same time, Colorado's English language acquisition pathway designed to support these students is underperforming: just [12.9 percent of ML students](#) were eligible for Redesignation (also known as Fluent English proficiency) in 2024-25, and only 42.6 percent meet redesignation criteria within Colorado's [funded five-year window](#), despite the research that [five-seven years are required](#) for a MLs to become academically fluent.

Together, these outcomes reveal a systemic gap between the support which MLs are promised and the results they achieve. The 2024 passage of [HB24-1448](#), which directs an estimated [\\$62 million](#) in additional funding for MLs, presents an unprecedented window to address these failures—but only if Colorado prioritizes sustained, meaningful investment in the success of multilingual learners.

These issues are compounded by the multiple funding streams that support multilingual learners but operate under differing requirements. Currently, Colorado funds MLs students through four funding streams: Title III Federal funding, English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA), state funding formula, and local shares provided by district taxes. Districts are required to report current ML outcomes, including English language proficiency test scores and other evidence, used in their performance framework ratings. However, reporting the outcomes doesn't guarantee that districts will prioritize improvement.

Redesignation Practices: Variation in redesignation criteria creates inconsistent experiences for students. Colorado requires a two-step process for students to redesignate as fully English proficient:

1. Students must achieve a minimum score of 4.0 (out of 6.0) in the areas of Literacy and Overall on the WIDA ACCESS assessment - Colorado's English language proficiency assessment.
2. Students who meet the ACCESS requirement must have a body of evidence demonstrating the ability to access grade-level content instruction without scaffolds.

The result is an uneven landscape: some students stay in programming longer than expected, some may exit programming without demonstrating true proficiency, and some may be reclassified in one district but denied in another with similar evidence.

MLs with disabilities face additional roadblocks on the path to proficiency. Students with Individualized Education Program (IEPs) for Significant Reading Disabilities must meet the same requirements as students without a disability. This is especially burdensome given 75 percent of the WIDA ACCESS score is derived from Reading and Writing skills. Even after meeting the ACCESS threshold, these students must still demonstrate grade-level proficiency in areas directly affected by their disability. Students dually identified as both ML and having an IEP are about four times more likely [to be categorized as Long-Term ELs](#) (students who do not redesignate out of the program in the expected five-year window).

Colorado has worked to improve the outcomes of MLs through additional funding from HB24-1448 and updated CDE licensure renewal requirements requiring Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education (CLDE) professional development. However, without clearer accountability structures for how funds are spent and how programs are evaluated, districts may fall into the same patterns seen with historical funding. The current system in Colorado lacks the necessary structures and supports to ensure student success in achieving English proficiency. Without clearer accountability structures and targeted programmatic supports, increased funding alone is unlikely to close the persistent gaps MLs face.

Instructional Practices and Teacher Qualifications: While funding and accountability structures shape the system, the daily experiences of multilingual learners are ultimately defined by classroom instruction and educator capacity, areas where significant inconsistencies persist across Colorado. Evidence-based instructional practices for multilingual learners, such as explicit language objectives, structured student discourse, and scaffolding, are not consistently implemented across classrooms. Too often, language development is treated as separate from core content instruction, limiting students' ability to fully access grade-level material. Additionally, support for MLs tends to be reactive, relying on intervention or pull-out services rather than strengthening Tier 1 instruction. These gaps are compounded by limited use of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, as well as insufficient differentiation for Long-Term English Learners who require targeted strategies to accelerate progress.

At the same time, many educators lack the training and support necessary to effectively serve multilingual learners. General education teachers, who provide the majority of instruction to MLs, often report feeling underprepared to integrate language

development into their teaching. While recent policy changes have introduced professional development requirements, these opportunities are frequently compliance-driven and lack the depth or continuity needed to shift instructional practice. Districts also face ongoing shortages of CLDE-endorsed educators, limiting access to specialized expertise and increasing caseloads for existing staff. Limited time for collaboration between general educators and ML specialists further hinders the implementation of cohesive, aligned supports. Without stronger investment in teacher preparation, ongoing professional learning, and collaborative structures, improvements in funding alone are unlikely to translate into meaningful gains in multilingual learners' outcomes.

Recommendations

To ensure that multilingual learners have access to successful outcomes and appropriate instruction, we recommend the following:

Strengthen Statewide Accountability and Evaluation of Multilingual Learner Programming.

Request an independent evaluation of CLDE programming and funding across the state to assess the relationship between resource allocation, instructional practices, ML program expectations, educator qualifications and endorsements, redesignation practices, and student English language proficiency outcomes. Given the passage of SB19-199, the READ Act provides a precedent for a similar process to better align funding, resource allocation, and student progress.

Improve Alignment Of Funding To Student Needs.

Revise ELPA funding and multilingual learner supporting policies to allow for flexibility based on student need, including extended eligibility for students with disabilities and differentiated timelines based on program entry point.

Identify And Scale Highly Successful Multilingual Learner Programs.

Identify high-performing programs with high redesignation rates within five years and support scaling the instructional and funding practices from these programs to improve student outcomes statewide.

Conclusion

Recent policy and funding changes create an opportunity to improve multilingual learner outcomes in Colorado. Meaningful progress will require aligning funding, accountability, and instructional support to ensure investments translate into measurable student success. Action now will mean stronger outcomes and increased benefit with less strain on educators and less speculation into funding efficacy.

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Members of our working group are available to discuss the impact of Colorado policy on multilingual learners in our classrooms and districts.

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. 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. teachplus.org/co



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