

# Section 8. K-12 Schools and Immigrant-Background and English Learner Students

*from*

## All in for a Thriving Connecticut

### Opportunities to Support Upward Mobility for the State's Immigrant Families

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## 8 K-12 Schools and Immigrant-Background and English Learner Students

Connecticut’s immigrant-background student population has grown significantly over the past two decades. Between 2000 and 2023, the share of school-age children with at least one foreign-born parent nearly doubled, rising from slightly more than 15 percent to 30 percent.<sup>178</sup> This growth is most evident in the towns of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Danbury, where immigrant-background children now make up more than half of the child population.<sup>179</sup> These children, some of whom are U.S. born while others are immigrants themselves, are served by a state education system that ranks 5th in the United States for “adequacy,” meaning it spends above the necessary level to meet test score goals, but 47th in the nation for equal opportunity; this is due to funding inequities between the state’s high-need, high-poverty school districts versus high-wealth districts, which contribute to a marked achievement gap in terms of students’ test scores in these districts.<sup>180</sup>

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For decades, U.S. law and policy have held that it is a fundamental right of all children to have equal access to education.<sup>181</sup> Educational attainment not only shapes individual students’ future opportunities but also influences the broader economic and social development of their families and the communities in which they reside. Civil rights law protects immigrant children’s enrollment in school and also requires educators to provide them meaningful access to the same curriculum as all other students. Systems for these children are typically organized around their needs as English Learners (ELs),<sup>182</sup> though EL and immigrant students are not categories that perfectly overlap. Accountability measures under federal law aim to ensure that schools are supporting ELs to make progress toward English proficiency and—equally—toward broader academic measures such as high school graduation.

Connecticut ELs are supported at the state level by laws and guidance that align with research on effective EL education. Most notably, Connecticut is one of only a handful of states requiring that bilingual education programs be available in specific circumstances.<sup>183</sup> These programs have a long history in the state owing to advocacy on behalf of Puerto Rican students in the 1960s and 1970s, which sought more effective instructional programs for these children and recruitment of specially trained teachers to staff them.<sup>184</sup>

178 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Connecticut—Demographics & Social,” accessed February 27, 2025.

179 Renata Daou, “Which CT Towns Have the Most Children of Foreign-Born Parents?” CT Mirror, January 31, 2025.

180 School Finance Indicators Database, “State School Finance Profile: 2021-22 School Year—Connecticut” (data profile, Albert Shanker Institute, University of Miami School of Education and Human Development, and Rutgers Graduate School of Education, Washington, DC, Miami, and New Brunswick, NJ, 2025).

181 Julie Sugarman, *Legal Protections for K-12 English Learner and Immigrant-Background Students* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2019).

182 Note that Connecticut uses the term English Learners/Multilingual Learners to refer to students identified using the federal definition. This section uses the federal term English Learners (ELs) throughout.

183 In Connecticut, the requirement applies to schools that have at least 20 ELs who speak the same language.

184 Cerda-Ocampo, “La Escuelita: Start, End, and Future” (post by professor and students of Educ 300: Education Reform, Past and Present, Trinity College, May 4, 2019).

Yet, as will be discussed below, background research and interviews with school and community leaders conducted for this report indicate that despite EL students comprising a significant share of the state's students for many decades, EL outcomes do not reflect the generally high achievement of Connecticut students, and districts are inconsistent in their efforts to implement quality EL programs.

Outside of the instructional program context, many immigrant-background children face a range of socioeconomic factors that have been demonstrated to affect educational outcomes.<sup>185</sup> Many of their parents are low-income and have limited levels of formal education, both characteristics that can affect parents' efforts to support their children's academic success.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, Census data from the 2019–23 period showed that 17 percent of immigrant-led households with children in Connecticut were linguistically isolated, meaning that all members of the household over the age of 14 spoke English less than “very well.”<sup>187</sup> Low proficiency in English can limit parents' ability to communicate with school staff, understand information provided by the school, and advocate for their children's needs.<sup>188</sup>

In the same time period, 28 percent of immigrant parents in Connecticut were low income, compared to 17 percent of U.S.-born parents,<sup>189</sup> meaning they could face greater difficulties affording their children's

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access to supports such as tutoring, technology, and extracurricular activities. Additionally, Connecticut's immigrant parents were four times more likely than U.S.-born parents to lack a high school diploma or equivalent, comprising almost 60 percent of parents in the state without one.<sup>190</sup> Combined with the fact that they may not have attended school in the United States themselves, many immigrant parents may lack familiarity with the state's education system, including kindergarten-readiness

expectations, parents' roles and rights in selecting schools and instructional programs for their children, graduation requirements, and the like. As a result, schools and community groups often must make additional efforts to partner with parents, providing them with information and resources to help them navigate local systems and effectively support their child's academic journey.

Connecticut has adopted several policies and created new initiatives over the past five years in response to some of these challenges. In 2021, the state required that districts include parents and guardians in the development of student success plans for their child and mandated that schools provide a Black and

185 Pamela E. Davis-Kean, “The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2005): 294–304; Sean F. Reardon, Joseph P. Robinson, and Ericka S. Weathers, “Patterns and Trends in Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Academic Achievement Gaps,” prepublication draft later published in *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*, 2nd Edition, eds. Helen F. Ladd and Margaret E. Goertz (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

186 MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

187 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data. English proficiency is self-reported in the ACS, whether “very well,” “well,” “not well,” and “not at all.” Data on linguistically isolated households exclude individuals living in group quarters.

188 Ileana Najarro, “Language Barriers Keep Parents from Attending School Activities, New Data Show,” *Education Week*, December 4, 2024.

189 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

190 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Latino studies course for high school students, reflecting a commitment to parent partnerships and cultural inclusivity.<sup>191</sup> The following year, the state introduced a peer-to-peer mental health support program and required family care coordinators in each school district to coordinate student access to mental health resources.<sup>192</sup> The 2023 legislative session saw the passage of a Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners and the inclusion of world languages as a part of the K-8 model curriculum.<sup>193</sup> And in 2024, the state took steps to address long-standing concerns related to equity in school funding, implementing a student-centered funding formula that allocates resources based on the individual needs of students, regardless of where they live.<sup>194</sup>

Research conducted for this study sought to take into account recent measures such as these and the broader policy and funding contexts shaping K-12 education in the state, while focusing most heavily on the capacities of school, district, and state systems to provide quality instructional support to ELs and assist immigrant parents in understanding school processes and how they can support their children's academic success and future life goals. This section provides information on EL student numbers, geographic distribution, and performance along with analysis of key system challenges in the areas of EL instructional quality as well as access and system capacities for effective and meaningful communication with parents. This research benefited greatly from insights shared in interviews with school leaders, system administrators, and staff of community initiatives that serve or engage immigrant-background students and parents. The recommendations offered focus primarily on steps that should be taken to ensure that education leaders at the school, district, and state levels have the technical support and capacities needed to actualize the goals of existing state policies intended to support the success of immigrant-background students.

## *A. System Capacity to Provide Quality Instructional Programs for ELs*

An important first step toward assessing system capacity and challenges in the areas of EL instructional quality is understanding the characteristics of EL students in Connecticut. This section provides information on EL enrollment, top languages, top districts, and academic performance.

### **Demographics**

Despite a 4.9 percent drop in enrollment in the general student population in Connecticut in recent years, EL enrollment increased by more than 17,000 students between school years 2016–17 and 2023–24, and the EL share of all students in the state increased from 6.8 percent to 10.5 percent (see Figure 1). Over this period, the share of ELs who were Spanish speakers held steady at about 72 percent, while the share of Portuguese speakers nearly doubled, from 4.4 percent to 7.5 percent (see Table 1). The number of Arabic and Haitian Creole speakers (the third and fourth largest language groups) increased slightly over that time period, while the number of Mandarin speakers (the fifth largest group in school year 2016–17) slightly decreased. Pashto rose into the top fifteen languages in school year 2019–20 and has continued to increase since then, reaching fifth place in 2023–24. Ukrainian speakers also entered the top fifteen in 2022–23.

191 School Law Practice Group, "2021 Education Legislation Summary," Shipman & Goodwin LLP, August 17, 2021.

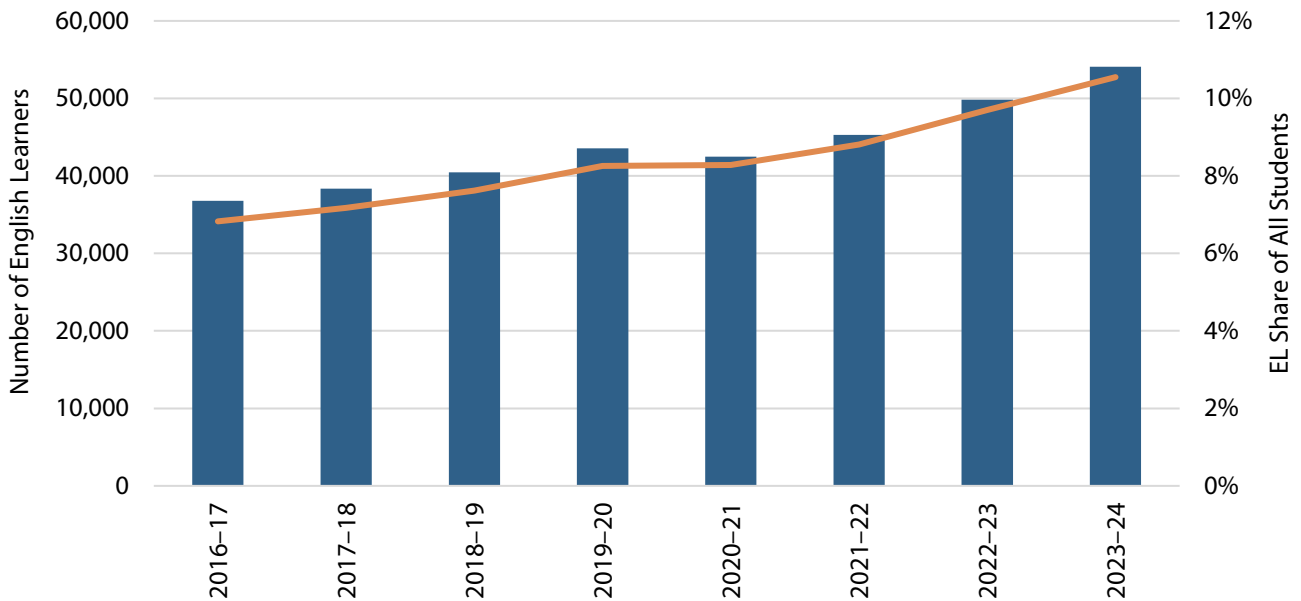
192 School Law Practice Group, "2022 Education Legislation Summary," Shipman & Goodwin LLP, July 26, 2022.

193 School Law Practice Group, "2023 Education Legislation Summary," Shipman & Goodwin LLP, August 3, 2023.

194 School + State Finance Project, "Snapshot: K-12 Education Funding in Budget Stabilization Bill (H.B. 5523)," updated July 15, 2025.

FIGURE 1

**Number of ELs and EL Share of All Students in Connecticut, School Years 2016–17 to 2023–24**



Source: State of Connecticut, “EdSight—Enrollment Dashboard,” accessed December 2, 2024.

TABLE 1

**Top 15 Languages Spoken by Connecticut ELs, School Year 2023–24 versus School Year 2016–17**

Language	School Year 2023–24			School Year 2016–17		
	Count	Percent	Rank	Count	Percent	Rank
Spanish	38,890	71.9%	1	26,349	72.1%	1
Portuguese	4,029	7.5%	2	1,616	4.4%	2
Arabic	1,385	2.6%	3	1,162	3.2%	3
Haitian Creole	949	1.8%	4	755	2.1%	4
Pashto	713	1.3%	5	*	*	*
Mandarin	642	1.2%	6	660	1.8%	5
Ukrainian	544	1.0%	7	*	*	*
Albanian	522	1.0%	8	406	1.1%	8
Polish	497	0.9%	9	474	1.3%	6
Urdu	497	0.9%	10	421	1.1%	7
Bengali	315	0.6%	11	215	0.6%	12
Russian	311	0.6%	12	202	0.5%	13
Tamil	281	0.5%	13	*	*	*
Vietnamese	278	0.5%	14	307	0.8%	9
French	274	0.5%	15	264	0.7%	10
All others	3,951	7.3%		3,348	9.1%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,078</b>	<b>100.0%</b>		<b>36,789</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

\* Not among the top 15 languages in school year 2016–17

Sources: Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), *The Condition of Education in Connecticut, 2016–17* (Hartford: CSDE, n.d.); author email correspondence with Michael Sabados, Education Consultant, CSDE, November 19, 2024; EdSight, “Enrollment Dashboard.”

As is the case in most states, ELs are disproportionately enrolled in urban districts. However, as of school year 2022–23, 88 percent of Connecticut’s local education agencies<sup>195</sup> served at least five ELs. The districts serving the greatest number of ELs that year were Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, and New Haven School Districts (see Table 2).

## Performance

Evaluating EL academic performance can be complicated due to the revolving nature of the EL subgroup: once students are proficient in English (and more likely to pass academic tests in English) they exit the subgroup, and newly arriving ELs (who are less likely to pass tests in English) join the group each year. Nevertheless, ELs are included in federal accountability calculations, and Connecticut duly publishes metrics related to their performance on standardized tests in grades 3 to 8 and 11, progress toward English proficiency, graduation rates, and other measures.

When comparing the academic achievement of ELs to non-ELs (a group that includes those former ELs who have been reclassified after passing English proficiency tests), state standardized test results show wide gaps in performance. While these gaps reflect ELs’ still-developing English proficiency, the value of the comparison is to see if schools are providing accommodations in instruction and in assessment practices that allow ELs to demonstrate what they know about academic content. Indeed, in school year 2023–24, just over 10 percent of Connecticut ELs scored proficient in state English language arts and math standardized tests, compared to roughly half of non-ELs.<sup>196</sup> Looking at a nationally comparable measure of academic knowledge and skills, Connecticut ELs tend to score lower than the EL national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, given annually to a sample of students across the country.<sup>197</sup>

Results from the state’s annual assessment of ELs’ English language development are mixed. On the positive side, data show that about 15 percent of ELs scored proficient in English in school year 2023–24.<sup>198</sup> With research suggesting that students typically take five to seven years to become proficient, a rate between 14 and 20 percent would be in line with that trend. However, only 31 percent of ELs made progress toward English proficiency that year.<sup>199</sup>

**TABLE 2**  
**Top Ten Local Education Agencies Serving ELs in Connecticut, School Year 2022–23**

School District	Number of ELs
Bridgeport School District	5,672
Danbury School District	4,608
Hartford School District	4,451
New Haven School District	4,327
Waterbury School District	3,753
Stamford School District	2,989
Norwalk School District	2,554
New Britain School District	1,992
Meriden School District	1,666
West Haven School District	1,272

Source: ED Data Express, “Data Download—File Specification 141, ELs Enrolled,” accessed February 6, 2025.

<sup>195</sup> Local education agencies include school districts, independent charter schools, and state-run schools.

<sup>196</sup> State of Connecticut, “EdSight—Smarter Balanced Achievement/Participation,” accessed February 6, 2025.

<sup>197</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), “Connecticut NAEP 2024 Math and Reading Results” (PowerPoint presentation, CSDE, Hartford, January 29, 2025).

<sup>198</sup> State of Connecticut, “EdSight—LAS Links Achievement,” accessed February 6, 2025.

<sup>199</sup> State of Connecticut, “EdSight—LAS Links Growth,” accessed February 6, 2025.

ELs in the ten Connecticut school districts serving the highest number of ELs (shown in Table 2) tend to perform below average in the achievement of English proficiency, with eight districts posting rates of 8 to 12 percent (Danbury and West Haven School Districts being the two scoring close to or above the state average of 15 percent).<sup>200</sup> The same is true for progress toward proficiency, with the same eight districts showing only 21 to 29 percent of ELs making progress, and Danbury and West Haven at or above the state average of 31 percent.<sup>201</sup> It is important to note that while districts with larger numbers of ELs can benefit from a concentration of specialized resources, in all ten districts, more than 50 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals (a measure of low socioeconomic status, which can also affect students' academic success).

Finally, in school year 2022–23, 73 percent of Connecticut ELs graduated high school in four years, compared to 90 percent of non-ELs. As is typical of national trends, Black and Hispanic students in Connecticut had lower four-year graduation rates (82 and 81 percent, respectively) than Asian and White students (96 and 93 percent). Likewise, students qualifying for free school meals graduated at a lower rate (80 percent) than students eligible for reduced-price meals (90 percent) or not eligible for either (94 percent).<sup>202</sup>

## *B. Opportunities to Enhance State Support for ELs*

States are responsible for setting the conditions for student success in schools and districts, while operating within federal civil rights laws. In Connecticut's case, state law and policy support ELs through measures such as the following:

- ▶ required bilingual instruction in schools with 20 ELs who speak the same language
- ▶ supplementary state funding, including
  - the Bilingual Education Program Grant, which provides a total of \$3.8 million to schools with bilingual programs, allocated per eligible pupil
  - a 25 percent weight added to the state per-pupil formula grant for all ELs
- ▶ the state seal of biliteracy, recognizing high school graduates attaining the English language arts credits required for graduation and proficiency in another language
- ▶ a Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners.<sup>203</sup>

Additionally, Connecticut's State Department of Education (CSDE) has developed numerous guides for districts to consult as they develop EL instructional programming,<sup>204</sup> and the department is working toward

200 State of Connecticut, "EdSight—LAS Links Achievement."

201 State of Connecticut, "EdSight—LAS Links Growth."

202 National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 219.46. Public High School 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), by Selected Student Characteristics and State or Jurisdiction: School Years 2011-12 through 2021-22," updated January 2024; State of Connecticut, "EdSight—Four Year Graduation Rates," accessed February 6, 2025.

203 CSDE, "English Learners/Multilingual Learners in Connecticut's Public Schools: Guidelines for Administrators" (guidance, CSDE, Hartford, 2024); CSDE, "Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners" (guidance, CSDE, Hartford, n.d.).

204 CSDE, "17 Ways the CSDE Is Supporting Multilingual Learners" (guidance, CSDE, Hartford, June 20, 2022).

a statewide EL framework to provide additional guidance on developing and sustaining systems to support research-based instruction, teacher training, monitoring of student progress, and other areas. All of these resources exist within a sociocultural context that is generally supportive of immigrant communities and approaches such as bilingual education, which can be an asset for drawing community support for initiatives to strengthen educational programs for immigrant and EL students.

### Connecticut underinvests in supporting educators of ELs.

As a state with a high level of local control over curriculum and instruction, Connecticut does not prescribe particular approaches or models for EL instruction. Only one CSDE staff member works full time on EL instruction, and that position focuses largely on compliance with state and federal law as opposed to providing systemic technical assistance on effective programs and practices to districts. Regional education service centers across the state provide direct assistance to districts, but not all centers are adequately staffed to provide expertise in EL programming and instruction. This results, as some interviewees noted, in some district and school leaders having little support to plan and evaluate their EL programming and instruction.

The state's lack of systemic support for administrators seemingly extends to teacher preparation as well, creating gaps in how educators are equipped to serve ELs. There is only one approved educator preparation program in Connecticut at the undergraduate level offering certification in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and bilingual education,

and three with graduate programs in one or both areas.<sup>205</sup> Interviewees noted that many districts report shortages of experienced and certified EL teachers, especially for bilingual programs, and this has been substantiated in CSDE's annual analysis.<sup>206</sup> In fact, bilingual programs may request permission to hire certified TESOL teachers instead of bilingual teachers if they cannot find suitable candidates, which is reported to be common.<sup>207</sup> Programs for general education teachers may also fall short, as there are no specific requirements for the amount or type of EL coursework in Connecticut teacher preparation programs.<sup>208</sup> There are some private, nonprofit organizations such as the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, Northeast (MABE) that can help fill gaps in teacher training through workshops and conferences, but these are accessed through individual initiative rather than being part of statewide programming.

In sum, educators with deep expertise working with ELs are too few in number in K-12 school, district, regional, and state administration and in institutions of higher education to be able to meet needs across all districts and effectively support needed systemic improvements in EL instruction and program design. Particularly in light of recent statewide policies that require ELs to have access to grade-level curriculum

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<sup>205</sup> CSDE, "Guide to Approved Educator Preparation Programs in Connecticut" (fact sheet, CSDE, Hartford, January 2025).

<sup>206</sup> CSDE, "Shortage Areas," accessed April 23, 2025.

<sup>207</sup> Education Commission of the States, "English Learner Policies: State Profiles—Connecticut," updated May 2020.

<sup>208</sup> Jeanine Pocoski and Kelly Michel, "Additional English Learner Course Requirements for Preservice Teachers," *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies* (Fall 2020 special issue).

and bilingual programming, state efforts to develop and expand educator expertise at the classroom and administrator levels are urgently needed in two key areas:

- ▶ **Technical assistance and monitoring.** CSDE and regional educational service centers will need additional expert staff able to support schools and districts in implementing EL and bilingual program models and instruction that meet the expectations and requirements set forth in existing state policies.
- ▶ **Pre-service teacher preparation.** Increasing the number of institutions of higher education with the capacity to prepare teachers of ELs, especially bilingual certified teachers, is also critical to expanding system capacities commensurate with needs for provision of effective instructional programming at scale in the state.
  - With teacher preparation funds targeted for significant cuts at the federal level, Connecticut will likely need to fund specific initiatives to hire teacher educators with expertise in TESOL and bilingual methods and develop new coursework to meet the demand for bilingual educators.
  - To improve consistency across institutions of higher education, the state could convene a higher education/preK-12 committee to collaborate on initiatives to improve teacher preparation.

### Despite pockets of excellence, the nature and quality of instructional programs vary.

Although CSDE makes recommendations for how program models such as dual language, transitional bilingual, newcomer, and English as a second language support should operate, program design and quality are enormously varied across the state. Private organizations such as MABE, the Connecticut Association of Biliteracy and Bicultural Education (CABBE), Connecticut Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ConnTESOL), and Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English Language Learners (CAPELL) increasingly serve a critical role of bringing education leaders together to share ideas and problem-solve, but they do not have the resources or authority to address the challenge of bringing best practices to scale across the state.

For example, dual language instruction has been recognized for decades as the most effective model for accelerating ELs' academic achievement. Yet, despite being a state with mandated bilingual instruction, Connecticut has very few dual language programs. According to MABE, New Haven and Windham are the only school districts operating multiple one-way and two-way models in their schools,<sup>209</sup> and Hartford, New Britain, Stratford, and Waterbury have a single two-way program.<sup>210</sup> Additional information indicates Norwalk has five total one- and two-way programs and there is a two-way program in New London, suggesting Connecticut has approximately 25 programs overall.<sup>211</sup> In contrast, Oregon—a state with

209 One-way dual language programs enroll primarily ELs who are speakers of the partner language (such as Spanish), and two-way models enroll a balance of ELs speaking the partner language and fluent English speakers who may or may not have a family connection to the partner language.

210 Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, Northeast, "Northeast Region Directory of Dual Language Education Programs," accessed February 15, 2025.

211 Author personal communication with Megan Alubicki Flick, English Learner/Multilingual Learner Consultant, CSDE, April 30, 2025.

comparable-sized EL and overall student populations—has 140 dual language programs in 34 districts, most of which are two-way models.<sup>212</sup>

In a state where, in school year 2024–25, there were 62 districts and 366 schools that were required to provide bilingual instruction in nine languages,<sup>213</sup> the apparent under-utilization of dual language models raises urgent questions about the state’s lack of strategies to support the scaling of effective models. Outside of dual language, the type of bilingual programming varies enormously, including transitional bilingual, individual classes offered in students’ native languages, or even support from bilingual paraprofessionals. And as noted above, schools that cannot find bilingual instructors may provide support using TESOL-certified teachers. There are many ways to provide native language support in an English-only context, including providing books and software in students’ languages, encouraging students to draft written work in their native language, and including native language messages in classroom environmental print. But these proxies do not offer the benefits associated with well-structured dual language and transitional bilingual programs, which provide instruction in literacy and content areas in the partner language.<sup>214</sup>

CSDE and the state legislature have come a long way in recent years, producing numerous policies and guidance documents that outline best practices in program design. However, implementation of those

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approaches generally relies on heroic efforts by individual administrators to create, implement, and sustain those programs, and even then, interviewees report when leadership transitions occur, programs may be discontinued if their value is not fully communicated or understood. Within districts, a sense of shared responsibility and development of systems requiring ELs to be centered in educational planning create a much stronger foundation for effective teaching than approaches where ELs are an afterthought and EL teachers have to improvise solutions.<sup>215</sup>

Thus, to ensure policymakers’ intent is realized and effective EL program designs are implemented at scale within Connecticut, state leaders will need to create the means to understand where such capacities are weak or nonexistent and grow them—in other words, to create and sustain an implementation design for the policies they have (rightly) set forth. The forthcoming release of the new statewide EL framework could

212 Oregon Department of Education, *English Learners in Oregon: Annual Report 2022-23* (Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Education, 2024); Oregon State University, “[Directory of Dual Language Bilingual Programs in Oregon](#),” accessed April 16, 2025.

213 In school year 2024–25, there were mandated bilingual programs serving children speaking Arabic, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Pashto, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, and Ukrainian. See CSDE, “[Recent Communication—Mandated Bilingual Programs for SY 2024-2025](#),” updated May 23, 2024.

214 Dual language programs provide at least 50 percent of instruction in the partner language for at least five to seven years. Transitional bilingual programs may provide up to 90 percent of instruction in the partner language for a short period, increasing the amount of English used across a program of one to three years.

215 Margarita Calderón and Shawn Slakk, “[Taking the Holistic Approach](#),” *Language Magazine*, March 14, 2017; Hayley Weddle, Megan Hopkins, Rebecca Lowenhaupt, and Sara E. N. Kangas, “Shared Responsibility for Multilingual Learners across Levels of the Education System,” *Educational Researcher* 53, no. 4 (2024): 252–61.

be leveraged to launch such an effort. Mirroring other states that have faced similar needs to review and understand EL program design and implementation challenges,<sup>216</sup> Connecticut should convene a legislative task force (or other such statewide review committee) to examine the existing educational programs and resources its districts and schools are using to support EL and immigrant student success, the obstacles they face in bringing quality designs to scale, and steps that should be taken to facilitate optimal scaling.

Given the challenges identified in this section, the task force should particularly focus on:

- ▶ how many bilingual programs lack staff to provide a robust transitional bilingual or dual language program;
- ▶ the number of general education teachers with and without training on EL instruction;
- ▶ the capacity of schools to provide targeted and linguistically appropriate support to ELs through school counseling services, wrap-around services (such as those provided in full-service community schools), and specialized instructional services including special education, gifted and talented programs, and intervention systems;
- ▶ obstacles reported by EL administrators, coaches, teachers, and other education administrators in implementing and sustaining quality instructional designs; and
- ▶ the capacity of institutions of higher education to train educators to meet the needs of ELs.

Drawing on findings from the task force, the state should invest in efforts that result in districts, schools, and CSDE itself having the capacities to ensure that the state's requirements for quality EL programming are realized. Once an effective implementation design for scaling quality EL instruction is operating in the state, administrators at all levels of the system would ideally be able to:

- ▶ gather detailed information about the specific services, staffing levels, and resources being deployed to support ELs in quality instructional designs at different levels of the system;
- ▶ articulate on a routine basis what successful EL education requires in terms of programs, personnel, and funding;
- ▶ have and use data to provide a more nuanced and accurate picture of students' academic growth and achievement patterns; and
- ▶ align EL implementation strategies with educational goals and system designs at the school, district, and state levels.

<sup>216</sup> See, for example, Rhode Island's blueprint, strategic plan, and instructional framework on State of Rhode Island Department of Education, "[Multilingual Learners \(MLLs\) / English Learners \(ELs\)](#)," accessed July 15, 2025, and Minnesota's EL Task Force report, available from the Minnesota Department of Education, *English Learner (EL) Task Force: Challenges and Recommendations* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Department of Education, 2025).

## More effective and meaningful communication is needed with immigrant parents.

In addition to individuals with expertise in EL instruction and education policy more broadly, interviewees included those running community-based programs that aim to support immigrant-background children's academic success. These included groups focused on refugee resettlement, health and social services, parent organizing, and others offering critical services based on their close-to-the-ground understanding of community needs. Program services included youth programs, such as tutoring and community field trips; activities to help families develop skills in literacy or advocacy; and support for critical education transitions, such as enrollment support for pre-K or kindergarten or helping families understand high school credits and what courses are needed for graduation and postsecondary opportunities. These organizations generally were not able to serve all children and families seeking their support, and in some cases they had limited relationships with schools and the larger education system. More concerning, their operations typically depended on temporary sources of funding, such as grants or private donors, and they often relied heavily on volunteers to provide program services.

Themes emerging from these interviews included ongoing unmet needs among immigrant parents to overcome language and systems knowledge barriers in order to support engagement with their children's education, and difficulties schools and communities face in creating and scaling two-generation initiatives that assist parents in developing knowledge and strategies that can lift their child's and family's education and life trajectories. The latter finding is puzzling in light of the state's professed support for two-generation approaches and its significant investment in adult education programs that operate within school districts and that could be tapped for such purposes.

In addition to scaling parent-focused programs that address information and skills gaps to support the upward integration trajectories of both immigrant parents and their school-age children, efforts to expand opportunities for the state's immigrant parents to become meaningful partners and active collaborators in their children's education could take many forms and be undertaken at the community, school, district, and state levels. For example, to provide official structures to bring the experiences of immigrant parents into policy and program processes, states including Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island have created English Learner/Multilingual Learner advisory councils or committees that include parents and advise state education department leadership on issues related to the quality of their children's education. In addition, such parent advisory councils exist in innumerable school districts from coast to coast,<sup>217</sup> including model efforts in cities such as Denver, nearby Vermont school districts,<sup>218</sup> and cities such as Worcester and Boston in Massachusetts.

The promulgation of the state's Parent Bill of Rights was also seen as a welcome and important development by interviewees. It was created through legislation passed in 2023 and adopted by the State Board of Education in early 2024, which directed CSDE to publish a Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners with the start of the 2024–25 school year. This document makes plain the major

217 State of California, "5 CCR § 11308. Advisory Committees," *California Code of Regulations* 2003, no. 2 (January 8, 2003); State of California, "5 CCR § 15495. Definitions," *California Code of Regulations* 2017, no. 11 (March 14, 2017); State of Illinois, "Section 228.30 Establishment of Programs," *Illinois Administrative Code* 46 (July 13, 2022): 13258; State of Massachusetts, "Section 6A: English Learner Parent Advisory Council," accessed April 23, 2025.

218 Essex Westford School District, "Multilingual Advisory Council (MAC)," accessed April 23, 2025.

policies in force across the state that are intended to ensure education access for immigrant-background students and ELs.<sup>219</sup> It affirms, among other things, parents' right to receive information about the ability of students to enroll in K-12 schools regardless of immigration status; for those with limited proficiency in English, to receive translation and interpretation services; the rights of EL students to access grade-level curriculum content; and ELs' right to bilingual instruction if it is provided in their school district. Implementation of this bill of rights is intended to widely communicate this important information to parents, and perhaps in doing so, to help ensure that schools in the state are aware of and comply with the various enumerated rights.

However, several of the key rights enumerated remain beyond reach in many districts, particularly access to bilingual instruction when conditions defined in state law warrant it and access for ELs to grade-level content. As described earlier in this section, delivering on these rights across the state will require improvements in technical support and other processes that build system capacities to provide effective instructional programs for ELs at

the school and classroom levels. Should the state fail to act proactively, local actors (both inside and outside schools) can of course still educate themselves on the capacities their schools and district may lack and advance efforts to improve access to effective program designs and quality instruction for EL students. Still, a statewide effort to make progress on established policy goals will be needed to bring promising practices to scale and to create more consistent quality programming for ELs across Connecticut.

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*A statewide effort to make progress on established policy goals will be needed to bring promising practices to scale and to create more consistent quality programming for ELs across Connecticut.*

<sup>219</sup> CSDE, "Parent Bill of Rights."