

# California Invests to Improve Preschool Instruction for Dual Language Learners

BLOG POST



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*In 2018, California invested a one-time \$5 million to train teachers to work with dual language learners (DLLs) using new models like **Sobrato Early Academic Language**, the **Language Learning Project** and **Preschool GLAD**. But in a state where a majority of young children are learning two languages, advocates say funding must be ongoing.*

*This blog is part of a series—reported in partnership with **Early Edge California**—that explores California’s innovative investments in professional development for teachers working with the state’s growing population of DLLs.*

In California, 60 percent of young children birth through age five are learning two languages. Yet too many teachers do not have access to training opportunities that prepare them to teach in the high-quality preschool programs that research shows these 3- and 4-year-olds need.

“This is a huge need for these preschool programs,” said Anya Hurwitz, executive director of Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL). Preschools in California have by and large “received no training of any magnitude around dual language,” Hurwitz said.

Now that is starting to change.

In 2018, the California legislature invested \$5 million for such training as part of its shift toward valuing bilingualism and multiculturalism. As part of that investment, SEAL and **five other organizations** received funding to provide professional development, curriculum support, and technical assistance to ensure teachers are equipped to meet the needs of the diverse populations in today’s preschools.

SEAL was awarded funding because of its proven, evidence-based model for strengthening early literacy instruction. **SEAL’s approach** focuses on integrating language development with hands-on learning and, crucially, valuing and supporting a child’s home language.

The new funding enabled SEAL to provide intensive professional development sessions for preschool teachers in 14 school districts. In addition, SEAL established four communities of practice across the state for preschool educators and administrators to build knowledge of best practices in supporting DLLs.

Preschool sets a strong foundation for children’s growth and success in kindergarten. Research shows that DLLs who attain **English proficiency in kindergarten** continue to keep pace with their peers academically as they go on in school.

Likewise, Hurwitz said research has shown that **SEAL students catch up or surpass** their peers. Findings show statistically significant gains in language, literacy and cognition, and significant impact on family literacy.

Hurwitz said preschool programs are hungry for this kind of training and interested in building systems that can train a cadre of expert teachers to work with bilingual children in their communities. But, she says, “The obstacle that is going to get in the way is funding. Are we building a professional development learning system or just providing Band-Aids?”

**Preschool GLAD(R)**, part of the Orange County Department of Education, is another professional development model that received funding from the California Department of Education. The model helps teachers implement research-based strategies that support quality early learning and language development with a focus on extensive teacher training, follow-up coaching and mentoring, and support for leadership and training the trainers.

The state funding enabled Preschool GLAD(R) to expand its work to 12 state preschool programs and to test a new program in Spanish to support Spanish dual immersion teachers.

Catalina Sanchez, a coordinator with the Orange County Department of Education, helps run the training programs and said the funding has enabled them to reach previously unserved teachers.

“We’ve been able to provide services that others could not afford and did not have access to quality professional development in the past,” she said.

GLAD’s strategies emphasize charts and visuals, songs and chants, deliberate scaffolds and connections to students’ lives and experiences.

The preschool training includes demonstration lessons, observations and time for teachers to learn the research behind the strategies and explore how they apply to their own work and programs.

Christie Baird, Preschool GLAD(R)’s coordinator of educational services said often preschool teachers have had a lot of training on safety measures and things like ratios, cleaning practices and classroom assessment tools.

“But if you’re talking about what is best practice for specific groups of students like special education or dual language learners, sometimes that’s the area teachers haven’t had the opportunity to look at.”

Baird said GLAD works closely with teachers to help them understand the latest research so they can identify the instructional strategies that best suit children's specific learning needs.

"We find they are thirsty for that."

Baird said that by investing in professional development for preschool teachers, the state has a real opportunity to make a difference for the future.

Research, Baird said, shows over and over that "it's the person that you put in front of the kids who makes the difference."