

Investing in Bilingual Teachers



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In the fall of 2017, the California Department of Education awarded a Bilingual Teacher Professional Development Program (BTPDP) state grant to eight Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to address the bilingual teacher shortage in California. Oak Grove School District served as the lead funding agency for one of the grant projects, which included a consortium of twelve school districts and one county office of education in partnership with SEAL (*Sobrato Early Academic Language*). The Oak Grove/SEAL BTPDP project was designed to address two primary purposes: 1) to increase the supply of bilingual teachers and 2) to improve the teaching skills and knowledge of bilingual teachers. The BTPDP grant project officially ended in June 2021, having been extended a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of the grant, the Oak Grove/SEAL BTPDP project helped increase the State's supply of bilingual teachers and their bilingual teaching expertise. However, there remains a

significant need for more bilingual teachers, and specifically for highly qualified, critically conscious bilingual teachers (Rodriguez-Mojica & Briceño, 2019), to serve California's linguistically rich students and families and to enact equity-oriented pedagogy. This article shares the results of the Oak Grove/SEAL BTPDP project. It also highlights the need for ongoing State investments aimed at increasing the supply of bilingual teachers and their bilingual teaching expertise.

BTPDP Teacher Participants

The Oak Grove/SEAL BTPDP project's main focus was Spanish-speaking teachers, including those who did not have a Bilingual Authorization and those who did but were not teaching in a bilingual classroom at the start of the grant. The project was designed to provide these teachers with professional development to strengthen their bilingual teaching skills and academic Spanish. This would allow them to be placed in a bilingual teaching assignment as soon as they obtained the

appropriate credential and/or when a bilingual placement became available. In addition, for teachers without a Bilingual Authorization, a primary goal was to help them meet the requirements to attain this certification, including passing the State Spanish assessments for teachers (CSET/LOTE) or completing alternative coursework.

A total of 157 teachers applied to participate in the grant project. Initially, 116 teachers were selected; however, 36 teachers either withdrew or were deemed ineligible to participate. This left 80 teachers who were active throughout the duration of the grant. (See Table 1 for a count of applicants by LEA). [Editor's note: All tables can be found in the appendix of the online version.] Of the 80 participating teachers, 22 already had their Bilingual Authorization, and 58 were working towards obtaining their Bilingual Authorization.

BTPDP Grant Activities

A number of activities and resources were provided to teachers to increase their pedagogical

knowledge and skills and to support their efforts to obtain their Bilingual Authorization. These included offerings from SEAL as well as from other organizations and universities with deep expertise on English Learners (ELs) and bilingual/multilingual education, such as the Center for Equity for English Learners at Loyola Marymount University and the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE). In addition, teachers were also offered financial assistance to offset fees for CSET Spanish test preparation courses or for taking college-level coursework that satisfied the CSET Spanish test requirements.

At the end of the project, teachers were surveyed about their participation in 14 different BTPDP activities and asked to rate the helpfulness of these activities on a 1-5 scale (1=Not at all helpful to 5=Extremely helpful). Forty-four teachers responded to these questions. All activities received an average rating of 4-5 (very helpful to extremely helpful). The highest-rated activities, both of which received a 5 (extremely helpful) rating, were SEAL's Bilingual Administrator and Coach Convening Webinar and SEAL's Bilingual Summer Bridge. It is important to note that both activities were attended by a relatively small number of survey respondents (16% and 25%, respectively). The activities that 60% or more of the survey respondents participated in were SEAL's Bilingual Convenings (80%), Individual Coaching Sessions with the BTPDP Coach (66%); Individual Learning Plan Sessions with district staff (61%), and CABE's Annual Conference (61%). These activities

received ratings ranging from 4.24 - 4.5. (See Table 2 for detail on activities.)

BTPDP Teacher Goals and Outcomes

Goal 1: Increase the number of teachers with Bilingual Authorizations

Teachers could choose from three pathways to obtain their Bilingual Authorization. These included taking only CSET exams, only university coursework, or a combination of CSET exams and university coursework. The availability of multiple paths was key in facilitating teachers' ability to obtain a Bilingual Authorization as it accommodated their learning styles and schedules. Out of the 58 Bilingual Authorization candidates, 52 (90%) chose to take only CSET exams, four (7%) chose to take only university coursework, and two (3%) chose a combination of CSET exams and university coursework. The six teachers who chose to take only university coursework or a combination of exams and coursework obtained their Bilingual Authorization.

Fifty-four teachers chose to take CSET exams as part of their pathway towards a Bilingual Authorization. Of these, 40 teachers attempted to take one or more CSET exams during the grant period and had high passing rates. Those who took one exam had a 100% pass rate; the pass rates for those who took two and three exams were 93% and 86%, respectively. (Table 3 details CSET pass rates.)

As a result of the grant, a total of 31 (53%) teachers received their Bilingual Authorization. Another 27 (47%) were still working on

completing the requirements to obtain their Bilingual Authorization. (See Table 4 for Bilingual Authorization status of all active BTPDP teachers.)

Goal 2: Increase the knowledge and skills of bilingual teachers

A pre- and post-survey was used to assess teacher knowledge and skills. One section of the survey focused on EL teaching knowledge and skills; a second section examined bilingual teaching knowledge and skills. Seventy-one teachers completed the pre-survey, 48 completed the post-survey, and 24 teachers completed both surveys. Although the matched sample constitutes about a third of the teacher sample that completed the pre-survey, the matched sample appears to be demographically similar (see Table 5). To compare pre and post-scores in the matched sample, t-tests were conducted to assess if the difference in means was statistically significant. The results that follow pertain to the 22-23 teachers in the matched sample that answered the questions in the EL teaching and bilingual teaching sections of the survey.

The EL teaching section of the survey included four areas: (1) knowledge of *EL instructional design elements* (e.g., ELD standards, Designated and Integrated ELD, home language support, differentiation). The other three areas examined instructional delivery related to (2) *rigorous and relevant curriculum*, (3) *comprehensibility in English*, and the (4) *classroom environment*. There was a statistically significant increase in all four areas, with the greatest increase in *EL instructional design elements* and the highest post-test

mean in *comprehensibility in English*. (See Table 6).

The bilingual teaching section of the survey included four areas, with the first two focusing on knowledge: (1) *research on bilingual education and bilingualism*, (2) *key terms and policies*; the last two focusing on instructional delivery, (3) *biliteracy development and equity*, and (4) *comprehensibility and proficiency in Spanish*. Again, there was a statistically significant increase in all four areas, with the greatest increase in *key terms and policies* and the highest post-test mean in *research on bilingual education and bilingualism*. (See Table 7).

In the post-survey, teachers were also asked about the extent to which the BTPDP helped improve their bilingual teaching knowledge and skills. Over 90% indicated that the BTPDP was “extremely helpful” or “very helpful” in this regard.

Ongoing Investments Needed to Support Bilingual Teachers

To identify grant components that were most valuable and the likelihood of sustaining these components beyond the grant, SEAL conducted focus groups with Local Education Agency (LEA) leads in February 2020 and April 2021. Following are some common themes that surfaced.

The need for a “BTPDP coach”

The role of the BTPDP coach, which was added about halfway through the grant, was frequently cited as being instrumental in helping teachers successfully navigate the path to Bilingual Authorization. The BTPDP coach played a key role in facilitating the

Bilingual Authorization process by identifying authorization options, helping teachers navigate the various steps, and tracking their test-taking and/or course-taking progress. (The BTPDP coach, Carla Herrera, developed a comprehensive list of resources and tips for teachers and administrators to help them navigate the Bilingual Authorization process, which is linked here for readers to access.) She also played an important “cheerleading” role, nudging and encouraging teachers along the way. The BTPDP coach role, and its associated FTE, is not one that LEAs felt they could absorb in their budgets. Having grant funds to pay for this critical expense was much appreciated by the LEAs, and its lack of sustainability without grant funds was universally acknowledged.

Reimbursements for testing and coursework required for Bilingual Authorization

Reimbursements for CSET test preparation, CSET testing fees, and tuition fees for university coursework in lieu of taking CSET exams were another commonly cited beneficial resource that the grant supplied. LEAs acknowledged they could not sustain these components without grant funds.

Professional development for teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators

Participating LEAs appreciated the quality of professional development that was provided by this grant to teachers, as well as the professional development offered to instructional coaches and school and district administrators. Some LEAs indicated that they could afford to pay for some of this

professional development within their existing budgets, but others said they could not.

Sustained attention and resources

All participating LEAs and SEAL staff recognized the value of this grant for focusing attention and resources on increasing the bilingual teacher supply and the caliber of their teaching methods. However, they also noted that the demand for high-quality bilingual teachers continues to exceed supply, and ongoing State investments are needed. In addition to providing ongoing financial assistance, like this grant, to help increase the supply and professional expertise of bilingual teachers, some LEAs suggested that paying bilingual teachers an additional stipend would help encourage more teachers to get their bilingual certification and to urge those with this certification to return to a bilingual classroom. LEAs also suggested the State launch a campaign encouraging young people to become a teacher, and specifically a bilingual teacher, and that this should be linked to the State’s Global 2030 initiative. As one LEA partner noted, “We need public service announcements from the State around the benefits of multilingualism because I think there’s still a lot of bad information out there.”

Conclusion

Overall, these results demonstrate the positive impact of the Oak Grove/SEAL BTPDP project. It increased the supply of bilingual teachers, and it increased the knowledge and skills of bilingual teachers. Although the grant funds were much appreciated, the work is far from over. Districts continue

to struggle to fill their bilingual teaching slots with highly qualified, critically conscious bilingual teachers, even as more bilingual programs are launching across the State, indeed, across the country. Resources for dedicated personnel to assist teachers in navigating the Bilingual Authorization process and to offset testing fees, test preparation coursework, or alternative coursework would

continue to help address this issue. Without grant funds, districts struggle to maintain supports for teachers, such as high-quality professional development specific to bilingual teachers. If the State is serious about meeting its Global 2030 goals, then State investments to continue strengthening the bilingual teacher pipeline will be needed for the foreseeable future. In the words of one LEA

partner, "We are hopeful that more funding comes around. We have interviewed for [an open bilingual teacher] position, and we had two candidates, but by the time we got to them, they had already accepted another position. So having more funding to do this again will be very helpful to identify other teachers and grow our own." ❧

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BACK-TO-SCHOOL STUDENT VOICES

Last fall, CABE asked students, "What's it like to get back to school after months of distance learning from home?"

