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More Than Three-Fourths of Early Learning Centers Lack Educators Trained to Work with Dual Language Learners

Sacramento, Calif. — First 5 California released *Quick Facts: Professional Development to Support Teachers of Young Dual Language Learners in California*, a new brief by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) highlighting the challenges early learning and care programs face and the support they need to ensure early childhood educators receive specialized training to serve dual language learners (DLLs). This study is part of a \$20 million initiative by First 5 California to promote high-quality early learning environments for children learning more than one language. The brief summarizes findings from a representative survey of program administrators across California and is now available at <https://californiadllstudy.org/reports>.

In California, nearly 60% of young children are considered dual language learners (DLLs), defined as children who are learning another language in addition to English from birth to five years of age. In 2019, 98% of licensed center-based programs and 70% of licensed family child care homes (FCCHs) in California served at least one DLL. Research shows DLLs have greater academic success over time if both home language and English are supported at an early age.

However, many educators lack training on how to work with DLLs, and many programs lack educators who speak the child's home language to facilitate engagement with families. In the study, 78% of centers and 69% of FCCHs reported not having enough early educators trained to work specifically with DLLs. Despite this, only 25% of early learning and care programs require their staff to participate in professional development focused on teaching or supporting DLLs.

"Early Learning professionals need additional support to access critical teacher training opportunities as well as wages that reflect their value to our children, families and our society. We cannot realize the benefits of dual language learning without an intentional system and an appropriately-trained workforce to support it," stated Mayra E. Alvarez, commissioner, First 5 California and president of The Children's Partnership, a nonprofit advocacy organization.

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Findings from a separate survey of program directors in July 2020 highlighted the impact of COVID-19 (<https://www.air.org/project/impact-covid-19-early-learning-and-care-california>) on continued services for young DLLs. Fewer than one-quarter of programs received guidance or resources to support DLLs during the school closures.

“When teachers aren’t trained in the unique needs of Dual Language Learners, we exclude a huge portion of California’s kids from reaping the full benefits of Early Learning,” said Patricia Lozano, Executive Director of Early Edge California. “By overlooking these kids, we create long-term barriers for their ultimate success in school and in life. If we get teacher training right for our DLLs, California ensures that all children get access to quality Early Learning.”

Proposition 227 effectively dismantled bilingual instruction in 1998 by severely restricting bilingual education in K–12 classrooms. However, Californians’ attitudes have shifted in recent years. Proposition 227 was repealed by Proposition 58 in 2016. Additionally, since about 2008, resources became more readily available to educators for enhancing their ability to provide classroom instruction with tools vital for shaping local practices in early learning settings. To identify effective and scalable practices, First 5 California launched the Dual Language Learner Pilot Study in 2017. Most recently, support for DLLs is identified as a priority in Governor Gavin Newsom’s *Master Plan for Early Learning and Care: California for All Kids*.

California has an opportunity and responsibility to support DLLs in reaching their full academic potential.

“Given the large number of DLLs in California in its early learning and care programs, the findings of these surveys uphold the recommendations of the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care to invest in DLL-specific professional development opportunities,” said Camille Maben, executive director of First 5 California, the state’s early childhood Commission. “These opportunities must ensure a qualified workforce that can support DLLs in all types of early learning programs, especially as the early learning system recovers from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

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About First 5 California

First 5 California was established in 1998 when voters passed Proposition 10, which taxes tobacco products to fund services for children ages 0 to 5 and their families. First 5 California programs and resources are designed to educate and support teachers, parents, and caregivers in the critical role they play during a child’s first five years – to help California kids receive the best possible start in life and thrive. For more information, please visit www.cfc.ca.gov.