



**mlrc**

Multilingual Learning  
Research Center



# Strengthening the Educator Workforce for Multilingual Learners Toolkit

Toolkit Overview

# Strengthening the Educator Workforce for Multilingual Learners<sup>1</sup>

One in five children ages 5–17 in the United States are multilingual learners (MLs) – children who live in households where a language other than English is spoken (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2023). Of these, half are designated as English learners (ELs) at school (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022).

In many states, the proportion of students designated as ELs has more than doubled since 2000, and several states – such as Kentucky, Mississippi, North Dakota, and South Carolina – are serving substantial numbers of ELs for the first time in recent history (NCES, 2022). While rates of growth may be slowing, many local educational agencies (LEAs) continue to grapple with shortages of certified teachers to provide bilingual instruction or English language development (ELD) support to their linguistically diverse student populations (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). **This tool helps LEA leaders identify specific needs to recruit, retain, and support teachers who serve ML and EL students.**

## Why This Tool Is Needed

Despite the growth in MLs and ELs across the country, many LEAs face shortages of certified teachers who can provide bilingual instruction or ELD support to linguistically diverse student populations. This tool provides districts with a process by which to collect and review local data in order to make an action plan to improve the alignment between teacher capacity and ML student characteristics.

This tool is designed to guide local leaders in supporting pathways into teaching and retention of educators who provide high-quality instruction to MLs. This includes both teachers who focus on delivering targeted ELD services, and thus who obtain a specific certification or endorsement, as well as those who focus on providing academic content instruction and may not have a specific ML-focused endorsement. Because English development and academic instruction occur in both bilingual and monolingual programs, the tool is relevant for districts as they plan for educator pathways regardless of the program models in place.

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<sup>1</sup> This tool has been adapted from: Parker, C. E., Partika, A. & Rutherford-Quach, S. (2024). Strengthening the teacher workforce to support multilingual learners: A tool for state educational agencies. National Comprehensive Center at Westat. That document was prepared by the National Comprehensive Center under Award #S283B190028 for the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (PGSS) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education and is administered by Westat. The content of the document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the PGSS or OESE or the U.S. Department of Education.

## Who Should Use This Tool?

We hope this tool will prompt meaningful discussions both within an LEA and between the LEA and external partners who are invested in developing and supporting the pool of teachers serving MLs. To that end, we recommend forming a working group that includes representatives from across the LEA. This group might include school administrators, ML directors, leaders of teacher preparation or alternative certification programs, and leaders of professional learning for educators of MLs.

We encourage including teachers in the working group and finding ways to incorporate the perspectives of caregivers and students. The group should have a designated leader – ideally the LEA director of MLs or someone in a similar role – who is responsible for overseeing the process. The leader should review all materials in advance to prepare for each meeting and ensure the workbook is completed as intended. Additionally, engaging an external facilitator familiar with the tools can add value by offering a “critical friend” perspective that may be difficult for internal facilitators to provide.

## Terminology

In federal education policy, the term *English learner (EL)* refers to an elementary or secondary school student who (a) has a home language other than English and (b) is developing English language skills to succeed in U.S. educational settings. ELs are legally entitled to support and services for learning English, a policy that stems from the 1974 Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* that ELs were “effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education” in the absence of ELD support. This ruling was extended in *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), which established that programs to support ELs must be (a) based on sound educational theory; (b) implemented effectively with sufficient resources; and (c) evaluated for effectiveness following a trial period. Additionally, current federal policy articulated by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 specifies that education agencies are obligated to sufficiently staff EL programs (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015).

Importantly, EL status changes over time, and children who reach a certain level of English proficiency are reclassified as English proficient and are no longer considered ELs but rather *former or monitored ELs* (Sugarman, 2020). Therefore, *English learner* is a dynamic term that only applies to a child for a limited time. The term *multilingual learner (ML)*, on the other hand, is inclusive of all students who have a home language other than English, regardless of whether they are or have been classified as an EL. Further, *ML* is an asset-based term that emphasizes children’s multilingualism as a strength, rather than focusing solely on their developing skills in English (Yankelowitz, 2023).

In this tool, we intentionally use the term *multilingual learner (ML)*, except when specifically referring to the unique needs of students officially classified and monitored as *English learners (ELs)*, as well as to the legal responsibilities of education agencies to support those needs.

# A Systems-Change Approach

The purpose of this tool is to guide local leaders to support pathways for and retention of teachers who provide high-quality instruction to MLs. The tool addresses teachers who focus on providing targeted ELD services, and thus who obtain a specific certification or endorsement, as well as those who focus on providing academic content instruction. Both English development and academic instruction occur in bilingual and monolingual programs, and so the tool can help educators considering educator pathways to support MLs regardless of the programs offered.

Although this tool focuses specifically on recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers to work with MLs, we recognize that each educational policy is part of a larger system and needs to be considered within that system. The specific skills and expertise needed depend on the programs offered to MLs (e.g., two-way bilingual programs require teachers with expertise in bilingual education).

Recruitment and preparation need to be considered in the frame of broader teacher workforce issues – retaining teachers once they are hired, diversifying the teacher workforce to be more representative of the students, developing culturally responsive and sustaining practices, and supporting professional growth. Teacher workforce policies also are part of a larger system, and there is increasing recognition that policies should be considered within a frame of systems change rather than as isolated issues.

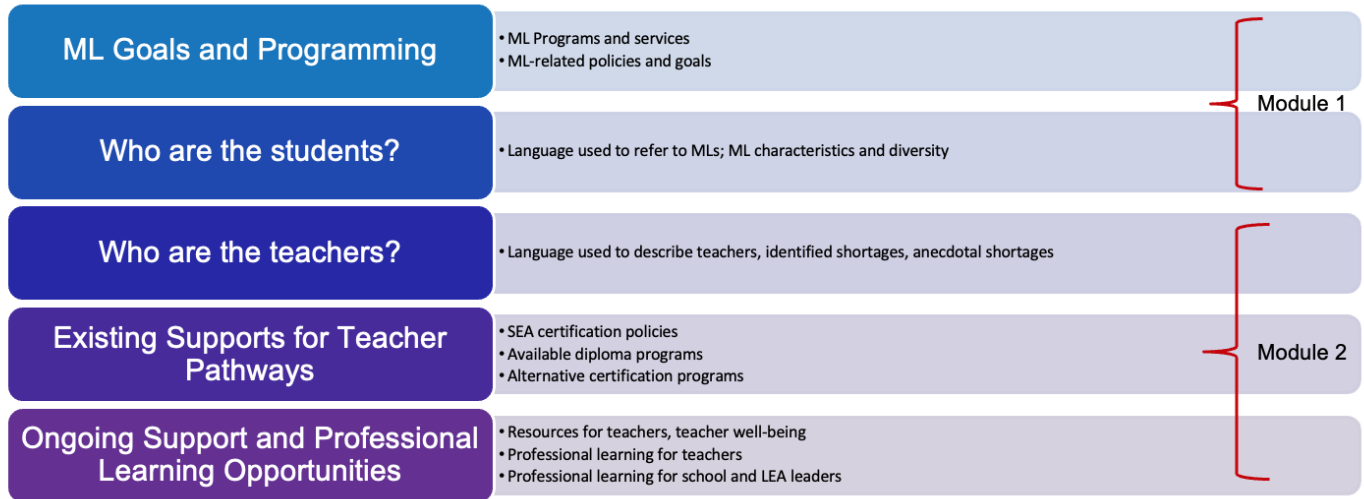
This tool seeks to facilitate systems change. This type of change focuses on transforming the root causes that perpetuate undesirable patterns of behavior within a system, while recognizing the intricate web of connections that characterizes systems. A system is made up of multiple levels:

- *Individuals* are at the heart of the system, with their ways of understanding the world and interpersonal dynamics.
- *Institutions* are the tangible structures governing how work gets done, and the norms and practices of these structures.
- *Structural interconnections* include how those institutions are interconnected, influencing, and being influenced by broader system behaviors (Kania et al., 2018).

In this tool, we focus on the institutional level while recognizing the critical importance of considering individuals' views and the structural interconnections across the system. One critical example of structural interconnections is the link between efforts to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce and pathways for teacher candidates who will work with MLs. Some efforts to recruit and prepare bilingual teachers explicitly target individuals from the school communities, even starting programs in high school to recruit young people into the teaching profession.

# Getting Started: How to Use the Tool

This tool supports the development of a robust teacher pool to serve MLs through collecting and reflecting on data from five components (Figure 1).



*Figure 1*

The tool process includes three modules (Figure 2), which provide an opportunity for the team to collect and reflect on data related to ML programs, students, teachers, and educator preparation.

- First, you will complete Module 1: Building a Vision for ML Programming in Your District. This module looks at your current ML programming, identifies steps to take to align it with district-identified goals and sets goals for the rest of the modules.
- Next, you will complete Module 2: Existing Supports for Teacher Pathways & Retention. This module focuses on building a shared understanding of the educational contexts of MLs in your LEA and then reviews current certification policies, preservice programs, and alternative certification strategies that support pathways into teaching as well as professional development and well-being supports that can promote teacher retention. You will consider the needs of ML students in your context and identify gaps between current practices and the needs of ML students.
- Finally, you will complete Module 3: Coming Together Around an Action Plan. In this module, you will synthesize what you've learned in Modules 1 and 2 to develop actionable steps you can take to support the teaching workforce to better meet the needs of your ML students.

We encourage you to set aside substantial time to think through all the topics raised in the tool, but you may choose to do so in a way that works best for you and your colleagues. Each module includes pre-work (e.g., populating data tables with your LEA information) to be completed ahead of the session by at least one participant, as well as content to discuss synchronously as part of a 2-hour session. However, you may adjust the content and timing of any module to better meet your needs.

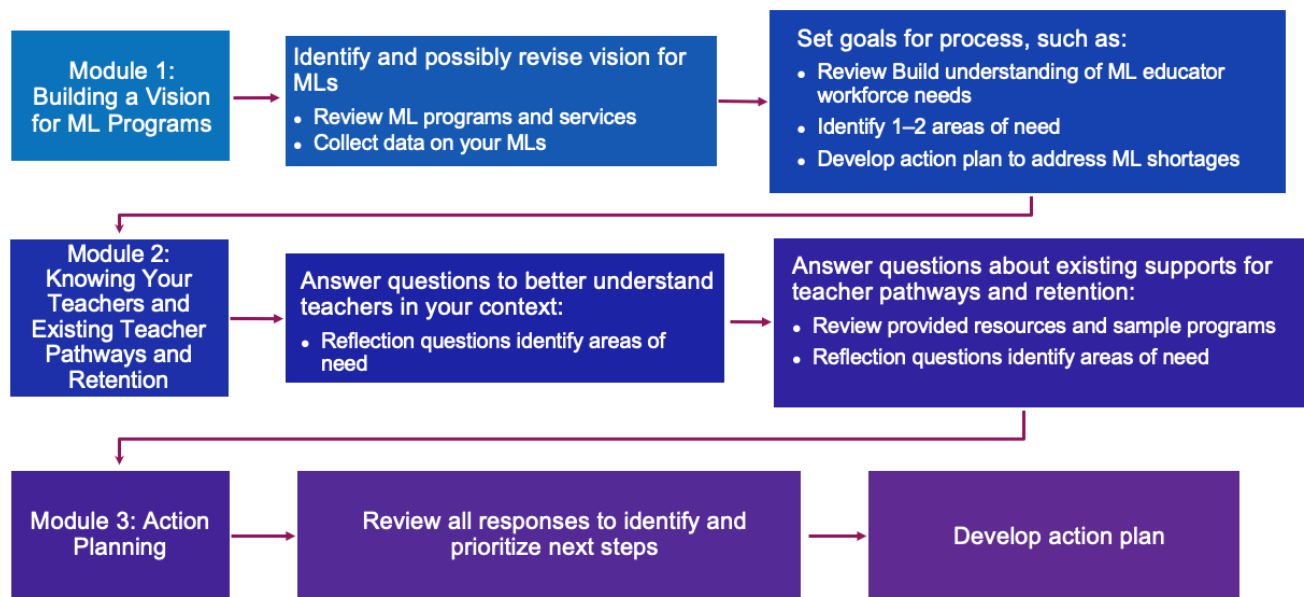


Figure 2

In some districts, the team may benefit from spending time articulating or refining their ML goals and programming before proceeding to the data collection phase. If modifications are made to existing programming, the needs of the district’s educator workforce may subsequently shift.

## What the Tool Includes

**The Introduction** provides key background to understand the need for an ML Educator Workforce Tool, how it is organized, and how to best use it.

**Resources and References** includes additional resources for each of the topic areas and key references.

**The Glossary** includes definitions for key terms used in the Tool.

Each module includes three documents:

- **Facilitator Guide** includes step-by-step instructions for going through the materials and slide deck, as well as some additional resources that can be shared. Although the Facilitator Guide provides all the content for the tool, we suggest that you have an outside facilitator who is familiar with the tools and can act as a critical friend for your team to provide additional supports as you engage in this process.
- **Participant Workbook** includes all the tables that will need to be completed. The **Pre-Work Tables** should be completed before the session so that all team members have access to the same information and data. The **Think About Tables** are opportunities for the team to jointly consider the implications of the data they have before them.
- **Slide deck** is aligned to the Facilitator Guide and will be used during the session.

## A Brief Look at Each Module

### Module 1: Building a Vision for ML Programs in Your District

In this module, the district leader and the external facilitator will work with the district team and set goals for the work ahead. Together, they will examine state and district policies and frameworks, as well as current ML programming and district vision for MLs and then will assess whether current ML programming meets student needs.

Before your Module 1 session, the district leader and external facilitator should:

- Review the Facilitator Guides, slide decks and Participant Workbooks for all modules (1–3).
- Recruit team members who should participate in this work and list them in the table below.
- Determine how the team will collaborate through this process.
  - How will you work within the workbooks?
  - Will you use a shared drive for team access?
- Establish a timeline for the work.
  - When should **Pre-Work** be completed and shared with the team?
  - If possible, pre-schedule the three sessions to approximately 2 hours each.
- Complete the **Pre-Work** (or assign it to team members) and bring any additional data that may support or align to your goals.

During the Module 1 session, you and the team will:

- Identify overall goals for using the tool.
- Finalize the list of participants.
- Review pre-work focused on (1) state and district policies/vision, (2) current ML programs and services, (3) information about the district's ML students.
- Together consider and respond to the **Think About** questions.

After completing Module 1, you should have:

- Completed Module 1 **Pre-Work** data tables and **Think About** questions.
- A finalized list of strategic team members.
- A clear set of goals for using the tool.
- A description of district programs and how they align with your vision.
- Plans to complete **Pre-Work** for Module 2.

## Module 2: Existing Supports for Teacher Pathways and Retention

In Module 2, you will deepen your understanding of the teachers who serve your MLs. You will review current certification policies, preservice programs, and alternative certification strategies that support pathways into teaching, as well as professional development and well-being supports that promote teacher retention. This module will guide you to consider the assets that ML students bring to your district, how your current educators and educator pathways support your MLs, and areas you can change to improve the ability of educators to effectively teach MLs.

Before your Module 2 session, you should:

- Review the Module 2 Facilitator Guide and Participant Workbook and customize the Module 2 slide deck.
- Complete the **Pre-Work** and bring any additional data that may be useful and aligned to your goals.
- Recruit any additional team members identified as essential for this stage of the work.

During the Module 2 session, you will:

- Review **Pre-Work** together.
- Consider and respond to the Module 2 **Think About** questions.

After completing Module 2, you should have:

- Completed Module 2 **Pre-Work** data tables and **Think About** questions.
- An understanding of how ML programs and services align or do not align with your students, how current teacher capacity aligns or does not with the district vision, and how future teacher pathways can address any gaps.
- A plan to review all work and findings before beginning Module 3.

## Module 3: Coming Together Around an Action Plan

In Module 3, you will synthesize what you learned in Modules 1 and 2 to develop concrete actionable steps that strengthen your teaching workforce and better meet the needs of your ML students.

Before your Module 3 session, you should:

- Review the Module 3 Participant Workbook and customize the Module 3 slide deck.
- Review the completed Participant Workbooks from Modules 1 and 2.
- Come prepared to revisit and if necessary, revise the original goals, and to collaborate on developing a clear action plan for implementation.

During the Module 3 session, you will:

- Complete and finalize your action plan.

After completing Module 3, you should have:

- A finalized action plan ready for implementation, including short-term wins and next steps.

# Glossary

**Bilingual (teaching) certification:** A professional certification that allows teachers to work with student populations whose primary language may not be English and teach in bilingual programs that provide instruction in both English and another language. Also known as a **bilingual authorization**, a **bilingual credential**, or a **bilingual endorsement**. However, **bilingual endorsement** is typically used to refer to an *add-on* to a teaching certification, rather than the certification itself.

**Dual language learner (DLL):** “A child who is acquiring two or more languages at the same time, or a child who is learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language” (Office of Head Start, 2016, Part 1305.2). Typically used in the early childhood education context.

**Dual language program:** “A bilingual program where the goal is for students to develop language proficiency in two languages by receiving instruction in English and another language in a classroom that is usually comprised of half primary-English speakers and half primary speakers of the other language” (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Also known as **two-way bilingual program** or **developmental bilingual program**.

**English language development (ELD):** “A program of techniques, methodology, and special curriculum designed to teach EL students explicitly about the English language, including the academic vocabulary needed to access content instruction, and to develop their English language proficiency in all four language domains (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing). English as a second language (ESL) instruction is usually in English with little use of the EL students’ primary language(s)” (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). May be **pull-out** – in which students are “pulled out” of general education classrooms to receive ELD instruction – or **push-in** – in which a certified ELD teacher provides instruction in general education classrooms (Colorín Colorado, n.d.). Also known as **English as a second language (ESL)**, **English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)**, **designated ELD/ESL**, or **targeted ELD/ESL**.

**English learner (EL):** An individual “(A) who is aged 3 through 21; (B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school; (C)(i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; (ii) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency; or (iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and (D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual – (i) the ability to meet the challenging state academic standards; (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Section 8101(20), as amended by the ESSA, 2015). Also known as **English language learner (ELL)**.

**Former English learner:** “A student who reached English proficiency and was exited from the EL status. Federal law requires local educational agencies (LEAs) to monitor students for at least two years to make sure that: (1) they have not been exited too early; (2) any academic deficits incurred as a result of participating in the EL program have been remedied; and (3) they are meaningfully participating in the standard program of instruction comparable to their never-EL peers. In addition, the ESEA now requires LEAs to report on the number and percentage of former ELs meeting state academic standards for four years” (New America, n.d.).

**General education settings:** In this tool, classrooms in which multilingual learners (MLs) are in classrooms with non-ML students and may or may not receive integrated language support.

**General education teachers:** In this tool, teachers who do not have an EL or bilingual endorsement but may be teaching MLs in their classes.

**Grow Your Own programs:** “Partnerships between school districts, institutions of higher education, and community-based organizations to recruit and prepare community members to become teachers in local schools” (Garcia, 2022).

**Long-term English learners:** “English learner (EL) students who have been enrolled in a U.S. school for six years or more and have not been reclassified as fluent English proficient” (REL West & WestEd, 2016).

**Multilingual learners (MLs):** Prekindergarten to grade 12 students “whose home or ancestral language is a language other than English; in many cases, these language(s) have been oppressed or debased, explicitly or implicitly, by national and local policies and institutions.” An “umbrella term that includes the many terms and labels used to identify linguistically minoritized students in U.S. public schools” (REL West & WestEd, in press).

**Preservice programs:** Preservice teacher education is the education and training provided to student teachers before they have undertaken any teaching, usually, but not exclusively, in a higher education setting.

**Structured English immersion (SEI):** “A program designed to impart English language skills so that the EL student can transition and succeed in an English-only mainstream classroom once proficient. All instruction in an immersion strategy program is in English. Teachers have specialized training in meeting the needs of EL students (e.g., an ESL teaching credential and/or SEI training) and have demonstrated strong skills in promoting ELD and SEI strategies for ensuring EL students’ access to content” (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015).

**Transitional bilingual education (TBE):** “A program that utilizes a student’s primary language in instruction. The program maintains and develops skills in the primary language while introducing, maintaining, and developing skills in English. The primary purpose of a TBE program is to facilitate the EL student’s transition to an all-English instructional program, while the student receives academic subject instruction in the primary language to the extent necessary” (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Also known as early-exit bilingual education.

The Multilingual Learning Research Center is a research center whose goal is to advance educational outcomes for multilingual learners through innovative and socially just research and research–practice partnerships.

- We collaborate across research disciplines to bring together bodies of knowledge, theories and methodologies in innovative ways.
- We seek to answer complex questions that have an impact on multilingual learners’ school success.
- We focus on elements key to the educational success of multilingual learners, including instruction, assessment, curriculum and program design.
- We value research–practice partnerships with educators to develop long-term, mutually beneficial collaborations around the production and use of research.
- We leverage local and global contexts and connections to interrogate a range of issues related to the education of multilingual learners.

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