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BUILDING A BILINGUAL TEACHER PIPELINE

Bilingual Teacher Fellows at
Highline Public Schools

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About the Author



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Cover photo: Bilingual teacher fellow Gamaliel Diaz leads a before school English language development class for newcomer EL students. Photo by Amaya Garcia.

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Terminology

This paper uses the term English learner (EL) to refer to students between the ages of 3–21 enrolled in the PreK–12 educational system who have a native language other than English and are in the process of developing their academic English language proficiency. This definition aligns with that used in a recent consensus report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*.

Series Introduction

English learners (ELs) represent a growing segment of the U.S. student population, especially in the early years. Nearly one in six kindergartners is an EL starting the process of learning English while they continue to develop in their home languages.¹ Research suggests that ELs learn best in environments that support the acquisition of English and continued development of their home languages, but bringing bilingual programs to scale will require a stable pipeline of qualified educators. This pipeline does not currently exist. The majority of states report shortages in bilingual, dual language immersion, and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers.² Creating a pool of bilingual educators will require deliberate investments and partnerships between states, school districts, and institutes of higher education.

This is the first in a series of papers that examine innovative approaches to bilingual educator preparation. The programs highlighted in this series were designed to match the context and meet the needs of specific school districts and to help them develop their own pool of qualified bilingual educators. These alternative pathways were created to help remove barriers to entering the teaching profession and in collaboration with local universities invested in designing rigorous programs that allow teacher candidates to do a majority of their learning on the job. These papers should help illustrate the diversity of design options available and the conditions needed to help launch these programs successfully.

INTRODUCTION

Another rainy morning in western Washington: the students at Midway Elementary School are running into the building to escape the cold. Inside one classroom, paraprofessional Diana Davis is leading a before-school Spanish literacy class. She is teaching five English learners (ELs) how to mix syllables together to form a word. She points to the syllable “li” and then to the syllable “ma.” “Li. Ma. Lima. Tu sabes que es una lima?” (*Do you know what a lima is?*) she asks. Since many do not, Davis says, “Yo te voy a mostrar!” (*I am going to show you!*) She holds one of her hands in front of her face and exclaims “Oh mis uñas! Están muy largas!” (*Oh my fingernails! They are so long!*), dramatically motioning away from her fingernails to show that they are long. She elongates the word “largas” to “laaaaaargas.” Her energy is palpable.

“Necesito una lima.” (*I need a nail file.*) She grabs a marker and says, “vamos pretender que esto es una lima.” (*We are going to pretend that this [marker] is a nail file.*) She pretends to file her nails with the marker and then exclaims, “ahora, mis uñas están muy bonitas porque yo use una lima para hacer que mis uñas sean más...” (*now my fingernails are very pretty because I used a nail file to make them more...?*) “Chicos!” (*small!*) yells out a student. Davis gently corrects the student and offers up a more accurate word: “cortas. Se dice cortas. Ya no tengo

unas uñas muy largas sino más cortas.” (*Short. Say short. Now I don’t have long fingernails but shorter fingernails.*)

The strategies employed during this one-minute interaction, such as the visual demonstration, represent best practices in helping EL students learn new vocabulary.³ It is hard to believe that Davis is not a teacher, given the skill and fluidity of her instruction. Luckily, she will soon be a certified teacher, thanks to her participation in an innovative alternative certification program being implemented at Highline Public Schools in partnership with Woodring College of Education at Western Washington University.

The Woodring Highline Future Bilingual Teacher Fellow Program is designed to prepare a small group of paraprofessionals to earn their teaching certification with the goal of easing the district’s current shortage of bilingual teachers. Davis is one of 16 fellows participating in the inaugural cohort of the two-year program, which offers a bachelor’s degree and K–8 teaching credential with the option of also earning a reading endorsement, English learner endorsement, or bilingual endorsement. The program, which began in the summer of 2016, is structured so that the fellows work as full-time paraprofessionals (see *What is a Paraprofessional?*)

and attend classes in the evening and on weekends. Their time is split between traditional paraprofessional duties such as running small groups, providing translation/interpretation and other support, and working with a mentor teacher to gain practice in leading instruction.

The mentor teacher provides opportunities to plan and deliver lessons and gives ongoing feedback, scaffolding in these opportunities over the year to give fellows the chance to contribute to student instruction and learning. “My teacher and I work closely to determine student needs. She allows me to teach 1–2 lessons a week,” says fellow Lorena Garcia, who works in a kindergarten Spanish-English dual language immersion classroom.⁴

These on-the-job learning experiences are central to the program’s goal of preparing the next

generation of bilingual educators. Indeed, research conducted by our Dual Language Learners National Work Group highlights the role that bilingual paraprofessionals, like Garcia and Davis, could play in reducing bilingual teacher shortages.⁵ Bilingual paraprofessionals often have the linguistic and cultural competencies schools need, but face many barriers to becoming certified teachers (see *Why Paraprofessionals?*).⁶ The program highlighted here has been designed to address these challenges and has enabled the school district to “grow its own” by providing paraprofessionals with the necessary financial, academic, and logistical supports to become certified teachers. It is also the expression of a state-level commitment to address current teacher shortages, a strong district-university partnership, intentional program design, and a thoughtful implementation process.

What is a Paraprofessional?

A public-school paraprofessional can go by many names and is often called a paraeducator, a teaching assistant, or an instructional aide. These educators usually support instruction in special education, early education, and/or bilingual classrooms. Their responsibilities often include providing one-on-one tutoring, assisting with classroom management, instructing small groups of students, and translating between students, students’ families, and the lead teacher.

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which required that all paraprofessionals in schools receiving Title I funds possess a minimum set of qualifications. These include: at least two years of college, an associate’s degree or higher, or a passing rate on a state or local assessment that demonstrates knowledge or skills in assisting math, reading, and writing instruction. Importantly, however, these requirements do not apply to paraprofessionals who are proficient in both English and another language and serve primarily in a translation or parental involvement role. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced NCLB at the end of 2015, maintains these qualifications.

Note: This sidebar originally appeared in Kaylan Connally, Amaya Garcia, Shayna Cook, and Conor P. Williams, *Teacher Talent Untapped: Multilingual Paraprofessionals Speak About the Barriers to Entering the Profession* (Washington, DC: New America, 2017), p. 3

“She’s great. We meet twice a week in the morning and she helps me so much. She actually went to Western...so she’s been able to help me with the overall program and how it went for her. And then I also help her with Journalism Club after school so we get to connect often throughout the day and before school and after school. I love it. I love working with [her].”

Cristina Rosas

“She’s fantastic. I love her! She’s very professional. She’s been doing this for 23 years, mostly in first grade. I feel like I can approach her for help whenever I need to but that she is still willing to let me do what I like without intervening too much.”

Sandra Ruiz Kim

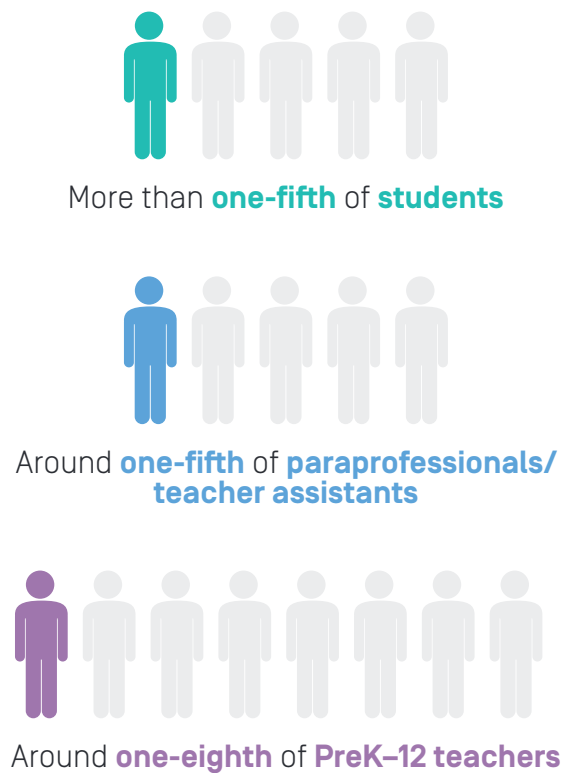
“I love my mentor teacher because our relationship is really good. I mean I am lucky to have her....Now we’re actually coteaching and that’s super rich for me because I’ve been learning GLAD. I’ve been learning how to get to the students and how to organize the classroom, how to actually plan what we’re going to do or how you in-the-minute make the changes that actually work for you when things happen. And she always takes the time to explain every moment. The [time with her] is like an extra class with no credit.”

Letys Ellefson

Why Paraprofessionals?

Paraprofessionals more closely match the demographics of the American student population in terms of race/ethnicity and home language than the general teacher workforce [see Figure 1 and 2]. In addition to their linguistic and cultural competencies, research suggests that multilingual paraprofessionals often have strong connections to the communities where they work and significant experience providing ELs with targeted instruction and home language supports.⁷ These assets should be leveraged to support the diversification of the educator workforce and to increase opportunities for EL students to gain access to bilingual instructional models and culturally-relevant instruction. However, helping paraprofessionals become teachers will take intentional and comprehensive preparation programs that aim to reduce barriers and facilitate program completion.⁸

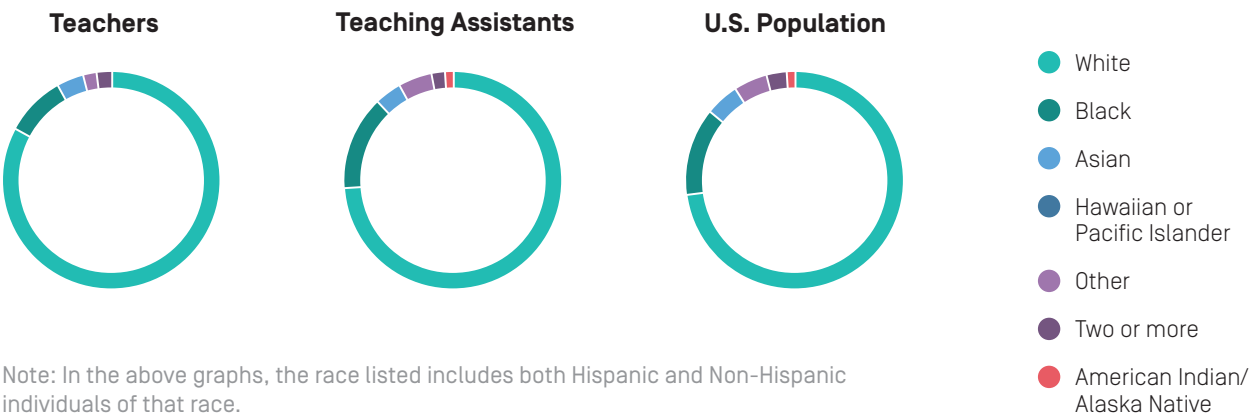
Figure 1 | Who in the U.S. Speaks a Non-English Language at Home?



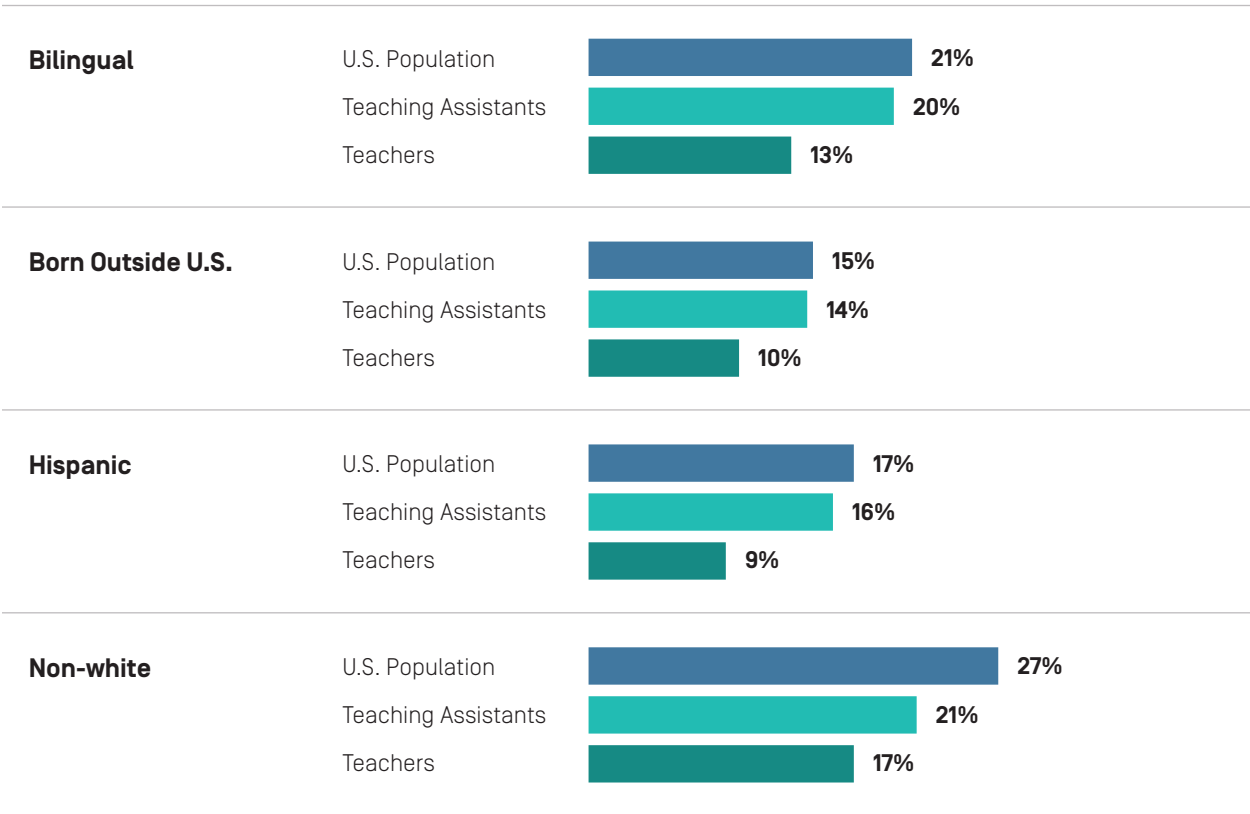
Source: Conor P. Williams, Amaya Garcia, Kaylan Connally, Shayna Cook and Kim Dancy, *Multilingual Paraprofessionals: An Untapped Resource for Supporting American Pluralism* [Washington, DC: New America, 2016], p. 3

Figure 2 | Teachers, Teaching Assistants, and the U.S. Population

Diversity among teaching assistants more closely resembles that of their students on a variety of measures:



Note: In the above graphs, the race listed includes both Hispanic and Non-Hispanic individuals of that race.



Source: Kaylan Connally, Amaya Garcia, Shayna Cook, and Conor P. Williams, *Teacher Talent Untapped: Multilingual Paraprofessionals Speak About the Barriers to Entering the Profession* (Washington, DC: New America, 2017), p.7.

HELPING EVERY STUDENT IN HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS BECOME BILITERATE

Highline operates 18 elementary, 6 middle, and 8 high schools that span the communities of Burien, Des Moines, SeaTac, and Seattle. A full 25 percent of students are ELs. They represent 101 distinct languages. As Bernard Koontz, executive director of language learning and teacher development for Highline, told us, “making sure that [EL] kids thrive” and “do well academically and graduate with all of their potential is really important to us and...having a strong teaching force that’s bilingual and biliterate is critical to that.”⁹

Indeed, a growing body of research suggests that bilingual instructional models work particularly well for ELs. In the early years, bilingual models have been found to be beneficial for language acquisition in English and Spanish.¹⁰ Children in these programs are not only able to build their Spanish language skills without interfering with their acquisition of English, but a 2012 study on the impact of bilingual instruction on preschool EL students’ academic skills showed that even modest levels of Spanish instruction can enhance their early reading and math skills.¹¹ These effects were strongest for children whose teachers were more

responsive and sensitive—signaling that educators who provide home language and socio-emotional support create an overall positive learning environment.

Dual language immersion programs—where instruction is split between English and a partner language such as Spanish or Mandarin—have also been found to enhance ELs’ academic performance and facilitate an earlier exit from the EL label and related language services. Stanford University researchers Rachel Valentino and Sean Reardon found that ELs enrolled in dual language immersion programs had higher growth in their English language arts (ELA) scores than of ELs in English only programs over time.¹² Specifically, between second and seventh grade, the ELA scores of ELs in dual language immersion grew while those of their peers in English-only programs declined. By sixth grade, the ELA scores of ELs in dual language immersion surpassed those of their English-only counterparts. A recent study of Portland Public Schools’ dual language immersion programs found that ELs in those programs exited from language learner services at faster rates than

The bilingual fellows program is one solution that will enable the district to recruit and hire bilingual teachers rooted in our community.

— Bernard Koontz
Highline Public Schools

those not in the program.¹³ Additionally, immersion students outperformed their non-immersion peers on the state standardized reading assessment by seven months of learning in grade five, and nine months of learning in grade eight. These findings are significant in light of the academic challenges faced by long-term ELs (students who have been classified as EL for more than six years).

The research on the economic, cognitive, and academic benefits of bilingualism has not gone ignored by Highline’s leadership. In 2014, the school board set the ambitious goal of having every student in the district graduate as bilingual and biliterate by 2026.¹⁴ But in order to realize this goal, the district will have to expand dual language immersion and world language programs, which will require access to a stable pool of

bilingual educators. However, there are multiple barriers to recruiting these candidates. The first is that the market for dual language immersion teachers is very competitive, given that many other school districts in the area offer these programs. Additionally, it can be difficult to find teachers who already know and are rooted in the community and are representative of the diversity of the district’s student population. The district has relied on teachers from Spain (who work on three-year visas) to staff these programs, an expensive and temporary strategy that is framed as a Band-Aid to the bilingual teacher shortage.¹⁵ “All these reasons combined to compel us to establish a strong way to get great teachers from our community,” Koontz told us, adding, “the bilingual fellows program is one solution that will enable the district to recruit and hire bilingual teachers rooted in our community.”¹⁶

DESIGNING A HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAM

A State-Level Commitment

Washington State is currently facing a large teacher shortage and is looking to new ideas to fill open positions.¹⁷ A 2016 report by Washington’s Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), which is charged with policy and oversight of teacher preparation and certification, noted that the previous five years showed a 250 percent increase teacher hiring.¹⁸ Current shortages are attributed to high levels of attrition and transfer among veteran

teachers who are “leaving at a rate that we have not seen for at least the past decade,” noted the report.¹⁹ Other factors contributing to the shortage include decreased enrollment in teacher preparation programs, attrition of beginning teachers, policies such as class size reduction and full-day kindergarten, and growth in student enrollment.²⁰

The state is expanding alternative routes to teacher certification to help ameliorate the current shortage and as a strategy to diversify the

Figure 3 | Alternative Routes in Washington



Source: Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), “Alternate Block Grant: Technical Assistance Day,” PowerPoint presentation, https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1qTnsYmPq0ujs8ouZyMe4LiIvonNB_9oWB3NFu9mylvE/edit#slide=id.p12.

educator workforce. Governor Jay Inslee's 2017–19 budget proposal included an \$11 million boost in funding for alternative route programs with priority given to programs focused on bilingual educator preparation.²¹ (For more on how the state is supporting its growing EL student population, see *Washington's Responsive EL Policies*.)

Washington has offered alternative routes since 2001 with the aim of creating multiple pathways into teaching. The four alternative routes to teacher certification (see *Figure 3: Alternative Routes in Washington*) have several common features including targeting specific populations of teacher candidates and a residency component that allows candidates to work under the guidance of a mentor teacher.²²

Route 1, which is designed with school classified staff and paraprofessionals in mind, is the model behind the bilingual teacher fellows program in Highline Public Schools. State law mandates that Route 1 programs be offered to current classified

instructional employees (e.g., non-certified instructional staff) with associate's degrees who are interested in obtaining teacher certification in special education, bilingual education, or English as a Second Language (ESL).²⁶ These programs are expected to take a maximum of two years and require prospective candidates to meet a set of basic entry requirements.

In 2015, the state legislature provided \$5 million in funding for growing alternative route teacher preparation programs after sharp funding cuts in 2011 and elimination of funding for these programs in 2013.²⁷ This money was distributed to university and school district partners through a competitive grant program led by the PESB and awardees were eligible to receive up to \$420,000 per year for a period of two years. The amount awarded depended on the number of candidates in the program, as funds were distributed as a per-candidate allocation. Funds were primarily used to provide student scholarships and financial support to universities and school districts (for a

Washington's Responsive EL Policies

In 2014, nearly 11 percent of students enrolled in Washington's public schools were ELs, representing 215 different home languages. Over the past seven years, the population of EL students has grown each year and state policymakers are taking notice.²³ In 2016, Governor Jay Inslee signed an education bill into law that included three important provisions for ELs: 1) by the 2019–20 school year, all teachers in the state will be required to have either an ELL or bilingual endorsement; 2) the state must provide districts with guidance in selecting EL instructional models, materials, and teacher professional development; and 3) teachers, principals, and administrators must receive professional development to build cultural competence.²⁴ Moreover, the state has strong EL monitoring practices, including using an "ever-EL" category to track the academic performance of students who were ever classified as EL. That data category can allow for a more nuanced picture of student performance and help account for the fact that the EL subgroup is not stable (e.g., different students enter and exit EL status every year).²⁵ Finally, the governor recently signed two important bills into law: HB 1455, which addresses specific supports for expanding dual language immersion programs, and HB 1115, which provides enhanced professional development for paraprofessionals and pathways for them to become teachers.

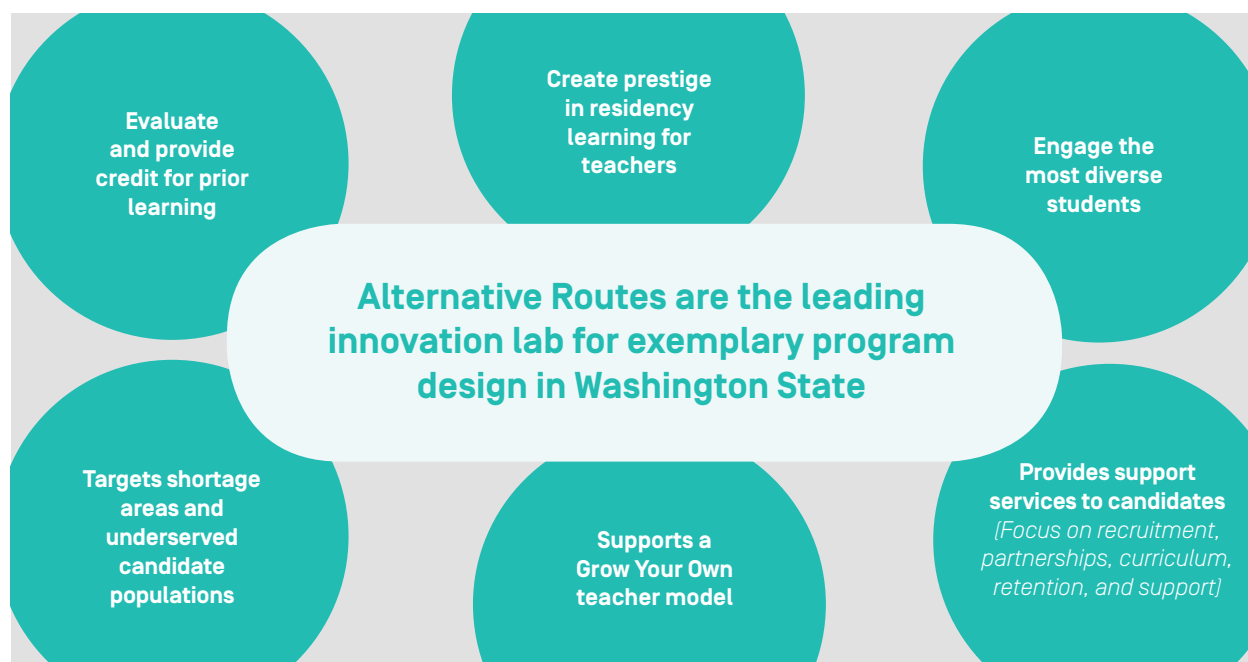
program manager, course instructors, district-level support staff, administrative staff, etc.). Teacher candidates were eligible to receive scholarships of \$8,000 per year (for two years) on the condition that they maintain enrollment, make progress in the program, and agree to teach in a public school in the state for four years.

The PESB leveraged the resurgence in funding to redesign and reimagine the “next generation” of alternative route programs to promote local innovation. It convened a working group that developed a set of six absolute priorities to drive the grant-making process (see *Next-Generation Alternative Routes in Washington State*, which captures these priorities). Many of these priorities are especially relevant for programs that target paraprofessionals. For example, paraprofessionals

often have significant opportunities to learn on the job and so benefit from structures that allow earning credit for prior learning and experience. Additionally, paraprofessionals are often non-traditional students who may require financial, academic, and social supports to earn their teacher certification.

Importantly, alternative route programs lead to the same teacher certification as traditional teacher preparation programs in Washington. According to Alexandra Manuel, deputy director at PESB, the benefit of alternative route programs is that they allow the state to meet candidates “where they are” and provide them with the opportunity to earn a credential and receive hands-on training.²⁸ Moreover, these diverse pathways have the potential to increase the diversity of the teacher

Figure 4 | Next-Generation Alternative Routes in Washington State



Source: Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), “Alternate Block Grant: Technical Assistance Day,” PowerPoint presentation, https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1qTnsYmPq0ujs8ouZyMe4LiIvonNB_9oWB3NFu9mylvE/edit#slide=id.p12.

“My son, the first five years of his life, spoke in Spanish actually and [when] he started school that was just in English. All that experience as a mother, as a parent, and it brought me to thinking, ‘I can be a teacher. I want to be a teacher. I can be an advocate for my students as I did for my son.’”

Letys Ellefson

“This program came about and I applied for it specifically because it was a bilingual program. I am trilingual...and it was something very unusual for me to have an Asian teacher and I thought that [it] would be really cool for me to be able to provide a service, just be in a position where I could be bilingual, communicate with students and parents especially in two languages.”

Sandra Ruiz Kim

“I was a bilingual paraprofessional for nine years and then ran an after-school program. I felt that I lacked the teaching skills and pedagogy to maximize the quality of the program. I knew that in order to effect change I need[ed] to learn how differentiate effectively. This program was too big of an opportunity to pass up.”

Jonathan Ruiz

workforce and increase student achievement, thus addressing the ethnic and linguistic gap often found between teachers and students. “No state can be satisfied with the match between the demographics of the teacher workforce and the demographics of students. Until we address that [issue] we will continue to see opportunity and achievement gaps,” said Manuel.²⁹

Essential Partnerships

School district and teacher preparation program partnerships are at the center of the alternative route block grant application process. Western Washington University (WWU) and Highline Public Schools were natural partners given existing relationships, the university’s strong bilingual educator preparation program, and the district’s need for bilingual educators. Francisco Rios, former dean of the Woodring College of Education, noted that the project is closely aligned with the college’s mission to honor diversity, leverage community partnerships to advance knowledge, and promote social justice. He said,

we’re focused on a very specific slice of [the teacher] shortage: bilingual teachers, teachers who have ELL endorsements, and ethnic minority teachers. We’re not trying to say we’re going to fill every shortage area, but we are targeting the shortage areas that are most consistent with what we’re about as a college and university. And we’re picking up folks who wouldn’t typically be able to access higher education.³⁰

From the district’s perspective, the partnership was a natural fit to help build a pipeline of well-prepared bilingual educators. According to Koontz, Western is a leader in the state when it comes to dual language immersion education and has deep expertise on how to prepare educators to work in these programs.³¹

The partnership provided the district with the opportunity to draw from a talented pool of

bilingual paraprofessionals who already had a commitment to the community, strong relationships with students and families, and instructional skills acquired on the job. “We knew that many [paraprofessionals] were interested in becoming teachers, but might not have the means to do that,” said Kristin Percy Calaff, Highline’s director of language learning. “They needed their regular paycheck,” but taking “a year or two off to go back to school full time just wasn’t a realistic option for most of them. So that really made us think about how do we harness that potential that we have right here...[and] help get those people into classrooms.”³² To that end, nine of the fellows in this first cohort were recruited from the district’s existing pool of paraprofessionals.

However, the success of the bilingual teacher fellows program is also predicated on a partnership between the district and the Teamsters Union that represents paraprofessionals. The union is an essential partner given its role in contract bargaining and setting the parameters for paraprofessionals’ responsibilities and duties. To that end, the district and union worked together closely in the development of a separate job description for the bilingual teacher fellow position to ensure that it was meeting the terms of the existing contract. Bilingual teacher fellows are distinguished from bilingual paraprofessionals in that they have additional responsibilities and duties including instructing students under the guidance of a mentor teacher, integrating a variety of instructional strategies and content, and preparing lesson plans to meet state objectives. The fellows get paid at a slightly higher rate than bilingual paraeducators.³³

This carefully worked-out job description was seen as a point of innovation by the state and offered as an example to other districts aiming to create similar programs.³⁴ Teamsters’ business agent Anthony Murrietta is a strong supporter of the program and would like to see similar opportunities offered to all paraprofessionals, as it is the only real pathway to a higher salary. “This, in my eyes, is so much bigger than trying to train one person

Figure 5 | Funding the Bilingual Teacher Fellow Program

Alternative Route Block Grant	Highline EL Funding	Other Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WWU staffing • Program management • Fellow scholarships • Highline staffing for program management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilingual teacher fellow positions • Access to chromebooks for fellows • Professional learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamsters: \$500 for continuing education • Federal financial aid • Other scholarships

Source: Marsha Riddle Buly, interview with author, March 6, 2017; Bernard Koontz, interview with author, March 7, 2017.

to be a teacher,” Murrietta told us. “It’s a strategy for helping people gain a foothold.”³⁵ Moreover, he agreed that the job description was essential to ensuring that no one “got bumped” out of their position in favor of a bilingual teacher fellow.

Program Priorities

Partners had to demonstrate that they would work together to address the six absolute priorities of the program, a process that was facilitated by a set of required project services and goals.³⁶ Some of these key goals included:

1. Collaborative recruitment and selection amongst partners
2. Flexible program design to meet district(s) need(s)
3. Extensive support services provided to candidates, with all partners engaged
4. Engagement of mentor teachers in professional learning communities with candidates

The recruitment and selection process was done under a fairly tight timeline since WWU received the grant in early February and the program began in July. A variety of recruitment strategies

were deployed, including advertising on listservs across the state and by word of mouth, sponsoring information sessions, and engaging directly with classified staff already working in Highline. However, partners noted that the real work began after “word was out” about the program. Koontz described selection as a three-tiered process that entailed talking through the program with each candidate, getting him or her through the employment process, and then ensuring that he or she qualified for admission to WWU.³⁷

Highline’s bilingual teacher fellow job description guided the employment process and helped to clarify expectations and responsibilities. Koontz believes that the job description also helped streamline the selection process:

having that separate job description was a huge piece; it makes it crystal clear what it’s about, it raises the prestige of [the program] and from the district perspective, it makes it really clear who wants to play and who doesn’t. If we were to go out to the paras and say, ‘hey who’s interested in this,’ we would have a much sloppier process, but because they have to go into our human resources system and apply for the job it makes it very clear that these are the people who are in.³⁸

Candidates had to apply, have their references checked, take and pass the language tests to

demonstrate proficiency in a second language, and show evidence that they had their associate's degree (AA). A few candidates lacked the AA and so had to work with Maggie Barklind in WWU's Extended Education Office to determine how they could finish the degree. She helped each candidate navigate the multiple requirements of the admission process.

Washington requires that all candidates pass the West-B, a basic skills tests necessary for admission into a teacher preparation program. This proved a roadblock for some of the candidates, since "we were at a point where we had a number of people who were on the tentative list who still had tests to pass....Often it's a matter of, 'this isn't my first language and so I'm trying to take a test in my second language and I'm struggling with it,' or 'I haven't studied math in years,' and...having to jump in and take this math test...is challenging," Percy Calaff told us.³⁹

The university had to ensure that otherwise qualified candidates were not cut off from the opportunity to participate in the program. Barklind devised a strategy where those candidates were allowed to audit courses until they passed the test, enabling them to participate in the program without incurring the cost of tuition. Once they passed the West-B their status was changed to fully admitted, which did require "a great deal of maneuvering on the registrar side" but allowed them to begin the program at the same time as the rest of the cohort, according to Barklind.⁴⁰

As the university and district were working to identify, hire, and admit candidates, WWU bilingual teacher fellows program director Marsha Riddle Buly was working with her colleagues to design the course structure and sequence of the program. Riddle Buly had one primary goal: to ensure that candidates did not earn a "watered-down degree."⁴¹ To that end, she modified the existing major in language, literacy and cultural studies and the elementary education degree to meet the parameters of the fellows program.

The program is designed so that university

coursework is offered on-site at Highline by WWU instructors (the district had to undergo an accreditation process to become an official WWU site), necessary because WWU is located two hours away from Highline. The program is divided into 8 quarters and fellows take 15–20 credits each quarter. Courses are offered on Tuesday evening and all day on Saturday, with a few delivered as hybrid courses/online. However, the fellows in this first cohort have a strong preference for "face-to-face" instruction and enjoy talking through the "applicable content, theory and policy" in class, according to Jenna Harris, WWU course instructor and field mentor⁴² (see *Snapshot from a Special Education Course*).

Despite the heavy course load, those credit hours do not necessarily translate into seat time. The courses that are specific to the K–8 credential (primarily methods courses) are structured around Washington's Endorsement Competencies that specify the knowledge and skills teacher candidates must be able to demonstrate in order to earn their certification.⁴⁶ Harris told us, "if it's a 4–5 credit course it's not necessarily the credit load that's mattering when they graduate; it's that all of the bilingual competencies are met so that they can be effective teachers."⁴⁷ At the end of each quarter fellows are tasked with demonstrating that they have met a set of competencies either through a link to a video, a quiz, or an assignment. At the end of the two-year program WWU program faculty will examine the evidence of fellows' learning and sign off that they have met all of the competencies.

Multiple project partners emphasized that the bilingual teacher fellows program is "not for the faint of heart," given its rigor and demands. Fellows receive comprehensive support services to ensure their success in the program. WWU offers help in navigating the admission process, including financial aid, but also provides each fellow with a faculty field mentor. These mentors described themselves as "jacks of all trades," which reflects their multifaceted role: providing advice to help fellows stay on track; problem solving and networking with other program instructors; meeting regularly with fellows to complete

Snapshot from a Special Education Course



Bilingual teacher fellows working together during their SPED class. Photo by Amaya Garcia.

It is a Tuesday night and the fellows are assembled in the library at Seahurst Elementary School for their weekly Special Education (SPED) course. Instructor Rachel Hoff, an elementary language learning program specialist in the district, is delivering a short lecture on Universal Design for Learning, which she describes as a framework that educators can use to create adaptations to their instruction and materials to help all students access content.

Hoff has invited two colleagues from Highline to demonstrate a range of adaptations that can be used with students, including English learners. These strategies range from creating visual charts of the daily schedule and using manipulatives to help with math problems to using computer programs so that students can access information in their home languages.

Fellows walk through different stations around the library to learn about the variety of strategies available to help adapt their instruction. As Jesua Aguilar, a fellow at White Center Elementary School, shares, the SPED course is challenging but it has been “amazing” to learn how to work with students who have diverse needs and to receive support from the special education teachers in bridging what she is learning in class with actual classroom practices.⁴³

During the second half of the class, fellows break into small groups to discuss profiles they completed on individual students as part of an assignment on how to determine whether a student should be referred for special education services. Fellows use a matrix to frame their discussions and guide their presentation of each student’s academic, social, and behavioral profile. At one table, fellows debate what qualifies as a speech delay and spend time trying to figure out how a student’s developmental history (obtained from parent reports) influences her learning.

Several fellows described an initial feeling of shock at having to manage a full course load while working full time. But some of these feelings have been mediated by the fact that coursework is applicable to their day-to-day work. “I definitely have been able to apply everything that we’re learning in courses now to what I’m doing. I feel like Western’s done a good job of making sure that what we’re learning is obviously applicable to what we’re doing,” said Sandra Ruiz Kim, who spends the majority of her time working with EL students.⁴⁴

The courses are opening fellows’ eyes to new concepts and ways of approaching their students. As Letys Ellefson noted, “this quarter we’ve been learning about bilingual education and how language is acquired. That was a new aha moment, ‘oh, so that’s the way!’ And last quarter we learned about linguistics....These two classes have changed for me the way I actually see my students. Now I understand, ‘oh wow, how can I ask him to do this if the first barrier we have is language?’”⁴⁵

This alignment between courses and work provides further illustration of the value of residency models in teacher preparation that allow students to learn and apply new skills in a supportive learning environment, with mentor teachers scaffolding and guiding the connection of coursework and classroom-level practices.

collaborative reflection logs that examine successes in the classroom, current challenges, and concerns; and designing/leading monthly mentor/mentee meetings focused on supporting those classroom partnerships.⁴⁸

Highline also offers support beyond the classroom. Richard Dunn, the district's bilingual teacher fellows program facilitator, serves as a liaison between the university and the district and between the district and elementary schools participating in the program. He works closely with the fellows to help address challenges that arise and he plays a strong role in facilitating the teacher/fellow relationship. The monthly mentor/mentee meetings, which Dunn co-plans and co-leads with the university mentors, serve as a professional learning community where fellows and mentors can learn about university program requirements, district policies, instructional practices, hiring practices, and interviewing skills; build specific mentoring skills with opportunities to practice these skills; and enjoy structured collaboration time.⁴⁹

Koontz framed these meetings as an activity “that drives a lot of conversation” and “gets really specific about how we want to support people through the experience.” For example, an upcoming meeting, he explained, would be used to “help folks really think about what the hiring process is going to look like, what they need to do to get ready for that, and how that impacts what they’re doing instructionally.”⁵⁰

WWU and Highline partners are in constant communication and see their roles as complementary. Together they are able to provide fellows with wrap-around support. Fellow Letys

Ellefson said that the people at Highline have “been very supportive, they are pampering us all the time. Everywhere you go, and just here in my school, I have the psychologist to help me, the principal...I have three mentors that always are either calling... or e-mailing...or we see them and meet them and express our concerns, what was going well, where it’s not. I think that we are on track.”⁵¹

The cohort structure of the program itself provides a layer of support. Cohort models provide a structure where students take classes with the same group of peers who are studying for the same degree or in the same content area. Research by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment on a Los Angeles-based BA cohort completion program demonstrated that graduates felt that the model was a key component in their attainment of a bachelor’s degree.⁵² Many cohort members maintained professional relationships after leaving the program, relying on each other to share best practices and to develop strategies for addressing workplace challenges. Indeed, many of the fellows at Highline emphasized that the cohort design has allowed for collaboration, exchanges of ideas, and the development of personal relationships. Jonathan Ruiz, a fellow at Southern Heights Elementary School, characterized the cohort as “invaluable to the experience.”⁵³

“It’s really hard. So what I do is I say, ‘okay, first my job.’ As soon as I get home, I’m mom; I do all the chores that a mother does and after my son goes to sleep at about 8:30–9:00 that’s my student time. So that’s my time to read, to do my homework, to check my computer and learn about the whole world.”

Letys Ellefson

“I don’t know how I balance coursework and working full time! I thought I would fail because I felt so overwhelmed. I felt like a fish out of water. Plus I had to balance other responsibilities with family life.”

Jesua Aguilar

“It helps a lot that we have our small group with the cohort. We all support each other and like, ‘hey let’s get together and work on these assignments.’ So that’s been helpful. A lot of the assignments have been overlapping with what we do in here and so that’s been also really nice. It’s just a lot of time management, planning out what we’re doing as soon as we’re out of work. It’s a lot but we knew that’s what we signed up for.”

Cristina Rosas

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the biggest challenges facing both Highline and WWU was the short timeline for implementing the program. The grant was awarded in early February and the cohort began its courses in July, so partners had to work quickly to get key components of the program in place.

On Highline's side, it was responsible for finding job placements for all hired fellows, which proved to be a bit of a puzzle since the district had fewer vacancies than normal. As Kristin Percy Calaff said, "the first year was tricky. We were trying to fit people into positions that already existed...and then we didn't have as many vacancies the year we were trying to place all of these folks...So that was [like] fitting a square peg into a round hole [since] they weren't all the ideal positions for them."⁵⁴

Only seven fellows were placed in schools with a dual language immersion program and some had to split their time as paraprofessionals with other duties such as working in the main office or as parent liaison. However, several fellows who work in non-dual language immersion schools get opportunities to use their bilingual skills in before-school programs. One example is the morning program for 16 Vietnamese students and their parents focused on literacy and shared book reading strategies run by Ai Vo, a native Vietnamese speaker.

Another challenge was finding principals and mentor teachers willing to take on a bilingual fellow. Koontz likened the placement process to "matchmaking," explaining that it was a big commitment for a school to take on. "You have to enter it as a principal with some flexibility for the experience to work really well for the bilingual teacher herself. She needs to be supported by a mentor teacher who really wants to take that on," he said, adding, "there's a lot of fine tuning around the matchmaking and sustaining the fellow position."⁵⁵ The district plans to have conversations with principals and mentor teachers to hear about their experiences with the program and learn how to make it work for them again next year. In schools where the match was not a good fit, the district is exploring placing fellows in new positions in the coming year.

Western Washington project staff had a different set of challenges to work through, primarily related to the rigidity and bureaucracy of higher education. Riddle Buly noted that it "took a lot of massaging" to convince her colleagues that the program could be designed with enough rigor to match the traditional degree.⁵⁶ She championed the program by pushing boundaries and asking people at the university to "rethink how they do things,"⁵⁷ according to Maggie Barklind, a colleague. Barklind, from the university's extended learning office, added, "a lot of the success rides on [the

university's] commitment to considering alternative approaches to administering programs and their good graces to making exceptions. Our tendency in higher education is to go for what's traditional."⁵⁸

Indeed, the program operates within the tension between traditional teacher preparation and alternative pathways. Francisco Rios, former dean of Woodring, worries about this tension and the need to ensure all teacher candidates are well-prepared:

There is this national narrative that we don't need traditional teacher education programs. We worry with the successes we're having [that] here's further proof that we don't need traditional teacher ed. We are serving an important population but are we undermining the bread and butter of our traditional teacher prep program? Between 300–400 teachers get prepared through that program compared to 15 who complete through alternative routes....It's a tension for me. The more success we have with these alt route programs the more we give fodder to [those who say] we don't need traditional teacher prep.

But maybe it does not have to be a question of which mode of preparation is better. As researchers Thomas S. Dee and Dan Goldhaber argue in their recent paper on teacher shortages, given the local nature of teacher labor markets and research suggesting that teacher candidates are often drawn to districts near where they grew up or completed their student teaching, Grow Your Own programs

might be an effective approach for districts seeking to recruit and retain teachers.⁵⁹ Alternative pathways are a door into the profession for prospective teachers who might not otherwise have access. The bilingual teacher fellows program was designed to meet a specific need and to support a specific population in its quest to become certified, a population that traditionally has not been served well by higher education.

Looking forward, both the district and WWU have their sights on securing funding for a second cohort of bilingual teacher fellows. In the short term, Riddle Buly plans to make some modifications to the course sequence and to work with the district on securing the necessary five weeks of release time for fellows to complete their student teaching requirement. Koontz and his colleagues at Highline seek to talk with the fellows about their experiences and devise ways to build in supports to help them navigate the experience of being teachers of color in schools where the staff is mostly white and the students are mostly children of color.⁶⁰ They believe that these supports are critical to ensuring that the fellows stay in the teaching profession: "retention of teachers of color in a field where institutional racism is rampant is critical. We are working to intentionally talk about race: how to respond to micro-aggressions, how to navigate the explicit instances of racism, recognizing and dealing with stereotypes...and more," said Koontz.⁶¹

Voices from the Field | Fellows on How to Improve the Program

“What I’ve noticed is that a lot of our cohort members have to live at home with their parents or many of us work second jobs to be able to, or rely on second incomes from spouses, to be able to make it work, especially in this area because it’s so expensive now. I’m not sure that’s anything anyone can do [anything] about, but it’s just something to consider.”

Sandra Ruiz Kim

“If people want to be in this program, they should only work a half day so they have time to focus on their courses.”

Ai Vo

Voices from the Field | Mentor Teachers & Administrators on the Fellows Program

“We definitely have a need for bilingual teachers; every year it’s been a hunt. We’ve been very thankful for those who come from Spain to fill a need and a cultural gap, but I think what’s really great about the bilingual paras is that they already know [our school] so when they get their teaching certification they’re going to know our policies, our procedures, our kids, our families, the staff, who they can go to for what. I think those first-year teacher things that sometimes weigh heavily on a first-year teacher are gonna really be eliminated because those basic foundations are already going to be set.”

Kathy Emerick, *Principal, Hilltop Elementary School*

“I wish I had that opportunity going to school....I didn’t get to do my student teaching when I was working as a para....When I had a mentor teacher, she was new, she was in a different school; it felt more businesslike when I was doing my student teaching. She would come in and say, ‘okay, doing good,’ and then she would leave and it wasn’t really like working together to teach the kids.”

Yazmin Gil, *Mentor Teacher, Hilltop Elementary School*

“I was nervous to take on a student teacher...but...I knew that this group of students...struggle a lot more with reading. Through the bilingual fellow model, we’re able to have her as a paraprofessional in the morning during my reading block and then in the afternoon she’s doing her student teaching in science. She gets to know the kids really well and she knows my teaching style because she’s in here a lot more hours during the day than you normally would be as a paraprofessional or as a student teacher since it’s spread out over two years. And so I really appreciate it a lot and I think the students benefit a lot from it because they can have a consistent person [who] knows their skills deeply and sees them in both English and Spanish.”

Nicole Grambo, *Mentor Teacher, Hilltop Elementary School*

CONCLUSION

Washington State's need for well-prepared bilingual educators is only going to continue to grow. In May, Governor Inslee signed into a law a bill to expand dual language immersion programs across the state through grants made to school districts. Under the law, districts are eligible for up to \$200,000 to start or expand two-way dual language immersion programs or one-way immersion programs in schools serving predominantly EL students.⁶² Additionally, PESB is charged with developing a program to recruit, mentor, and prepare bilingual high school students to become educators and school counselors, another promising approach to growing the linguistic diversity of the educator workforce and addressing the state's teacher shortage.

The Evergreen state is also placing emphasis on paraprofessionals' training, professional development, and growth through the creation of a new paraeducator board—the first board of its type in the country. The new board will determine governing priorities for the profession, including defining standards of practice and a baseline level of professional development, and focus on developing a career ladder for paraprofessionals. The board will consist of individuals who are appointed by the governor, including current paraprofessionals, school principals, and other

individuals working in education, and it will have rulemaking authority.

Finally, this spring, state legislators approved changes to the rules governing alternative route programs, which included a mandate for biannual reporting of program outcomes. Specifically, PESB will be required to track and report on: (1) the number and percentage of alternative route completers hired; (2) the percentage of alternative route completers from underrepresented populations; (3) three-year and five-year retention rates of alternative route completers; (4) the average hiring dates of alternative route completers; and (5) the percentage of alternative route completers hired in districts where their program was completed.⁶³

When these initiatives are taken together, the state is emerging as a national leader in creating pathways to support the preparation of bilingual educators. The Woodring Highline Future Bilingual Teacher Fellow Program is an exemplary model of how to create an alternative route program that removes barriers and provides wrap-around supports for paraprofessionals and it shows the vital role that school district and university partnerships can play in addressing local teacher shortages.

Notes

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