

AMAYA GARCIA

# BUILDING A BILINGUAL TEACHER PIPELINE

The Portland Public Schools and Portland State  
University Dual Language Teacher Partnership

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## Terminology

*English Learner:* A student between the ages of 3–21 enrolled in the PreK–12 educational system who has a native language other than English and is in the process of developing 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*.<sup>1</sup>

*Paraprofessional:* A public school paraprofessional can go by many names: paraeducator, teaching assistant, or 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.<sup>2</sup>

*Grow Your Own:* Locally-developed teacher preparation programs that recruit from within the community in order to find teachers for local schools. These programs, also referred to as GYO, usually consist of partnerships between school districts and institutes of higher education and are designed to remove financial, academic, and linguistic barriers to entering the teaching profession.<sup>3</sup>

*Alternative Certification Teacher Preparation Program:* These programs provide individuals who hold a bachelor's degree the opportunity become teachers outside of the traditional teacher preparation pathway (e.g. a four to five year undergraduate program). Candidates are able to fast-track teacher licensure (usually in 1–2 years) and some programs allow candidates to work as teachers while taking the courses necessary to earn licensure (e.g., Teach for America and TNTP Teaching Fellows).<sup>4</sup>

## 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. 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 and effective teachers. This pipeline does not currently exist. The majority of states report shortages in bilingual, dual immersion, and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers.<sup>5</sup> Creating a pool of bilingual teachers will require deliberate investments and partnerships between states, school districts, and institutes of higher education.

This is the second in a series of papers that examine innovative approaches to bilingual teacher 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 effective bilingual teachers. These 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.

This paper builds on recent research by the Dual Language Learners National Work Group on the role that “Grow Your Own” teacher preparation programs could play in easing the bilingual teacher shortage.<sup>6</sup> Grow Your Own programs are designed to recruit and prepare culturally competent teachers from the community who have the requisite skills and knowledge to address students’ needs.<sup>7</sup> These programs often target school -based staff such as paraprofessionals and translators and are designed to remove financial, linguistic, and academic barriers to entering the teaching profession for non-traditional students.<sup>8</sup>

# INTRODUCTION

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At the start of the 2015–16 school year, the dual language immersion and world language programs at Portland Public Schools (PPS) were in a precarious situation. The district, which has offered bilingual instruction for several decades, was undertaking an ambitious expansion of these offerings as part of a larger effort to increase equity and close long-standing achievement gaps. However, with expanding dual language immersion programs in neighboring districts and small numbers of bilingual candidates graduating from Oregon’s teacher preparation programs, there was a dearth of educators to support the model. The district had been unable to fill 14 teacher vacancies and scrambled to adjust program models in some schools to cover the staffing gaps. It was clear that district administrators needed to take action to ensure that their dual language immersion programs had the staff they needed.

“Dual language immersion has been the number one hire at PPS for many years running because, with our equity work, the board has said, ‘go forth and expand as fast as possible.’ We have a staffing shortage,” said Michael Bacon, assistant director of Dual Language Immersion at PPS. “We’ve done trips to Puerto Rico, we have brought in visiting international teachers, but that’s still not meeting the need that we have. So we decided that we need to grow them ourselves.”<sup>9</sup>

In summer 2016, the district, in partnership with Portland State University (PSU), launched two cohorts of the PPS & PSU Dual Language Teacher Partnership. The partnership provides 28 dual language teacher fellows with the opportunity to earn a master’s degree in elementary education with a bilingual/English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement or in secondary education with a world language endorsement (e.g., Spanish) while they simultaneously work as classroom teachers, full-time substitutes, or paraprofessionals. Each bilingual fellow underwent a multi-step process to join the program, including gaining admission into PSU and into the teacher preparation program (either Bilingual Teacher Pathway or Graduate Teacher Education Program) and getting hired by the school district. These candidates were drawn from both existing staff (e.g., paraprofessionals) and the local community. “The whole premise of this [program] was the belief that we had already tomorrow’s teachers...in our community. We just have to identify them and equip them,” Debbie Armendariz, senior director of Dual Language Immersion at PPS, told us.<sup>10</sup>

This program is the first in Oregon to leverage a school district/university partnership to build a alternative certification bilingual educator pathway that allows participants to work as classroom teachers (and earn a teacher’s salary) while

pursuing an education degree and licensure.<sup>11</sup> The PPS/PSU program is one example of how states and districts are addressing the need for qualified

bilingual educators through alternative pathways designed to help them grow their own talent.

## DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION AS A DRIVER OF EQUITY

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Portland Public Schools has a long history of dual language immersion (DLI) programs—where instruction is split between English and a partner language such as Spanish or Mandarin—starting with an English-Spanish program at Ainsworth Elementary School in 1986.<sup>12</sup> In those early days, programs were largely built out of grassroots efforts that aimed to provide monolingual English speakers with educational enrichment. Today the district enrolls just over 5,000 students (about 10 percent of all PPS students) in DLI programs in Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese at 28 schools. These programs primarily target English learner (EL) students and with good reason: multiple studies<sup>13</sup> demonstrate that DLI programs facilitate EL academic achievement and English language proficiency.

The district’s approach to program expansion is centered on an equity focus for EL students. Many of the programs that began as “one-way” immersion programs that enrolled a majority of native English speakers have been converted into “two-way”

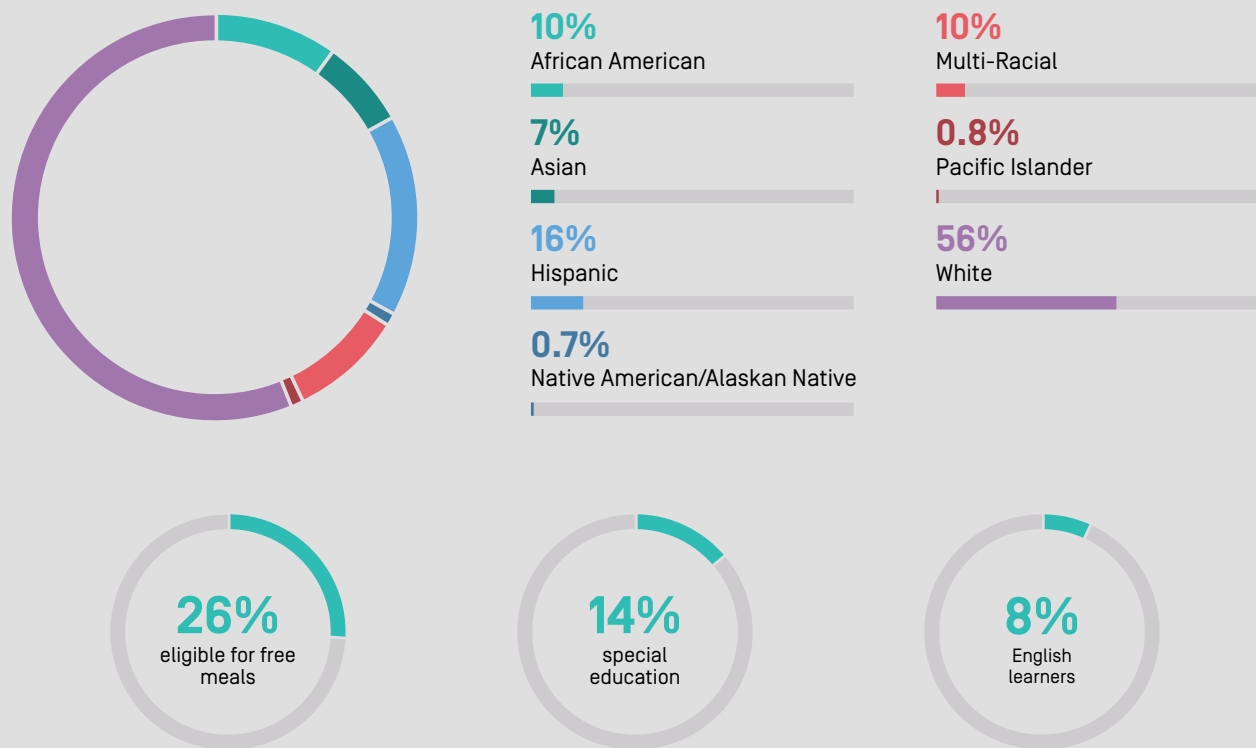
immersion programs that enroll equal shares of native English speakers and native speakers of the partner language. New program sites are selected with the input of a DLI expansion committee comprised of parents, teachers, administrators, and representatives of community-based organizations who provide recommendations. PPS also pays close attention to the number of EL students enrolled at a particular school as well as in other immersion programs—and the academic achievement of these students—to guide the selection of sites and target languages. For example, Bacon and Armendariz have been keeping a close eye on the growing Arabic population in the city’s Head Start programs and recently received funding to plan and implement an Arabic DLI program in the fall of 2018.

The expansion of dual language immersion in the district is guided by two objectives: 1) increasing educational equity and 2) closing achievement and opportunity gaps. In 2011, the PPS Board of Education made equity a district-wide focus with its creation and adoption of the Racial Educational

Equity Policy. That policy defines educational equity as increasing the achievement of all students while also reducing achievement gaps between different groups of students and eliminating predictable trends about which students are the highest and lowest achieving in the district.<sup>14</sup> Equity is not about equality of opportunity; it is about providing “additional and differentiated” resources to students based on their educational needs.<sup>15</sup>

These differentiated resources include DLI programs, which are seen as an essential tool for closing the achievement gap for ELs and other underserved students, a stance that the district has embraced wholeheartedly. A video on the PPS website chronicling the history of dual immersion programs in the district highlights that EL students have particularly large achievement gaps compared to their non-EL peers and links to research demonstrating that they thrive in two-way

**Figure 1 |** Portland Public Schools Student Demographics, SY 2016–17



Source: Portland Public Schools, <https://www.pps.net/domain/265>



dual language immersion programs. In other words, these programs are not simply aimed at helping develop cohorts of bilingual students but rather as a deliberate strategy to “support the district in its goal to close the achievement gap.”<sup>16</sup>

PPS has evidence that this approach is working thanks to its collaboration with researchers at the RAND Corporation and the American Councils for International Education on a three-year study of its programs’ impacts on student achievement. The study found that DLI 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.<sup>17</sup> Findings for math and science were neutral, with DLI having neither positive nor negative impact on student performance in these subjects. ELs enrolled in dual immersion have higher rates of reclassification (exiting EL services) than those who are not enrolled in one of these programs.<sup>18</sup>

This fall, the district will be opening a new Mandarin immersion program and has plans to convert an existing Spanish program within a school into a whole-school program. “It might just be that once we do that, between these two programs, we might have enough slots for almost all of our native speakers, in Spanish and in Chinese,” said Armendariz. “We’re getting close.”<sup>19</sup>

## BUILDING A STRONG PROGRAM

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### Essential Elements

According to a 2015 U.S. Department of Education report on the landscape of dual language policies and programs, one of the biggest barriers to program implementation is the lack of teachers with the requisite knowledge and pedagogical skills.<sup>20</sup> In the six states highlighted as case studies in the report, four had implemented alternative certification programs to help build their bilingual educator workforce. Alternative certification programs provide pathways into teaching for a more diverse pool of candidates, those who often

have previous work experience and who have already earned a bachelor’s degree. Commonly, these programs provide candidates with a restricted or temporary teaching license and a short period of training before placing them in their own classrooms.<sup>21</sup> In turn, candidates are expected to enroll in a teacher preparation program that will provide them with the coursework necessary to earn traditional licensure. As a 2004 report from the U.S. Department of Education states, “alternative programs tend to be created by a local partnership for the express purpose of preparing teachers to meet the needs of the local school district(s).”<sup>22</sup>

Portland's program has five essential design elements:

1. Fellows have a bachelor's degree.
2. Fellows working as classroom teachers are doing so under a restricted license that must be renewed every year for a maximum of three years.
3. Fellows are enrolled in either the Bilingual Teacher Pathway (BTP) program (for those seeking to teach at the elementary level) or the Graduate Teacher Education Program (GTEP) (for those seeking to teach at the secondary level) at Portland State University and are on track to earn a graduate degree in education, ESOL endorsement, or target language endorsement (e.g., Spanish) within two to three years.
4. Fellows began the program in the summer of 2016 by taking three courses and participating in a three-week DLI intensive training held by PPS, and they began teaching in the fall of 2016.
5. Fellows must be proficient bilinguals, required to pass a language fluency assessment.

## Critical Partnerships

For the past 18 years, PSU has offered a pathway for bilingual paraprofessionals and school-based staff to earn their teaching degrees through the Bilingual Teacher Pathway (BTP) program. Initially, PPS considered starting its own teacher preparation program, but quickly realized it had neither time nor capacity to undertake that work. It was directed to PSU through Keith Menk, who worked at the Teacher Standards and Practice Commission (TSPC), Oregon's teacher licensing agency. As Esperanza De La Vega, coordinator of the BTP program, explained, Menk suggested that PPS partner with PSU in order to leverage the existing curriculum and resources of the BTP program.<sup>23</sup>

PPS and PSU began meeting to discuss what the district wanted and what the university could provide. As Micki Caskey, PSU's associate dean for academic affairs in the Graduate School of Education, explained, it took several meetings before they realized that the district needed programs to prepare both elementary and secondary teachers. She said, "we brought a lot of people together and had a lot of conversations about what courses should be taught when. We have approved programs that have a set of courses, experiences, and assessments that are all packaged together, but how [should] that get adapted to meet the needs of the district? So there was a lot of collaboration, a lot of planning."<sup>24</sup>

During the program's first year, fellows were grouped into separate cohorts from other students in the BTP and GTEP programs and provided with a different course sequence. The first three summer courses offered were those that would best prepare fellows for their entry into a classroom in the fall: classroom management; planning, assessment, and curriculum; and the impact of language and culture (focused on preparing teachers to work with children from different cultures). Additional modifications to the course sequence also allowed for adjustments based on what the fellows were experiencing in their own classrooms and the information they needed to be successful on the job. For those in the BTP program, De La Vega was careful about who was instructing the fellows, since "it's critical that any faculty who work with these candidates understand that they're not traditional university students. They have tremendous pressures, and any way that we can make the content relevant and meaningful for the candidates...[to] use in their classroom...would be the most ideal. I don't want to just hire someone who is going to teach them in a traditional way," she said.<sup>25</sup>

Both PPS and PSU program advisors and administrators acknowledged that the program's design and flexibility has been constrained by the university system. For example, PSU requires a minimum number of candidates in order for

the program to be fiscally viable. “We thought we could have distinct separate cohorts for the GTEP residency model or the BTP residency. But their numbers did not hold. We were thinking there’d be 25 in each, and we ended up with maybe 19 or 18 in them. By the time we finished with the first term, we were down to about 14. So you think about the attrition; we want to make sure we have a viable program,” said Caskey.<sup>26</sup>

For the upcoming year, the number of program applicants dropped and there will be only 10 fellows in BTP and 10 fellows in GTEP. It is no longer feasible to keep them as a distinct group and so they will be integrated into the existing BTP and GTEP cohorts. But that change does not impact the modified course sequence that has been tailored for them. For example, GTEP has modified the course sequence to ensure that fellows take a classroom management course the first summer, before stepping into the classroom.

## Removing Barriers for Bilingual Educators

Oregon has long recognized the need to increase the racial and linguistic diversity of its educator workforce. The issue has been addressed in state statute since the passage of the Minority Teacher Act in 1991 (see **Increasing Educator Diversity in Oregon**). That law aims to have the racial and linguistic makeup of the educator workforce mirror that of the state’s student population. In PPS, 43 percent of students are students of color, while only 19 percent of the school district’s teacher workforce is comprised of people of color.<sup>27</sup> By comparison, 87 percent of the PPS dual language teacher fellows are people of color and all are bilingual (in Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, or Vietnamese).

Debbie Armendariz emphasized that the PPS/PSU program is designed to remove barriers to entering the teaching profession for linguistically and ethnically diverse candidates. These barriers include navigating the higher education system (application process, required exams, transcript

translation fees), the cost of required exams and application fees, and the district’s hiring process. To that end, the district hired a full-time program coordinator, Alma Morales Galicia, who leads program recruitment, helps candidates navigate the application process, and supports the fellows once they start the program.

“As a field in education, we realize that our students of color and our underachieving students are underachieving because there are barriers inside the system that prevent them from taking advantage of opportunity or from having access to opportunity,” said Armendariz. “The same thing happens to our people of color who are adults so having someone like Alma be a barrier buster and an opportunity provider is kind of the key in our particular flavor of an alternative certification program. Most of [the fellows] are local and most of them are teachers of color.”<sup>27</sup>

Having access to educators who can speak their language and are knowledgeable about their culture allows English learners continue to develop proficiency in their native languages and gives them the experience of having their culture valued in the classroom. As Bacon told us, the program has also helped increase opportunities for ELs who are not in DLI programs. For example, “we have two Somali teachers who are part of our program and their communities that they’re in, the principals just love them,” he said. “All of sudden there’s just this asset within the community that helps them support their families and their children.”<sup>28</sup>

But identifying, recruiting, and hiring these teachers was no simple task. Morales Galicia led the program recruitment process and described it as a “grassroots” effort that included holding information nights, talking with principals and asking them to recommend paraprofessionals in their buildings, reaching out to community partners, and creating a program website. The word-of-mouth strategy proved effective, and 75 candidates applied to be part of the first program cohort. Prospective candidates underwent a three-step application process (see **Figure 2**).

## Increasing Educator Diversity in Oregon

In 2015, state legislators updated the Minority Teacher Act with the Educator Equity Act that aims to reduce the disparities between the state's diverse student population and the predominantly white, monolingual educator workforce. While nearly 37 percent of students in Oregon are culturally and linguistically diverse, only 10 percent of the educator workforce has these characteristics.<sup>28</sup>

These trends are mirrored in the state's teacher preparation programs, where only 10 percent of teacher candidates in 2014–15 were people of color. "If educator preparation programs were able to graduate candidates who mirrored the demographics of Oregon's graduating high school students, the pool of candidates for hire should be over 31 percent racially and linguistically diverse," notes the 2016 Oregon Educator Equity Report.<sup>29</sup> The revised law mandates that teacher preparation programs create and submit plans with goals, strategies, and deadlines for the recruitment, admission, retention, and graduation of diverse educators.

In a 2010 article in *Urban Review*, researchers Ana María Villegas and Jacqueline Jordan Irvine identify three arguments for increasing the overall diversity of the teacher workforce: 1) diverse educators are role models for all students, 2) diverse educators may increase the academic achievement and improve the school experience of diverse students, and 3) diverse educators reduce teacher shortages in hard to staff schools as they tend to stay working in those settings longer than their white peers.<sup>30</sup> However, data from Oregon show that teachers of color actually have lower rates of retention than white teachers.<sup>31</sup>

The state's Educator Equity Advisory Group recommends several strategies to combat the issue of retention of teachers of color including: provide in-service teachers with mentoring support for a period of one to two years and develop Grow Your

Own programs to help local candidates eager to work in their home communities.<sup>32</sup>

Some examples of state and district efforts to diversify the educator workforce in Oregon include:

1. **Pathways in Education Program.** A partnership between Springfield, Eugene, and Bethel School Districts and the University of Oregon, Pacific University, and Northwest Christian University, Pathways in Education provides recent high school graduates (who must be linguistically, culturally, or socio-economically diverse) with academic support, scholarships, professional development, tutoring, and other services. The goal is for these students to become teachers in the sponsoring school districts upon graduation from a teacher preparation program.<sup>33</sup>
2. **TeachOregon.** A three-year initiative of the Chalkboard Project and Oregon's Network for Quality Teaching and Learning, TeachOregon was focused on improving teacher training and increasing the diversity of the educator workforce.<sup>34</sup> The project brought together school districts, community colleges, and university teacher preparation programs to recruit and train diverse teacher candidates starting as early as middle school, to improve the student teaching experience by providing cooperating teachers with training, to evaluate and improve hiring and placement practices, and to enhance new teacher mentoring and induction.
3. **Chemeketa Community College Bilingual Teacher Pathway.** This program provides Spanish-speaking students with the opportunity to work as bilingual student teacher leaders for 5–10 hours a week. Students provide translation, student tutoring, and help with special projects and in return earn up to \$400 in tuition assistance per term. Chemeketa has

articulation agreements with most Oregon state universities that allow students to transfer as juniors and earn their bachelor's degree, which is necessary for certification.

4. **Salem-Keizer Public Schools.** Salem-Keizer has a partnership with Corban University and Western Oregon University to build a pipeline of diverse educators starting in high school.<sup>35</sup> The district offers teacher cadet courses that are taught by Salem-Keizer teachers and university faculty to help support the transition from high school to college. The Bilingual Scholars Program at Western Oregon University provides

mentoring, academic support, and financial assistance to graduates from Salem-Keizer (along with two other school districts) who are on their way to becoming bilingual teachers. Students in the program work in Salem-Keizer's summer school programs under the guidance of a mentor teacher. They are guaranteed a job interview in their home district upon graduation from college.<sup>36</sup>

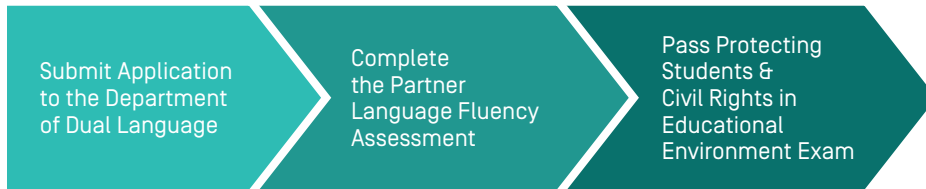
First, applicants applied to the program via a Google form that asked for basic contact and demographic information and answers to three key questions: (1) Why would you like to become a teacher? (2) Describe any experience you have working and engaging with students particularly in an educational setting; and (3) What is the impact you hope to make in the lives of historically underserved students and in the closing of the achievement gap? After that, applicants completed a language fluency exam to ensure that they met or exceeded the proficiency requirements to teach in a DLI program. Finally, they had to pass the state's civil rights exam, which is mandated for anyone requesting a teaching license in Oregon. The district paid for the cost of the exam and for all other fees associated with the admission process to Portland State University. Morales Galicia organized tutoring and training support to help candidates pass the exam.

Second, prospective fellows had to apply for admission to PSU's graduate education program. They could apply to one of two programs:

1. **Bilingual Teacher Pathway (BTP).** A two-year graduate program that partners with local school districts to recruit bilingual paraprofessionals and prepare them for licensure, BTP is designed to help fill critical shortages of bilingual educators across the Portland region. Program candidates earn a master's degree in elementary education (grades K–8) with the option of also earning an ESOL endorsement. Some of the classes that BTP students take include: Elementary Mathematics Methods, Assessment of Language and Content Learning for K–12 English Learners, ESL/Bilingual Program Design, and Models and Language and Literacy Development for Diverse Learners.
2. **Graduate Teacher Education Program (GTEP).** GTEP offers one-year and two-year programs in both elementary and secondary education. Candidates from the dual language teacher fellows program are enrolled in the two-year secondary education program (grades 6–12) and will earn a master's degree plus a world language endorsement (in Spanish, Russian,

**Figure 2** | Program Application and Admission Process

### Step 1 Preliminary Admission to the Program from the Department of Dual Language



### Step 2 Admissions to BTP/GTEP



### Step 3 Hiring Process



Source: Portland Public Schools, Department of Dual Language, Teacher Fellows Program Application Process and Timeline, <https://sites.google.com/a/apps4pps.net/portland-dual-language-teacher-fellows/application-process-and-timeline>.

Japanese, and Chinese, among others). Some of the classes that GTEP students take include: World Language Methods I, Assessment for Learning, Educating for Equity and Social Justice, and Technology as a Tool for Learning.

Candidates were provided with support and training on the application process, which included taking them through each step of the application and providing guidance on how to answer some of the questions. Yuuki Sakai, a current dual language teacher fellow, said that even though the admission process was quite arduous, the resources provided by the district were extremely helpful. “Once you apply to this program and pass [the language

screenings] basically they say, ‘good. Now we can help you do all these other things.’ They say at this point, ‘we need you to take these tests, we’ll pay for these tests, at this point we need you to fill out this form and do this thing’ and they’ll tell you ahead of time and they’ll also remind you well enough in advance,” he said.<sup>39</sup>

However, despite the assistance, some applicants faced significant barriers in their quest for admission to PSU. Some applicants faltered on the TOEFL exam, which was required of anyone who was not a native English speaker. Other applicants had trouble meeting the education requirements. “They thought they had a bachelor’s degree but

when their transcripts were evaluated they actually were three-year degrees; they needed one more....It wasn't equivalent. Or individuals who had degrees from other countries but didn't pass the TOEFL.... So those were the two major barriers that prevented people from actually being admitted into the university," said De La Vega.<sup>40</sup>

The admissions process often does not provide the flexibility necessary to ensure that non-traditional candidates gain entry into programs. Fellow Angela Bonilla shared the story of a co-worker who was denied admission after scoring two points below the cut-off on the TOEFL exam. She said, "I think for me what was difficult was seeing co-workers who have had more experience, who can do this work, being unable to be a part of this program because of something that had to do not with the PPS side of 'we want you to work here, we want you to do this,' but with the academic PSU side."<sup>41</sup>

However, PSU did make some accommodations for candidates, such as extending the program application deadline, working with the graduate

office of admissions to provide extended time for a fellow to resolve challenges getting his transcript from his home country, and giving another student who did not meet the minimum GPA advice on what to do in order to eventually qualify for admission. That student is "considering beginning the program as just a post-bac student and taking 9 credits this summer to...bring her GPA up to qualified; then we'll support her resubmission of admission to the graduate office," said Howard Yank, a secondary cohort leader and faculty member in the Graduate Teacher Education Program.<sup>42</sup>

At the end of the application process to both the fellows program and PSU, prospective teachers had to go through the PPS hiring process, which included applying to vacancies, participating in interviews, and giving demonstration lessons. Morales Galicia walked them through the application process, provided interview tips, and helped with resumes. By the end of the process, there was a cohort of 28 fellows who were hired as classroom teachers, full-time substitute teachers, educational assistants, and paraeducators.

# IDENTIFYING & ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

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## Job Equity for Fellows

The variety of classroom positions that the fellows find presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the program. PPS cannot guarantee that all fellows will be hired for a classroom teaching job. All candidates must undergo a competitive hiring process whereby principals and school hiring committees select and hire the most qualified candidates per the teachers' union contract.

Additionally, there were not as many open teaching positions as expected in the first year, especially in the Japanese and Chinese programs, which left some fellows with few options beyond working as full-time substitutes and paraprofessionals. "My language is Japanese and there's only one elementary school and they don't have vacancies. I just have to wait; it could be two weeks or 10 years. So I said, 'fine. I'll take the other job,'" said fellow Yuuki Sakai.<sup>43</sup>

However, as Armendariz explained, this shortage did not prove to be a particularly large problem from the district's end: "the first year we learned that our screening was so rigorous and our training so rigorous that all of the candidates" who did not get a teaching position "were eventually offered a subbing position," she said. "Some of them

preferred to take [paraprofessional] positions or different kinds of positions. So now we kind of know that it's likely that at the very least you would be able to get a substitute teaching position."<sup>44</sup> In the latest program application round, the district actively communicated with prospective candidates about the possibility that they could work as either classroom teachers or substitute teachers and provided basic job descriptions for both positions.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, the proliferation of bilingual substitutes proved a win for the district, which has often struggled to find substitutes proficient in the partner languages offered in their dual language immersion programs. Some fellows were able to get long-term substitute positions to cover maternity leaves that in the past were sometimes filled by monolingual English speaking teachers and that led to disruptions in educational continuity. In addition, substitute positions provide fellows with the flexibility of either working full time or part time. In reflecting on how to balance work with other responsibilities, fellow Xiaolan Zhang explains, "it's very challenging: you have family, you have school, you have work, but I'm a sub, I can be flexible. I think, 'this day I have homework so I put online, I'm [not working] today.' So I take it easy sometimes."<sup>46</sup> However, the flexibility offered to substitutes comes with some cost: they do not receive benefits during



their first year with the district and their pay is based on how many hours they work each week.

## Differential Pay

While 18 fellows were classroom teachers during their first year in the program, an additional six fellows worked as substitutes, another three worked as bilingual educational assistants, and one was a paraprofessional. The pay differential between a classroom teacher and a paraprofessional is significant. Fellow Angela Bonilla said her pay as a teacher is almost double what she earned as a paraprofessional.<sup>47</sup> A look at starting teacher salaries reveals that in 2015–16, the base salary for a teacher with a BA and no teaching experience was \$38,516.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, paraprofessionals are paid by the hour and at a starting rate of \$15.46/hour earn approximately \$19,000 a year (based on a 6.5 hour school day and 190 contract days).<sup>49</sup> Bilingual educational assistants earn a little bit less per hour, for around \$18,000 per year.

Yuuki Sakai, who worked as a special education paraprofessional during his first year in the program said, “my paycheck is worse than a minimum wage job. Although I make more hourly, my paycheck per month comes out to less than when I worked at a bookstore making minimum wage.”<sup>50</sup> He resigned from his position at the end of the school year and will now be a full-time substitute in the district. Subs earn \$185.45 for a full day of work or approximately \$33,000 a year (based on working every day in a 180 day school year).

## Supports for Fellows in the Classroom

Fellows who are working as full-time classroom teachers have access to multiple types of mentoring that substitutes, paraprofessionals, and educational assistants are not eligible for. All first- and second-year teachers in PPS are eligible for mentoring and a few mentors are bilingual. These mentors focus on culturally-responsive pedagogy that considers how to work with diverse learners while addressing

racial disparities in education.<sup>51</sup> In addition, fellows working as classroom teachers are matched with an instructional coach who meets with them regularly to work through challenges and provide support beyond what is offered by the district mentor. These coaches are part of the district’s group of Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) who provide a variety of support for teachers across the district, not just the fellows.

As Bonilla, who works as a fourth grade teacher in the Spanish-English dual language program at Rigler Elementary School, explained, “my TOSA is awesome and we talk or meet weekly unless something comes up....My TOSA did a really great job of making sure she wasn’t overlapping with anyone else. She’d ask me, ‘okay, what subject do you specifically want support in? What are you doing with your mentor? What are you doing with your team? What gap can I fill?’ ...She was indispensable. One of my strongest supports this year.”<sup>52</sup>

This was a sentiment shared by fellow Li-Ching Chiu, who worked as a part-time Mandarin world language teacher at Wilson High School. She said, “the TOSA support is amazing. I really learn a lot from my TOSA.” She sees room for improvement, however, adding, “I think [my] TOSA has too many things to do. If she can have more time...with this program it would be even better. I can tell she’s trying hard to support me but she also [has] other Chinese teachers that she needs to support. It’s difficult for her to take care of everyone.”<sup>53</sup>

PPS acknowledged this challenge and attempted to address it by moving towards online support to allow for the creation of professional learning communities (PLC) of teachers led by TOSAs. Fellows used a platform called Edthena to upload videos of them teaching and were provided with feedback from their TOSA online. This had mixed results. Among the fellows interviewed, there was general agreement that Edthena did not work well for them and was quite labor intensive. However, because there are a limited number of TOSAs, each of whom has multiple responsibilities in addition

to working with teachers, the district intends to continue using Edthena and so will focus its summer institute trainings on how to use the software for maximum benefit.

TOSAs are themselves offered professional development through PPS's partnership with PSU. Howard Yank, a faculty member of GTEP, leads a twice-monthly PLC where he provides training on instructional coaching and an opportunity to work on coaching strategies and share problems of practice. PPS views the PLC as one of the strongest benefits of its partnership with PSU.

## Relevance of PSU Coursework

An advantage of pursuing an education degree while working as a teacher is the chance to apply and test out what you are learning in your own classroom with your own students. PSU places a strong emphasis on making coursework relevant to fellows' daily experiences rather than focusing simply on theory. Said Sakai, "I'm a believer in that method because...you interact with your classes differently [in] the questions you ask, the types of things that you pay attention to when they're relevant for real people, for a building, in a room that you work in every day and you're invested in. That's valuable. I can't imagine having to go through standard licensure where everything was theoretical for two years."<sup>54</sup>

This sentiment was echoed by other fellows who praised PSU faculty members for being willing to stop and answer questions about instructional issues or challenges. However, the applicability of course content was not always clear for those who were not working as classroom teachers. Sakai noted that since the program was initially designed with the expectation that fellows would be classroom teachers in DLI programs, any deviation from that model makes it harder for the participant. Since he worked as a paraprofessional in a school without a dual language program, his experience differed from those in the BTP cohort who were working as teachers. "My courses...helped [my

classmates] differently than they helped me because I'm in a totally different educational setting," he said. "I have to find ways to make it work and still develop professionally and it's harder....because it's not directly related to what I do the next day."<sup>55</sup>

But that is not to say he was not up to the challenge. All of the fellows we spoke to shared a deep belief that they were agents of change who were helping to shift norms and raise expectations and the educational experiences of traditionally underserved students. This commitment was shared by the majority of PSU faculty they worked with, especially in the BTP program, which has a strong focus on social justice and equity.

## Financial Barriers

The cost of obtaining additional credentials and education serves as a significant barrier for paraprofessionals and other school-based staff seeking to become certified teachers.<sup>56</sup> PPS does provide fellows with financial support throughout the program application process by covering the cost of required fees and exams. Additionally, the district was able to secure a one-time donation from a local foundation to cover the costs of the three summer courses fellows took prior to the start of the school year. Fellows are also eligible for tuition vouchers through the district that will cover two-thirds of the cost of one three-credit course at PSU. However, PPS is not able to cover the cost of program tuition and PSU was not able to offer the fellows a reduced rate. That means fellows are responsible for paying almost the full cost of their education, which is around \$24,000 across the two years.

Michael Bacon at PPS acknowledged that the cost of the program may have caused the loss of some qualified candidates who were overwhelmed at the prospect of taking on such high tuition. However, program coordinator Alma Morales Galicia sees an important aspect of her role as helping fellows find a way to plan for and manage the cost: "when you have a candidate who is thinking of becoming a

teacher and [he or she] see[s], ‘I have to pay \$24,000 in two years,’ it’s impossible,” she says. “But if you break it down to, ‘let’s take it one step at a time. This is three credits, or two classes, you’re already getting one-third of this with this voucher, what other help can you get? Have you reached out to financial aid? Have you received any scholarships?’ It’s breaking it down to one step at a time and making them realize that it is feasible.”<sup>57</sup>

Program cost impacts fellows in different ways. Many rely on student loans. For example, Bonilla said that she relies on financial aid and uses her teacher salary to cover expenses that she could not previously afford while working as a paraprofessional. One fellow was not eligible for student loans because she was in the process of securing her green card and so had to cover the cost of out-of-state tuition, which is double the cost of in-state tuition. Another cited lack of financial support as a challenge because not everyone was able to secure a teaching position, with its higher salary.

The state’s student teaching requirement also poses a potential financial burden. PSU teacher candidates must complete 15–16 weeks of student teaching, which are typically unpaid experiences. Fellows who are working as classroom teachers will be able to complete this requirement on the job and so will continue to be paid their regular salary.

Those who are working as substitutes, educational aides, or paraprofessionals will have to leave their jobs and go unpaid for the duration of their student teaching. A few who work as substitutes may get lucky and be placed in a long-term position that will provide them with the opportunity to complete their student teaching while earning an income, but there is no guarantee. Esperanza De La Vega, who runs the BTP program at PSU, encourages students to plan ahead and save money to help “get through that because it’s a big hardship on a lot of people to leave their job and do that.”<sup>58</sup>

From the perspective of the fellows we spoke with, the best way to address these challenges is for the district to be completely transparent—even if it means the loss of some great candidates. As fellow Bonilla told us, increasing transparency around the financial challenges of being in the program might improve retention. She said, “we have a bunch of parents in our program and I can’t imagine being a parent and having to say, ‘I’m not gonna get paid for [several] months.’ And so it’s not just feasible. I think one of the things is that we gotta hear all this stuff up front. You might lose some candidates who would have been awesome, but you’re more likely to keep all the candidates who are willing ... and can do it.”<sup>59</sup>

# LOOKING FORWARD

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After the first year of program implementation, the district has been able to virtually eliminate its bilingual teacher shortage. In that way, the program has been a resolute success. As Armendariz explained, “if we measure [success] in terms of our ability to put teachers in classrooms that our principals are reporting to us are strong and are moving along and are engaged and have been asked to come back next year, it’s been very, very successful. We don’t have a bilingual teacher gap at this point.”<sup>60</sup> This outcome is critical in the context of the district’s efforts to continue expanding its dual language immersion programs and to the success of its English learner students. Bacon elaborated: “I think the other piece...is that it has put us in a place when we walk in and say, ‘we want to expand a program’ or ‘we want to serve the needs of our students,’ we often get, ‘well, can you find us teachers?’ It’s allowed us to fulfill our real objective of breaking down barriers for our emerging bilingual children.”<sup>61</sup>

In 2017, PPS partnered with Education Northwest on a project to use data to drive program improvements. Education Northwest is one of nine Regional Educational Labs (REL) across the U.S., serving the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, funded with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute for Education Sciences. Its role is to provide states and

districts with research, technical assistance, and data analysis to help with evidence-based decisions. Its partnership with PPS is part of a larger track of grant-funded work focused on building district capacity to use research and data to help develop and refine systems. “The task as we see it is really to build PPS’ ability to use and collect data to track progress and ultimately evaluate this system. Is this Grow Your Own or alternative pathway program an effective way of recruiting, training, and retaining bilingual teachers of color?” said Jason Greenberg Motamedi, a senior researcher at Education Northwest.<sup>62</sup>

Education Northwest is also helping PPS tackle other questions, such as how to use data to identify and recruit paraprofessionals who may be interested in becoming teachers and what modifications can be made to the program to improve the experience of the fellows. This includes tackling the challenge of ensuring full time teaching positions for all fellows, and the impact that not having a teaching position (e.g., being a paraprofessional or short-term substitute) has on their learning and growth as educators. Greenberg Motamedi suggested that one way to address this challenge would be to only recruit fellows who have teaching positions. “If you can’t give them all jobs,” he says, “this is not sustainable. In order for this to work, the fellows need to be teaching.”<sup>63</sup>

The district is also eager to partner with other local districts to expand and replicate the program. To that end, PPS program leaders and PSU program faculty and administrators have been giving presentations around the state to get the word out. Education Northwest is working with PPS and PSU to “capture the pieces that are really essential for success” in order to help give guidance to other local districts.<sup>64</sup>

One of the biggest takeaways from the design and implementation of the program is that this work is possible without having to make substantial changes to policy, state law, and licensure. Armendariz pointed out that the opportunities already existed in the district and the essential component to launch the program was having someone like Alma Morales Galicia to help identify opportunities for people who did not know how to access them on their own.<sup>65</sup> In other words, Grow Your Own programs like the PPS & PSU Dual Language Teacher Partnership are predicated on a design that provides substantial one-on-one support to help remove barriers. While policies that allow for alternative teacher certification can provide a needed jump start, it is the people operating the programs that enable conditions that promote success. As Morales Galicia said about her role,

It’s having that someone you can go to. I get phone calls about issues at PSU. I get phone call questions with HR. I don’t have the answers to all of those questions, but I can tell them, ‘send an e-mail to this person and this is what you’re going to ask.’ I know of a couple teachers who had been looking into joining the Bilingual Teacher Pathway program for years but for one or another reason they weren’t able to get through the process and so it is having that support of someone you can call and ask a question.<sup>66</sup>

Another important takeaway is that the fellows in the program really see themselves as agents of change who are capable of challenging and reforming the current educational system to ensure that traditionally underserved students have access to an equitable and high-quality education. “I feel like I am in the presence of people who are not only willing but capable of making effective change that we’re really looking for, that makes a difference to students. It’s scary to move against a bureaucracy. It’s scary to move against historic norms and it’s very challenging. There’s a lot of pushback. The very fact that we call ourselves the Bilingual Teacher Pathway is a political statement and I think it’s brave. That’s something I can be on board with,” explained fellow Yuuki Sakai.<sup>67</sup>

Those shifts in historic norms also apply to the work being done by PPS and PSU to transform teacher preparation in a way that really meets the needs of all teacher candidates. As Keith Menk, formerly of the state’s Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, acknowledged, traditional teacher preparation programs largely operate in “predominantly white institutions with predominantly white faculty with predominantly white candidates to teach primarily white students and the systems are set up to support this population. When you have folks who don’t fit that profile, where are the student services to support these students? Why not change the base program to accommodate diverse students? That was my biggest issue so I was happy PPS was looking at something creative and that PSU was willing to work them to do something different to meet the student’s needs.”<sup>68</sup>

## Notes

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