

AB 321 – DLL CHILDCARE AND PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Assemblywoman Suzette Martinez Valladares

IN BRIEF

AB 321 will ensure children from homes in which the primary language is not English are eligible to enroll in state childcare services and preschools. This measure increases access to these services, helps dual-language children acquire English language proficiency, and successfully prepares them for K-12.

THE ISSUE

[Over half of California's children](#) under the age of six speak a language other than or in addition to English at home. These children, who are commonly referred to as dual-language learners (DLLs), will be designated as “English learners” (ELs) if they enter kindergarten or later grades without being fully proficient in English.

ELs represent one of the fastest growing student populations in the United States. In California, nearly [25 percent of public school students are ELs](#). California's ELs are diverse: though the vast majority of them, [around 84%](#), speak Spanish at home, there are at least 59 other languages represented within California's EL population.

Despite their diversity, ELs face many of the same unfortunate realities. ELs are more likely to experience poverty than their peers are. [Depending on the study](#), the poverty rate among ELs ranges from 74 to 85 percent, which is significantly higher than the 21 percent overall poverty rate for California's school-aged children. Additionally, [ELs lag behind](#) their native English-speaking peers academically. California ELs' performance on statewide tests consistently [ranks lower than that of any other measured category of students](#)—students by ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty. This is unsurprising

given that many ELs who are unable to attain English proficiency face multiple difficulties in the classroom. Everything from unfamiliarity with vocabulary and cultural contexts to fear of in-class participation, contribute to ELs poor performance in K-12.

Fortunately, students who transition out of the EL designation by achieving English proficiency are significantly more likely to succeed in the classroom than ELs in general. [A Public Policy Institute of California report](#) found that throughout grades 2-11, former ELs who became proficient in English scored significantly higher on statewide tests than ELs did in general, and even higher than native English speakers did in some grade levels. A [recent University of Chicago study confirms](#) that ELs who achieved English proficiency by eighth grade actually performed as well and in some cases better on tests than their native English-speaking peers do. The sooner ELs learn English, the more likely they are to perform well in school

The [recently released Master Plan for Early Learning and Care](#) includes several proposals for preschool teachers and childcare providers, including new reporting requirements and professional development programs. However, these proposals would do little to increase access for DLLs to childcare and preschool services. The Legislature must act to expand access to necessary resources for California's DLLs so that they can be prepared for K-12.

THE SOLUTION

AB 321 would increase access to state childcare and preschool services for dual language learners by expanding their eligibility to enroll in these services.

Currently, eligibility for enrollment in these services is limited to families that are current aid recipients, income eligible, homeless, or whose children receive or are eligible for protective services. AB 321 would specify that families in which the primary home language is not English, would be eligible for enrollment in state childcare and preschool services as long as they meet all other necessary requirements.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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