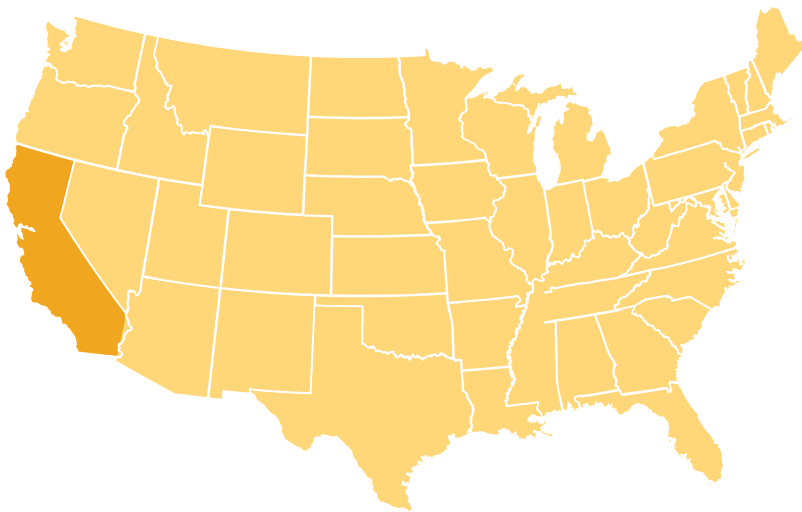




# BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS IN CALIFORNIA WITH HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS



# ABOUT EDREPORTS:

EdReports is a non-profit organization designed to increase the capacity of teachers, administrators, and leaders to seek, identify, and demand the highest-quality instructional materials. Excellent curricula that advance student learning and support inclusive and affirming classroom environments are available, but too often these materials are not being used.

What you select and how you select matters. The materials adoption process is a critical lever for ensuring that quality materials are chosen and then used well in classrooms.

EdReports provides free reviews of K-12 instructional materials and works directly with states, school systems, and regional offices to support high quality, comprehensive adoption practices. We aim to empower educators with independent information, resources, and training so that all students have access to the curriculum they need to thrive.

## **Additional related resources:**

[What I Learned From Teaching English-Language Learners for 30 Years](#)

Watch: ["I wanted to be the teacher I needed."](#)

[Mathematicians at Work, Expect Noise: A Conversation with Georgina Rivera](#)

["Everybody Wants to Be Seen": A Conversation with Mathematician Georgina Rivera](#)

[5 Ways Quality Curricula Can Support English Language Learners](#)

# INTRODUCTION

Supporting the needs of multilingual learners<sup>1</sup> is a pressing need for educators. Multilingual learner enrollment in K–12 schools increased by [28%](#) since 2000, and there are now an estimated 4.9 million children in U.S. public schools learning the English language. Millions of those students are spending much of their days in general education classrooms, often with teachers [not specifically trained](#) to work with them. By 2025, [1 out of 4 children](#) in classrooms across the nation will be a multilingual learner student.

California has the largest number of multilingual learners in the United States, with over one million students—nearly 20% of the K–12 student population. According to the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP), in 2019, 87.4% of these students did not meet grade-level expectations for mathematics standards. NAEP scores also reveal enormous gaps in mathematics with multilingual learner students performing 23–36 points below their non-multilingual learner peers in grades 4 and 8. This gap has been exacerbated by challenges and impacts stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic with mathematics scores in 2022 showing the [largest decline in two decades](#).



**“We’re truly trying to push students to that next level and give them access to the content. We have to be aware that just because they cannot do it doesn’t mean that they do not know it. They just don’t have an access point.”**

The impact of COVID-19 on multilingual learners in California cannot be overstated. While school closures across the state had a negative effect on all students, particularly in core content areas such as mathematics and English language arts (ELA), virtual learning was specifically difficult for students learning English. Many of the English language development protocols were abandoned. Scaffolds teachers had once depended on to support multilingual learners to learn both content and develop language were more difficult to implement in a virtual space. Further, it’s likely that a lack of daily English use also contributed to set backs in language development.

Gaps that exist for many multilingual learners have nothing to do with ability. “Access is key,” said Dr. Shontoria Walker, Adoption and Innovation Lead at EdReports and co-author of *Culture To The Max! Culturally Responsive Teaching and Practice*, “We’re truly trying to push students to that next level and give them access to the content. We have to be aware that just because they cannot do it doesn’t mean that they do not know it. They just don’t have an access point.”

Language access is crucial for each content area, including mathematics. “Every aspect of core content is grounded in literacy, whether it’s science, math, ELA, or social studies,” said Walker. “You really need students to access that language and that language development in order to be successful in any core content.”

<sup>1</sup> Note on terminology: At EdReports, we use the term “multilingual learners” when we refer to students who are developing proficiency in multiple languages including students learning English as an additional language in school. This choice is the organization’s attempt to use more asset-based language. The majority of states and school systems along with the United States federal government continue to use the terms: “English Learner” (EL) and/ or “English Language Learner” (ELL). While we are shifting our language, we understand that many of our stakeholders, including curriculum publishers, continue to use EL and ELL. As you explore the content on our website, you may see a mix of these terms when EdReports is referencing outside sources or research that use designations other than multilingual learner. We defer to the primary source terminology when directly citing external information.

This is where instructional materials can truly be a difference maker. High-quality curricula [with specific supports for multilingual learners](#) matter when it comes to accessing the grade-level content crucial for students to learn and grow. Teachers know this. [Seventy-two percent of teachers](#) say materials that tailor instruction and include supports for multilingual learners are somewhat or extremely important to them. However, when it comes to the materials teachers are using, less than a quarter of teachers describe their curriculum as adequate or completely adequate in meeting the needs of multilingual learners.

Sub-prompt	Completely Inadequate			(Adequate in some ways and inadequate in others)			Completely Adequate	Not Sure or N/A
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Helping all students master my state's [subject] standards	2.7%	1.9%	3.0%	29.9%	15.9%	22.5%	18.9%	4.0%
Making learning engaging for students	4.4%	4.8%	9.5%	25.0%	19.2%	18.9%	13.7%	3.4%
Meeting the needs of English learners	6.4%	9.3%	12.3%	25.5%	12.9%	12.6%	9.8%	10.1%
Helping me provide culturally relevant instruction	7.7%	8.9%	14.9%	24.8%	14.3%	12.5%	8.5%	7.3%

Note: ELA, mathematics, and science teachers are represented in these data. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error and 1.1% missing data.

A [2021 survey](#) from the English Learners Success Forum in conjunction with San Diego State University and RAND revealed that mathematics teachers in California see the acute need for high-quality instructional materials to support multilingual learners in math as well.

**56% of teachers reported that their materials did not support them in regularly assessing Multilingual Learners' use of math language to communicate their thinking in mathematics.**

**66% of the teachers reported that their materials did not support them to provide consistent feedback strategies to promote Multilingual Learners' math writing over time.**

**62% of CA teachers reported that their curriculum materials did not connect math concepts to Multilingual Learners' lived experiences and cultures.**

**66% of CA mathematics teachers responded negatively to a question asking whether their instructional materials help them build on home languages and informal ways of talking about math to develop grade-level math understanding and math language of Multilingual Learners.**

Overcoming pandemic learning loss and meeting the needs of one million multilingual students, who bring a wide variety of languages into the classroom, requires intentionally designed resources and supports. From high-quality curriculum to ongoing coaching and professional learning, teachers need tools that support students to build essential language and mathematics skills for the future.

# THE CALIFORNIA MULTILINGUAL LEARNER PILOT

The California Multilingual Learner Pilot was proposed in an effort to provide California educators with additional information about how well their instructional materials support multilingual learners to access grade-level content. The project aimed to review high-quality<sup>2</sup>, widely used, middle school mathematics programs in California and provide free, easily accessible information about the supports the materials actually offer for multilingual learners. “There are a lot of high-quality, standards-aligned curriculum out there, but not all of them are intentionally designed to support students learning English,” said Margaret Overbagh-Feld, EdReports Multilingual Learner Lead. “This pilot was focused on providing curriculum buyers and educators credible data to more easily seek out programs that offer research-based, proven supports and strategies that will support multilingual learners.”

The pilot also had a larger purpose: as the state with the largest number of students enrolled in K–12 schooling, California’s choice of instructional materials is highly consequential and determinative of what’s available on the supply side of the market as a whole. If the pilot was able to better identify and highlight which programs offer strong multilingual supports, it could ultimately have an impact on the kind of materials students have access to across the country.

A pilot of this scale required collaboration across diverse expertise and included four key partners: EdReports, the English Learners Success Forum, Pivot/UnboundEd, and EdSolutions. The organizations worked together to develop the review tool, conduct the review process, and ultimately create and disseminate the reviews.



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<sup>2</sup> Programs selected met EdReports expectations for standards-alignment and usability.

## Developing the Review Tool

EdReports was tasked with leading the review process due to its expertise in this area. It is important to note that this was first and foremost a learning process and exploratory in nature. Because of the learning at the project's foundation, the pilot was distinct from EdReports traditional review process: participation in the pilot was voluntary, reviews were conducted on a shorter timeline and were unscored (the purpose was to identify supports present rather than assign a number value to specific criteria).

The initial goal was to review all of the middle school mathematics programs which met EdReports' criteria for quality and were widely used across the state. EdReports reached out to five publishers, however ultimately only two chose to participate.

The review tool was developed in collaboration with the English Learners Success Forum and focused on the best practices around scaffolds and supports that many educators are familiar with, as well as the [newest research](#) around how to best support multilingual learners to grow and thrive. For math and language learning to happen simultaneously, students must be able to access grade-level content and build academic language skills and proficiency.

The table below highlights the criteria, or categories that were examined for each program, developed in partnership with ELSF as the foundation for the review tool.

### Review Criterion

<b>Criterion 1: Simultaneous content, math practices and language development</b>	Materials consistently provide opportunities for simultaneous content, math practices, and language development
<b>Criterion 2: Language Features of Mathematical Tasks</b>	Materials provide tasks that require students to make meaning through collaboration by interpreting and producing language.
<b>Criterion 3: Language Supports</b>	Materials provide responsive language and collaborative supports that amplify mathematical language development.
<b>Criterion 4: Leveraging Students' Assets</b>	Materials forefront, value, and use the assets of students, including their home language, experiences, and beliefs, in the teaching of mathematics
<b>Criterion 5: Formative Assessment of Content, Math Practices, and Language</b>	Materials provide opportunities to consistently assess, analyze, and communicate progress while students have opportunities to incorporate feedback.

The EdReports team also created a resource modeled off our [Evidence Guides](#) that are used to guide the standard EdReports review process. Included in the [California multilingual learner pilot guide](#) are descriptions of the criteria followed by detailed indicators that outline what quality looks like for each of the criteria.

The pilot guide summarizes each indicator including its purpose and the resources and research that form its foundation. In addition, guiding questions are provided for each indicator followed by descriptors for evidence collection. The purpose was to ensure reviewers knew what to look for and had examples of the different kinds of evidence they might encounter.

It is important to note that unlike EdReports other content-area tools, this review tool was designed to be completely unscored. The goal for this learning pilot was to describe what supports (if any) each program offered so that stakeholders could make informed decisions about the best options for multilingual learners.

## Training the Educator Reviewers

Twelve California educators conducted the evaluations of the middle school math programs. The educators came from a mix of districts including urban, suburban, and rural from across the state, and brought extensive collective experience in mathematics, multilingual learners, and middle school learning.

The educators were divided into two teams. EdReports led a series of training sessions in advance of and throughout the review process. Due to the mix of knowledge bases, it was important to begin by ensuring a baseline knowledge around multilingual learners. Like many other issues in education, the field of multilingual learner learning is constantly evolving.

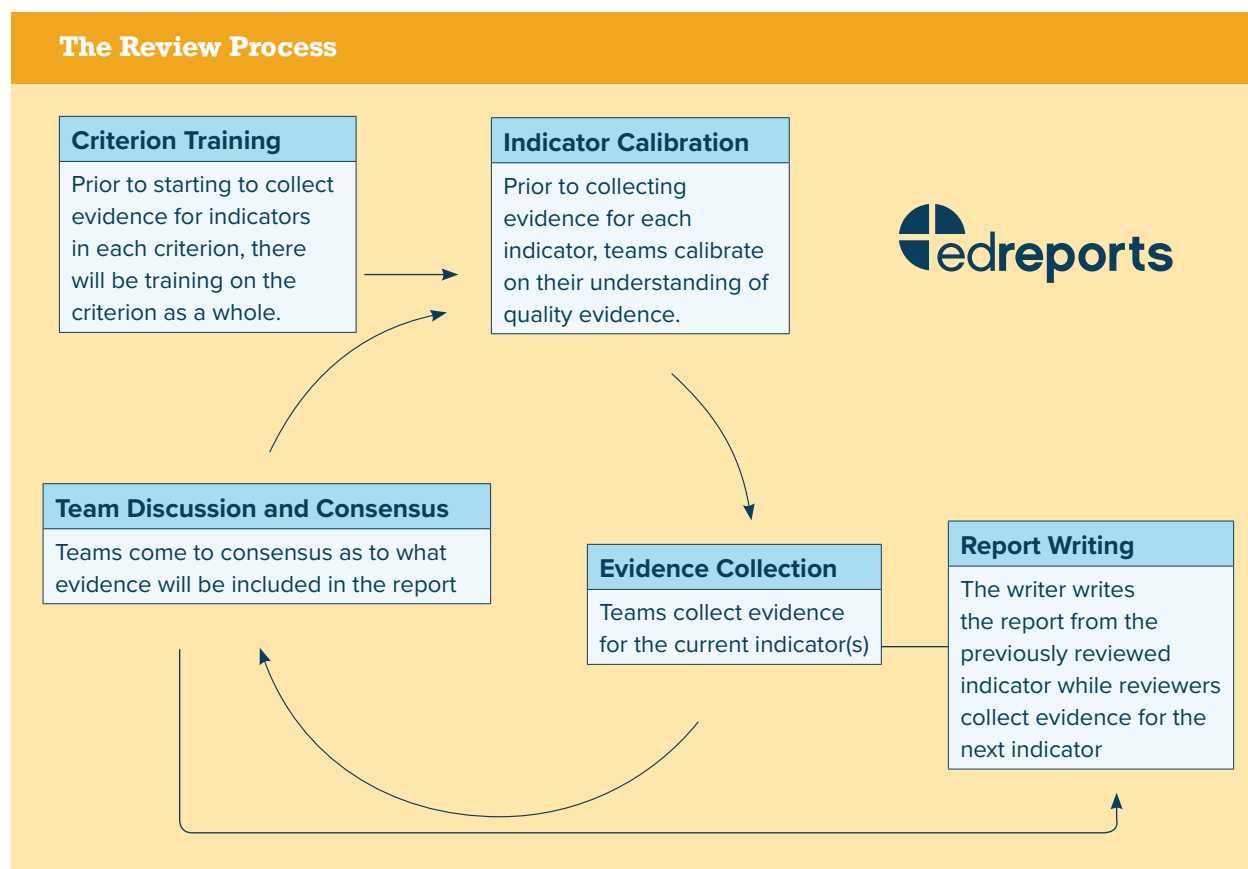
Margaret Overbaugh-Feld said, “Unlike some other areas, where big initiatives like the Common Core started to shift instruction, multilingual learner instruction feels a little more piecemeal. If your school or district hasn’t made it a priority, you may not be aware of what’s at the forefront of multilingual learner education.”

The sessions also included training on [the new review tool](#) and [evidence guide](#), an overview of the review process, and a publisher walkthrough in which the publishers offered an orientation to their programs with a specific emphasis on multilingual supports.



## Conducting and Creating the Reviews

Conducting the reviews began with a three and a half day in-person convening where the programs were evaluated and evidence was collected to determine multilingual learner supports within the materials. Report writing took place asynchronously and involved feedback from ELSF and other partners. Publishers were able to submit feedback to the draft reports before the reviews were finalized.



The [reports](#) revealed a wealth of evidence that programs offered supports for multilingual learners. These supports included (but were not limited to) language structures and routines to support math conversations, descriptions of math language goals informed by language demands and objectives at the lesson or unit level, and guidance for teachers in how to encourage student participation and agency for language development.

The reviews outline key areas educators can look to as they strive to ensure their students can access grade-level content. “I was pleasantly surprised with the amount of supports we found in the materials,” said Overbagh-Feld. “That has not been my personal experience with curriculum. It’s hopeful to learn that for teachers in the classroom there are resources out there that can serve your students if you’re able to find them.”

The information provided in these initial reports is just the beginning of ensuring teachers can do just that: easily locate and use the instructional materials that will make a difference for each and every student in the classroom. California districts are already accessing the tools and applying the knowledge learned from this pilot in their mathematics materials adoptions.



# Multilingual Learner Tools and Resources in Action:

## San Bernardino City Unified District's K–12 Mathematics Adoption

### District Facts:

Source  
[National Center for Education Statistics](#)

**Number  
of Students:**  
46,509

**Multilingual  
Learners:**  
22%

When San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD) launched a K–12 mathematics materials adoption in 2023, they turned to EdReports for assistance in developing a comprehensive selection process.

Sixty-seven percent of the student community in San Bernardino identify as Hispanic or Latino and nearly a quarter of students are considered multilingual learners. The district has seen large gaps in performance, with only 19% of Latino students demonstrating they meet expectations of mathematics proficiency based on the results of the most recent state assessments.

Based on these challenges and the desire of the district to better serve and meet the needs of their students, SBCUSD identified supports for multilingual learners as one of their top curriculum priorities.

SBCUSD outlined their commitment to choose a program which was available in both English and Spanish. As part of EdReports expertise and services, the organization's technical assistance team suggested that SBCUSD incorporate the tools and reviews from the California Multilingual Learner pilot to inform their mathematics materials selection.

From February to May 2023, SBCUSD materials adoption committee participated in training and professional learning provided by EdReports to prepare for the adoption work ahead. The

piloted tools and resources were central to the professional development sessions that educators used to learn more about how to identify high-quality materials and re-imagine what multilingual learner supports could actually look like in curricula. In October, the committee used the tools again as part of their deep dive into potential programs for selection.

The real-world application of the California Multilingual Learner pilot tools illustrates the power of independent information to ensure students have access to content that truly supports them to grow and thrive no matter what language they speak.

[Learn more](#) about how EdReports can support your next instructional materials adoption.



# LESSONS LEARNED AND ONGOING IMPACT

The California Multilingual Learner Pilot was a single project, however, its ripple effects continue to impact educators across the state. With districts such as San Bernardino using the review criteria and evidence guides as part of their K–12 mathematics adoption, more multilingual learners will have access to high-quality materials and content needed to prepare them for college and careers. Whether districts are adopting new mathematics materials now or in the future, the project has revealed important learnings and best practices:

**“We’ve seen now that materials with these kinds of supports are available. This can be done. We must continue to demand this level of quality for multilingual learners and to push the field in the direction we know is best for our students.”**

## **1. There are quality programs that support multilingual learners available, but there’s still more work to do.**

Not only did the pilot findings show that the participating publishers are making strong strides toward providing comprehensive supports for multilingual learners, the publishers also expressed an openness to feedback and a desire to understand how their programs could be improved. The more information districts and educators have about existing materials, the more this kind of improvement can be demanded. Lisa Fik, an educator reviewer who participated in the pilot, said, “We’re hoping to push curriculum producers to take a better look at their materials so that they’re thinking about the needs of every student.”

Even with only two reviews, pilot participants believe this can be an important start for states and districts to be aware of what is possible, and the high bar they should hold for the materials they purchase. EdReports’ Margaret Overbakh-Feld said, “We’ve seen now that materials with these kinds of supports are available. This can be done. We must continue to demand this level of quality for multilingual learners and to push the field in the direction we know is best for our students.”

## **2. Participating organizations and educators deepened their knowledge and have continued to apply their learnings to expand supports for multilingual learners.**

Educators conducting the reviews already had extensive backgrounds in mathematics and years working with multilingual learners. However, many cited just how much more they learned in the process. Educator reviewer Lisa Fik said, “From this experience with the pilot team, my understanding has truly broadened and deepened when it comes to serving multilingual learners. Through the review process I participated in deep, rich, analytical conversations with other math teachers and English learner specialists, and I saw instructional materials in a whole new light. It was invaluable learning I could bring with me.”

The learnings did not stop with participating educator reviewers. EdReports learned a tremendous amount throughout the pilot that we are applying to our current efforts around supporting multilingual learners and ensuring access to grade-level content. Our efforts in the California multilingual learner pilot helped us initiate a deeper dive into our [standard review tools](#) and consider how we can bring additional evidence and criteria into our process in a way that gives crucial information to educators about the supports materials provide for multilingual learners.

**“I was really proud to be a part of this project because beyond the reviews, we’re offering criteria and a rubric that other districts can use to look at materials and I think that’s huge. We’re providing a lens that can help ensure that each and every student is considered when we’re looking at materials.”**

We also expanded into additional pilots, have made plans to invest in multilingual learner review teams, and continue on a path to better incorporate multilingual learner criteria as we revise our review tools. The aim is to ensure that multilingual learner supports are not only identified but that the needs of multilingual learners are considered as integral when instructional materials are designed and that these supports work in tandem with all the other components each and every student needs to learn and grow.

**3. The multilingual learners review tool and evidence guide that were developed can be used (and are being used) when districts select instructional materials.**

The review tool and evidence guide used for the pilot are accessible and free for any district to use as part of their selection process. San Bernardino City Unified School District (spotlighted above) is an example of a school system that has incorporated the tools into their K–12 mathematics adoption process. “I was really proud to be a part of this project because beyond the reviews, we’re offering criteria and a rubric that other districts can use to look at materials and I think that’s huge,” said Fik. “We’re providing a lens that can help ensure that each and every student is considered when we’re looking at materials.”

Multilingual Learner Lead Margaret Overbagh-Feld also reflected on the impact of the project and reviews within the state: “California has one of the highest percentages of multilingual learners in the country. If our reviews and our resources can be used in district adoptions, then we’ll be showing just how much support is possible for multilingual learners within materials. I think districts can be attuned to multilingual learners’ needs and make sure it’s part of a local priority in their process and know they can count on finding materials to speak to those needs. This could go a long way for math education for multilingual learners in a state where they really need it.”

While participants are proud of what they learned and the initial impact of the pilot, no one is resting on their laurels. Educators understand that this contribution to the field matters, but there is still more work to do.

Guillermo Lopez, a pilot participant said: “As a math educator for 15 years, I understand we have a responsibility to look at curriculum and identify whether the materials really meet our students’ needs. This project offered an avenue to educators to ensure that multilingual learners are seen, are engaged in dialogue, and that teachers have access to tools and content to support the full community of students in our classrooms. We are only at the beginning, but it’s an important foundational step.”