



Leveraging Flexible Teacher Certification Policies to Address the Bilingual Teacher Shortage

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This brief is the third of a four-part series that focuses on bilingual education, bilingual educators, and addressing the bilingual teacher shortage in contexts across the United States. This research was commissioned by the New Jersey State Department of Education, which is committed to providing quality bilingual education to its linguistically diverse student population.

More than half of U.S. states are experiencing bilingual teacher shortages, with shortages most acute in states that provide bilingual education to the greatest numbers of English learners (ELs) and those that require teachers to obtain specific bilingual endorsements (for more information on the term “English learner,” please refer to our previous brief, *Bilingual Education Across the United States*).ⁱ These states experience a persistent tension between: 1) requiring educators to comply with certification¹ requirements and 2) meeting the increasing demand for bilingual teachers,ⁱⁱ driven by the growing population of ELsⁱⁱⁱ and the increasing popularity of dual language programs.^{iv} States have created various policy solutions to broaden their bilingual teacher pool by diversifying the ways in which teachers may gain certification. **In this brief, we share strategies that state education agencies may use to provide more flexibility in teacher certification policies and thereby mitigate bilingual teacher shortages**, including:

1. providing educators multiple pathways to certification,
2. offering prospective teachers a menu of certification requirements,
3. allowing educators to earn probationary certifications, and
4. creating flexible reciprocity policies.

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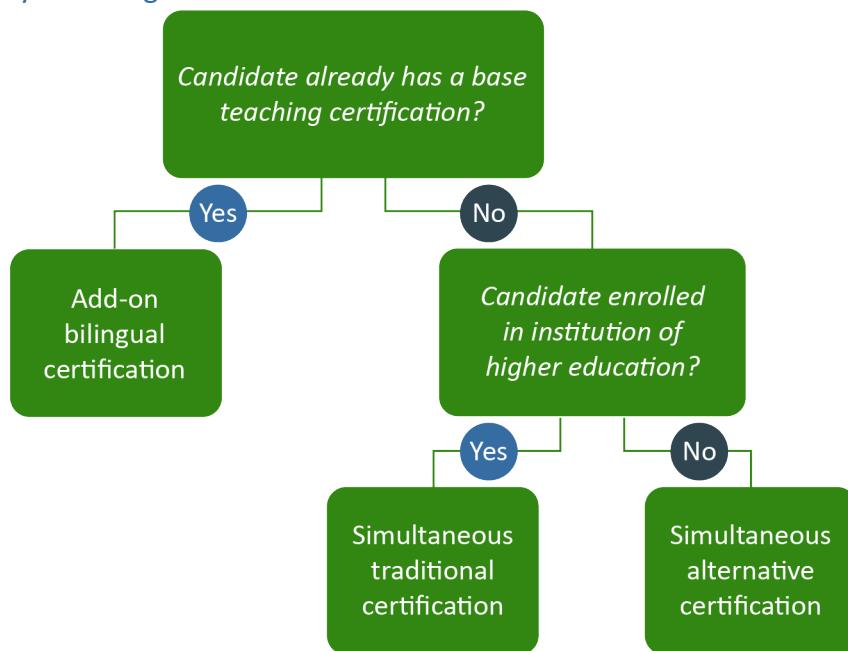
ⁱIn this brief we use three terms to refer to different types of teaching licensure. *Certification* is used as a broad term to refer to any and all general licensure requirements. *Credential* refers to base teaching licensures (i.e., not bilingual, but instead general education K-5, 6-8, etc.). Finally, the term *endorsement* is used to refer to additive bilingual licensures that teachers must pursue in many states to teach bilingually.

Provide multiple pathways to certification: Allow teacher candidates to earn both their base teacher credential and their bilingual endorsement at the same time.

One common strategy that states use to broaden the bilingual teacher pool is to provide multiple “pathways” through which candidates can earn a bilingual endorsement. The three most common pathways are described below (Exhibit 1). Two of these pathways offer simultaneous certification, meaning that they allow a bilingual teacher candidate to obtain both a base teaching certificate and a bilingual endorsement at the same time. Because teacher candidates bear the financial and time burden of their education, these simultaneous pathways can be particularly attractive to candidates who want to minimize the amount of money and time spent pursuing certification.

- **Simultaneous traditional certification:** Teacher candidates can enroll in undergraduate or graduate programs to earn a bilingual endorsement while simultaneously enrolled in a traditional certification program where they earn a base credential (e.g. elementary, secondary, etc.).
- **Simultaneous alternative certification:** This category includes bilingual teacher residencies or alternative certification programs where teacher candidates work as bilingual interns or teachers-of-record while earning their teaching credential and bilingual endorsement.
- **Add-on bilingual endorsement:** In some states, authorized institutions of higher education (IHEs) offer add-on bilingual endorsement programs to potential bilingual teachers. These programs typically require participants to complete a concentrated sequence of courses and meet a fieldwork requirement. Some of these programs require a full-time commitment, which can be difficult to take on for in-service teachers looking to add a bilingual endorsement. More often, candidates already working as teachers of record in classrooms opt for add-on bilingual pathways that allow them to complete one course at a time in the evenings or on weekends.

Exhibit 1. Pathways to bilingual certification



Offer prospective teachers a menu of certification requirements: Identify the essential content and skills required for a bilingual endorsement and provide candidates course options that address that content.

Several states have attempted to broaden their bilingual teacher pool by offering a menu of certification requirements, as opposed to traditional prescriptive single-option certification requirements, to potential teachers. These policies allow bilingual teaching candidates more flexibility in how to attain their credentials while still requiring them to meet high standards for certification.

Offering a menu of certification requirements could lower the coursework burden for preliminary or probationary² certified teachers who already took courses that address bilingual content in other contexts. This would also provide institutes of higher learning (IHEs) more flexibility as they develop bilingual teacher preparation programs.

These options may also lower the financial barrier to certification that some teaching candidates face. Exhibit 2 outlines some of the distinctions between traditional and flexible certification requirements and provides examples from states that offer flexibility.

Exhibit 2. Traditional vs. flexible requirements for bilingual certification

Certification requirement	Traditional requirements	Flexible requirements	Example of flexible requirements
<i>Coursework AND/OR Content Exam</i>	Traditional, state-approved educator certification program through IHE AND passing score on state certification test	State-approved coursework in bilingual education (can be through IHE or alternative pathway) AND/OR passing score on state certification test ^v	California: Candidates applying for a bilingual certification must either demonstrate that they have successfully completed coursework as part of a state-approved bilingual program OR pass specified portions of the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET): World Languages, addressing both language proficiency and content knowledge.
<i>Type of Language Proficiency Exam</i>	Single state-administered test	Multiple test options	Massachusetts: Candidates seeking a bilingual endorsement in certain languages can satisfy the language proficiency testing requirement by achieving a passing score on the bilingual Massachusetts Test for Educational Licensure (MTEL) OR by passing the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) offered through the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages. ^{vi}

² Preliminary or probationary certifications allow educators to teach in classrooms under certain circumstances without having received their full certification.

Certification requirement	Traditional requirements	Flexible requirements	Example of flexible requirements
<i>Coursework Options</i>	Specific, prescribed program of study determined by state or local departments of education or IHEs	Variety of courses for candidate to choose from that address bilingual education competencies and pedagogy, rather than a prescribed set of courses	New York: Candidates seeking a bilingual extension can either complete a bilingual education preparation program at a state-approved IHE OR demonstrate that they have taken individual courses that meet state requirements (sometimes over several years) and submit to a state evaluation.

Allow educators to earn probationary certifications: Offer multiple certification options for teachers who have experience working with ELs to enter the classroom.

State education agencies may consider allowing probationary bilingual teachers or teachers who hold English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsements to test out of coursework requirements rather than completing additional coursework. Testing out of coursework requirements could also help paraprofessionals obtain bilingual endorsements more easily, saving time and money while allowing them to continue working in a school setting.

Additionally, state education agencies may consider offering preliminary or initial licensure and emergency certification, which are the two most common strategies that states employ to address teacher shortages, outlined below in Exhibit 3. States typically use these strategies across hard-to-staff subjects, geographical areas, and classroom settings, including linguistically diverse classrooms.

Exhibit 3. Probationary teaching certificates

	Preliminary or initial licenses ³	Emergency certificates or permits ⁴
<i>What?</i>	Bilingual certification valid for 1–3 years	1-year certificate to teach bilingually, when fully licensed staff not available in high-need school or district
<i>For whom?</i>	Teaching candidates who have not yet completed certification requirements (such as state certification exams or teacher preparation courses), but they will complete requirements typically through an educator preparation program	Teaching candidates with some qualifications, who may only be authorized to teach specific courses. These candidates may not have plans to complete educator preparation programs
<i>Examples</i>	Illinois: Approval for up to 3 years of bilingual endorsements to candidates who have 9 credit hours toward	California: Emergency 1-year bilingual credential to candidates ^{viii} who are

³ States that offer preliminary or initial licenses include Connecticut, New Jersey, Idaho, Illinois, Nevada, Utah, and Wisconsin.

⁴ States that offer emergency certification include California, Delaware, Idaho, Rhode Island, Texas, New Mexico, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Preliminary or initial licenses ³	Emergency certificates or permits ⁴
<p>certification or have passed content or language tests.</p> <p>Nevada: Nonrenewable provisional license for teaching candidates who are missing 6 semester hours in the endorsement area and/or have not completed required exams but have otherwise met minimum requirements for certification.</p> <p>Utah: Temporary Associate Educator License for teaching candidates who have completed a Bachelor's degree with a major in the field in which they are seeking licensure, OR have passed appropriate content area tests, OR have appropriate career and technical education certifications of expertise, but have not met other requirements to earn a teaching license.^{vii}</p>	<p>completing bilingual credential requirements and showing progress.</p> <p>Idaho: Emergency certificates to fill an identified area of need when a candidate does not hold current certification or credential.</p> <p>Rhode Island: Emergency certificates available to teachers at a school district's request when a fully certified and qualified candidate is not available.</p> <p>Texas: Emergency permit for teachers in the process of obtaining bilingual certification and who have completed a bachelor's degree, are certified at the appropriate level, and have completed either 6 semester hours in bilingual education OR have passed a language proficiency exam. Candidates without certification at the appropriate level must be currently enrolled in a teacher preparation program for bilingual education and have completed either 12 semester hours OR have passed a language proficiency exam.</p>

Create flexible reciprocity policies: Revise reciprocity requirements for bilingual teachers who have been certified in another state or country.

Reciprocity policies, which allow educators who are already certified to teach in one state to transfer their credential to another state, are an important and low-cost credentialing option. In most cases, teachers who apply for reciprocity have already completed teacher preparation programs and have classroom experience, which makes them a valuable pool from which to draw to address teacher shortages. State education agencies could consider widening or eliminating the time frame (i.e., within the last 3 years) during which out-of-state candidates have to demonstrate having received effective teaching ratings.

States that are part of the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) have access to interstate teacher licensing records that facilitate the certification process in new states. State education agencies that are not members of NASDTEC may consider joining the association to streamline the process of providing credentials to educators who are certified to teach in other states.

State education agencies could also consider entering into reciprocity agreements with other countries. These agreements could make it easier for bilingual teaching candidates who have received foreign credentials and/or taught abroad to bring their language skills and pedagogical expertise to classrooms in the United States. In states where bilingual teacher shortages are particularly severe, it may be worthwhile for state education agencies to consider teacher pools outside of the U.S. in addition to their local communities.

Endnotes

ⁱ States with bilingual teacher shortage: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin. States with shortage of ESL/ESOL teachers: Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wyoming.

ⁱⁱ Quintero, D., & Hansen, M. (2017). *English learners and the growing need for qualified teachers*. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/06/02/english-learners-and-the-growing-need-for-qualified-teachers/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Flynn, K., & Hill, J. (2005). English language learners: A growing population. *Policy brief: Mid-continent research for education and learning*, 1–12. National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA). (2011). *The growing numbers of English language learner students, 1998/99 - 2008/09*. NCELA.

Samson, J. F., & Collins, B. A. (2012). *Preparing all teachers to meet the needs of English language learners: Applying research to policy and practice for teacher effectiveness*. Center for American Progress.

^{iv} Wilson, D. M. (2011). Dual language programs on the rise. *Harvard education letter*, 27(2), 1–2.

^v This flexibility allows teachers who are proficient in the target language and have developed the relevant content knowledge from other experiences to become certified more easily to teach in bilingual settings.

^{vi} Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (n.d.) *Guidelines for the bilingual education endorsement*. <https://www.umb.edu/academics/cla/appling/grad/dual-language-certificate>

^{vii} Educational Personnel Endorsement. NAC 391.242. <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/NAC/NAC-391.html#NAC391Sec242>

Utah State Board of Education. (2020, April 14). *Dual language immersion*. <https://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/dualimmersion>

^{viii} State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2017, April) *Emergency permits. Crosscultural, language, and academic development (CLAD) and bilingual authorization permits*. https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/leaflets/cl533o-clad-bl.pdf?sfvrsn=844de569_2