

SPECIAL ISSUE

Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers

education policy analysis
archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,
open access, multilingual journal



epaa | aape

Arizona State University

Volume 32 Number 55

September 17, 2024

ISSN 1068-2341

Resisting Practice to Impact Policy: A Case for Moving Toward an ESL/Bilingual Teacher Education Initiative

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Citation: Mawhinney, L., Hannon, L. V., Wingfield, J., & Charriez, T. (2024). Resisting practice to impact policy: A case for moving toward an ESL/bilingual teacher education initiative. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 32(55). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.32.8283> This article is part of the special issue, *Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers*, guest edited by Conra Gist, Travis Bristol, and Saili Kulkarni.

Abstract: While it is nationally recognized that there is a high need for teachers, particularly those of diverse backgrounds and with ESL/bilingual certifications, barriers to certification continue to exist for undocumented individuals. Within the state of New Jersey, these barriers mirror the national limitations. Although New Jersey has made efforts to address citizenship and reform policies, some barriers persist, hindering these candidates from making a positive impact on students' lives through a teaching career. This policy piece aims to shed light on the barriers to teacher certification faced by undocumented individuals and outlines measures taken by the Rutgers University-Newark (RU-N) Department of Urban Education to address these challenges.

Journal website: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/>

Facebook: /EPAAA

Twitter: @epaa_aape

Manuscript received: 1/8/2023

Revisions received: 3/5/2024

Accepted: 15/8/2024

Keywords: ESL/bilingual teacher education; urban education; preservice teachers; Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers; teacher education policy

La resistencia a que la práctica influya en las políticas: Un argumento a favor de avanzar hacia una iniciativa para la formación de profesores de ESL/bilingües

Resumen: Si bien se reconoce a nivel nacional que existe una gran necesidad de docentes, en particular aquellos de diversos orígenes y con certificaciones de inglés como segundo idioma o bilingües, siguen existiendo barreras para la certificación de los indocumentados. Dentro del estado de Nueva Jersey, estas barreras reflejan las limitaciones nacionales. Si bien Nueva Jersey ha hecho esfuerzos para abordar las políticas de ciudadanía y reforma, persisten algunas barreras que impiden que estos candidatos tengan un impacto positivo en las vidas de los estudiantes a través de una carrera docente. Este artículo de política tiene como objetivo arrojar luz sobre las barreras a la certificación de docentes que enfrentan los indocumentados y describe las medidas adoptadas por el Departamento de Educación Urbana de la Universidad Rutgers-Newark (RU-N) para abordar estos desafíos.

Palabras-clave: ESL/formación docente bilingüe; educación urbana; maestros en formación; Maestros de Color y Maestros Indígenas; política de formación docente

Resistindo à prática para impactar a política: Um caso para avançar em direção a uma iniciativa de formação de professores de ESL/bilíngues

Resumo: Embora seja reconhecido a nível nacional que existe uma grande necessidade de professores, especialmente aqueles de origens diversas e com inglês como segunda língua ou certificações bilingües, permanecem barreiras à certificação para os indocumentados. Dentro do estado de Nova Jersey, essas barreiras refletem as limitações nacionais. Embora Nova Jersey tenha feito esforços para abordar políticas de cidadania e reforma, algumas barreiras persistem, impedindo esses candidatos de causar um impacto positivo na vida dos alunos por meio de uma carreira de ensino. Esta peça de política visa lançar luz sobre as barreiras à certificação de professores enfrentadas por indivíduos indocumentados e descreve as medidas tomadas pelo Departamento de Educação Urbana da Rutgers University-Newark (RU-N) para abordar esses desafios.

Palavras-chave: educação de professores de ESL/bilíngue; educação urbana; professores em formação; Professores de Cor e Professores Indígenas; política de formação de professores

Resisting Practice to Impact Policy: A Case for Moving Toward an ESL/Bilingual Teacher Education Initiative

American cities and their suburbs house populations from all over the globe, thus having a vigorous and continual flow and mix of cultures. Parallel to the changing demographic landscape of students in K–12 public schools in New Jersey, during the 2013–2014 school year, there were a total of 670,726 students; of these, nearly 10% (64,208) were classified as students with limited English proficiencies (LEP; Zong & Batalova, 2015). In contrast, the number of teachers receiving certification in ESL (English as a Second Language) or Bilingual Education instruction is drastically disproportionate. During the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years, 9,284 teachers obtained a New Jersey Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS), but only 2% of these certificates were in ESL (179) or Bilingual/Bicultural (34) instruction (NJDOE, 2014).

According to the United States and New Jersey Departments of Education, ESL and Bilingual Education are two areas of teacher shortages at both the national and state levels. In sum, the need is for teacher candidates and practicing teachers to earn ESL and Bilingual certifications. While the high need for teachers is nationally recognized, particularly those with cultural and linguistic diversity and ESL/Bilingual certifications (Nieto, 2017), policy and practice barriers to teacher certification continue. Undocumented individuals face significant barriers in pursuing a career in teaching, including limited access to education, legal restrictions, and lack of work authorization and recognition of their qualifications.

At the national level, the current landscape presents significant obstacles for undocumented individuals seeking teacher certification. The lack of a clear pathway to legal status or citizenship often denies them access to federal financial aid and professional licensing requirements. Consequently, they encounter hurdles in fulfilling the prerequisites necessary for teacher certification.

Within the state of New Jersey, the barriers to teacher certification for undocumented candidates mirror the national limitations, albeit with some specific nuances. It is important to note the distinction between undocumented students and non-citizens. For example, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients are non-citizens eligible for a social security number. Therefore, they are eligible for teacher certification. Undocumented candidates are ineligible to receive a social security number. Therefore, undocumented individuals in New Jersey face limitations in receiving teacher certification due to legal barriers, such as lawful presence requirements and work authorization that hinder or complicate their path to a career in education. Even in the face of legislation that aspires to open up pathways for undocumented individuals, the pathway remains unclear and undefined.

This policy piece sheds light on the barriers to teacher certification faced by undocumented teacher candidates and outlines measures that have been taken by the Rutgers University–Newark (RU-N) Department of Urban Education to address these challenges. Removing barriers to teacher certification for undocumented candidates is essential for building a more inclusive education system. By addressing the national and state-level limitations, establishing pathways, and providing adequate support and training, we can ensure that aspiring educators from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to pursue their passion for teaching. Such policies will not only benefit these individuals but also enrich our schools, empower our communities, and create a more just and equitable society.

Part I: Overview of Policy Research in Bilingual Teacher Education: A Policy Push for Us and by Us

Elizabeth Todd-Breland (2022) stated very pointedly that “Education was an important tool for European conquest” (p. 20) and still sits as a place of colonization. Yet, Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers have continually worked with the power of coalition and collectives to create spaces for students of Color to thrive. In the 1960s, the American Indian Movement (AIM) worked to have Native bilingual-bicultural schools that were tribally controlled (Crum, 2007; Todd-Breland, 2022). History shows, again and again, how teachers of Color will work collectively to push policy to make a space for people of Color in P–12 learning spaces.

This collective push also happens within higher education when considering teacher training for bilingual and bicultural education. Federal policies like the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 started to open educational spaces where bilingual and multilingual students could be educated in their primary language in P–12 classrooms. It also provided pathways for teacher

education programs to build bilingual teacher education programs (Todd-Breland, 2022). For example, Sacramento State University, which prepares the largest number of bilingual P–12 educators in the state of California, created *Comprometid@s*, which stands for Committed to Promoting Latin@s in Teaching Careers (Yadira Herrera et al., 2022). *Comprometid@s* specifically supports Latinx and Spanish-speaking prospective teachers through recruitment, support, and retention from high school through postbaccalaureate teaching. Illinois State University, the largest teacher education program in the state of Illinois, created a bilingual education program that speaks directly to the need of Chicago Public School students needing bilingual certified teachers (Williams & Skinner, 2022). Fresno State University’s Teacher Education Program has built programs to “grow and nourish our own,” with supporting and certifying prospective Latinx and Chicax teachers (Yadira Herrera et al., 2022, p. 305).

Much of the push against policy and bilingual teacher training comes from Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and, specifically, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) (e.g., Sacramento State University, Fresno State University, and University of Houston–Clear Lake). Although HSIs are the most recent federal designation of MSIs, they refer to higher education institutions that have a 25% Latinx undergraduate population that is also low-income (Fenwick & Akua, 2022). HSIs join a long list of MSIs (e.g. Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCUs], Tribal Colleges and Universities [TCUs], and the like) that actively certify culturally and linguistically diverse teachers. Specifically, MSIs are responsible for certifying: (a) 54.1% of Latino/a students who received undergraduate degrees in education; (b) 32.8% of Black or African American students who received undergraduate degrees in education; (c) 57.7% of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander students who received undergraduate degrees in education; (d) 17.4% of Asian American students who received undergraduate degrees in education; and (e) 11.7% of American Indian and Alaskan Native students who received undergraduate degrees in education (Petchauer & Mawhinney, 2017, p. 4).

Most prospective bilingual and multilingual teachers are also situated within MSIs and HSIs, making these institutions a prime space for teacher educators to push policy and create programming for bilingual teacher education. Often run by teacher educators of Color, HSI teacher education programs provide spaces where program designs can actively speak to the needs of preservice teachers and the communities they serve (Petchauer & Mawhinney, 2022). For example, the University of Houston–Clear Lake built its bilingual teacher education program to support the needs of their preservice Latinx teachers (Browning, 2017) based on nine principles on Latinx student success at HSIs (Miller & García, 2004): (a) institutional leadership, (b) targeted recruitment, (c) engaged faculty, (d) personal attention, (e) peer support, (f) comprehensive financial assistance, (g) enriched research opportunities, (h) accessible bridges to the next level, and (i) continuous evaluation.

In essence, Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers “advocate for policies to make the joys of teaching triumph over the barriers and challenges in the profession” (Todd-Breland, 2022, p. 30). This article outlines how we, a collective of marginalized and minoritized teacher educators and organizers at an HSI in an urban context, understand the current policies in New Jersey that impact undocumented students concerning teacher certification. To understand our case exemplar, we outline current teacher certification policy effects and impacts within the state of New Jersey.

Teacher Certification Policy Effects on Undocumented Students

Increasing numbers of departments and schools of education understand the urgency to reimagine their programmatic and course offerings to better serve all students, particularly in urban contexts. Yet, several purportedly value-neutral local, state, and federal policies impose unnecessary restrictions on candidates or divert their participation altogether. There is extensive literature on

inequities in the teacher preparation pipeline, specifically around race and gender (Bennett et al., 2006; Sleeter, 2017). Lesser known, yet still emergent, is inquiry on linguistically diverse and undocumented communities as they seek pathways into the teaching profession. This section provides an analysis of how the aforementioned communities interact with the stages of the teacher education pipeline: gaining admission to and persisting through both college and teacher preparations programs and, when possible, ultimately achieving employment.

Across the United States, the demand for teachers educated in bilingual and ESL instruction represents a crucible moment for teacher preparation programs. One of the few rights undocumented immigrants have in the United States is their eligibility to access a free and public K–12 education (*Plyler v. Department of Education*, 1982). However, K-12 schools can impose complicated paperwork and interpretations of residency requirements that impede enrollment or push students toward segregated and under-resourced schools, lower-track classes, or classrooms led by less experienced teachers (Gonzales, 2010; Orfield & Lee, 2006; Walker, 2016). Additionally, there is scant research on practices that support undocumented high school students' access to college (Murillo, 2021). Even less is known about how undocumented students at MSIs engage with the teacher preparation pipeline where attention to linguistic and ethnoracial identities in educational settings is present (Connery & Weiner, 2021). HSIs represent the fastest growing classification of MSIs and enroll not only large numbers of Latinx students but also more Black and Indigenous students than HBCUs and TCUs. This renders them as important sites in the conversation on diversifying the P–12 teaching force, particularly around linguistic equity (Núñez et al., 2015). Still, few empirical studies examine the impacts, or potential impacts, of MSIs on continuing to “expand the pool of qualified and committed [multilingual teachers of Color]” (Ginsberg et al., 2017, p. 5).

As previously stated, undocumented students face numerous challenges in pursuing a teaching career or even working in a field where they would likely excel. Of the 4.4 million undocumented people under the age of 30, many report an aspiration to enroll in a college or university with the aim of securing legal employment (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012). However, the end of high school and transition to adulthood also represents a critical juncture and move into “illegality” (Gonzales, 2011). This liminal state may impede a student's opportunity for postsecondary financial support. It can also create hesitancy in the pursuit of safe spaces and counsel from P–16 personnel that enable persistence toward degree completion. Many students fear these interactions will invite scrutiny of their immigration or legal status (Contreras, 2009). These findings align with research conducted with undocumented undergraduate college students who also reported feeling invisible because the institution failed to acknowledge their needs on campus (Huber, 2011).

The contentious and delicate period after high school, compounded by a lack of access to resources, financial aid, and academic support, can ultimately deter students from even considering a teaching career and continuing educational pursuits altogether. States like California and Pennsylvania recently enacted policies to enable undocumented students to apply for a teaching license; however, such candidates face discrimination during the hiring process as employers may be hesitant to hire individuals who lack legal status. Furthermore, school district hiring policies that purport to maintain professionalism and employment standards also have the potential to put individuals at risk. They can contribute to the hyper-surveillance of undocumented and immigrant communities, given negative discourses; increased harassment, threats, and microaggressions; and hyper-criminalization of and harmful actions toward such populations (Connery & Weiner, 2021).

Policy Landscape

According to the Presidents' Alliance (2023), one out of every three students enrolled in higher education in the United States is a first- or second-generation immigrant or international student. Access to higher education and financial aid for immigrant students are a start in helping to

diversify the teacher pipeline. One of the untapped populations of students who can aid this initiative is systematically disqualified from the teacher candidacy pool. Policies and legislation that provide pathways for individuals, regardless of immigration status, to obtain professional, commercial, and business licenses are developing both in support of and opposition to undocumented persons. Five states provide comprehensive access to licensure, and two provide access to licensure. Eleven states provide limited access to licensure, and 31 states have no state policy at all. One state actively prohibits licensure to anyone without lawful presence. While the state of New Jersey is one of the states that provides comprehensive access to professional and occupational licenses, this does not apply to teacher licensure for undocumented students who fall outside of the scope of DACA.

Simply stated, nationally, teacher certification requires a U.S. social security number, and employment requests a background check which also calls for a social security number. This policy loop makes it nearly impossible for potential students to enter teaching professions. Some states, such as New York, permit undocumented students to complete teacher preparation programs, but students remain ineligible for state certification. In other words, they are educated but unable to gain lawful, certificated employment.

Contributions of Immigrant Students in Higher Education in New Jersey

According to the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration and Migration Policy Institute (2020), higher education in the United States benefits from the participation of immigrant and international students. There are approximately 215,000 first- and second-generation immigrant students in New Jersey Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs). Of those students, 17,590 are undocumented students. This means that 8% of first- and second-generation immigrant students will be educated in New Jersey colleges and universities with knowledge and skills for community-building and economic mobility, but they will be systematically excluded from helping and healing professions that disproportionately impact people of color. With 4,000 undocumented students in New Jersey graduating high school each year, representation matters. Higher education helps prepare immigrant students to fill critical career and skills needs, but undocumented students do not have this opportunity.

Undocumented students attend New Jersey public schools, colleges, and universities and receive state financial aid but are unable to enter the teaching profession. The exclusion of undocumented students from obtaining licensure has an immeasurable impact on the diversity of New Jersey's future educators. The social security number barrier is an issue of access and economic mobility and impacts any profession that requires state licensure for employment such as teaching, nursing, counseling, and a host of vocational trades. These are professions where racial and linguistic disparities exist.

By addressing these glaring inequities through policy and practice, Rutgers University-Newark's Department of Urban Education is working to diversify the cultural and linguistic landscape of New Jersey professions and prepare teachers to meet the diverse needs of P-12 students. By creating pathways for linguistically diverse students to enter a teacher preparation program, including undocumented students, we are helping to make school educators more reflective of the student population.

The following are statements and issues related to the current state of teacher preparation:

- (a) The linguistic diversity of students demands teachers who are trained and eligible to receive teacher licenses;
- (b) More than 40% of students in Newark public schools speak a language other than English at home;
- (c) There is a teacher shortage with ESL and Bilingual/Bicultural Education certifications;
- (d) Due to the lack of licensed teachers, students are being taught by teachers without the necessary training;
- (e) Teacher certification is contingent on candidates producing a social

security number; (f) Undocumented students are eligible for state funding for college but ineligible for a social security number and therefore unable to work; and (g) Linguistically diverse college students are losing interest in education as a career path because of the lack of clarity and uncertain eligibility of DACA and undocumented students.

New Jersey Senate Bill (S)2455, which was signed into law on September 1, 2020, removes the requirement for lawful presence in the United States as a qualification for obtaining professional or occupational licenses. However, any profession requiring that a license be issued by the NJDOE Board of Examiners, including teaching and nursing, is not included in this legislation. Specifically, N.J.S.A. 45:1-2.1 identifies the boards or commissions that are subject to the provisions of the applicable statutory title for the subject legislation to which the State Board of Examiners (Board) within the Department of Education is not included. As such, the Board is the entity responsible for issuance of educator certificates in New Jersey. Accordingly, the NJDOE does not believe that the new legislation is applicable to the Board. Ultimately, teacher candidates still cannot apply for certification.

In support of statewide initiatives to diversify the teacher workforce, some state organizations have started to reimagine how to attract, retain, and support culturally and linguistically diverse students. This could mean creating more inclusive and welcoming environments in teacher preparation or convening institutions for conversations on the current situation. Organizations such as the New Jersey Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NJACTE), which is comprised of 25 New Jersey colleges and universities, are leading the charge by legislatively advocating for educator preparation programs and the students in them. By collectively engaging with issues that disparately impact students of Color, NJACTE is initiating change on the state level.

Resisting Practice and Impacting Policy: A Case Exemplar

It is our hope in this article that we bring to light how we, as a collective at Rutgers University–Newark (RU-N), worked to push the general practice of teacher education in the state of New Jersey, with the hopes of pushing policy forward.

Institutional Context and K-12 School District Needs in New Jersey

Prior to 2022, all educator preparation programs (referred to as EPPs) that certify teachers in the areas of ESL and/or Bilingual/Bicultural Education in New Jersey are only offered at the graduate school level. This was not a state policy but a long-standing practice that privileged the monolingual teachers with advanced credentialing. But at RU–N, this practice was inequitable and financially irresponsible to our multilingual and multiliterate students. So, we brought this to the attention of NJACTE and resisted this practice. To understand this case exemplar and its programmatic resistance, it is important to understand the context of the university.

RU-N is an HSI and has been considered one of the most diverse campuses in the United States (Suneson, 2020). Seventy percent of the total student population identify as a person of Color. Most students are bilingual or multilingual, with English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic as the top languages spoken on campus. The diversity of the campus, in short, means that the RU–N’s urban teacher education program is one of the most diverse in the state of New Jersey, preparing 69% teacher candidates of Color. This is compared to the 19.9% of program completers identifying as persons of Color in the whole state (NJDOE Educator Preparation Performance Report, 2019). We also know that while students of Color comprise 56% of the students in New Jersey public schools, 84% of the teacher workforce identifies as white (NJDOE, 2023). As such, there is a constant need for more quality teachers of Color, especially those dedicated to meeting the linguistic needs of students in urban schools (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2019; Petchauer, 2018).

One of the most urgent needs of urban schools is for certified teachers who also demonstrate bilingual literacy. Based on the state’s publicly available demographic information for each district, Table 1 represents the home languages spoken by the student populations within three RU-N’s partner districts. Over the three districts, almost one-quarter of the students also speak Spanish at home.

Table 1

Demographics of Languages within Partner School Districts

| Demographics | District One | District Two | District Three |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Home Languages Spoken | 21% Spanish | 31% Spanish | 38% Spanish |
| | 8.7% Arabic | 8% Portuguese | 12.4% Haitian |
| | 2.3% Gujarati | 2% Other | 4.6% Other |
| | 2.2% Hindi | | |
| | 13% Other | | |

The publicly available data do not include the languages spoken by the teachers, so we do not presume there is a correlation between race/ethnicity and bilingual abilities. For example, we do not assume that all the white teachers are not bilingual or multilingual or, on the other side, that all Latinx teachers speak multiple languages. But given national static of bilingual K–12 teachers nationwide is only 13% (Williams, 2023), coupled with the language needs of the partner districts, it is safe to assume there are more monolingual teachers employed versus bilingual or multilingual teachers. The diversity of students’ home languages is varied in comparison to the majority monolingual teaching population of the partner districts.

Figures 1-3 outline the racial/ethnic comparisons between student demographics and teacher demographics. For example, District 1 has no white students, but 53% of teachers are white.

Figure 1

Student and Teacher Demographics of District 1

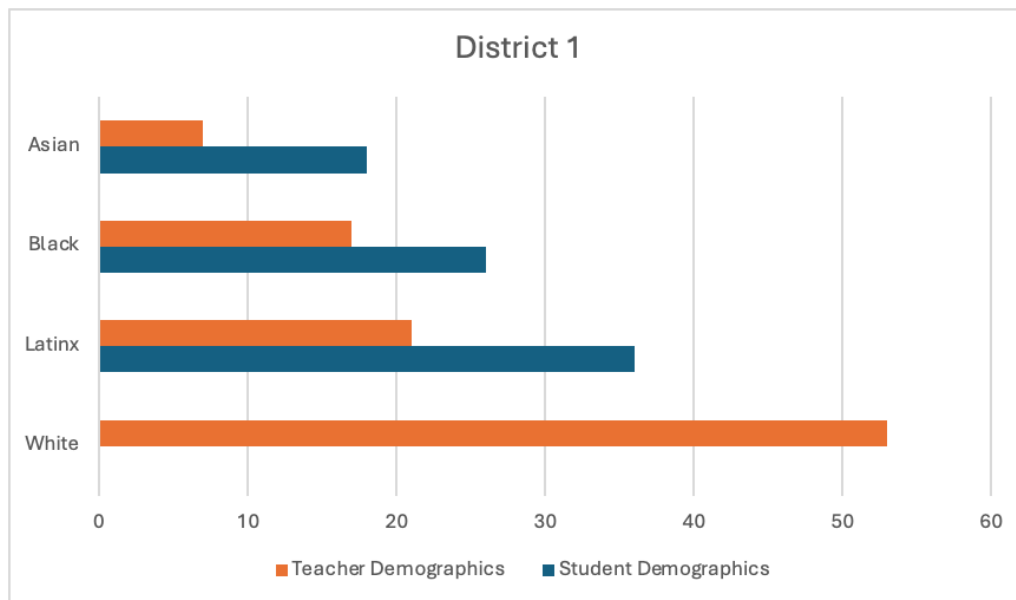


Figure 2

Student and Teacher Demographics of District 2

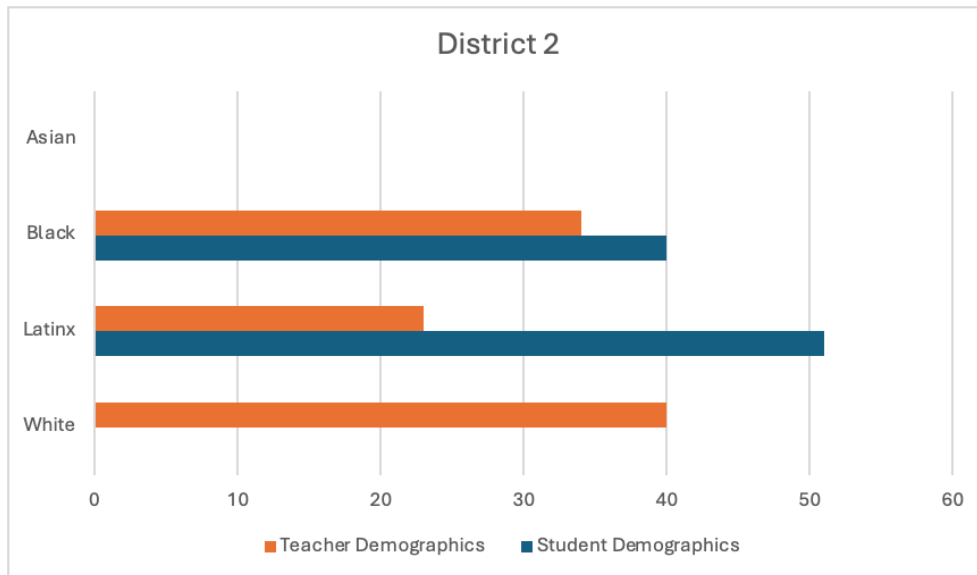
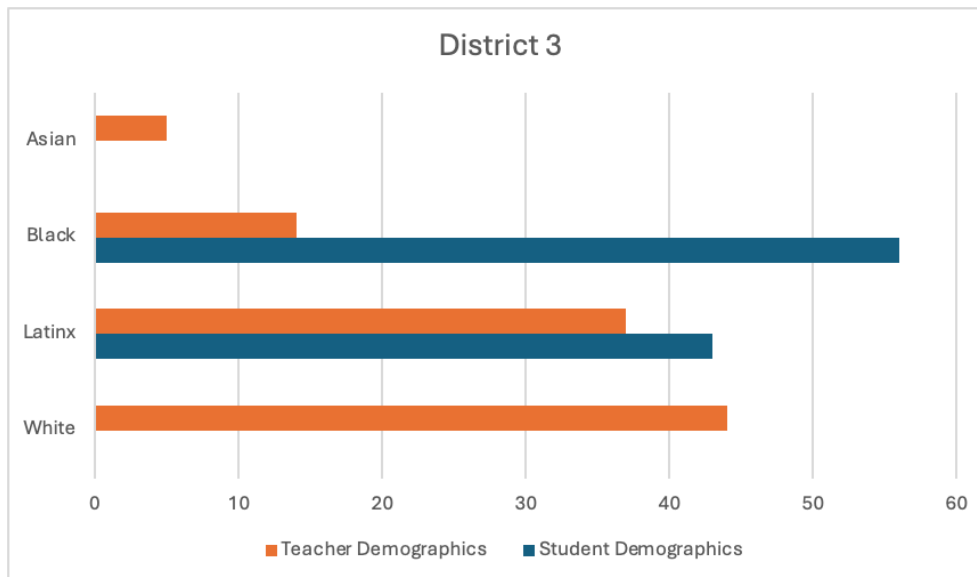


Figure 3

Student and Teacher Demographics of District 3



The cultural dissonance that often exists between students of Color in urban schools and teachers who have not had similar educational experiences is one hurdle that our graduates generally do not have to navigate. Thus, the graduates of RU-N’s Department of Urban Education teacher preparation programs are highly sought-after by our partner school districts because of their preparation, cultural and linguistic diversity, and familiarity with the strengths and challenges of urban school communities.

Resisting Practice and Leveraging Students' Abilities

In 2016, the previous Department of Urban Education administration received a grant to design a postbaccalaureate dual certification program for ESL/Bilingual Education certifications. The courses in the program were designed for certificated teachers to earn ESL and Bilingual/Bicultural Education certifications with the flexibility of online learning. The previous program administrators who received the grant have since transitioned to other positions within the university or left the institution for other positions. The complete turnover of department administration is critical to understanding the context of program reimagining.

In 2020, Dr. Lynnette Mawhinney was hired as the chair of the department to reimagine the possibilities of the department and curate an administrative team who could also actualize the possibilities. It was during this early stage that Lynnette and the new administrative team learned of the grant award and development of the online courses. Unfortunately, we also learned that the developed ESL/Bilingual program was not launched and the courses were dormant. Collectively, our new three-person administrative team of Lynnette, Dr. LaChan Hannon (Director of Teacher Preparation and Innovation), and Dr. Jhanea Wingfield (Director of Field Experiences and Partnerships) recognized the opportunity to address the current practices for certifying ESL and Bilingual Education teachers. The first opportunity was the state-acknowledged and documented need for more EPPs to certify teachers in ESL and Bilingual/Bicultural Education. Our urban partner districts were eager to fill much-needed positions in employing certified teachers who could meet their students' linguistic needs and were willing to support certified teachers with linguistic literacy who wanted to obtain these necessary teaching credentials.

For example, in 2020, the departmental administrative team evaluated one local school district to examine the district's need for ESL and bilingual certified teachers. Forty in-service teachers were surveyed about their interest in obtaining additional teaching certificates. From this study, 70% of certificated teachers wanted to pursue teaching endorsements in teaching ESL and Bilingual/Bicultural Education.

The second opportunity for our program was that while EPPs offered postbaccalaureate certification programs in ESL and Bilingual Education, none of them offered certification at the undergraduate level. Locally, RU-N's undergraduate students were requesting permission to take the courses, typically offered at the graduate level, prior to graduation. They had the language biliteracy and desire to teach in this area, as many of them benefitted from ESL and Bilingual Education courses during their own schooling experiences. What we came to appreciate was that the EPPs' practice of providing pathways to ESL/Bilingual Education certification was a practice and not a policy. We knew that this needed to change. Currently, students who desire to be ESL or Bilingual Education teachers are required to pay for graduate-level courses for the additional certifications. We quickly learned that the practice by New Jersey EPPs of limiting access to these certifications was economically unjust. Our administrative team resisted this practice and decided to create an undergraduate ESL/Bilingual Education program to give biliterate students access to the otherwise off-limits coursework. This program would become the first of its kind in the state of New Jersey to resist the current practice and address the equity and access opportunity.

As such, we designed a program that privileged multilingualism as an asset to teaching and learning and leveraged our students' abilities by creating an undergraduate program. By doing so, future teachers are better positioned to address the needs of diverse students as well as significantly increase their own professional employability. Moreover, the program's major strengthens the university's mission of increasing democratic citizenry in our students by encouraging and supporting bilingualism among teachers and students. However, when we consider the students who attend our university and their linguistic diversity, we are inherently excluding a population of

undocumented immigrant students who are educated in urban public schools and want to become teachers in those same schools. So, while our new program meets the needs of some students, it is still exclusionary to others. It is not enough to change practice if the guiding policies do not also promote access and equity.

Challenging Policy for Equity

Language and schooling are inextricably tied to one another. For years, American educational institutions have been confronted with how multilingualism and the traditional practices of schooling impact linguistically diverse student populations. For example, Baker-Bell (2020) explicitly discussed how schooling spaces need to move toward anti-Black linguistic racism “and the linguistic violence, persecution, dehumanization, and marginalization of that Black language speakers experience in schools and everyday life” (p. 11). Moreover, teacher preparation policies and practices are rooted in this belief system. As our understandings of K–12 students and teacher preparation evolve, one issue that continually arises in the conversation on educating emergent bilingual students is how teachers, schools, and policies respond to the language barriers that exist between bilingual students and monolingual teachers. To understand this dynamic better, we need to examine three questions: (a) What is the relationship between language and schooling? (b) What are the differences between the language of schooling and everyday language? and (c) How do the practices of teacher preparation and the policies of teacher certification reinforce these inequities? Giving specific consideration to teacher preparation allows us to address issues of power, identity, and cultural resources in relation to the above questions.

Power: The Relationship Between Language and Schooling

Through a series of federal initiatives, the success of English Language Learners (ELLs) and schooling has been both supported and undermined. Historically, as the young and expanding America was growing with culturally and linguistically diverse populations, the 1880s through 1920s movement toward Americanization was a fundamental tenet of the purpose of education. Moreover, the American identity of the English-speaking, Protestant, Anglo Saxon perspective was prized as the linguistic currency toward true citizenship. For 40 more years and by the end of the 1960s, the once-integrated approach to bilingual education had been eliminated in schools. Immigrant families and students were left to “sink” by being further marginalized because of their language barrier or “swim” by assimilating into the monolingual white American culture and adopting English as the valued language. However, with the realization of Title VI, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the 1968 Title VII Bilingual Education Act, the federal government began to create policies that addressed some of the unique linguistic experiences of immigrant students and provided grants for innovative programs in teacher preparation and student support. Although some efforts re-focused on bilingual education during the 1970s, many bilingual programs had been federally banned by the 1980s and late 1990s. Immigrant students are still feeling the effects of these bans in American public schools well into the current millennium. In the 2000s, federal acts such as No Child Left Behind and the signed Every Child Succeeds Act shifted their efforts toward providing a more equitable learning experience for linguistically diverse student populations. But how are language and policies still being leveraged against immigrant students in schools, teachers, and teaching?

Valdés et al. (2005) discussed the many uses of language, specifically in relation to schooling. Their position is that teachers use language in a variety of ways and are likely unconscious of their own language use. More specifically, they challenged teachers to examine how they used the English language with ‘other’ emergent bilinguals. Their text pointed out that in schools, these language dynamics are often unexamined by teachers. Because teachers do not critically reflect on their practices, language is generally only discussed when it is thought to be an underlying explanation of

students' learning struggles. We still see this now in 2024. In other words, a student's language ability or inability to grasp new concepts or ideas is not seen as a challenge in navigating shifts in language conventions; rather, it is viewed as a cognitive or an intellectual issue. For example, we have all heard someone say, "They don't understand English." Rarely, do we hear "The teacher doesn't understand Spanish." This misunderstanding has led to students being segregated and classified with learning disabilities that may or may not exist (Valdés et al., 2005). The sociocultural awareness of language, or lack thereof, has a direct impact on how both teachers and students make sense of the language of schooling. An understanding of these constructs is why RU-N's ESL/Bilingual Education program is needed in teacher preparation. Remarks by the U.S. Secretary of Education reinforced this fact when he stated, "Let's look at our students in bilingual programs as gifted with assets that we want other students to have. Being bilingual and bicultural is a superpower! Let's place a high value on having graduates be multilingual" (Cardona, 2023, p. 1). Our program draws on the linguistic strengths of its students and positions biliterate teachers as both cultural and academic brokers for students with similar experiences (Hannon, 2020).

Identity: The Language of Schooling and Everyday Language

American education perpetuates the dominance of American English; consequently, it is important to discuss how both everyday language and school language are used for the purposes of conveying ideas about specific topics, building relationships with the participants engaged in discourse, and reinforcing one's identity (Schleppegrell, 2004). Schleppegrell also argued that for many ELLs, how language is used at home and in the community differs greatly from how it is used at school. In schooling, language is contextual, and the meanings made of words are often different from that in everyday language. Who better to help students make language connections and navigate these transitions than teacher candidates who were once developing bilinguals themselves?

Cultural and linguistic congruence between teachers and students supports joint meaning-making and identity development in students. The asset-based lens of bilingualism and the intentionality of creating welcoming and affirming learning environments for learners create space for students and teachers to show up as their whole selves. In schools, emergent bilingual students are expected to make meaning and communicate in ways that do not generally apply to language outside of school. But because learning and language are integrated and happen both inside and outside the school, multilingual teachers are a necessary component in helping to bridge the gaps between home language and school language without deprioritizing one or the other. This variation between the language of schooling and everyday language helps us to better appreciate how identity and context absolutely influence the purpose of communication and rapport building. The evidence presented continues to reinforce the need for biliterate teachers who understand the experiences of their students. It is with this understanding that in our next call for equity, we consider how policy impacts our ability to fulfill or restrict our university mission.

Part II: Policy Impacts and Recommendations

Implications for Teaching and Teacher Preparation

Valdés et al. (2005) affirmed that teachers must be careful about their values and judgments based on how language is used. Since cultural identity and social status are constructed through one's use of language, how teachers and teacher preparation programs project their values onto students requires a sociocultural consciousness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Lucas (2011) posited that teachers need to have dispositions, knowledge, and skills when working with emerging bilinguals, and special attention needs to be given to the deliberate education and preparation of teachers to

work with them. Valdés and colleagues (2005) argued that teacher preparation includes teachers' understanding that through interactions within their families and their communities, ELLs have already developed the ability to use language efficiently. We share three policy recommendations and urge other teacher education programs to take them into consideration: (a) leverage students' abilities with pathway programs for undergraduate teaching certification opportunities; (b) collectively push federal, state, and/or local policymakers to consider financial investments for undocumented students; and (c) leverage current in-service teachers for endorsement programs.

The cultural resources that our teacher candidates already bring to the learning environment are rich. Teachers who do not share these cultural understandings, have to be deliberately taught how to capitalize on the students' prior learning. New Jersey, in particular, remains a critical site for linguistically and culturally responsive work. With over 600 school districts, numerous statewide organizations are working in conjunction with national policy institutes to dismantle ethn racial segregation, enable equitable opportunities for gainful employment, and commit to linguistic diversity, drawing from the strengths of their numerous sanctuary cities. Given that the disparities faced by undocumented populations exist within and extend beyond campus and teacher certification requirements, attention to local knowledge, community partnerships, and advocacy groups remain important sites for sustaining access for historically underrepresented undergraduate teacher education candidates.

Programs can also collectively push for financial support undocumented students. There is currently no federal law requiring applicants to disclose proof of citizenship to gain admission to U.S. colleges. However, some states put restrictions on undocumented students, barring them from public universities or qualifying for in-state tuition, which is a major impediment to postsecondary attainment. Financial support in the form of scholarships, such as those provided by Golden Door Scholars and Immigrants Rising, works to disrupt intergenerational poverty and enable educational opportunity by providing financial support in the form of large college scholarships, along with mentoring, community-building opportunities, and legal services. Access to financial support, housing, books, and fees continue to put undue burden on undocumented and DACA students. Embedded legal support with low-cost services is also essential for degree attainment and secure employment. The Immigration Legal Resource Center, the National Immigration Services Director, the National Immigration Law Center, and United We Dream offer training on students navigating educational systems.

Lastly, although we discussed our undergraduate case exemplar, it provides a recommendation for teacher education also to consider (as we have) endorsement certification pathways for inservice teachers. Current teachers have the linguistic ability, knowledge, and desire to be dual-certified as a bilingual teacher. Teacher education programs can work in partnership with districts in creating endorsement programs and securing monies for inservice teachers to obtain their bilingual certifications in order to support their district's needs.

So, where does this leave us? It leaves us with a number of questions that we need continually to ask of ourselves, our institutions, and our legislatures: (a) Are we ready to critically examine the policies and practices that are clearly gatekeeping who can and cannot become a teacher? (b) How are our policies and practices using language as a litmus test for teacher quality? (c) Are our gatekeeping practices reliable in assessing teacher quality? (d) Are the dollars spent to diversify the teacher workforce being undermined by policy and practice? and (e) Who is willing to take the risk to examine these inequalities?

Rutgers University–Newark is proud to be an anchor institution, *in* and *of* the community of Newark, and steeped in resilience. We believe in our community and believe that policy changes because the people use their individual and collective voice to resist the status quo and require change. The Department of Urban Education has listened to its students and responded

accordingly. We are excited to welcome the first cohort of ESL/Bilingual Education teacher candidates.

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SPECIAL ISSUE

Research on Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers

education policy analysis archives

Volume 32 Number 55

September 17, 2024

ISSN 1068-2341



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