



A New Blueprint for Success:

Meeting the Needs of Asian American Multilingual Students

February 2026

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Executive Summary

California is home to the largest Asian American K-12 student population in the country.¹ Of the 1 million multilingual learners in the state, approximately 120,000 are from households that speak an Asian language. And yet, the model minority myth and one-size-fits-all education policies have left thousands of Asian American multilingual learners (AAMLs) in California without the tailored support they need to succeed. Even more critically, federal attempts to destabilize public education across the country have heightened the need for strong state protections for our most vulnerable school communities. Recognizing these challenges, **Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA)** organized a summit for educators, researchers, and community-based organizations to identify systemic barriers for these students and develop a platform of actionable statewide policy solutions.

This report highlights key research and findings from the summit, revealing how AAMLs remain underserved. This report further explores community-informed strategies to improve educational equity, including culturally responsive instruction, building up bilingual teacher pipelines, improving data collection, and dismantling stereotypes - all of which can be adapted to support multilingual students in diverse contexts across the United States.

¹ [National Center for Education Statistics](#). U.S. Department of Education. Accessed 22 Dec. 2025.

Key Findings:

- Asian-language programs often fall below enrollment thresholds that dictate dedicated curriculum, staff, and materials.
- In California, non-English educational materials are far less available in Asian languages than in Spanish. This scarcity is even more acute for smaller and “low-incidence” Asian languages, compounding curriculum access challenges.
- Asian-language bilingual workforce and instructional materials are insufficient, producing teacher shortages, few language-specific curricula, and reliance on outdated or poorly adapted resources.
- State and district data systems aggregate Asian students into a single category, making language-specific needs and disparities invisible to planners and policymakers.
- AAMLs are especially slow to reclassify, largely due to low performance on the written portion of the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC). Educators report that these assessments hinder student confidence and learning, and should be reevaluated by the state to reflect accurate language acquisition.
- Family engagement models are burdensome for immigrant households, rife with communication pitfalls, and rarely culturally responsive for Asian American communities.
- Federal and state funding streams have not kept pace with inflation or program complexity. Local funding initiatives provide relief but do not replace stable statewide investment.
- Federal executive actions against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), English-only messaging, and heightened immigration enforcement have created confusion about student rights and fear among families, driving absenteeism and lowering family engagement for AAMLs.
- Equity requires simultaneous systemwide investments in staffing, centralized supports, curricula professional development and targeted community-led solutions for underenrolled languages, data disaggregation, and low-burden family engagement.

Background and Data

Terminology

This report uses the pan-ethnic label “Asian American” to refer to immigrants and descendants of immigrants from East, Southeast, and South Asia residing in the United States. This term originated in the late 1960s as a political and organizing identity, and necessarily combines many distinct ethnicities, national origins, and languages (e.g., Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong).² Many students and families identify primarily by their specific ethnic or national identities rather than the broader “Asian American” umbrella term. Where possible, this report disaggregates findings by ethnicity, language, and national origin to avoid erasing these important distinctions. Future research may examine differences across specific ethnic, national, and linguistic groups to create even more targeted policy outcomes.

The report also employs two related terms to refer to students speaking a primary language other than English. The Background and Data section follows California Department of Education (CDE) classifications and uses the label “Asian-language English learner (EL)” to ensure alignment with state datasets used to inform corresponding findings. The rest of the report adopts the asset-based term “Asian American Multilingual Learner (AAMLs)” to center students’ multilingual strengths.

² Kambhampaty, Anna Purna. “In 1968, These Activists Coined the Term ‘Asian American’—And Helped Shape Decades of Advocacy.” *Time*, 22 May 2020. Accessed 22 Dec. 2025.

This article provides a clear, journalistic account of the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) founding at UC Berkeley and credits Emma Gee and Yuji Ichioka with coining the term.

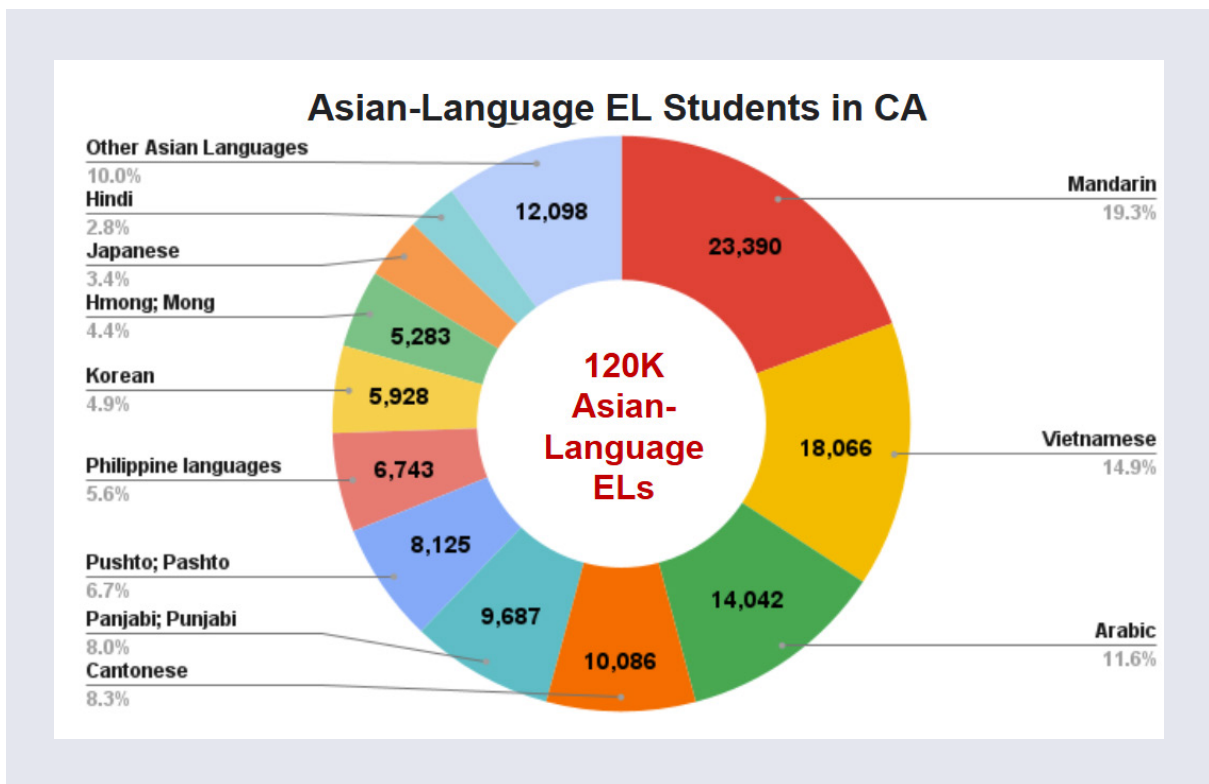
	Definition	Report Use	Limits
Asian American	Pan-ethnic term referring to Asian immigrants and their descendants living in the United States	Used for readability and comparability; disaggregated hereafter where possible	Collapses diverse ethnicities and languages; best used for broader policy analysis
Asian-language English Learner (EL)	Refers to English learners who speak an Asian language at home	Only used when referencing CDE datasets and reporting	Focuses on skill deficits rather than strengths of students who speak a language other than English
Asian American Multilingual Learner (AAML)	Asset-based descriptor for multilingual students of Asian descent	Primary term used to refer to students who speak an Asian language other than English	Not an official data category (may not track to public records)

Asian-Language English Learners in California

Asian-language English Learners (ELs) in California occupy a paradox: they are numerically large and linguistically diverse, yet often invisible in education policy. In school year 2024-25 there were **120,079** students identified as speaking an Asian language and receiving English learner supports, with a few prominent Asian language groups spread throughout the state.³ **Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Cantonese** are the most commonly reported Asian primary languages and together account for **54.1%** of Asian-language EL students in the state. Treating Asian-language ELs as a single category masks important differences in language development trajectories, home- and community-language resources, and culturally specific barriers to access and engagement.

Socioeconomic vulnerability also is widespread: **64%** of Asian-language ELs are classified as **Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (SED)**, defined by eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Meals, and approximately **3%** are experiencing homelessness. These indicators show that many students who speak Asian languages at home are also coping with housing instability, food insecurity, and other stressors that directly affect attendance, learning opportunities, and family capacity to participate in school-based supports.

3 California Department of Education. “[Students by Language](#).” DataQuest, Spring Data, 2024-25. Accessed June 26, 2025.



County Data

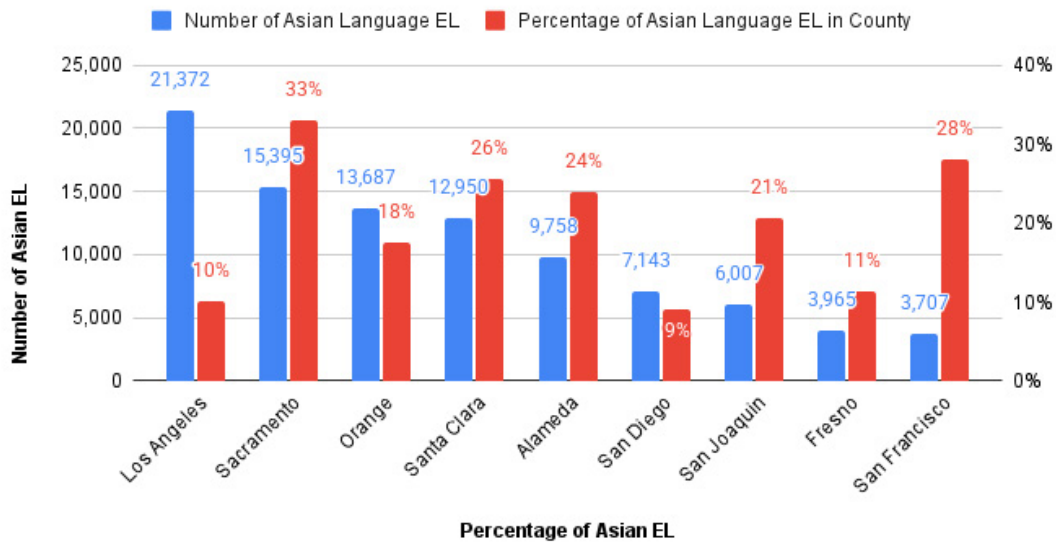
Adding to this complexity, the Asian-language English learner population is not evenly distributed across the state; instead, it clusters in a handful of counties.

Los Angeles County has the single largest share by count of Asian-language EL students at **21,372** even though its overall percentage is relatively low compared to other counties.⁴ Programs and investments in Los Angeles reach large absolute numbers of students and families, so district- and county-level innovations there can produce substantial statewide impact when scaled.

Conversely, Sacramento County has about **15,395** Asian-language EL students and the highest county rate at roughly **33%**, meaning that a much larger fraction of Sacramento's student population speaks an Asian language at home. High concentration like this creates different needs than high-count but low-concentration contexts. Schools and community organizations in Sacramento must integrate culturally and linguistically responsive services across many classrooms and grade levels, normalize multilingual family engagement, and ensure that district systems (assessment, reclassification, translation services, etc.) are designed to serve a sizable multilingual population rather than a small subgroup for optimal academic outcomes.

⁴ California Department of Education. "Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade Levels". DataQuest, California Department of Education, 2024-25, Accessed 26 June 2025.

Number of Asian EL vs. Percentage of Asian EL



Beyond Los Angeles and Sacramento, Santa Clara, Alameda, San Diego, and Fresno emerge as high-impact targets for outreach and sustained investment. Together these counties combine either high absolute counts, high concentrations, or both, and they represent diverse urban, suburban, and regional contexts where Asian-language communities speak different dominant languages, have distinct migration histories, and face different socioeconomic profiles. For example, Santa Clara County is home to one of the largest Vietnamese diaspora communities in the United States as a result of waves of refugee resettlement that began in the mid-1970s following the end of the Vietnam War.⁵

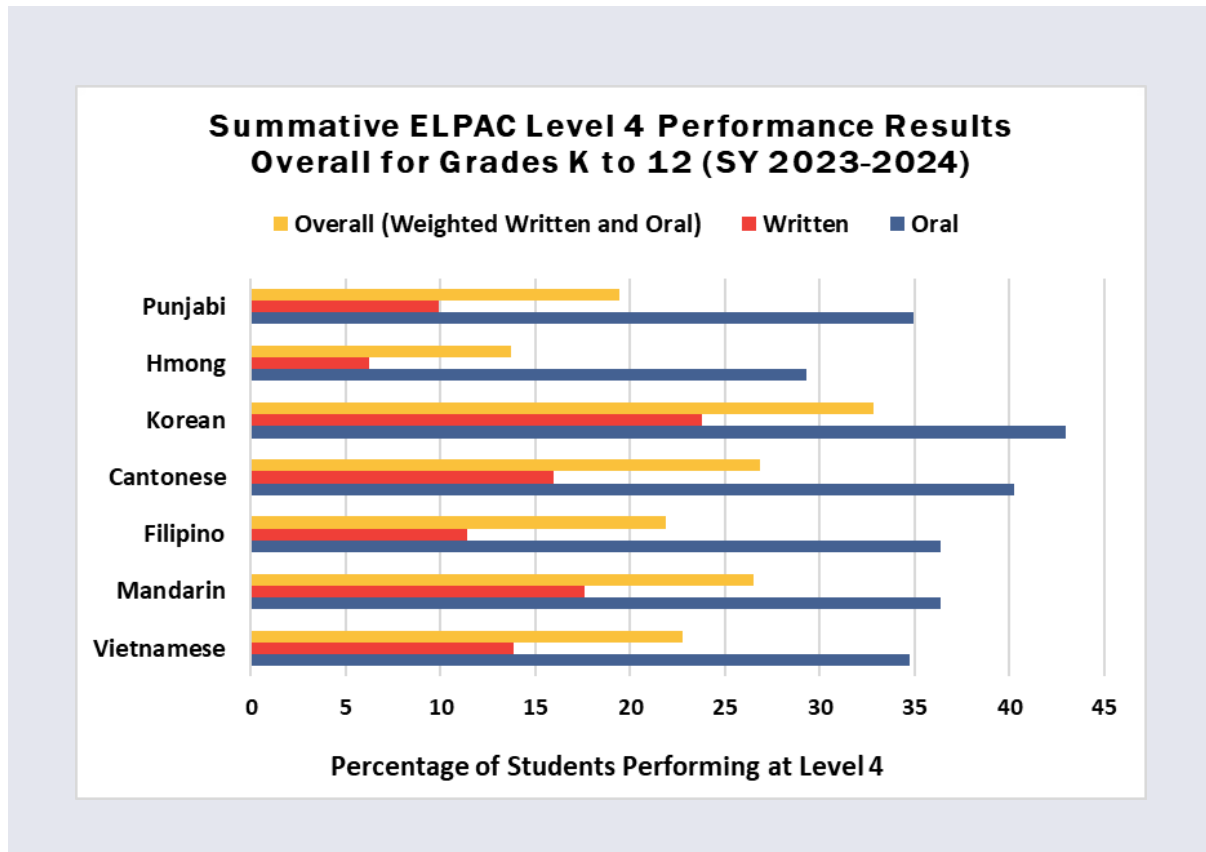
Student Achievement

ELPAC

The English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC) measures students' English proficiency across oral and written skillsets and is used to guide services and reclassification decisions. This section focuses on the Summative ELPAC because it provides the statewide, end-of-year measure used to determine whether students meet the standardized English proficiency criteria (Performance Level 4 or PL4) that initiates consideration for English learner reclassification.

⁵ Southeast Asia Resource Action Center. [Southeast Asian American Journeys: A National Snapshot of Our Communities](#). SEARAC, 2020.

The chart below displays the percentage of students scoring at Performance Level 4 on the 2023-24 Summative ELPAC for Grades K-12, broken out by Oral, Written, and the weighted Overall score.⁶ For grades 1-12, the Overall score is calculated as 50% Oral and 50% Written. The x-axis shows the percent of students at Level 4; the y-axis lists seven major Asian primary languages (Punjabi through Vietnamese), in ascending order by number of speakers in California schools. Data were pulled from the Summative ELPAC Detailed Test Results by Primary Language and combined so each language row contains Oral PL4, Written PL4, and Overall PL4 for all grades K-12.



Notable Observations:

- **Korean speaking students show the strongest outcomes** across categories, with more than 30% reaching Overall PL4.
- **Punjabi and Hmong speakers showed the largest Oral and Written gaps**, scoring much higher in Oral than in Written PL4, likely due to differences in writing systems and instructional supports that hinder writing.

⁶ [Summative ELPAC 2023-24: Overall Performance by Primary Language](#). California Department of Education, 2024. Accessed 26 June 2025.

- **Hmong speakers have the lowest Overall PL4 rates**, likely reflecting limited in-language instructional resources and staffing.
- Across all seven language groups, **no group exceeds approximately 35% Overall PL4**, suggesting that a majority of Asian-language English learners are not yet meeting the statewide reclassification threshold.

Because the Overall PL4 is equally weighted between Oral and Written domains, weaknesses in written English disproportionately reduce reclassification likelihood even when oral skills are strong, if not fluent. Targeted supports and written testing methods that accurately gauge student progress are therefore critical for improving reclassification outcomes for specific language groups.

LTEs

Long-term English learners (LTEs) are students in grades 6-12 who have attended school in the United States for six or more years and who have remained at the same ELPAC proficiency level for two or more years or have regressed.⁷ CDE reporting provides limited LTEL information (e.g., data is not disaggregated by primary language, race, and identity), making it impossible to analyze how LTEL outcomes and needs vary across Asian American communities.⁸ Without language- and ethnicity-specific counts and outcome measures, researchers and policymakers cannot reliably identify which groups face the greatest barriers or design targeted literacy and reclassification supports.

7 California Department of Education. [Long-Term English Learner \(LTEL\) Students](#). California Department of Education, Accessed 27 June 2025.

8 California School Dashboard. [Academic Performance: English Learner Progress](#). California School Dashboard, 2024, Accessed 27 June 2025. The California School Dashboard's Academic Performance section includes the English Learner Progress indicator and related contextual data used for district and state reporting. As of December 2025 this tool only reflects data for overall English Learner and Long-Term English Learner groups.



Summit Overview

Attendees

The **Asian American Multilingual Learner Policy Summit** convened 21 attendees from across California for a one-day summit held at CAA's historic office in San Francisco's Chinatown. The June 2025 event brought together community-based organizations that serve AAMLs and their families, statewide public policy advocates working with multilingual and newcomer students, current and former bilingual educators, staff from after-school care programs, tutoring and academic support providers, and youth organizers. Several attendees also identified as current or former AAMLs or as parents of AAMLs, contributing their first-hand perspectives on family experience and student needs.



Organizations represented at the summit:

- [Asian Youth Center Los Angeles](#)
- [Californians Together](#)
- [Chinese for Affirmative Action](#)
- [Community Youth Center of San Francisco](#)
- [Ed Trust-West](#)
- [Hmong Innovating Politics](#)
- [Koreatown Youth + Community Center](#)
- [The Association of Chinese Teachers](#)
- [VietUnity](#)



Attendees interact with students from transitional kindergarten through 12th grade, with roughly half of participants working primarily with elementary-aged multilingual learners where early intervention and progress toward ELPAC reclassification are most critical. Community organizations reported service to Bengali, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Korean, and Vietnamese students, reflecting both large and small language communities. State policy advocates joined to connect local practice with systems-level insights. Across grades and languages, participants emphasized these common priorities:

- Improve language-disaggregated data to track outcomes by primary language
- Strengthen bilingual teacher recruitment and retention pipelines
- Provide family-centered outreach and interpretation services
- Tailor culturally responsive instructional materials for different language communities



Program Agenda

In a pre-summit questionnaire about potential discussion topics, respondents elevated concerns about the invisibility of Asian American representation in education policy, bilingual educator shortages, social-emotional impacts of anti-Asian bullying, and rising fears around federal immigration enforcement activity on school grounds. They also expressed a clear and urgent desire to convene, share strategies, and build sustained peer networks across California to accelerate meaningful systemic change for AAMLs in their communities.

Speaking directly to this input, CAA designed a program that facilitated conversations on the nuanced experiences of multilingual and immigrant students, regional policy landscapes, and open peer-to-peer discussion. Specifically, the morning session grounded participants in AAML statistics and ELPAC data and focused on identifying the distinct Asian American multilingual learner experience. Afternoon programming featured geographic learning profiles for San Francisco, the greater Bay Area, Sacramento and the Central Valley, and Southern California followed by a policy synthesis workshop to begin exploring recommendations. These structured conversations, paired with opportunities for freeform dialogue, were used to shape and inform the findings and recommendations presented in this report.

Findings

Across the summit, participants described a consistent picture of AAMLs facing systemic neglect that stems from small absolute numbers in any single language, uneven local priorities, and inadequate funding and staffing. Those gaps create instructional, cultural, and family-engagement barriers that both mirror challenges experienced by other multilingual learners and produce distinct harms, especially for less common Asian languages where critical mass is smaller and resources are scarce.

Structural Barriers and Economies of Scale

- Critical-mass problem: Districts prioritize programming where student populations justify dedicated curriculum, staffing, and materials. Asian languages frequently fall below those thresholds.
- Language rarity gradient: Common “high-incidence” Asian languages (e.g., Mandarin) attract relatively more resources than less common “low-incidence” languages (e.g., Cantonese, Vietnamese, Hmong), producing compounded disparities among different AAML groups.
- District capacity: District offices rarely prioritize centralized supports for Asian language bilingual education programs (e.g., hiring just one district coordinator covering duties for multiple school sites and languages). Programs, when present, are fragmented and under-resourced.

Gaps in Bilingual Staffing and Instructional Resources

- Teacher shortages: A pervasive, statewide lack of bilingual teachers for Asian languages limits program options and raises student-to-teacher ratios.
- Curriculum vacuum: Publishers are not widely producing bilingual education curricula for Asian languages. What does exist is often outdated and not specifically designed for English Language Development (ELD) needs.⁹ Bilingual teachers and school sites must create or heavily adapt instructional materials, increasing workload and producing inconsistent instruction across classrooms and districts.
- Time constraints: Teachers report insufficient daily ELD time for AAMLs, with Designated ELD frequently and inconsistently merged into general instruction time.
- Professional development: Bilingual teachers have little protected time or incentives for professional development which impacts program quality and staff retention.

Reclassification

- Reclassification gap: Across languages, AAMLs experience a low rate of reclassification. Written scores on the ELPAC assessment are much lower than Oral scores.
- Assessment barrier: Educators report that the written portion of the ELPAC is a primary obstacle to reclassification for AAMLs. Bilingual teachers noted that the writing tasks are so challenging that many native English-speaking students would struggle to meet the standard.
- Harm to students: Continual failure to reclassify is damaging to student confidence and impacts future language acquisition. The current written ELPAC may not accurately reflect a student’s true progress in the classroom, and educators at the summit widely agreed that the assessment should be reevaluated.

⁹ California Department of Education. [AB 714: ELD Instructional Requirements](#).

English Language Development (ELD) is the specialized instruction that California law requires districts to provide to all multilingual learners to develop the academic English needed to access grade-level content.

Data Concerns

- The “Asian” umbrella: State data on AAMLs are aggregated under one large “Asian” label, obscuring language-level differences and leaving many Asian language groups (Hmong, Khmer, Lao, Burmese, South Asian languages, etc.) invisible in statewide counts.
- Incomplete picture of LTELs: LTEL data are similarly not disaggregated, obscuring trends for specific AAML subgroups.
- District aggregates: Districts typically follow CDE categories, so local needs for low-incidence Asian languages are not reflected in district dashboards or plans.

Family Engagement and Advocacy

- Communication breakdowns: Parents of AAMLs frequently receive poor translations, weak communication with school staff, and ineffective English Learner Advisory Committee meetings that impede participation in their children’s education.
- Competing priorities and access: Immigrant caregivers juggle work and other responsibilities. Districts’ family engagement structures are often one-off events rather than consistent, low-burden partnerships.
- Cultural and emotional context: For some communities, speaking their home language is linked to trauma or intergenerational conflict (particularly noted in Vietnamese speaking groups). Schools may lack culturally competent supports and sometimes replicate discriminatory attitudes.
- Limited solidarity: Language communities are siloed from each other and from other ML groups, reducing collective advocacy power.

Federal Policy Impacts

- Executive actions and anti-DEI rhetoric: The English-only executive order and nationwide anti-DEI measures have created confusion among parents and educators about students’ legal rights and permissible programming.¹⁰
 - Note: *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 remain the law of the land. Public schools that receive federal funds must provide English learners meaningful access to education regardless of their primary language. Executive orders do not remove that obligation.¹¹

10 The White House. “[Designating English as the Official Language of The United States.](#)” The White House, 1 Mar. 2025.
U.S. Department of Education. “U.S. Department of Education Directs Schools to End Racial Preferences.” U.S. Department of Education, 15 Feb. 2025.

11 Chinese for Affirmative Action. “[Lau v. Nichols Resource Center](#)” Chinese for Affirmative Action Oct. 2025.

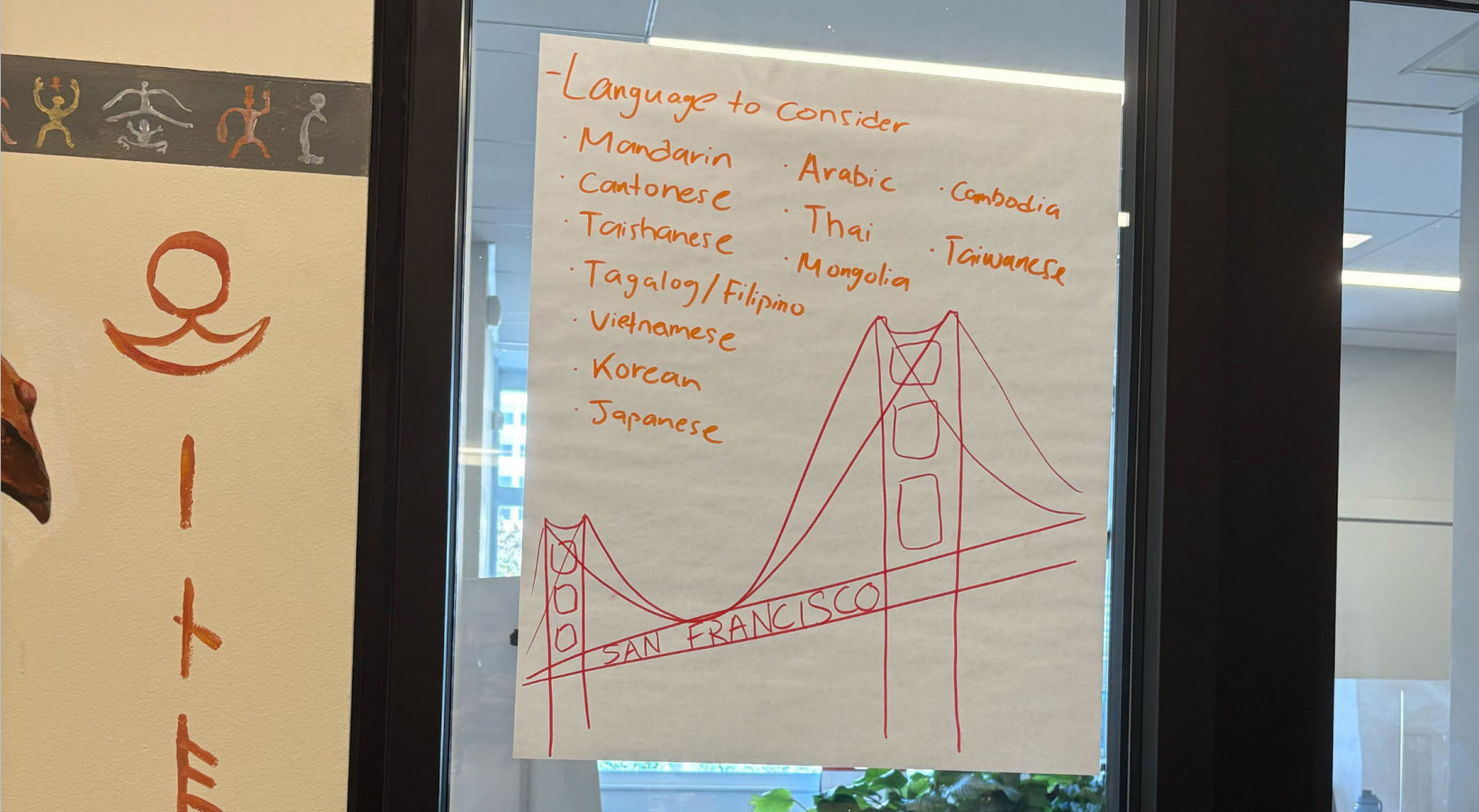
- Administrative uncertainty: District leaders have struggled with interpreting and communicating changing federal signals.
- Funding volatility: Uncertainty about the future level and stability of Title I and Title III funding has impaired districts' ability to plan multi-year budgets and to sustain bilingual/dual-language programs.¹² Short funding horizons force stop-gap measures rather than strategic, evidence-based program development.
- Anti-immigrant climate and enforcement: Rising anti-immigrant rhetoric and enforcement actions (including targeted ICE activity in parts of California) have direct consequences, including increased absenteeism, reduced family engagement, and fear that impedes learning for AAML students and their families.

Local Implementation

- Funding constraints: Title III and other funding streams have not matched inflation or the complexity of multilingual program needs. Moreover, the aforementioned volatility of these funds exacerbate instability.
- Promising initiatives: Locally available funding (such as the Public Education Enrichment Fund or PEEF in San Francisco and the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program in Los Angeles) contribute greatly to holistic wraparound services that improve learning outcomes for AAMLs.
- Policy-practice gap: Despite state and federal legal protections (for example, constitutional rights established in *Lau v. Nichols*) that establish a baseline for educating ML students, local districts have discretion in determining educational curricula and priorities, which leaves MLs in places with anti-immigrant political views vulnerable.
 - Equity missteps: Dual-immersion programs are often created to attract advantaged English-dominant families (e.g., white families wanting their children to learn Mandarin to improve later job prospects), contributing to program gentrification rather than expanding equitable access for AAMLs.

¹² Johnson, Carolyn. "[Trump Freezes Grant Funding, Upending School Budgets.](#)" EdSource, 1 July 2025.

At the time of our summit in June 2025, the Trump administration abruptly announced it would withhold nearly \$7 billion in federal education funds that states and districts had been expecting the very next day. This freeze included major K-12 programs such as Title I (supporting low-income students) and Title III (supporting English learners). The sudden freeze created panic among states and school districts, which had already built their budgets and programming around these funds.



Regional Insights

San Francisco

San Francisco possesses advantageous voter-funded supports like the PEEF but lacks substantive centralized district support for AAMLs. For instance, at the time of the summit, San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) employed only one full-time Teacher on Special Assignment to support both Cantonese and Mandarin bilingual programs across nine different elementary and middle school sites. According to summit attendees, SFUSD has even considered eliminating the position altogether due to its critical budget deficit tied to severe underenrollment, triggering vocal pushback from Chinese bilingual teachers in the district. Although the city has a large Chinese-speaking population, hiring and retaining credentialed Chinese educators is difficult, and state auditors have maintained partial control of the district's finances since May 2024.¹³

Educators in San Francisco voiced these priorities:

- Lowering student-to-teacher ratios
- Addressing split-level classes (e.g., combining fourth and fifth grade) created by budget and enrollment pressures
- Funding public education options over charter schools
- Supporting all family members to raise bilingual children

¹³ Wallach, Ezra. "SFUSD Asks City to Applaud Its Budget. There Are Reasons to Be Skeptical." The SF Standard, 5 Dec. 2025.

Greater Bay Area

Cities across the greater Bay Area (Oakland, San Jose, Fremont, Palo Alto, etc.) share some similarities but have extremely diverse student populations and Asian American communities. Student populations include Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian, Burmese, and Afghan families, with sharp economic disparities across the East Bay, South Bay, and Peninsula subregions. Some successful immersion models exist, but most multilingual learners lack access to dual-language programs. Economic divides among the Peninsula, South Bay, and East Bay shape who benefits. Oakland International High School's open house was highlighted as a successful newcomer-resources model. Across the region advocates aim for policy shifts toward language-justice approaches and broader access to immersion pathways.

Sacramento and Central Valley

Community organizing is a strength within Sacramento and Central Valley schools. Teachers, students, community-based organizations, and limited-English proficient family members are able to work together to build coalitions and leverage their collective voice. However, parents of AAML students are still largely unaware of policies and miss key engagement moments due to language barriers, time constraints, and caregiving responsibilities. Community advocacy for Southeast Asian (SEA) students is strong in Fresno, where sizable SEA populations have organized to push for services. Despite the large SEA population, district and state data systems utilize the aggregate "Asian" category, which erases cultural, linguistic, and educational differences and obscures specific needs for languages such as Hmong, Lao, and Khmer. This oversimplification hampers program planning, funding allocations, and outreach.

Southern California

Los Angeles Unified has the largest total number of AAMLs in California, but they remain a minority among MLs in the district compared to Spanish-speaking students. Because 82% of ELs in Los Angeles County speak Spanish as their primary language, emphasis on programming for Spanish-speaking students is necessary and imperative.¹⁴ Ideally such services for Spanish-speaking students should serve as a model for how LAUSD can better serve AAMLs, who similarly need in-language support to master content standards and acquire English. Furthermore, increasing fear around immigration enforcement activity in Los Angeles County has also likely led to underreporting of actual ML populations, Asian American or otherwise. Similar to other regions, dual immersion programs tend to serve English-dominant families more readily than multilingual learners. AAMLs and their families frequently find it difficult to navigate expansive district systems despite available services, leading to low academic engagement. However, the LA region's urban density and the large Asian diaspora populations mean that AAML families are readily able to seek supplemental afterschool programs and language access resources from trusted Asian-serving community-based organizations.

14 California Department of Education. DataQuest: [English Learners by Language \(Los Angeles County\)](#). Accessed 6 Jan 2026.

Policy Recommendations

In this critical moment where federal policy shifts have significantly destabilized our public education system, California must act decisively to ensure all learners have equitable and sustained access to multilingual programs. In some instances, practical policy solutions that benefit all multilingual learners will also benefit AAMLs, who share many challenges with their peers in other languages groups (e.g., refining state resources for English language acquisition). At the same time, AAMLs also need targeted approaches that seek to close gaps that exist within their unique linguistic, geographic, and cultural contexts.

State of California Recommendations

- Direct the CDE to adopt the U.S. Department Education's 2015 Dear Colleague English Learner guidance to ensure clarity and parity in bilingual education implementation across California districts.¹⁵
- Publish CDE AAML outcome metrics including reclassification rates, LTEL demographics, attendance, access, and proficiency – all disaggregated by Asian language.
- Renew funding for the Asian Language Bilingual Teacher Education Program Consortium, which was a one-time \$5 million state budget allocation in 2022 aimed at increasing the number of credentialed Asian-language bilingual educators.¹⁶ A renewal should include outreach and technical assistance grant pathways for participating institutions, professional development incentives for currently credentialed teachers, and loan forgiveness initiatives targeted to candidates preparing to teach in Asian languages.
- Provide county or multi-district implementation grants to build centralized hubs for targeted recruitment, curriculum development, assessment translation, and placement for low-incidence Asian languages. This way, districts can work with each other and overcome the challenges posed by the small absolute numbers of specific AAML communities.
- Fund development and statewide dissemination of project-based ELD integrated into core subjects and require protected professional development time and mentoring for bilingual teachers.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the CDE's written assessments of the ELPAC to ensure its accuracy, cultural, and linguistic validity for AAMLs, and alignment with the skills required for reclassification. This review should include educator input, analysis of score disparities between oral and written domains, and revisions that more accurately reflect students' academic English proficiency.
- Require Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) and outreach benchmarks proportional to California's Asian American populations for new dual-immersion programs and tie state expansion funds to demonstrated access for AAMLs.

15 U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. [Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents](#). 7 Jan. 2015. In August 2025, the U.S. Department of Education rescinded the letter above that outlined comprehensive guidance on the obligations of school districts in educating English learners. This rescission has significantly weakened federal frameworks for ensuring equitable EL services and learning outcomes.

16 Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Southern California. ["\\$5 Million Provided to Accredite More Asian Language Bilingual Teachers in California."](#) Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Southern California, 8 Jul. 2022.

- Allocate funding in the California state budget for the implementation of AB 101, the statewide ethnic studies high school graduation requirement.¹⁷ Research shows that ethnic studies boosts critical thinking, improves academic outcomes including attendance graduation rates, and increases civic engagement – all of which is helpful for AAMLs and all students.¹⁸
- Establish community-school grants and social-emotional learning integration as a regular part of state categorical funding to support trauma-informed responses for Asian American communities. Evidence from California’s community schools initiative shows that stable funding for integrated student supports improves attendance, school climate, and student well-being.¹⁹
- Fully and faithfully implement existing state laws that protect immigrant students, using Attorney General Bonta’s updated *Promoting a Safe and Secure Learning Environment for All* to guide districts in upholding student rights, safeguarding sensitive information, and maintaining safe, inclusive learning environments.²⁰

17 Though AB 101 was passed in 2021, without appropriation it remains an unfunded mandate; it has not yet been implemented statewide. Fensterwald, John. [“The Clock Is Ticking, Ethnic Studies Remains an Unfunded Mandate; What Will Newsom Do?”](#) EdSource, 2024.

18 Dreilinger, Danielle. [“Research Finds Sustained Impact from an Ethnic Studies Class.”](#) Stanford Report, 6 Sept. 2021. [“Ethnic Studies Boosts Critical Thinking, Equity Awareness in High School Students.”](#) Marsal Family School of Education, University of Michigan, 6 Dec. 2024

19 Swain, Walker, et al. [Community Schools Impact on Student Outcomes: Evidence from California](#). Learning Policy Institute, 16 Sept. 2025.

20 California Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General. [Promoting a Safe and Secure Learning Environment for All: Guidance and Model Policies to Assist California’s K-12 Schools in Responding to Immigration Issues](#). California Department of Justice, Dec. 2025.

Regional Recommendations



San Francisco

- Continue investments in Cantonese, Mandarin, and other Asian language programming, including the hiring and retention of bilingual educators, partnerships with higher education institutions to subsidize credentials and retention incentives for credentialed Chinese and other Asian language teachers.
- Dedicate a portion of PEEF funds for bilingual staffing stabilization.
- Implement school budget planning practices that reduce split-level classes and lower student-teacher ratios in multilingual cohorts.



Greater Bay Area

- Form inter-district networks to share high quality Asian-language curricula, assessments, and teacher pipelines across diverse city contexts.
- Fund targeted outreach to historically underrepresented Asian language communities (e.g., Vietnamese, Burmese, South Asian languages).
- Scale successful newcomer models with state micro-grants for replication and adaptation.



Sacramento and Central Valley

- Invest in locally based language navigators and parent-education campaigns in Hmong, Lao, Khmer, and other SEA languages to increase awareness of rights, services, and program enrollment.
- Use disaggregated data to allocate additional program planning funds to districts with high SEA populations and to seed community-school partnerships.



Southern California

- Support full and faithful implementation of the *Éxito y Promesa* Resolution, a resolution passed unanimously by LAUSD in May 2024 that expanded support for Multilingual Learners and international newcomer students.²¹
- Provide LAUSD and neighboring districts with targeted funds to translate enrollment and program materials into Asian languages, create community liaisons, and run out-of-hours program navigation events.
- Fund culturally responsive, trauma-informed wraparound services for students and families impacted by increased federal immigration enforcement activity.
- Provide targeted training for Southern California local education agencies (LEAs) on Attorney General Bonta's updated guidance to ensure districts understand their legal obligations, adopt the model policies, and implement consistent protocols for responding to immigration-related issues in schools.

Key Metrics

To evaluate the effectiveness of future policies designed to support AAMLs, the following metrics may be used to track progress across access, outcomes, workforce capacity, family engagement, and program quality. These metrics should serve as the foundation for transparent, equity-driven accountability, enabling state and local leaders to monitor progress, identify gaps, and make continuous improvements in how California's public education systems support AAMLs.

- Enrollment and participation rates of AAMLs in bilingual/dual-language programs (disaggregated by language).
- Reclassification rates and long-term EL population changes for each Asian language group.
- Teacher pipeline indicators: number of credentialed teachers in target Asian languages; retention at 1, 3, and 5 years.
- Family engagement measures: attendance at outreach events; use of language navigation services; reported trust in schools.
- Program quality indicators: protected professional development hours delivered; fidelity to Integrated ELD models; access to wraparound supports.
- Number of educators completing social-emotional learning and trauma-informed professional development training specific to Asian American cultural contexts.

21 Gonzales, Kelly. Los Angeles Unified School District. "[Éxito y Promesa: Deepening and Expanding Support for Multi Language Learners.](#)" 07 May 2024.

3. Create Sustainable funding pathways for programs supporting AA MLs.

• All new orgs
• Find out what
• What is the
• What is the

Start a
measure to find
and report AA MLs
that will bring in new
other groups
• Increase visibility
on LCFF dollars
to support AA MLs

Provide funding to
AA MLs
Public funding
Sustainability
// (2021)

Revisit
LCFF to
generate
more
funding

AA MLs
Sustainability
// (2021)

Conclusion

These recommendations arrive at a moment of profound challenge for immigrant families, many of whom are experiencing heightened fear, instability, and barriers to participation in public life. For Asian American communities, these pressures accompany decades of low investment in Asian-language programs, invisibility in state data systems, and persistent false stereotypes that obscure the needs of our students.

By implementing these changes now, California can create a new path forward that affirms the linguistic assets of Asian American students and strengthens trust with immigrant communities. Equitable access, culturally responsive instruction, strong family partnerships, and data-driven accountability offer a blueprint for improving outcomes not only for AAMLs, but for every multilingual learner in California.

Acknowledgments

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Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) was founded in 1969 to protect the civil and political rights of Chinese Americans and to advance multiracial democracy in the United States. Today, CAA is a progressive voice in and on behalf of the broader Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

We advocate for systemic change that protects immigrant rights, promotes language diversity, and remedies racial and social injustice.

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