

SABRINA LEE, ASHLEY WOO, JULIA H. KAUFMAN, SY DOAN

Lost in Translation— Teachers Report Feeling Unprepared to Support Multilingual Learners

Findings from the 2024 American Instructional Resources Surveys

In today's increasingly diverse classrooms, multilingual learners (MLLs) are a rapidly growing subpopulation of K–12 public school students, growing by 35 percent from 2000 to 2020 (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2022). As of 2021, they made up 10.6 percent of the public school student population—or about 5 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a). The MLL population is as high as 20 percent in several states, including Texas and

California, and continues to grow swiftly in many other states, such as South Carolina, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Indiana (Grantmakers for Education, 2010; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2022).

MLLs bring linguistic and cultural assets to the classroom, but they also face academic challenges compared with their English-only peers. Only 5 percent of 8th grade MLLs scored at least proficient on the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment, compared with 32 percent of their English-

KEY FINDINGS

- About one-half of teachers serving multilingual learners (MLLs) reported feeling not at all or only somewhat prepared to teach MLLs.
- Addressing the needs of MLLs ranked low among principals' priorities for selecting teachers' professional learning and instructional materials, even in schools with a moderate to large proportion of MLLs.
- Slightly less than one-third of teachers serving MLLs reported that their curriculum materials were adequate for helping MLLs master their state standards and language in English language arts, mathematics, and science.
- About 60 percent of teachers serving MLLs reported a moderate or major need for more or better curriculum materials that provide options for MLLs.

Abbreviations

AIRS	American Instructional Resources Surveys
CCSS	Common Core State Standards
ELA	English language arts
ELD	English language development
ESL	English as a second language
MLL	multilingual learner
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress

only peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024c). MLLs are also less likely to be placed in advanced or honor courses (Callahan, 2005; Callahan and Shifrer, 2016), are less likely to graduate from high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024b), and are more likely to experience lower teacher expectations (Blanchard and Muller, 2015). For more on MLLs and who they are, see Box 1.

Teachers play an important role in helping all students, but especially MLLs, acquire such skills as reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the English language. Importantly, these skills are critical for meeting academic standards. For example, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require students to engage in such linguistically demanding tasks as explaining, describing, persuading, and justifying (Bailey and Heritage, 2014; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). However, research shows that teachers may feel underprepared and ill-equipped to address MLLs' needs without the proper resources and professional learning (Wynn and Zahner, 2022).

Teachers' access to quality instructional materials that support MLLs likely influences the quality of their instruction. Prior RAND research found that teachers serving a majority of MLLs in their classrooms were more likely to consider their curriculum materials as meeting the needs of MLLs than teachers serving fewer MLLs, possibly because schools or districts with more MLLs intentionally selected or created instructional materials tailored for this specific student group (Prado Tuma, Doan, and Lawrence, 2021). Another study found that teachers who used

materials containing notes on strategies to use with MLLs were more likely to apply these strategies. Applying these recommended strategies had strong, positive associations with MLLs' learning (Cervetti, Kulikowich, and Bravo, 2015). Specifically, these notes included evidence-based strategies designed to advance MLL learning, such as the use of cognates to aid Spanish-speaking MLLs in understanding new English words, opportunities to write or talk in their native language before learning content, and reading strategies (e.g., comprehension monitoring).

Teachers' decisions on whether and how to use instructional strategies for MLLs are shaped by such factors as teachers' feelings of efficacy in teaching MLLs and administrator support (Cervetti et al., 2012). When teachers understand how to scaffold instruction for MLLs, they can more effectively support MLLs in achieving grade-level standards and language skills, first with guidance and then, eventually, by themselves (Lucas and Grinberg, 2008). Scaffolding strategies might include modeling a new task, bridging new content with prior knowledge, or helping students develop an awareness of how their learning happens (Walqui, 2006). This research highlights the importance of building teachers' capacity to engage in instructional strategies tailored for MLLs. Professional learning may be the bridge between learning these strategies and implementing them in the classroom. Altogether, these studies illustrate the many ways that schools can support teachers in addressing MLLs' needs.

In this report, we draw on nationally representative teacher survey data to explore how prepared teachers feel about teaching MLLs. We also draw on nationally representative principal survey data to examine the extent to which principals prioritize supports for MLLs when selecting professional learning and curriculum materials.

We examine the following research questions:

- To what extent are teachers prepared to teach MLLs?
- To what extent do educators prioritize professional learning, instructional materials, and instructional activities that support MLLs?
- What are teachers' perceptions of whether their curriculum materials meet the needs of MLLs?

Box 1. Who Are Multilingual Learners?

According to the U.S. Department of Education, MLLs are elementary or secondary students who use a language other than English at home and struggle to speak, read, write, or understand English at the level of their state academic standards (Public Law 89-10, 1965). In our survey, we therefore defined MLLs as students with a primary or home language other than English who are in the process of acquiring English.

MLLs are a heterogeneous group, consisting of varying language backgrounds, cultures, and prior educational experiences. Nearly all MLLs are students of color. Seventy-eight percent of MLLs are Hispanic, 10 percent are Asian, 6 percent are White, 4 percent are Black, and the remainder are mixed race, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Pacific Islanders (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a). Seventy-six percent of MLLs speak Spanish as their first or native language, and the remaining MLLs use Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and many other languages (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a; Kindler, 2002). Notably, 82 percent of elementary MLLs and 62 percent of secondary MLLs are U.S.-born, and the remainder are foreign-born (Mitchell, 2016).

Every state is required to provide their MLLs with services in English language instruction educational programs, such as English as a second language (ESL) instruction or English language development (ELD) instruction (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a; Faulkner-Bond et al., 2012). As of 2020, 28 states^a provide, require, or incentivize certain MLL-related qualifications or pre-service and in-service training and professional development for general classroom teachers (Education Commission of the States, 2020).

The initial process for identifying and classifying MLLs usually begins with an English proficiency assessment administered to students (National Research Council, 2011). If a student scores below proficient, the student is classified as an MLL and will receive ELD instruction. Each year, schools assess MLLs using their state criteria to see whether these students are eligible to be reclassified as fluent English proficient. Reclassification criteria may include proficiency test scores, content scores, district-established criteria, school personnel input, parental input, and other requirements depending on the state. In 2021, 15 percent of kindergarteners were MLLs, while only 6 percent of 12th graders were MLLs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a). There are more MLLs in lower grades than in higher grades, possibly as a result of the reclassification process (Novicoff, Reardon, and Johnson, 2024).

^a Few states have their own regional ELD standards and assessment system for MLLs, and most are tied to the ones offered by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, a research-based system of language standards, assessments, professional learning, and educator supports developed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Summit K12, undated).

Our findings provide insights into teachers' perceptions of their instructional materials and professional learning and principals' prioritization of those supports. Using our findings, we offer guidance to state and local leaders on how they can create school systems that can better evaluate, select, and implement instructional materials and professional learning tailored to MLLs' needs. We hope these insights also illuminate ways in which curriculum developers, organizations that review curricula, and professional learning providers can partner with state and local education agencies on crafting supports that are more targeted toward MLLs.

Overview of Data Sources and Methods in This Report

This report draws on survey data collected from the spring 2024 American Instructional Resources Surveys (AIRS). The AIRS were administered to a national sample of 9,126 K–12 English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science public school teachers, including general elementary teachers of multiple subjects, and 1,496 K–12 public school principals. Responses from these surveys were weighted to be nationally representative of each population. Details on the weighting of the teacher and principal samples are described in the 2024 AIRS technical documentation (Doan et al., 2024).

Throughout this report, we present samplewide and subgroup-specific means and proportions of variables of interest. We focus on five comparisons:

- **Subject.** We compare the responses of ELA, mathematics, and science teachers.
- **Grade level.** We compare the responses of elementary (K–5) teachers and secondary (6–12) teachers.
- **Credentials held.** We compare the responses of teachers with and without an ESL or bilingual credential. In our sample, 17 percent of teachers had such a credential.
- **Proportion of MLLs.** The AIRS asked teachers and principals to estimate what percentage of the students they serve are MLLs using the following six categories: 0 percent, 1–10 percent, 11–24 percent, 25–49 percent, 50–74 percent, and 75–100 percent. Throughout this report, we focus our analysis on only educators who reported serving any MLLs. Thus we excluded the 16 percent of teachers who reported that there were no MLLs in their classrooms and the 8 percent of principals who reported that there were no MLLs in their schools. We compare the responses of teachers who served a *small* proportion (i.e., 1–10 percent), a *moderate* proportion (i.e., 11–74 percent), and a *large* proportion (i.e., 75–100 percent) of MLLs in their classrooms. We categorized 1–10 percent as a small proportion because roughly 10 percent of the national population of K–12 students are MLLs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a). Forty percent of teachers ($n = 3,946$) served a small proportion of MLLs, 38 percent ($n = 3,141$) served a moderate proportion, and 7 percent ($n = 433$) served a large proportion. We also compare the responses of principals who served a *small* proportion (i.e., 1–10 percent) and a *moderate to large* proportion (i.e., 11–100 percent) of MLLs in their schools. In our principal sample, 49 percent ($n = 733$) of principals served a small proportion, and 43 percent ($n = 600$) served a moderate to large proportion of MLLs. We are not able to report separately on principals who

served a large (75–100 percent) proportion of MLLs because of the small sample size ($n = 28$).

- **Curriculum used.** We compare the responses of teachers serving MLLs who reported regularly using at least one standards-aligned material (as defined by the curriculum review nonprofit EdReports) and those who did not regularly use a standards-aligned material.¹ We defined *regular use* as using a material at least once a week or more on average. EdReports’ review process includes a few indicators on whether materials contain supports for MLLs, although they are not the focus of EdReports’ review.²

Unless otherwise noted, we reference only differences among educator subgroups that are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). We did not make statistical adjustments for multiple comparisons because the intent of this report is to provide exploratory, descriptive information rather than to test specific hypotheses or causal relationships.

To What Extent Are Teachers Prepared to Teach MLLs?

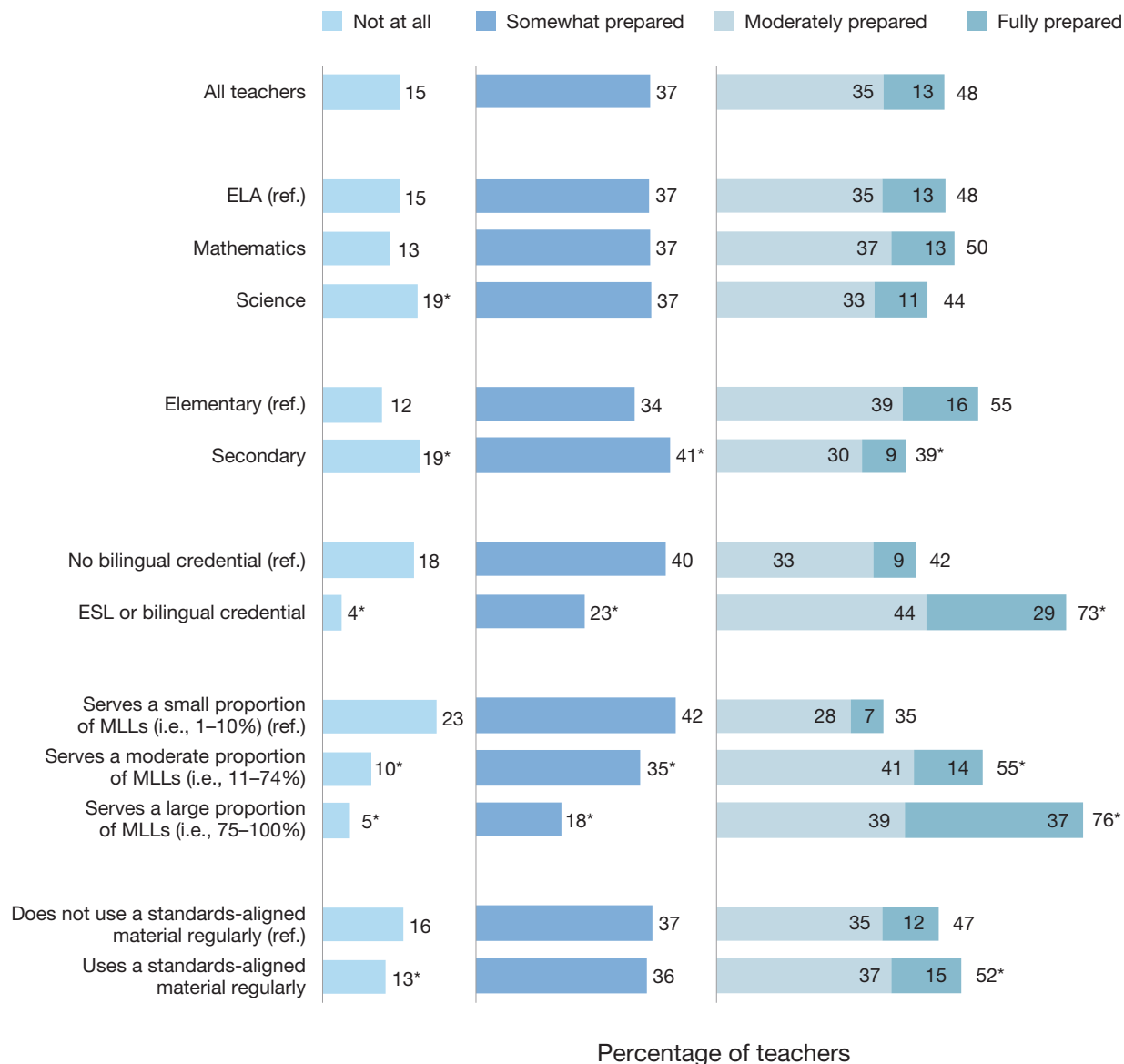
About Half of Teachers Serving MLLs Reported Feeling Not at All or Only Somewhat Prepared to Teach MLLs

Among teachers serving any proportion of MLLs, 48 percent reported feeling moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs, with only 13 percent reporting that they felt fully prepared. Thirty-seven percent reported feeling only somewhat prepared, and 15 percent of teachers reported feeling not at all prepared (see Figure 1).

Teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential were significantly more likely to say that they felt moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs compared with their counterparts. Seventy-three percent of teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential reported feeling moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs compared with 42 percent teachers without an ESL or bilingual credential. Only 4 percent of teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential reported feeling not at all pre-

FIGURE 1

Percentage of Teachers Serving MLLs Who Reported on How Prepared They Felt to Teach MLLs to Grade-Level Standards



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "How prepared do you feel to teach multilingual learners to the grade-level standards in [ELA/mathematics/science]?" Response choices included (1) "not at all," (2) "somewhat prepared," (3) "moderately prepared," (4) "fully prepared," and (5) "not applicable because I do not teach any multilingual teachers." For ease of interpretation, we excluded the teachers who did not report serving any percentage of MLLs or who responded, "Not applicable because I do not teach any multilingual learners." An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group (ref.) before controlling for any teacher- or school-level characteristics. Teachers who reported feeling moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs are grouped together in this figure to show the total percentage of teachers we interpret as feeling adequately prepared to teach MLLs. $N = 7,235$.

pared to teach MLLs, compared with 18 percent of teachers without an ESL or bilingual credential.

Although an ESL or bilingual credential may help teachers feel more prepared to teach MLLs, it is likely not the only factor. Teachers serving more MLLs may

also accumulate experience and knowledge that better prepare them to teach MLLs. Teachers serving greater proportions of MLLs were more likely to report feeling prepared to teach MLLs: Teachers serving a large proportion of MLLs were *most* likely to report feeling

prepared (76 percent), and teachers serving a small proportion of MLLs were *least* likely to report feeling prepared (35 percent). Teachers serving a moderate proportion of MLLs were in the middle (55 percent). Teachers serving a small proportion of MLLs were also more likely to report feeling not at all prepared to teach MLLs than teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs (23 percent, compared with 10 percent and 5 percent, respectively). Although teachers serving more MLLs were more likely to have an ESL or bilingual credential (see Box 2), these differences between teachers serving small, moderate, and large proportions of MLLs remained significant even after controlling for whether teachers had an ESL or bilingual credential.

Secondary teachers serving MLLs were less likely to report feeling moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs than their elementary counterparts (39 percent versus 55 percent). Secondary teachers were also more likely than elementary teachers to report feeling not at all prepared (19 percent versus 12 percent). Unlike secondary teachers, some elementary teachers are required to learn about early language skills needed for reading (i.e., phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency) as part of their multiple-subject credential and to teach these skills in the classroom (California Educator Credentialing Assessments, undated). Secondary teachers may also experience heightened challenges with teaching MLLs because academic learning—especially reading—in higher grade levels involves more-complex texts and a greater accumulation of academic knowledge and skills. As a result, students with limited English proficiency may struggle to engage with grade-level content, and their teachers may similarly struggle with knowing how to support

these students. Again, although elementary teachers were more likely than their secondary counterparts to have an ESL or bilingual credential, this difference remained significant even after controlling for whether teachers had an ESL or bilingual credential, suggesting that elementary teachers may receive more supports to teach MLLs than their secondary counterparts.

Similar to secondary teachers, science teachers also may not be equipped with the resources (e.g., quality curriculum materials or adequate training) to teach MLLs. Science teachers were more likely than mathematics and ELA teachers to report feeling not at all prepared (19 percent versus 13 percent and 15 percent, respectively).

Finally, teachers who regularly use standards-aligned materials may be more prepared to teach MLLs than their counterparts who are not using a standards-aligned material because their materials might include some scaffolding features for MLLs in their design. Fifty-two percent of teachers who regularly used a standards-aligned material reported feeling moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs compared with 47 percent of those who did not regularly use a standards-aligned material. Teachers who regularly used a standards-aligned material also were less likely to say that they felt not at all prepared (13 percent versus 16 percent, respectively).

In addition to teachers' teaching assignment, student population, and credentialing to teach MLLs, it is also possible that teachers' state policy context—and the supports they receive from their states—can influence the extent to which teachers feel prepared to teach MLLs (see Box 3).

In the remainder of this report, we explore some potential reasons why teachers may feel unprepared

Box 2. Overlaps Between Teacher Subgroups

The higher prevalence of teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential among elementary teachers and teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs may contribute to—although not fully explain—some of the patterns we observed. For instance, among teachers serving any proportion of MLLs in our sample, elementary teachers were nearly twice as likely as secondary teachers to have an ESL or bilingual credential (24 percent versus 13 percent). Similarly, teachers serving a moderate and large proportion of MLLs were about two and five times as likely, respectively, as teachers serving a small proportion of MLLs to have an ESL or bilingual credential (23 percent and 49 percent, respectively, versus 10 percent).

Box 3. State Policy Bright Spot: California

The AIRS had state-representative results for teachers in 18 states. Among these 18 states, California has one of the highest populations of MLLs, serving 1.1 million MLLs, which comprises 19 percent of its K–12 public school student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a). Across teachers serving MLLs in the 18 oversampled states, California teachers were among the most likely to say that they felt prepared to teach MLLs. That is, 59 percent of California teachers reported feeling moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs in comparison with 48 percent of teachers in other states.

California enacted numerous policy initiatives that could explain why its teachers were more likely than other teachers serving MLLs to report feeling prepared to teach MLLs. California was one of the first states to advance curriculum, instruction, credentialing, and teacher preparation to better serve MLLs. In 2014, California adopted the English Language Development Framework for MLLs that aligns and provides guidance on the implementation of the California CCSS for ELA and the California ELD standards. In 2016, the state created the California English Learner Roadmap to augment the state efforts to implement the California ELD standards (WestEd, 2024). The roadmap provided guidance for schools to meet the state requirements for teaching MLLs and expanded the reach of bilingual programs for students (Hopkinson, 2017). California also requires all teachers with at least one MLL in their classrooms to have an English-learner certificate or authorization.

to teach MLLs. Specifically, we examine educators' lack of prioritization of supports for MLLs and inadequate curriculum materials.

To What Extent Do Educators Prioritize Professional Learning, Instructional Materials, and Instructional Activities That Support MLLs?

Addressing the Needs of MLLs Ranked Low Among Principals' Priorities for Teacher Professional Learning, Even in Schools with a Moderate to Large Proportion of MLLs

Helping teachers address the needs of MLLs was one of principals' lowest priorities for professional learning. Only about 10 percent of principals serving any MLLs ranked helping teachers address the needs of MLLs as one of their top three priorities for professional learning in ELA, mathematics, and science (see Table 1).

Only about one-fifth of principals with a moderate to large proportion of MLLs in their schools ranked professional learning that helps teachers address the needs of MLLs as one of their top three priorities. For principals serving a small proportion

of MLLs, this was an even lower priority: Less than 5 percent of principals with a small proportion of MLLs in their schools said this was a top professional learning priority.

Instead, principals were most likely to prioritize professional learning that is aligned with their state standards, helps teachers address the needs of students who are struggling to master grade-level content, and helps teachers plan instruction using their required or recommended curriculum materials. It is possible that competing priorities may hinder principals from prioritizing professional learning focused on MLLs. Principals may also be considering the needs of MLLs when prioritizing professional learning that helps teachers address the needs of struggling students. However, such supports may not be as effective for MLLs if they do not target MLLs' specific needs.

Teachers' survey responses illuminated areas where schools and districts might concentrate their professional learning efforts in the face of competing priorities. When asked about what types of professional learning best prepared them to teach MLLs, a majority of teachers serving MLLs selected collaborative learning with other teachers (56 percent). Teachers were much less likely to point to professional development workshops (27 percent) or coaching (7 percent) as the professional learning that best helped them to teach MLLs.

TABLE 1

Top Ranked Priorities of Principals Serving MLLs for Selecting Professional Learning for Teachers for ELA, Mathematics, and Science

Priority	ELA	Mathematics	Science
Is aligned with [ELA/mathematics/science] state standards	65%	68%	75%
Helps teachers address needs of students who are struggling to master grade-level [ELA/mathematics/science] content	63%	63%	53%
Helps teachers plan instruction using their required or recommended [ELA/mathematics/science] curriculum materials	59%	61%	64%
Helps teachers use or analyze [ELA/mathematics/science] student data	49%	53%	38%
Helps teachers address needs of students who need more advanced or challenging instruction	18%	18%	19%
Helps teachers address the needs of students with IEP and/or 504 plan	12%	12%	12%
Helps teachers address the needs of multilingual learners	12%	10%	12%
Helps teachers activate diverse cultural background knowledge of students	10%	6%	9%
Helps teachers better use technology for instruction	5%	5%	10%
Provides guidance on students' social and emotional learning	4%	3%	4%

NOTE: IEP = Individualized Educational Plan. This table shows principals' responses to the following survey question: "Rank the top three priorities that dictate the content-area focus of teacher professional learning for instruction at your school (regardless of whether you are the primary decisionmaker for the focus and frequency of professional development)" for ELA, mathematics, and science. We display the percentage of principals who reported that each listed item was one of their top three priorities and excluded principals who reported not serving any proportion of MLLs. Darker blue shading indicates a higher percentage of principals who reported that item as a priority. $N = 1,332$ for ELA; $N = 1,333$ for mathematics and science.

Few Principals Prioritized Providing Options for MLLs When Selecting Teachers' Instructional Materials, Even in Schools with Many MLLs

Echoing their responses about professional learning, relatively few principals serving any proportion of MLLs reported that providing options for MLLs was one of their top priorities dictating which instructional materials they required or recommended that teachers use. We did not define "providing options for MLLs," so principals may have interpreted these options in various ways. For instance, they could have been thinking about whether instructional materials included scaffolds, differentiated learning activities, or different modalities of learning (i.e., visual, auditory, kinesthetic) for MLLs.

Only about 10 percent of principals serving MLLs ranked materials that provide options for MLLs as one of their top three priorities for requiring or recommending instructional materials for

ELA, mathematics, and science, respectively. In comparison, almost three-quarters of principals ranked alignment with their state academic standards, and about one-half of principals ranked scaffolds to help students master grade-level content and materials that are engaging to students as top priorities. These areas are important for serving all types of students, which may explain why so many principals selected them as top priorities. Principals may be comparatively less focused on selecting materials that serve a specific subpopulation of students.

Principals with a moderate to large proportion of MLLs in their schools were more likely to rank providing options for MLLs as a top priority: About one-fifth of such principals said that providing options for MLLs was a top priority when requiring or recommending ELA, mathematics, or science materials, compared with 2 percent to 3 percent of principals with a small proportion of MLLs in their schools. However, similar to principals' responses about professional learning, this percentage was relatively low.

Only About One-Fifth of Teachers Serving MLLs Prioritized Providing Options for MLLs When Selecting Instructional Activities

Among a list of 14 priorities, providing options for MLLs was among the lowest priorities for teachers serving MLLs when selecting tasks or activities from their instructional materials, if not their lowest priority depending on their subject.³ Overall, only 19 percent of teachers serving MLLs said that providing options for MLLs was one of their top five priorities (see Figure 2). As with principals, we did not define “providing options for MLLs” for teachers, meaning we do not know specifically what options they were envisioning. Importantly, we are unable to determine whether these options were scaffolds that helped students master grade-level content or whether they represented a reduction in the rigor of instruction provided to students.

Teachers serving MLLs tended to most highly prioritize tasks and activities that were engaging to students (78 percent), provided scaffolds to master grade-level content (69 percent), or were aligned to state standards (54 percent). These results mirror principals’ priorities when selecting instructional materials. As with principals, we acknowledge that these teachers may have been considering the needs of their MLLs when selecting these qualities as their top priorities. However, we similarly note that this finding suggests that teachers are not prioritizing supports targeted for MLLs specifically but are instead prioritizing qualities that likely apply to all of their students, including MLLs.

Unsurprisingly, teachers with a moderate or large proportion of MLLs in their classes were significantly more likely to prioritize tasks or activities that provide options for MLLs than teachers with a small proportion of MLLs. Twenty-seven percent and 48 percent of teachers with a moderate or large proportion of MLLs ranked options for MLLs as a top priority, respectively, in comparison with 7 percent of teachers with a small proportion of MLLs.

We also observed some differences by teachers’ grade and subject assignment. ELA and science teachers were slightly more likely than mathematics teachers to prioritize options for MLLs in their

instructional tasks and activities (21 percent of ELA teachers and 22 percent of science teachers versus 16 percent of mathematics teachers). Elementary teachers were also more likely than secondary teachers to report that providing options for MLLs was a top priority (23 percent versus 16 percent). Although these differences are relatively small, they may reflect (1) differences in teachers’ perceptions about the language skills that students need for different content areas and (2) potential differences in teachers’ access to training that helps them assess the language demands of their instructional materials or activities.

Teachers who regularly used a standards-aligned materials were also slightly more likely than their counterparts not regularly using standards-aligned material to prioritize selecting tasks or activities that provide options for MLLs (21 percent versus 17 percent, respectively). Teachers regularly using a standards-aligned material may be more motivated to prioritize tasks and activities that provide appropriate scaffolds for MLLs because they find these materials difficult for MLLs. A prior RAND study found that teachers who regularly used standards-aligned materials were more likely to perceive their materials as challenging for their students compared with teachers who did not regularly use such materials (Doan and Shapiro, 2023).

Although providing options for MLLs was overall not a top priority for many teachers, it is possible that state policy efforts can provide guidance and implementation supports for teachers to help them prioritize MLLs’ needs (see Box 4).

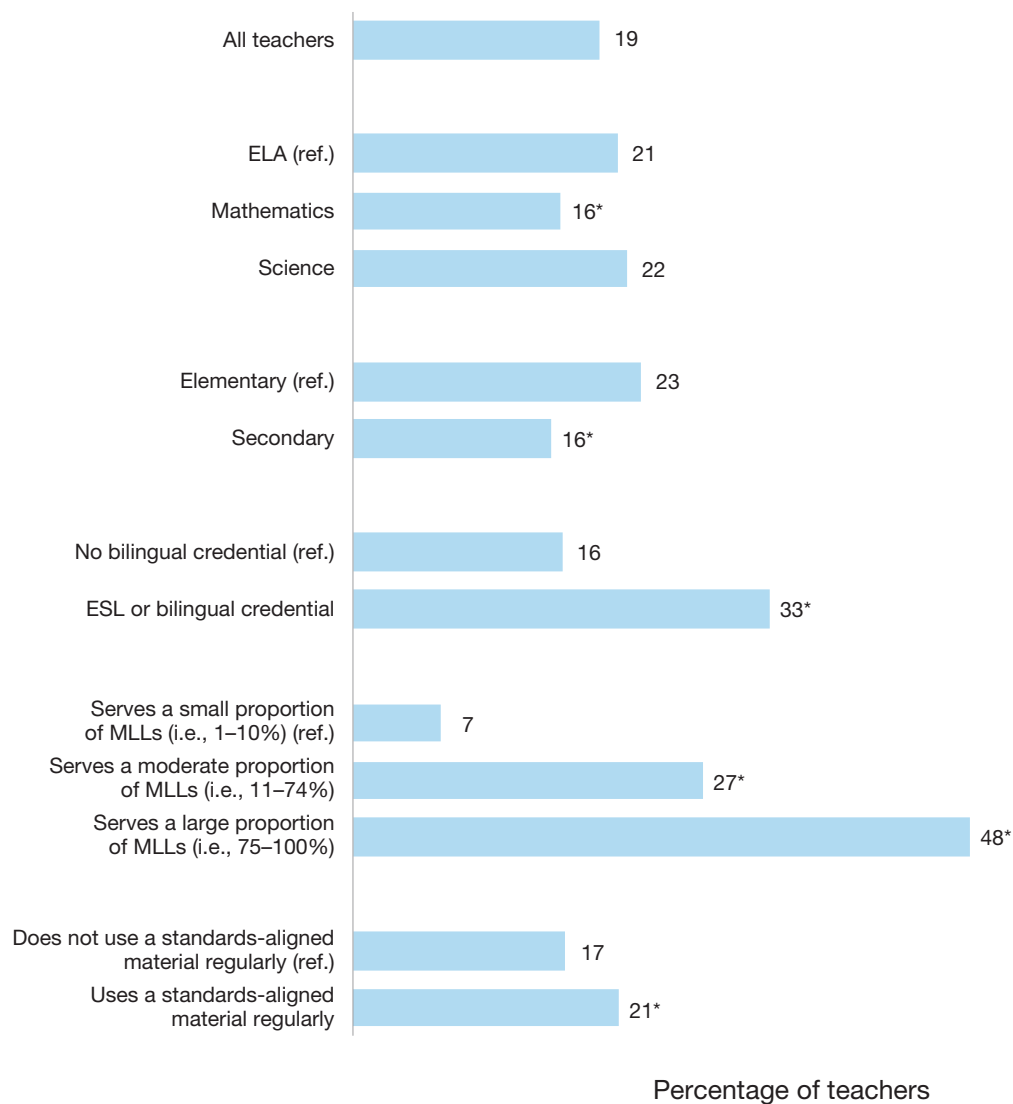
What Are Teachers’ Perceptions About Whether Their Curriculum Materials Meet the Needs of MLLs?

Slightly Less Than One-Third of Teachers Serving MLLs Indicated That Their Curriculum Materials Were Adequate for Helping MLLs Master Their State Standards and Language

Among teachers serving any proportion of MLLs, 29 percent indicated that their school- or district-

FIGURE 2

Percentage of Teachers Serving MLLs Who Ranked Providing Options to MLLs as One of Their Top Five Priorities When Selecting Tasks and Activities in Their Instructional Materials



NOTE: This figure shows teachers' responses to the following survey question: "Think about the tasks or activities within the [ELA/mathematics/science] instructional materials that you used in the most recent week you taught. Rank the top five priorities that determined which tasks or activities from those materials you decided to use for your [ELA/mathematics/science] instruction." Respondents were given a list of 14 options, which included "provided options for multilingual learners." We display the percentage of teachers who reported that providing options for MLLs was one of their top five priorities. We display only the responses of teachers who reported serving any MLLs. An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group (ref.) before controlling for any teacher- or school-level characteristics. $N = 7,458$.

Box 4. State Policy Bright Spot: Rhode Island

Among teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs in the 18 oversampled states, Rhode Island teachers were the most likely to report feeling moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs. Seventy-five percent of Rhode Island teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs reported feeling moderately or fully prepared, compared with 59 percent of similar teachers in other states.

In 2021, Rhode Island served about 18,000 MLLs, which comprised about 13 percent of its K–12 public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024a). As part of an effort to align components of its instructional system, Rhode Island has worked to streamline and improve its education system to better serve MLLs. In 2020, Rhode Island released its Blueprint for Multilingual Learner Success that describes the vision and evidence-based principles for supporting MLLs and its five-year Strategic Plan for Multilingual Success that outlines the action steps to implement the blueprint (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020).

Since then, Rhode Island has implemented parts of its strategic plan and alignment efforts. Rhode Island has released guidance for teachers on integrating evidence-based practices into their instruction and curricula through its High-Quality Instructional Framework for MLLs to Thrive (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2021). The state also provided student loan incentives to recruit more teachers of color, funded world language specialists to support districts' bilingual programs, offered job-embedded professional learning on supporting MLLs, and assisted teachers in using data on MLLs to identify and close the achievement gaps in their classes (Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, 2024; Rhode Island Foundation, 2022).

Perhaps as a result of the state's many efforts to provide guidance to teachers on how to teach MLLs, Rhode Island teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs were far more likely than similar teachers in other states to report that providing options to MLLs was one of their top priorities when selecting instructional activities or tasks (49 percent versus 30 percent).

required or recommended curriculum materials were adequate for helping MLLs master their state standards and language. In comparison, nearly twice as many teachers (51 percent) considered their materials inadequate for this purpose, and the remainder (20 percent) were in the middle, indicating that they found their materials both adequate and inadequate (see Figure 3).

Teachers serving a large proportion of MLLs were more likely to perceive their materials as adequate compared with those serving a small proportion of MLLs (35 percent versus 28 percent). However, we observed no differences between teachers serving a small and moderate proportion of MLLs. It is possible that teachers serving a large proportion of MLLs are more likely to teach in schools or districts that prioritize adopting instructional materials that address the needs of MLLs.

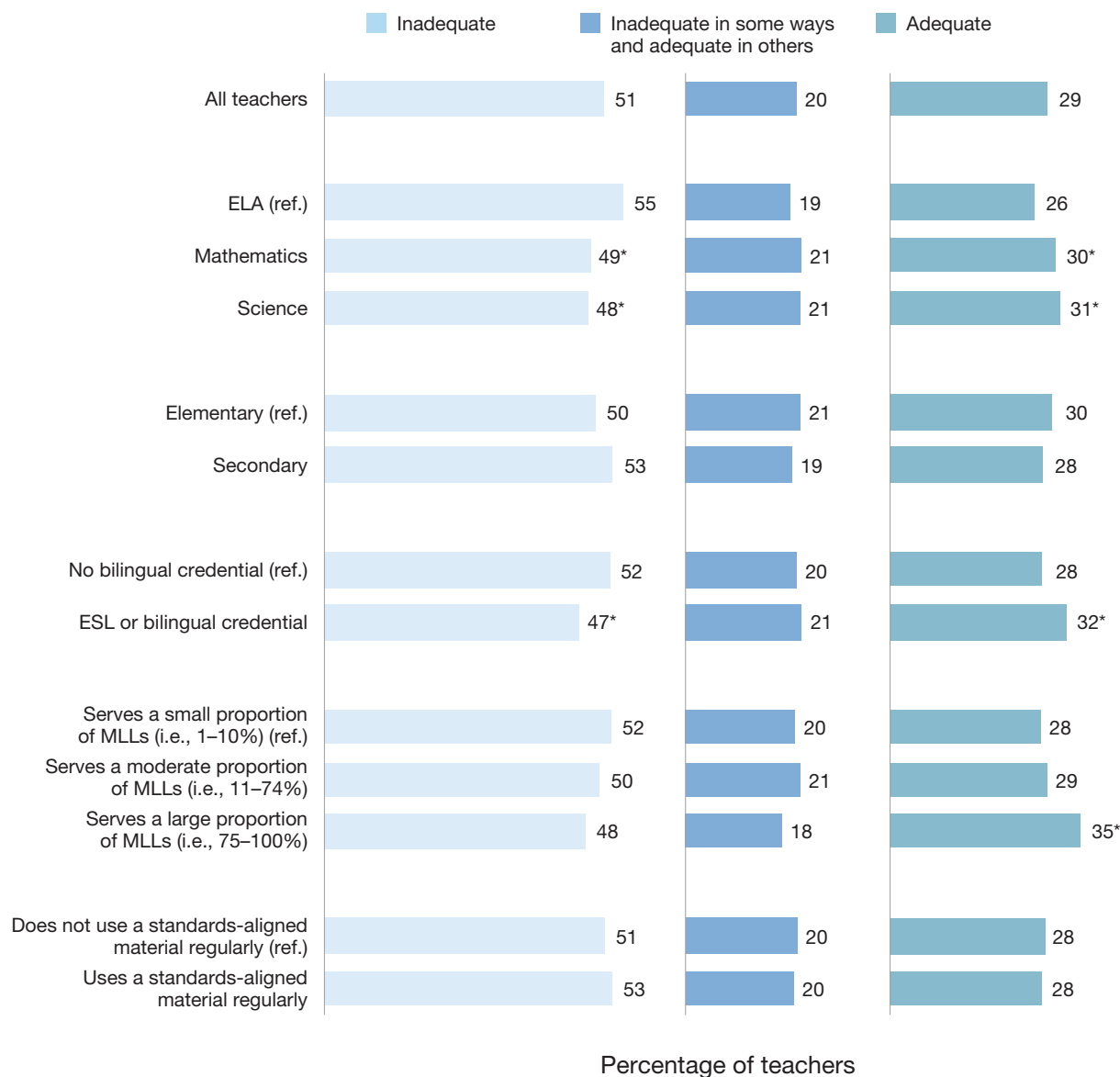
Teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential were also more likely than teachers lacking such a credential to consider their materials adequate for helping MLLs master state standards and language

(32 percent versus 28 percent, respectively), and also less likely to consider their materials inadequate (47 percent versus 52 percent). Although we do not know for certain why we observe this pattern, we have a few hypotheses. For instance, teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential may be better trained to judge the adequacy of their curriculum materials or better understand how to use the scaffolds embedded within their materials to support MLLs. Although we asked about teachers' perceptions of materials as they were designed, prior to any modifications they may have made to them, teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential may be using or modifying their materials in a way that better suits MLLs. In addition, these teachers may be able to leverage their expertise to support the selection of curriculum materials that address MLLs' needs at their schools or districts.

Finally, mathematics and science teachers (30 percent and 31 percent, respectively) were slightly more likely than ELA teachers (26 percent) to report that their materials were adequate for helping MLLs master state standards and language. They were

FIGURE 3

Percentage of Teachers Serving MLLs Who Reported the Adequacy of Their Required or Recommended Curriculum Materials for Helping MLLs Master State Standards Content and Language



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "Indicate the extent to which the [ELA/mathematics/science] curriculum materials provided by your district or school as a recommendation or requirement are adequate for each purpose listed below. We are specifically interested in knowing your perceptions of those materials as they were designed (regardless of whether you use them in practice and prior to any modifications you may make to them)." The list of purposes included "helping multilingual learners master my state's [ELA/mathematics/science] standards content and language." Response choices were on a scale ranging from 1 through 7, with 1 meaning "completely inadequate," 4 as "inadequate in some ways and adequate in others," and 7 as "completely adequate." Teachers could also respond not sure or N/A. We excluded the teachers who responded not sure or N/A and teachers who did not report serving any MLLs. We interpreted the responses of teachers who indicated a 5 or above as those who considered their materials adequate and teachers who indicated a 3 or below as those who considered their materials inadequate. An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group (ref.) before controlling for any teacher- or school-level characteristics. $N = 6,859$.

also less likely to perceive their materials as inadequate than ELA teachers (49 percent and 48 percent, respectively, versus 55 percent). It is possible that, given the heavy focus on reading and language development in ELA, ELA teachers may be more critical of whether their materials adequately support MLLs.

Although elementary teachers and teachers regularly using a standards-aligned material were more likely than their counterparts to prioritize selecting tasks and activities with options for MLLs as described earlier, these teachers were no more likely to consider their curriculum materials adequate for supporting MLLs.

Our results suggest a relationship between the adequacy of teachers' materials and teachers' feelings of preparedness to teach MLLs. Teachers who reported feeling moderately or fully prepared to teach MLLs were more likely to perceive their materials as adequate than those who were only somewhat or not at all prepared, and vice versa. Notably, these relationships held even after controlling for potential moderators, such as the proportion of MLLs teachers served and whether teachers had an ESL or bilingual credential. We are unable to definitively determine the directionality of this relationship, but we offer a few hypotheses explaining this association. For instance, it is possible that teachers who perceived their materials as adequate were more likely to report feeling prepared to teach MLLs because access to adequate materials enhanced their feelings of preparedness. This may be plausible especially because we asked for teachers' perceptions of their *school- or district-required or recommended materials* without any modifications. It is also possible that teachers who said that they felt more prepared to teach MLLs were better able to understand how to use their provided materials to address the needs of MLLs, leading to more-positive perceptions of their materials.

About One-Third of Teachers Serving MLLs Reported That Their Materials Helped Teach MLLs Content Standards and Language Skills Simultaneously and Over Time

To further unpack the ways that teachers' curriculum materials might help students learn content standards and language skills, we asked teachers who served any proportion of MLLs the extent to which their materials helped them (1) teach MLLs both grade-level standards content and language *simultaneously* and (2) build MLLs' content knowledge and language skills *over time in a coherent and progressive way*.⁴ These items were based on guidelines from the English Learners Success Forum (undated).

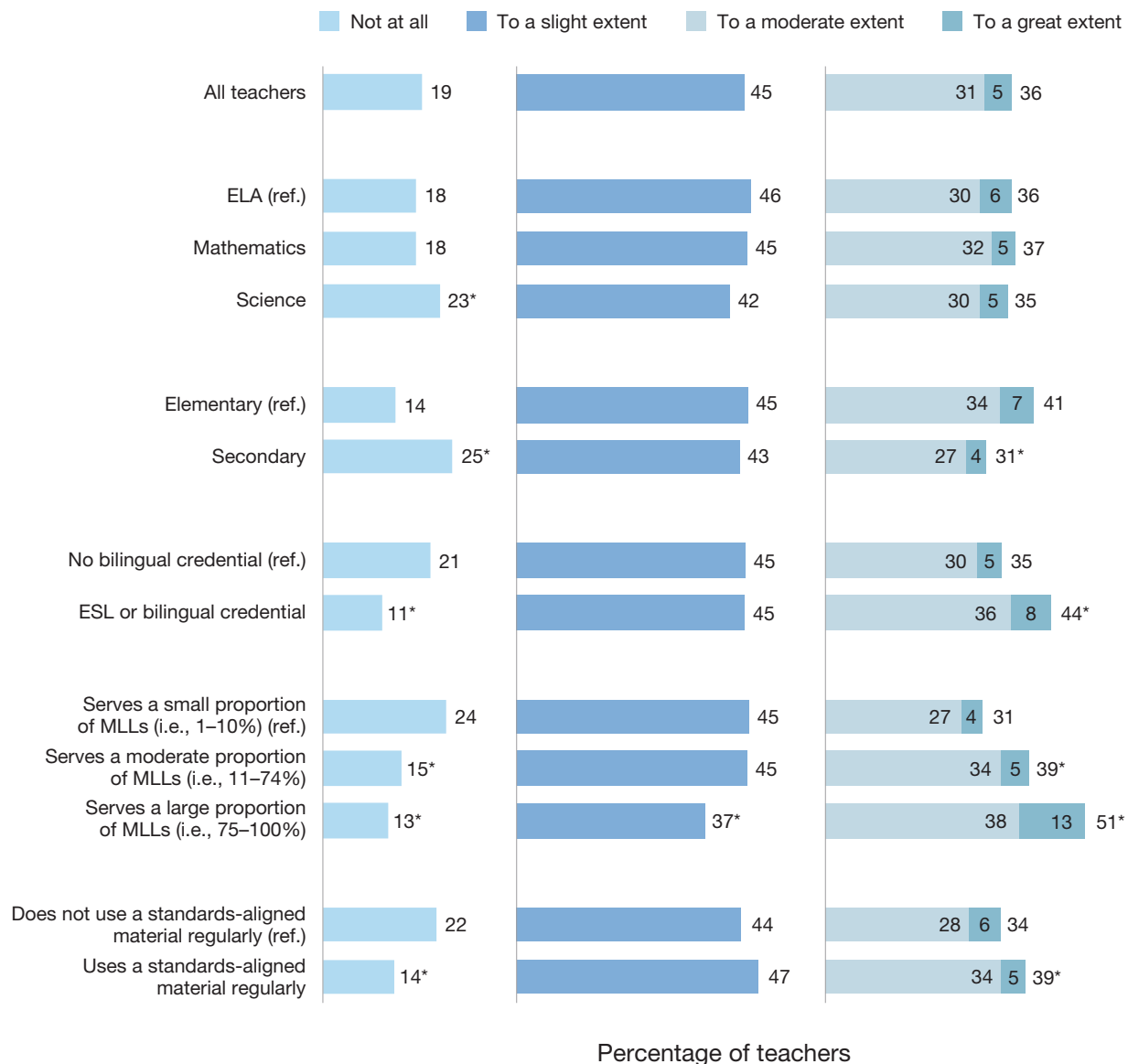
For both items, about one-third of teachers with MLLs said that their curriculum materials helped them teach MLLs academic standards and language simultaneously or coherently over time to a moderate or great extent, although only 5 percent reported that their materials helped them to a great extent. For both items, about 45 percent of teachers with MLLs said that their curriculum materials helped them to a slight extent, with the remaining 19 percent reporting that their materials did not help them at all (see Figure 4). Teachers' responses across both items were very similar, so when exploring subgroup differences, we report results for one of the items (i.e., building content knowledge and language skills over time) for illustrative purposes.

Echoing prior findings, teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs (39 percent and 51 percent, respectively) and teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential (44 percent) were more likely to find their materials helpful to a moderate or great extent than teachers with a small proportion of MLLs (31 percent) and teachers without an ESL or bilingual credential (35 percent). Teachers serving more MLLs and teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential may be in school environments that prioritize supports for MLLs. Or, they may have greater awareness about what curriculum materials that support MLLs should look like.

Elementary teachers were more likely to report that their materials were helpful to a moderate or great extent compared with secondary teachers

FIGURE 4

Percentage of Teachers Serving MLLs Who Reported the Extent to Which Their Recommended or Required Materials Helped Build MLLs' Content Knowledge and Language over Time in a Coherent and Progressive Way



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "To what extent do the materials provided by your district or school as a recommendation or requirement help you teach multilingual learners grade-level content standards and language skills in [ELA/mathematics/science]?" We display teachers' responses for the item "build multilingual learners' [ELA/mathematics/science] content knowledge and language skills over time in a coherent and progressive way." Response choices included (1) "not at all," (2) "to a slight extent," (3) "to a moderate extent," and (4) "to a great extent." An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group (ref.) before controlling for any teacher- or school-level characteristics. Only teachers serving any proportion of MLLs were asked this question. $N = 7,482$.

(41 percent versus 31 percent). Secondary teachers were also more likely than elementary teachers to find their materials were not at all helpful in building MLLs' knowledge and language over time (25 percent versus 14 percent). Similarly, science teachers were

more likely to report their materials were not at all helpful compared with ELA and mathematics teachers (23 percent versus 18 percent for both ELA and mathematics teachers). Secondary and science teachers may have worse perceptions of their materials for

teaching MLLs because materials for these grades and subject may not include as many scaffolds for MLLs or because these teachers are less prepared to use materials to support MLLs.

Finally, we find that teachers who were regularly using a standards-aligned material had more-positive perceptions of their materials than teachers who were not regularly using a standards-aligned material: They were less likely than their counterparts who were not regularly using a standards-aligned material to say that their materials did not help them teach MLLs at all (14 percent versus 22 percent) and more likely to say that their materials helped them to a moderate or great extent (39 percent versus 34 percent). The inclusion of additional indicators on MLL supports in EdReports' review process may explain why teachers who were regularly using standards-aligned materials had slightly more-favorable perceptions about whether their materials teach both content and language simultaneously and over time. In addition to the few indicators related to MLL supports in its review process, EdReports' reviews include indicators related to building content knowledge and language skills simultaneously and coherently over time (e.g., including a "cohesive, year-long plan for students to achieve grade-level writing proficiency by the end of the school year" or having students "demonstrate their knowledge of a unit's topic(s) through integrated literacy skills") (EdReports, 2021).

Mathematics Teachers Had More-Favorable Perceptions About Whether Their Materials Supported MLLs' Language Development and Content Knowledge

Two other strategies that teachers can use to support MLLs' learning include (1) supporting language development to engage in subject-specific content areas and (2) building content knowledge through classroom discussions. Mathematics teachers viewed their materials more positively than ELA and science teachers for engaging in both strategies. About one-third of ELA and science teachers said that their required or recommended curriculum materials helped them engage in either strategy to a moderate

or great extent in comparison with about 45 percent of mathematics teachers (see Table 2).

Conversely, for both strategies, there were more science teachers who reported that their materials did not help them *at all*. This aligns with our prior finding that science teachers perceived their materials more negatively for supporting MLLs.

Almost Two-Thirds of Teachers Serving MLLs Reported a Moderate or Major Need for More or Better Curriculum Materials That Provide Options for MLLs

Sixty-one percent of teachers serving MLLs reported a moderate or major need for more or better curriculum materials that provide options for MLLs (see Figure 5). The relatively high proportion of teachers expressing a need for more or better materials for supporting MLLs is not surprising, given our earlier finding that many teachers said that their required or recommended materials were inadequate for this purpose. Few teachers serving MLLs (about 10 percent) reported that this was something their curriculum materials already do well.

Unsurprisingly, teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs were more likely than teachers serving a small proportion of MLLs to report a major or moderate need for more or better materials that include options for MLLs. Sixty-six percent and 69 percent of teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs in their classrooms, respectively, reported having a moderate or major need, compared with 54 percent of teachers with a small proportion of MLLs.

ELA teachers were also slightly more likely to report a moderate or major need for more or better materials than mathematics teachers (63 percent versus 58 percent). As we observed earlier, ELA teachers may perceive a greater need for quality curriculum materials when teaching MLLs given the heavy focus on language development, reading, and writing in ELA.

Teachers using and not using a standards-aligned material were equally likely to report that they needed more or better materials for MLLs. This

TABLE 2

Percentage of Teachers Who Reported to What Extent Their Recommended or Required Materials Helped Teach MLLs Grade-Level Content and Language Skills

Strategy		Not at All	To a Slight Extent	To a Moderate or Great Extent
Supporting language development to engage in content areas				
ELA	Teach multilingual learners the forms and functions of English in the context of reading and writing about grade-level texts	19%	45%	35%
Mathematics	Provide opportunities for students to develop language functions (e.g., justifying a solution strategy or explaining reasoning) while engaging in mathematical practices	15%	39%	46%
Science	Provide opportunities for students to develop language functions while engaging in scientific practices	24%	39%	37%
Building content knowledge through discussion				
ELA	Engage multilingual learners equitably in sustained discussions about grade-level texts	20%	47%	33%
Mathematics	Develop multilingual learners' understanding of grade-level concepts through mathematical discussion	15%	41%	44%
Science	Develop multilingual learners' understanding of grade-level science concepts through scientific discussion	22%	41%	37%

NOTE: The table shows ELA, mathematics, and science teachers' responses to the following survey question: "To what extent do the materials provided by your district or school as a recommendation or requirement help you teach multilingual learners grade-level content standards and language skills?" We display teachers' responses for the items shown in the table. Response choices included (1) "not at all," (2) "to a slight extent," (3) "to a moderate extent," and (4) "to a great extent." Universe of respondents were teachers who reported teaching some proportion of MLLs in their classes. *N* = 3,234 for ELA teachers; *N* = 2,640 for mathematics teachers; *N* = 1,608 for science teachers.

finding may reflect teachers' need for materials that scaffold instruction for MLLs, regardless of the type of curriculum used.

Summary and Recommendations

MLLs make up an increasingly large share of the U.S. student population (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2022). Yet, about one-half of teachers serving MLLs reported not feeling prepared to teach MLLs. Although teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs were more likely to report feeling prepared to teach MLLs, relatively few teachers serving a small proportion of MLLs—only about one-third—reported feeling prepared to teach MLLs. This is important because, as student demographics continue to shift, these teachers may eventually serve more MLLs. Moreover, even teachers who serve relatively few MLLs still should

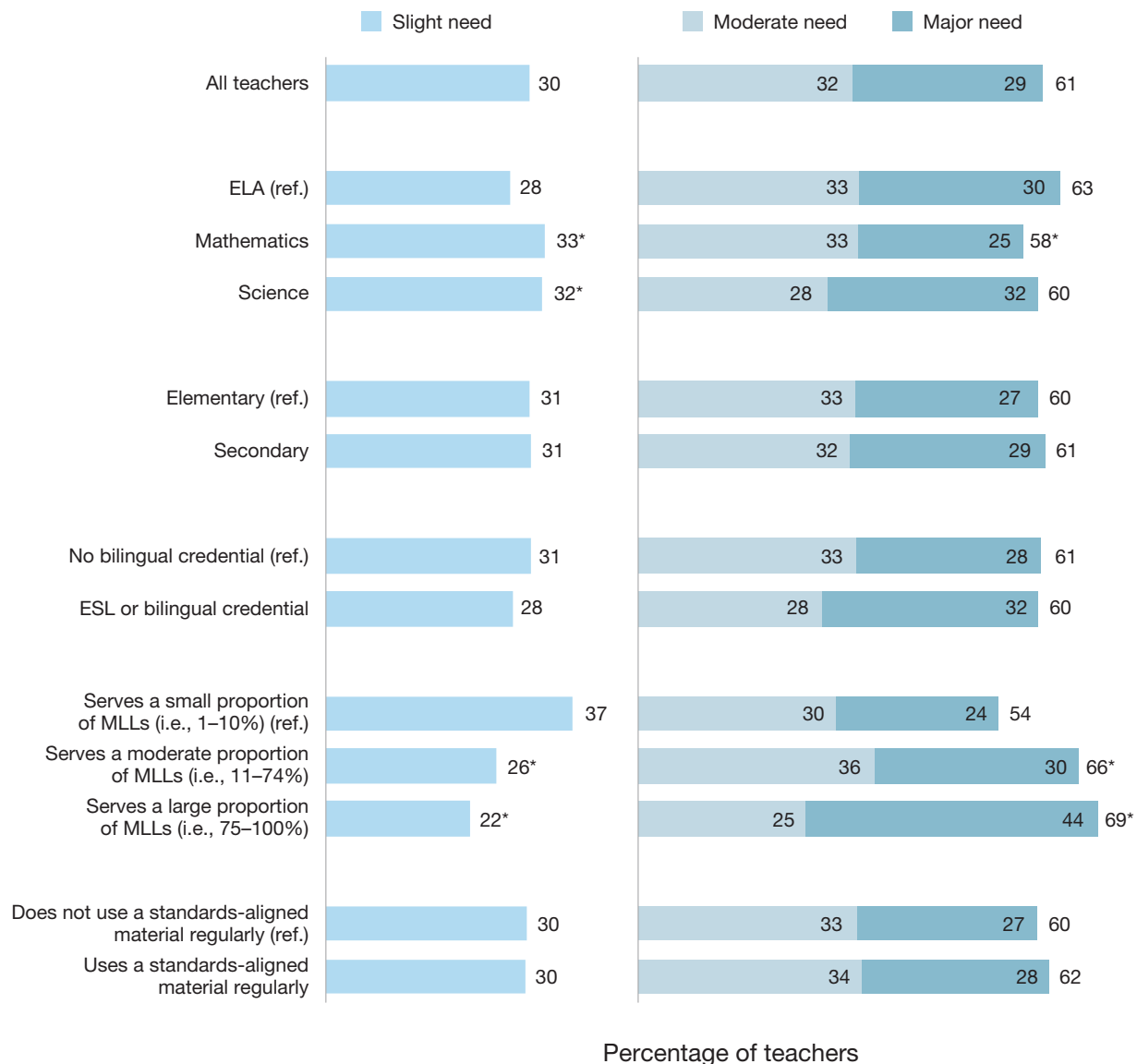
have access to resources and guidance that help them address the needs of those students. Studies show that interventions and practices typically used with MLLs can also help improve the language proficiency of students who are not MLLs (Goldenberg, 2020). Thus, all teachers, even those with fewer MLLs in their classrooms, can benefit from being prepared to teach MLLs.

Two main avenues could support teachers' instruction of MLLs—building teachers' capacity to support MLLs through professional learning or additional credentials and improving teachers' access to curriculum materials that could help them address the needs of MLLs.

Teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential were more likely to say that they felt prepared to teach MLLs and more likely to prioritize options for MLLs when selecting instructional tasks or activities. This finding likely signals the value of receiving training specifically focused on enhancing teachers' capacity to address MLLs' needs. However, only

FIGURE 5

Percentage of Teachers Serving MLLs Who Reported to What Extent They Need Better or More Curriculum Materials to Provide Options for MLLs



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "To what extent do you need more or better [ELA/mathematics/science] curriculum materials for the following purposes?" The list of purposes included "provide options for multilingual learners." Response choices included (1) "slight need"; (2) "moderate need"; (3) "major need"; (4) "N/A—my materials already do this well"; and (5) "N/A—this is not applicable to my students." We excluded teachers who responded "N/A—this is not applicable to my students" and teachers who reported not serving any MLLs. An asterisk (*) indicates that percentages for that subgroup significantly differ at the $p < 0.05$ level from the reference group (ref.) before controlling for any teacher- or school-level characteristics. $N = 7,122$.

19 percent of teachers serving MLLs in our national sample of ELA, mathematics, and science teachers had such a credential. Even among teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs, an ESL or bilingual credential was still relatively uncommon (23 percent and 49 percent, respectively). This may

explain, in part, why about one-half of teachers serving MLLs report feeling unprepared to teach MLLs.

Providing teachers with instructional materials that adequately scaffold learning for MLLs and that pair academic content knowledge with language skills is another way to help teachers support MLLs. Yet, only about one-third of teachers, including those

For both principals and teachers, selecting materials and activities with supports and options for MLLs was very low on a list of priorities, highlighting educators' difficulties in navigating competing demands.

serving a large proportion of MLLs, reported that their materials were adequate. Instead, a majority of teachers serving MLLs considered their materials to be inadequate for teaching MLLs. Without adequate materials, teachers were less likely to say that they felt prepared to teach MLLs. Teachers' relatively unfavorable perceptions of their curriculum materials are not surprising given educators' priorities when selecting professional learning, curriculum materials, and activities within those materials. For both principals *and* teachers, selecting materials and activities with supports and options for MLLs was very low on a list of priorities, highlighting educators' difficulties in navigating competing demands. Although selecting supports for MLLs was overall a low priority, about 60 percent of teachers serving MLLs nevertheless expressed a desire for more or better materials for supporting MLLs. This was even higher among teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs.

Policy efforts in Rhode Island and California demonstrate that aligning aspects of states' instructional systems (e.g., guidance around instructional material implementation, professional learning, teacher recruitment, teacher preparation, and funding) can help teachers instruct MLLs and prioritize

supports for MLLs. Supporting MLLs likely requires a multifaceted and systemic approach that aligns instructional systems and includes access to high-quality instructional materials containing adequate scaffolds, professional learning specific to MLLs, supportive school leadership, and opportunities for building educator capacity through credentials or certifications. Addressing these areas can ensure that educators are equipped to meet the needs of MLLs. Thus, we offer the following recommendations.

Curriculum Materials Should Address the Needs of MLLs to Some Degree

Our findings underscore the need for high-quality materials that adequately address the needs of MLLs, especially given that those materials will likely be used with at least some MLLs.

Curriculum developers should partner with researchers and subject-matter experts to embed best practices and strategies for teaching MLLs into curricula. Features of high-quality curricula that best serve MLLs include explicit and systematic oral language instruction, modifications of language to aid comprehension, use of visual aids, opportunities for discussion, and the integration of academic vocabulary with oral language for reading instruction (Carlo et al., 2004; Vaughn et al., 2006; Gersten et al., 2007).

Curriculum developers should also build partnerships with districts or schools to better understand educators' and students' needs. When developers deepen their understanding of what instruction looks like in practice, they can better blend evidence-based strategies and engaging content to create high-quality instructional materials that are both rigorous for MLLs and accessible to teachers.

State and Local Leaders Should Consider Using Curriculum Review Tools to Identify and Select Standards-Aligned Instructional Materials That Integrate Supports for MLLs

The existence of high-quality curricula that address the needs of MLLs is necessary but likely not sufficient for ensuring the uptake of those materials. State and local leaders can help teachers access these

materials by using curriculum review tools that can support the identification and selection of materials that adequately support MLLs.

Previously, EdReports' review process only included supports for MLLs as a few indicators used in its final stage focused on the usability of materials. However, since early 2025, EdReports now provides a comprehensive review of K–12 materials for ELA, mathematics, and science focused on MLL-specific supports. Its new review process covers MLLs' engagement with grade-level content, coherence of supports for MLLs, teacher guidance, and assessments, including formative assessment plans for language development across ELA, mathematics, and science.

State and local leaders could use such existing review tools or even create their own review tools that could help them curate a selection of vetted, high-quality curricula that align to state standards and best practices for MLLs across all grades and disciplines. In this review process, leaders should attend to whether the materials contain a sufficient number of scientifically proven practices, such as oral language development, before including them on their state-recommended list. Supporting transparency around the quality of materials for addressing MLLs' needs can reduce the burden on teachers to find and assess materials on their own.

When Developing, Assessing, or Selecting Curriculum Materials, Curriculum Developers and State and Local Leaders Should Ensure That They Are Addressing the Needs of Secondary Teachers and Science Teachers

Our findings show secondary and science teachers may have heightened needs when supporting MLLs. They were more likely than their counterparts to report feeling not at all prepared to teach MLLs and also more likely to say that their materials were not at all helpful for building MLLs' content knowledge and language simultaneously and in a coherent and progressive way. Historically, educators have focused on ensuring that students acquire sufficient English-language ability before teaching academic content

(Minicucci and Olsen, 1992). However, teaching academic content and the English language simultaneously is essential for grade-level student learning (Janzen, 2008). Secondary teachers, in particular, may experience a more urgent need for MLL-specific scaffolds because academic content becomes more complex as students move up in grade levels.

Supporting science and secondary teachers may entail understanding more deeply the challenges they face in supporting MLLs, the reasons they feel less prepared, and why they consider their materials inadequate. One way to support secondary and science teachers is to consider their instructional needs and perspectives when developing and selecting curriculum materials. Curriculum developers could seek out the perspectives of teachers who may struggle more to teach MLLs, such as secondary and science teachers. When assessing, selecting, and adopting curricula, state and local leaders could also do the same. Including science and secondary teachers in these processes can also help build the capacity of participating teachers to understand, recognize, and assess curriculum features that would be supportive of MLLs.

State and Local Leaders Should Prioritize Supports for MLLs, Including Professional Learning Opportunities That Help Teachers Coherently Address the Needs of MLLs

One potential reason that teachers do not prioritize supports for MLLs in their selection of instructional activities is because principals appear to place a low priority on addressing the needs of MLLs. For teachers to access the professional learning necessary to support MLLs, principals should prioritize the allocation of resources (e.g., time, funds) toward those tailored supports for MLLs. Even teachers who do not serve a majority of MLLs may eventually serve more MLLs, considering the growth of the MLL population nationally, so it is important that all teachers are prepared to teach MLLs.

First, state and local leaders can support teachers' access to ongoing curriculum-based professional learning (CBPL) to help them use their curriculum materials effectively to teach MLLs. By rooting pro-

professional learning in teachers' specific curriculum materials, education leaders can ensure that teachers are receiving coherent signals about how to teach MLLs (Wang et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Such CPBL could integrate the contents of teachers' materials, evidence-based practices, students' backgrounds, and targeted linguistic supports. When teachers are trained to use their district- or school-selected materials with evidence-based practices, they are able to flexibly adapt the curriculum to their students' needs, including the needs of MLLs (McAlduff and Westergard, 2024). State leaders could evaluate and identify high-quality CBPL vendors, which can help school or district leaders select and engage such vendors. School and district leaders could then encourage teachers to participate in such professional development and provide them with the resources to do so (e.g., funding, class coverage).

Fostering opportunities for peer collaboration is another way that local leaders can help teachers receive the necessary supports to teach MLLs. By creating structures that allow teachers to share strategies, focus on a lesson together, engage in peer observations, and analyze classroom teaching with each other, schools can cultivate a professional learning community that is responsive to the needs of MLLs. This effort could include dedicated time for both subject-specific and ELD teachers to meet within and across disciplines to discuss strategies for supporting MLLs or developing mentoring programs in which veteran educators can guide novice teachers.

Finally, state and local leaders should also leverage MLL-specific professionals (i.e., a coach, specialist, or consultant) to provide ongoing professional development in districts and schools. These professionals can help provide one-on-one coaching, lead a professional development series, develop a bilingual education program, and respond directly to educators' and students' needs. For example, Rhode Island funded world language specialists to help support districts' bilingual programs. State leaders could consider creating a network of professionals or using the train-the-trainer model to help districts and schools receive ongoing professional learning.

State and Local Leaders Should Help Schools Hire Additional Qualified and Credentialed Educators to Serve MLLs

We find that teachers with an ESL or bilingual credential felt more prepared to teach MLLs, were more likely to prioritize supports for MLLs, and were more likely to consider their curriculum materials as adequate. Overall, these findings point to the need to train and hire additional qualified educators who have preparation or a credential to teach MLLs.

To build the capacity of all teachers early in their careers, state leaders should help educator preparation programs (EPPs) include evidence-based practices for teaching MLLs in their coursework or fieldwork for obtaining a teaching credential. This may be especially important for secondary and science teachers who may have greater needs for supporting MLLs. Some EPPs are shifting to incorporate more training specific to MLLs in such content areas as mathematics and science. This training has focused on such topics as second language acquisition, instructional strategies for teaching MLLs, academic vocabulary development for MLLs, cooperative learning and oral language development, differentiation of text for MLLs, and the assessment of MLLs (DelliCarpini and Alonso, 2014). Some programs that train mathematics and science teachers have significantly increased how prepared teacher candidates said they felt to teach MLLs (Carpenter et al., 2024), which may galvanize more to follow.

Another way is to encourage teachers to pursue an ESL or bilingual education credential or MLL-specific micro-credentials. This step can enhance a teacher's ability to help MLLs develop their language skills alongside their academic skills and knowledge (National Education Association, undated). For example, California requires all teachers serving MLLs to have an English learner authorization, earned through coursework or an exam, and teachers serving in a dual-language program must have a bilingual authorization (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, undated). An ESL or bilingual education credential prepares K–12 teachers to help MLLs improve their academic achievement by using strategies that support bilingualism and ELD, such as leveraging students' native language and using visual

aids to scaffold comprehension (López, Scanlan, and Gundrum, 2013).

Micro-credentials also present an alternative opportunity for teachers to receive MLL-specific training. Micro-credentials are short, competency-based recognition certificates that signal mastery in a certain area (National Education Association, undated). They can be another path for educators who lack the time to participate in a full ESL or bilingual education credential program. Districts and schools can help lower the barriers to obtaining these credentials by offering financial incentives, flexible scheduling, and other supports. Making these pathways more accessible will help increase the number of teachers who are equipped to address the needs of MLLs.

Research Limitations

There are several caveats that readers should consider when interpreting our results. First, our analysis of survey responses relies on educators' self-reports. These self-reports should be interpreted with caution, because they rely on educators' understanding of what it means to be prepared to teach MLLs and the features of curriculum materials that would be adequate to support MLLs. For instance, teachers who are more knowledgeable about appropriate scaffolds for MLLs may be more critical of curriculum materials than teachers who are less knowledgeable. As another example, principals and teachers also self-reported the features of professional learning, instructional materials, and instructional tasks that they prioritized, but we do not know their priorities in practice.

Second, we asked educators a variety of survey items to understand how they prioritized supports for MLLs and their perceptions of the adequacy of their materials for teaching MLLs. We did not define all of the terms used in the survey items (e.g., developing "language functions," or providing "options for MLLs"). Teachers and principals may have interpreted these terms differently.

Third, our analysis of the teacher survey data is limited to only those who teach ELA, mathematics, or science, including general elementary teachers of multiple subjects. We are not able to report on the perceptions of teachers of other subjects.

Even teachers who do not serve a majority of MLLs may eventually serve more MLLs, so it is important all teachers are prepared to teach MLLs.

Last, these data do not provide any information about how teachers are using their materials in the classroom to support MLL learning. Additional research is needed to understand the ways teachers are using their materials in practice and the specific resources they find most useful to teach MLLs.

Notes

¹ Teachers serving more MLLs were not significantly more likely to use standards-aligned materials. Forty-seven percent of teachers serving a small proportion of MLLs regularly used standards-aligned materials, compared with 50 percent and 51 percent of teachers serving a moderate or large proportion of MLLs, respectively.

² In the final portion of EdReports' review process that focuses on the usability of materials, there are indicators focused on whether the "materials provide strategies and supports for students who read, write, and/or speak in a language other than English to meet or exceed grade-level standards to regularly participate in learning" grade-level content in ELA or mathematics and whether "materials provide guidance to encourage teachers to draw upon student home language to facilitate learning" (EdReports, 2021). Thus, EdReports' review process includes some indicators about the quality of supports for MLLs within curriculum materials, although these indicators comprise a relatively small portion of the overall review process. We also do not include science materials in this analysis because there are relatively few rated comprehensive curriculum materials for science, relative to ELA and mathematics. In the future, we plan to incorporate the analysis of these materials as EdReports' body of science material ratings grows.

³ We also asked teachers about the following additional priorities for selecting tasks or activities from their instructional materials and present the percentage of teachers serving any MLLs who selected each priority as a top priority: were engaging for students (78 percent); provided scaffolds or supports to help students

master grade-level content (69 percent); were aligned to their state academic standards (54 percent); were aligned with their state-mandated assessment (35 percent); provided authentic opportunities for students to understand and reflect upon their identities and identities of others (26 percent); reviewed content from prior grade levels that students have missed or not mastered (36 percent); provided options for students with IEPs or 504 plans (22 percent); were ones their schools or districts expect them to use (29 percent); helped their students advance beyond mastery of grade-level content (31 percent); were easily integrated with their school's technology (31 percent); were easy for [teachers] to enact in both virtual and physical classroom settings (26 percent); activated diverse cultural background knowledge of students (15 percent); and promoted social and emotional learning (14 percent).

⁴ There were small differences between the survey items we fielded to ELA, mathematics, and science teachers. We asked ELA teachers the extent to which their materials helped them “teach multilingual learners grade-level ELA standards content and language skills simultaneously.” We asked mathematics and science teachers the extent to which their materials helped them “teach multilingual learners grade-level [mathematics/science] standards content alongside the relevant [mathematics/science] language simultaneously.”

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About This Report

Drawing on the spring 2024 American Instructional Resources Surveys, the authors examine teachers' perceptions about how prepared they feel to teach multilingual learners (MLLs) and the adequacy of their curriculum materials for addressing the needs of MLLs. The authors also explore principals' priorities for selecting instructional materials and professional development opportunities that focus on supporting MLLs. The American Educator Panels are nationally representative samples of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders across the country. The panels are a proud member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Transparency Initiative.

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Funding

This research was funded by the Gates Foundation, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, and the Walton Family Foundation. The findings and conclusions presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the funders.

Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to the U.S. public school teachers and leaders who have agreed to participate in the panels. Their time and willingness to share their experiences were invaluable for this effort and for helping us understand more about how to better support their hard work in schools. We thank Daniel Ibarrola and Brian Kim for serving as the survey managers, Casey Hunter for serving as the data manager for the surveys used in this work, and Julie Newell and Tim Colvin for programming the survey. Thanks to Joshua Eagan for producing the sampling and weighting for these analyses. We also greatly appreciate the administrative support provided by Tina Petrossian. We also thank Benjamin Master, our quality assurance manager, and Elaine Wang and Renae Skarin, our reviewers, for helpful feedback that improved this report. Last, we thank Maria Vega for her editorial expertise and Monette Velasco for overseeing the publication process for this report.

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