

Examining Perceived Barriers to Access and Success in Higher Education

Issue Brief 2: *Services for Dual Language Learners (DLL)*

Background

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® (T.E.A.C.H.) initiative, operating in more than 20 states, provides [comprehensive scholarship support](#) to help the incumbent early childhood workforce take courses leading to two- and four-year degrees in early childhood education. Scholarship recipients are early childhood educators working with children from birth through 5 years of age, often making poverty-level wages, who represent the diversity of young children in our nation, may be the first in their family to go to college and work full time while going to college part time. Each T.E.A.C.H. recipient is supported by a T.E.A.C.H. counselor who helps them navigate college, work and family commitments and helps them meet the expectations of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship.

In fall 2018, the [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center](#) (National Center) began a three-part study to examine what T.E.A.C.H. counselors, T.E.A.C.H. associate and bachelor's degree scholarship recipients and their faculty in community colleges and universities believe are the biggest barriers to access and success. Respondents include 61 counselors, 2,071 scholarship recipients and 170 faculty members. Surveys were offered in Spanish and English to scholarship recipients. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which 49 different items were perceived as difficult. These items covered six basic categories: College Application and Admission Processes; T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Application Processes; Meeting College Expectations for Coursework and Degree Completion; Services for Dual Language Learners; Special College Requirements or Accessibility Issues; and Work/Life/School Balance. Questions about college affordability were not included on this survey, because recipients are all receiving scholarship support that allows for graduation from college with no debt.

Issue: Services for Dual Language Learners

Dual language learners (DLLs) often face different struggles than native speakers. For instance, they experience [the added stress of trying to learn another language or culture while also studying and completing classwork](#). Overall, [according to an NPR report](#), DLLs are less likely to graduate college than native speakers. This affects the timing of their entry into the workforce, their ability to be socially mobile and their ability to achieve career advancement. Few colleges offer a comprehensive array of services to support these students as they attend college to earn early childhood education degrees while learning English, putting DLLs at a disadvantage from the very start.

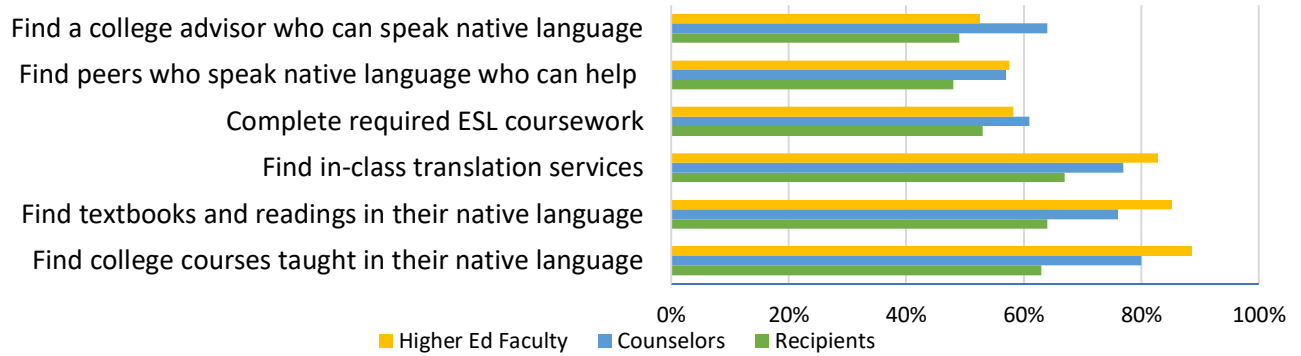
Findings

Across all three survey populations, for those who completed the survey in either English or Spanish, a high proportion of each of the six tasks were identified as difficult or very difficult, as illustrated in Figure 1. In FY19, 19% of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients were of Hispanic origin, and this percentage has increased each year.

“Me gustaria que por lo menos una vez al mes, yo pudiera hablar con una persona que entiende el programa y que supiera cuales son las materias que necesito para obtener mi S.A. Degree. Y no se ni a quien preguntar. A veces me siento sola en un mar abierto sin mirar la orilla. Pero Primeramente voy a llegar.”
(“I would like that at least once a month, I could talk to a person who understands the program and knows the subjects I need to get my degree. And I don't know anyone to ask. Sometimes I feel alone in an open sea with no sight of the shore. But first I'm going to get there.”)

Florida T.E.A.C.H. Recipient

Figure 1: Tasks Rated as Very Difficult or Difficult for English Language Learners



Promising Practices

Higher education faculty identified practices being used to address the barriers for T.E.A.C.H. recipients. This issue brief identifies three strategies.

Strategy #1: Facilitate “student-to-student” help. According to Ana DeHoyos-O’Connor (email: aoconnor9@alamo.edu), Associate Professor at San Antonio College, their program facilitates student-to-student help. What she means is if there is a native Spanish-speaking student in their program that is also fluent in English, she will connect that student to another student struggling with English or course material. This allows students to develop supportive and collaborative relationships with others in similar situations to increase learning and success.

Strategy #2: Offer bilingual programs with bilingual student cohorts to create a supportive learning environment that enables students to move through coursework with peers. Support networks and quality course instruction are vital for student success. However, according to the same [NPR report](#) above, teachers are often poorly equipped to help DLLs. Offering bilingual courses with staff and peers raises DLL achievement. According to Dr. Fran Langan, the Dean of the School of Professional Studies (email: fran.langan@keystone.edu) at Keystone College (PA), [their college](#) began offering a bilingual program in 2014-2015 where cohorts of 8-23 ECE students take courses taught in English and Spanish with other DLLs. This allows them to connect with faculty and increase their professional development. [Milwaukee Area Technical College \(MATC\)](#) offers a bilingual ECE program with written materials in student’s native language on their West Allis campus, where students speak English and Spanish (or Hmong) with bilingual faculty. Megan Cary (email: carym1@matc.edu), ECE Faculty and Program Coordinator, said MATC programs are built around students, so if students need to be taught primarily in Spanish, then they do so.

Strategy #3: Explore offering online bilingual courses and degrees that can help create (and increase access to) bilingual cohorts in more rural areas. If DLLs have to take courses in their non-native language, they may struggle and fall behind. Furthermore, according to the previously cited NPR report, the DLL population has grown over the past decade, especially in the rural midwest and south. As a result, students in those areas have a greater need for courses than what is currently offered, especially online. Providing online courses in these rural areas, using a wider catchment area for students to participate, helps build sufficient communities of bilingual students to populate courses and can increase access for DLL students and/or those students who cannot attend college onsite during traditional hours.

The National Center is creating an expanding [list](#) of resources that address specific barriers in higher education.

