

ABSTRACT

Title of Capstone: PROMOTING FOUNDATIONS IN
BILITERACY: EDUCATORS' REFLECTIONS
ON INTRODUCING MULTILINGUAL
STUDENTS AND FAMILIES TO THE SEAL OF
BILITERACY IN THE ELEMENTARY
CONTEXT

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The Seal of Biliteracy (SoBL) is an award given at high school graduation to students who demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English and another language. Though the SoBL was created as an advocacy initiative for multilingual learners (ML), gaps persist regarding ML's awareness and readiness to demonstrate the required proficiency to obtain the award. Given the length of the instructional time needed to develop the level of language proficiency required for the award, it is critical that school districts engage MLs from the onset of their education in promoting the value of their multilingualism and biliteracy. This qualitative research study sought to better understand what elementary school English language development (ELD) teachers know about the SoBL before and after explicit training, and how these teachers subsequently chose to integrate information about the award at their schools. This study utilized the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Protocol (Langley and Associates, 2009) to pilot a 90-minute training with 16 elementary ELD educators, across three schools in a large urban school district in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Results highlight that participants

deepened their understanding of the proficiency required to achieve the award, as well as the benefits of the SoBL. Following the training, participants chose to introduce the SoBL to ML students and families in tandem with existing preparation activities for the annual English language proficiency assessment. Participants centered their lessons on establishing foundational understandings on the meaning of biliterate for students. Findings from this study highlight specific and actionable steps school districts can take to promote early awareness of the SoBL with MLs, and thus expand opportunities to develop a strong pipeline of future candidates for the award.

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INTRODUCING MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS AND FAMILIES TO THE SEAL OF
BILITERACY IN THE ELEMENTARY CONTEXT**

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2026

Preface

As the daughter of an immigrant to the United States, I have seen firsthand the complexity of forging a path in this country. How much of yourself do you keep? How much of yourself do you let go? The daily grapple with unknown and constantly changing norms, while simultaneously trying to cultivate and build a solid ground for yourself, your family, and future generations.

Living these experiences as a second-generation American, it came as little surprise to anyone in my immediate circle that I pursued a career in teaching and sought to work in the most linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse environment I could find. Learning from my students is the most rewarding work I could ask for. In return, I feel a deep sense of obligation to ensure I am contributing to building a classroom, a school, a school system, and a society in which they are empowered to truly see and be themselves. A few years ago, a student of mine gave me a card that read, “thank you more than any one language could say.” At its core, language is about identity and connection. It is about being seen, heard, and validated and doing the same for others. For me, the Seal of Biliteracy is a deeply symbolic message to students that there is a place for them in our school district and larger society.

In my decision to pursue my doctorate and identify my problem of practice, I thought critically about the aspects of the identity that immigrant students are so frequently asked to neglect. Language and literacy, in our country, English, is the gateway to so many things. So many tenants of the foundation immigrants seek to build, rest on developing English quickly and competently. But in a true pluralistic society mastering one language should not come at the cost of losing another. Not just for part of them, but all of them.

Dedication

To Mom, Dad and Jake,
Thank you for supporting me in this chapter.
I can't wait for what our next one holds.

Acknowledgements

To Dr. Loren Jones, Dr. Drew Fagan, and Dr. Melissa Kanney,

It's been an honor to be supported by mentors who possess not only a clear vision for a more equitable public education system, but also an equally impressive track record to build it.

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Section I

The Seal of Biliteracy (SoBL) is an award, given at high school graduation, that acknowledges students with demonstrated proficiency in at least two languages across all four language domains. The SoBL was initially created to elevate the assets of multilingual learners (ML), or students who are acquiring English and receive English language development (ELD) support from the school systems until they demonstrate qualifying English proficiency, in a largely subtractive school system (Olsen, 2020). In 2012, California became the first state to pass legislation to adopt a SoBL policy (Olsen, 2020). Since then, the SoBL has expanded to all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In SY 22-23, over 139,653 high school graduates received the SoBL in the United States. 40% of the recipients were classified as former or current MLs, a decline of 8% from the prior year (Aguirre & Chou, 2024b; Aguirre & Chou, 2024a).

While the SoBL is theoretically available to students in all 50 states, critics of current SoBL policies have argued that the award is reserved for language learning within the school (Subtirelu et al., 2019). As a result, wealthier districts, with a higher percentage of English-dominant students, are more likely to have access to apply for the Seal and receive information about the opportunity (Heineke et al., 2018; Subtirelu et al., 2019). Without inclusive pathways, which consider and value MLs' full linguistic repertoire, opportunities to obtain the SoBL are limited for MLs in the local and national context.

Localized Context

This study seeks to address the low number of SoBL recipients in Gutierrez School District (GSD), a large district within the mid-Atlantic region of the United States with the

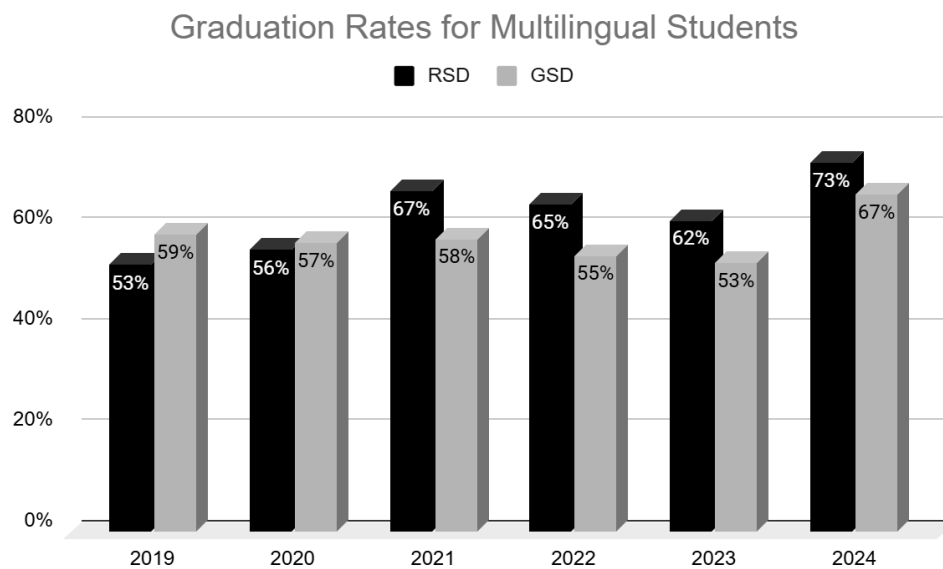
highest percentage of MLs in its state. To maintain the anonymity of the study participants, the state name is not specified in the study.

According to the most recent national annual report published for School Year 23-24, 2,743 graduates received the SoBL in the state, of which 48% were classified as former or current MLs (Aguirre & Chou, 2024b). The severity of GSD's current SoBL achievement is highlighted by the disparity in annual recipients in GSD compared to neighboring Rosapepe School District (RSD). Though there are over 33,000 MLs in GSD, only 328 graduates received the SoBL in 2024, accounting for a mere 4% of the overall graduating class (GSD, 2024; SDE, 2024a). While nearly 70% of the annual recipients in GSD are current or former MLs, only 12% of current MLs who graduated received the award in 2023. In comparison, there are 31,725 MLs enrolled in RSD, yet 2,178 graduates received the award in 2024, comprising 18% of all RSD graduates and 30% of ML graduates in 2024 (SDE, 2024a). This disparity between the two districts has persisted since the initial implementation in School Year 2016-2017, where GSD had 59 SoBL recipients, while RSD had 1,100 (GSD, 2024; RSD, 2016). Therefore, this study seeks to address the current problem of practice within GSD that too few current and former MLs' are positioned to leverage their multilingual skills to achieve the SoBL under current processes and procedures.

Analysis of local and state data indicates that underinvestment of the SoBL in GSD also correlates with shifting outcomes in graduation rates and college enrollment for MLs in GSD and RSD. The benefits of SoBL is supported by research that the development of first language literacy skills is a critical resource for MLs that leads to higher academic outcomes, graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment (Jang, & Brutt-Griffler, 2019; Lutz, 2004; Ruiz, 1984). The gap in graduation rates for MLs compared to the overall population is more severe in the state

than at the national level. While 72% of MLs graduated from high school within four years compared to 87% of the overall student population in the United States, only 57% of MLs graduated in the state compared to 86% of all students in School Year 2021-2022 (SDE, 2024a; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). However, since the initial implementation of the SoBL in School Year 2016-2017, there has been a shift in graduation rates for MLs in GSD and RSD. As noted in Figure 1, graduation rate trends have declined for MLs in GSD, while they have improved in RSD. While a multitude of complex factors contribute to graduation rate, the data suggests an interesting trend in the potential power of full promotion and access to the SoBL.

Figure 1



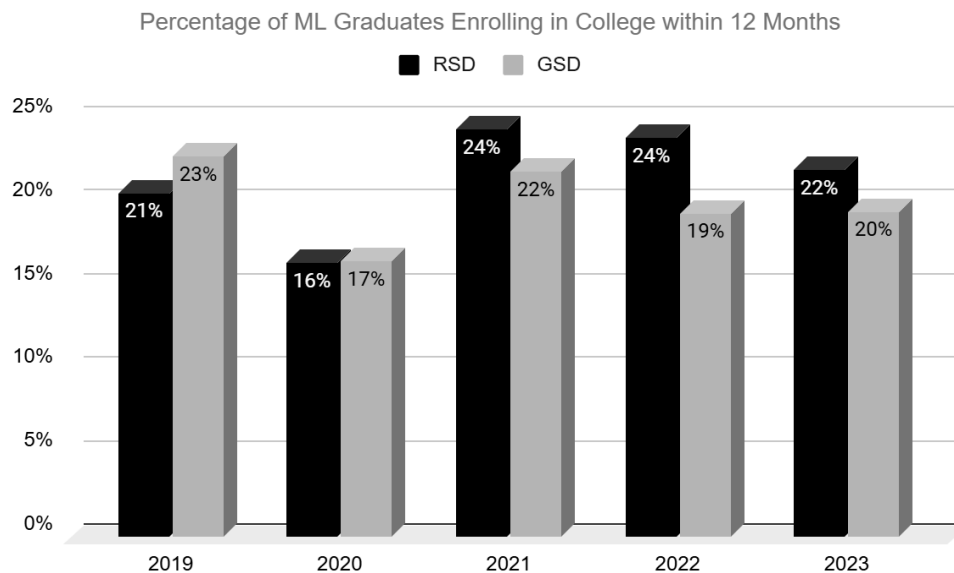
Source: SDE, 2024a

Along with graduation rates, MLs are less likely than their English-dominant peers to pursue post-secondary opportunities, despite comprising 10% of the overall school-age population in the United States (Kanno, 2018, 2021). Nationally, 54% of MLs enroll in some

form of postsecondary education, including college or trade school, after high school, compared to 73% of English-dominant students (Kanno & Cromley, 2015). In 2023, only 19% of MLs enrolled in college compared to 47% of students overall in the state (SDE, 2023).

Linguistically diverse students report that the SoBL has a positive effect on their self-perceptions of their multilingualism and their readiness for post-secondary education (Castro, 2020; Davin, 2021; Davin et al, 2024). Additionally, one large-scale quantitative study found that students who received the SoBL were more likely to enroll and complete a four-year college program than those who did not (Mihaly, 2022). Similar to graduation rate trends, Figure 2 highlights that RSD has seen an increase in the number of ML students pursuing post-secondary outcomes, while GSD has seen a decrease since 2019. Like graduation rates, the shift in post-secondary outcomes highlights an interesting correlation in the materialization of proposed benefits to acquiring the SoBL for current and former MLs.

Figure 2



Source: SDE, 2024a

Overall, all students, English-dominant and MLs, are motivated to pursue the SoBL because they believe it will have a positive impact on their future careers (Castro, 2014; Davin & Heineke, 2018; Monto, 2022). This belief is consistent with labor market trends which consistently highlight the value of multilingualism (Callahan & Gándara, 2014). Given this motivation, some scholars have also argued that investment in the SoBL is a low-cost way to reduce the number of long-term MLs (LTMLs), or students who have ELD services in school for at least six years, and have yet to demonstrate the qualifying scores on required proficiency assessments (Californians Together, 2024; Kolar, 2022). When informed about the SoBL, MLs are more incentivized to test out of English Language Development (ELD) support services to pursue more opportunities for upper language courses (Kolar, 2022). This motivating force is particularly relevant since the state recently added composite scores of 4.0 or higher on annual world language proficiency, known as the WIDA Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (WIDA ACCESS), as an approved pathway for current MLs in high school to demonstrate their English proficiency (SDE, 2025). Given that GSD currently has 6,210 LTMLs, increasing investment and building awareness of the SoBL, may be an effective way to motivate the subgroup of current MLs who are capable of demonstrating proficiency on the WIDA ACCESS assessment, but currently do not perceive the benefit of testing out of ELD services (GSD, 2024c).

Addressing the disparity in SoBL achievement between GSD and RSD is extremely pertinent given its direct alignment with the state's and GSD's mission and strategic plan. Passed in 2021 by lawmakers, the state has developed a Blueprint with five pillars to advance the quality and equity of education in the state. Within the Blueprint, boosting annual SoBL obtainment aligns directly with Pillar 3, College and Career Readiness, and Pillar 4, the allocation of

additional resources to underserved subgroups (SDE, 2026a). To monitor progress for Pillar 3, the state will begin tracking the number of students with career-connected learning experience or an industry-recognized credential beginning in Fall 2026, which will include obtaining the SoBL (SDE, 2026a). This is in addition to the on-going tracking that quantifies the number of students' achieving a well-rounded curriculum, including SoBL achievement, as a part of each district's overall score card in the state (SDE, 2024b).

In alignment with the State's goals, GSD's mission speaks to the organization's commitment to create an inclusive and empowering system that nurtures all students to reach their full academic and holistic potential. This includes not only ensuring that students graduate from the system, but also have a meaningful path forward after completion of high school. To anchor this vision, the District has created a Student Learner profile, which asserts students should be prepared to be global citizens, innovators, articulate communicators, and critical thinkers (GSD, 2021c). Expanding access to SoBL is a foundational way for MLs to see their linguistic assets as a value, and a critical way for the district to improve its' success on state indicators outlined above.

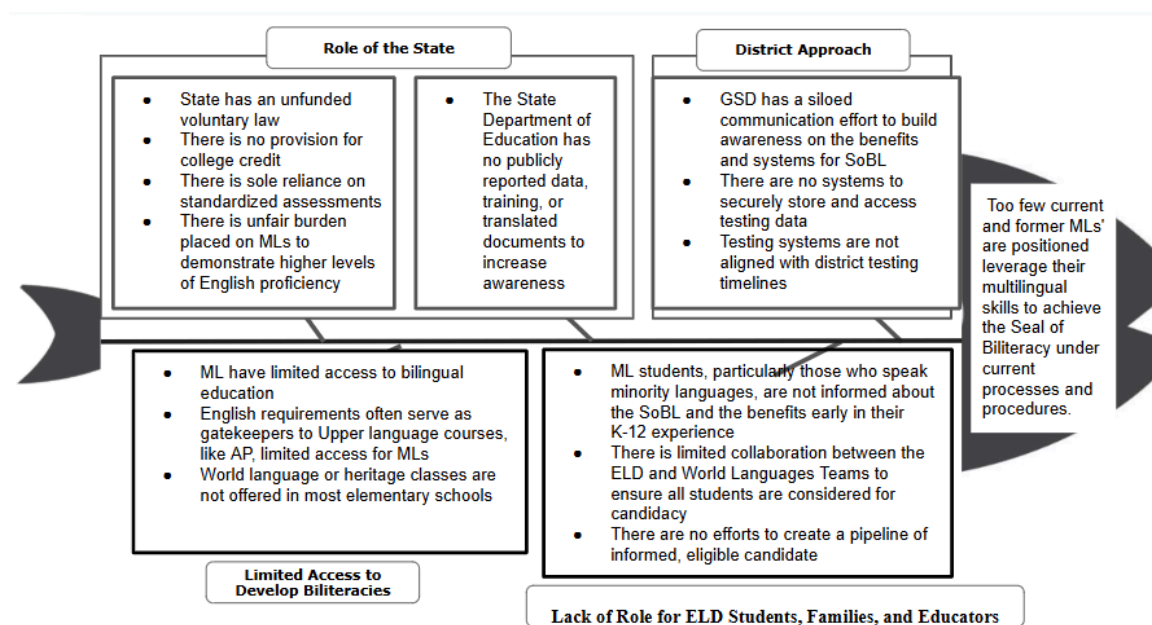
Causal Systems

The current problem of practice, too few current and former MLs' are positioned to leverage their multilingual skills to achieve the SoBL under current processes and procedures, can be understood through analysis of four causal factors. While the SoBL has proven to have a positive impact on MLs' perceptions of themselves as college-ready students, there are limited opportunities to pursue the SoBL in GSD because of the state's limited role in the standardizing expectations for the SoBL, the district's approach to implementing the SoBL, the limited

opportunities for MLs to develop literacy in their first language, and the lack of defined role for ELD students, teachers, and families in GSD, These causal factors are outlined in Figure 3 below and described in more detail below.

Figure 3

Fishbone Diagram



Role of the State

Currently, the state has an unfunded, voluntary SoBL program. The law includes no specific provisions for MLs, and there are no designated pathways for college credit for any recipient (Senate Bill 781, State Legislature, 2016). While the State Blueprint does discuss the benefits of SoBL for MLs, it does not include direct allocations to support promotion of the SoBL in districts (SDE, 2026a). Understanding the legislative history within the state and national context is a critical factor in analyzing the gap between the initial grassroots conception of the SoBL and the current policies implemented by most states.

The state adopted the SoBL legislation in 2016, after two years of failed attempts to pass the bill through the legislature (State General Assembly, 2014, 2015). If passed in 2014, the state would have been the fifth state to implement a SoBL measure. However, by the time the state passed in 2016, it was the 20th state to implement a statewide SoBL provision (Heineke & Davin, 2020).

Like other states that reported opposition to passage, resistance from state legislators was due to a lack of understanding regarding the value of multilingualism and the role that proficiency assessments play in determining linguistic competency (Heineke & Davin, 2020; State General Assembly, 2014, 2015, 2016). A review of committee testimony highlights that committee members expressed concern that passing legislation for the SoBL would create a “slippery slope” where other interest groups would then also seek endorsements on transcripts for other skills, such as financial literacy or Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (State General Assembly, 2014, 2015, 2016). A review of other state’s current endorsements for diplomas indicates Arizona is the only state to have such additional endorsements (Arizona Department of Education, 2020).

Given that the SoBL was initiated through grassroots advocacy, rather than Congress, no federal funding has been provided to implement statewide SoBL measures. As a result, the state, as with all states, does not provide any additional funding to implement its state programs (Heineke & Davin, 2020; Davin et al, 2022). While other states reported overwhelming endorsement because SoBL had no reported fiscal cost to the state, State legislators in committee hearings expressed concern that implementation of the SoBL would place additional financial burden on districts, potentially leading to inequities across the state (Heineke & Davin, 2020; State General Assembly, 2014, 2015, 2016). In other words, the lack of proposed funding for the

bill seemed to delegitimize the value of the award in the initial attempts to pass legislation in the state.

Testimony supporting the passage of SoBL in the state highlighted numerous benefits, including recognition for languages learned outside of formal schooling, increased competitiveness on college and job applications, as well as an opportunity to fulfill a need in the state for bilingual workers. Given the state's regional proximity to the nation's capital and the prominence of the National Security Agency (NSA) as a major employer in the state, proponents also argued that the SoBL aligned with national security interests (State General Assembly, 2014, 2015, 2016). Utilization of such arguments is consistent with overall critics of SoBL legislation, which assert proponents frequently presented the SoBL as a tool to sustain American competitiveness, rather than centering arguments on the importance of an inclusive ecosystem for MLs (Schwedhelm & King, 2020).

MLs were included in the proposed benefits of the SoBL during testimony in the state. Throughout the testimony, repeated reference was made to a 2008 report compiled as a result of former legislation that sought to address how the state could improve the preservation of heritage languages in the state. One of the several recommendations in the report noted the need to provide students with credit for languages learned outside of formal schooling (State Department of Education, 2008). Thus, the SoBL was presented as a natural follow-up to the aforementioned report's findings. However, like most states, no specific language was included in the law stating the prioritization of MLs (Heineke et al., 2018; State General Assembly, 2014, 2015, 2016;).

The language of the SoBL bills remained nearly identical each legislative session, despite requiring multiple years to pass. From the time of the initial introduction in 2014 to the ultimate passage in 2016, two states, Illinois and Minnesota, passed laws that included mandates for

SoBL recipients to receive college credit (Heineke & Davin, 2020). Though research indicates all students, including MLs, report a belief that the SoBL will reduce the cost of college through potential awarding of credits, only three states included this provision in their initial legislation (Davin, 2024; Heineke & Davin, 2020). The flagship research University provided a letter of support for the bill, but there was no concerted effort to include a provision that would provide college credits for recipients (Empathy Interview I, personal communication, December 1, 2024). Without guaranteed college credit, the materialization of benefits from the SoBL is decreased for all students, but particularly for MLs who may be first-generation college students burdened by the costs of post-secondary education (Davin et al., 2024; Hancock & Davin, 2020)

The state law asserts that the primary function of the State Department of Education (SDE) is to identify which specific assessments can be used for each language to demonstrate proficiency. Additionally, districts are not mandated to participate. However, if a district chooses to establish a program, an individual school may not opt out of participation (Senate Bill 781, 2016). During hearings, it was stated that voluntary participation was needed to ensure districts did not feel that the measure was an unfunded mandate. Additionally, proponents stated a voluntary system would facilitate better collaboration between the state and the districts (State General Assembly, 2016). The legislative journey in the state highlights how the SoBL has been presented in a nonthreatening manner that is equally as beneficial for English-dominant students (Subtirelu et al., 2019). Despite overwhelming public approval, most states' laws, including the state's, have no written specifications to consider the equity of MLs.

In addition to the voluntary, unfunded program, the state relies solely on standardized assessments to determine language proficiency, rather than also including a provision for portfolios or more authentic modes for demonstrating competency (SDE, 2019). Standardized

language assessments have been criticized for evaluating language mastery in a decontextualized way (Davin et al, 2022; Subtirelu et al., 2019). To demonstrate English language proficiency, the state, like most states, requires grade-level assessments. These assessments integrate English content knowledge and require critical thinking and synthesis skills. In some states, MLs are required to demonstrate mastery on these assessments and additional English language assessments. This contrasts the requirements for the world language assessments, which typically require mastery of more conversational competencies (Davin et al., 2022; Valdes, 2020). While English-dominant students are only required to demonstrate a mastery level expected after 3 to 5 years of language study for their second language, MLs are required to demonstrate a much more rigorous standard for English competency (Subtirelu et al., 2019).

Though all states have voluntary, unfunded programs, many states have established systems that support increased awareness of the state program and accountability for individual schools or districts. Table 1 highlights a brief summary of sample resources that states have in place to continue to expand access and participation in the SoBL, including annual reports or open data around the SoBL, training or implementation guides for districts, and translated documents for families.

Table 1

Publicly Available Resources Regarding the SoBL by State

Annual Reports or Open Data	Training or Implementation Guides for Districts	Translated Documents for Families
Arizona, California, Colorado Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, West Virginia	Alaska, Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Washington, Wyoming	Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania

Source: Review of State SoBL pages.

In contrast, SDE currently does not produce an annual report tracking growth and expansion of the SoBL programs. There are no specific timelines or guidelines posted for recommendations on how districts can create the strongest program, nor is translated information available for families or community groups to learn about the program (SDE, 2019). Publicly posted information is pivotal in ensuring there is equitable access for all students across counties. For example, state data reported to the National SoBL organization ranks the state within the five states with the highest percentage of recipients classified as ever MLs (Aguirre & Chou, 2024b). However, a deeper analysis among districts highlights that nearly 80% of the recipients are from RSD (Aguirre & Chou, 2024b; RSD, 2024). Without annual statewide reports or publicly posted guidelines, this disparity is absent from any public scrutiny.

District Approach

The majority of SoBL recipients in GSD obtain the award as a result of participation in a tested world language course, rather than completing an intentional process to achieve the award. This passive approach to implementing the SoBL results in low participation and completion rates. The district's SoBL outcomes are also negatively impacted by poor communication, inconsistent test administration procedures, and a failure to prioritize the program across the district. In contrast, neighboring districts like RSD take a more proactive approach, prioritizing the SoBL and ensuring better visibility and participation.

The GSD World Language Office oversees all communications, policies, procedures, and reporting for the SoBL (Empathy Interview II, personal communication, September 11, 2024). While research posits that SoBL is best implemented with a designated leader to initiate the implementation, RSD's implementation highlights how systems can be managed within an individual office, while overall communication and access to information are prioritized across

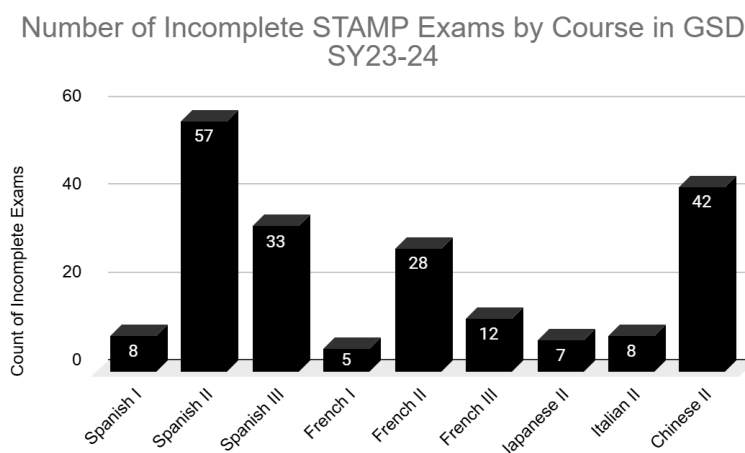
the entire district (Burnet, 2020). RSD includes annual SoBL counts in press releases regarding graduation and district achievements and the annual report (RSD, 2023a; RSD, 2024). This is consistent with research within early adoption districts, or districts who implemented district-wide SoBL systems immediately after state policies were passed (Burnett, 2020). These early adopter districts often consider themselves to be innovative and highly valued demonstrating their offerings to shareholders

RSD also includes information about the SoBL curriculum guidance documents for middle and high school students and publicly posts their testing dates in a central location for students and families to see (RSD, 2023). This also indicates there is a priority for counselors to be aware of the SoBL for scheduling purposes (Castro, 2020). In comparison, GSD does not mention the SoBL in annual updates, graduation press releases, or scheduling documents (GSD, 2022). These neighboring districts take a drastically different approach to communication, which has a direct impact on the awareness of the program in each county.

Within GSD, students demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English by obtaining qualifying Advanced Placement (AP) scores, International Baccalaureate scores, or through annual assessments in world language courses or immersion programs. Over 50% of SoBL recipients receive credit for the non-English language requirement for SoBL with a qualifying score on the Avant STAMP Assessment, which will be referred to as STAMP from this point forward. There is a testing window in the fall that is exclusively for seniors, and a testing window in the spring for underclassmen held annually (Empathy Interview II, personal communication, September 11, 2024; Empathy Interview III, personal communication, October 22, 2024).

While each school identifies and publicly communicates specific test days in RSD, neither the fall testing window for seniors nor the spring testing window for underclassmen is included in district-wide testing calendars in GSD (GSD, 2024a). There is a general description of the SoBL of the GSD world language webpage, but there is no specific mention of school-level points of contacts or testing dates (GSD, 2022). This lack of communication from the central office to ensure testing dates are clearly communicated to all shareholders within the schools contributes to the lack of prioritized time to complete all four requirement components of the qualifying exams. World language teachers and students often administer the test without the support of building-level test coordinators, who might even be unaware that the test is being administered (Empathy Interview III, personal communication, October 22nd, 2024). The lack of support and dedicated time has a significantly negative impact on completion rates for the STAMP. Figure 4 highlights that over 20% of the 900 STAMP tests administered in Spring 2024 were started but not completed, and, therefore not scorable. During the spring testing window alone, nearly 200 students lost out on their opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency in a language other than English to qualify for the SoBL.

Figure 4



Source: GSD, 2024c

Lack of communication also impacts how high school world language classes are selected for testing during the annual spring window. Currently, the exact process for how classes are selected for the annual spring testing window remains unclear (Empathy Interview II, personal communication, September 11, 2024; Empathy Interview III, personal communication, October 22, 2024). In 2024, 228 Spanish Level III students were administered the STAMP assessment, yet over 2,460 students enrolled in the Level III or Level III for Native Speakers course (GSD, 2024c).

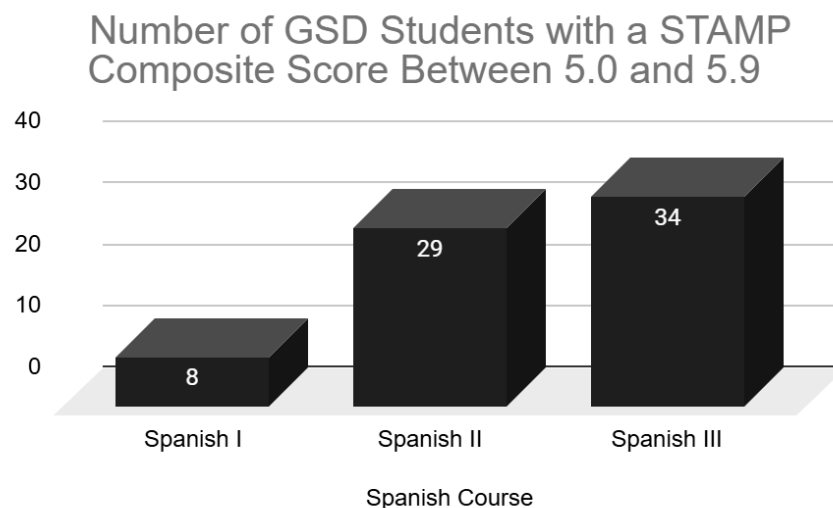
Some students in GSD may be provided multiple testing opportunities between eighth and twelfth grade, while others may only get the opportunity during the fall window in their senior year. (Empathy Interview II, personal communication, September 11, 2024; Empathy Interview III, personal communication, October 22, 2024). This disparity in the potential number of times students are able to take the assessment directly connects with critics of current SoBL policies, which asserts that access to the SoBL is often inequitable within a single school district (Heineke et al., 2018; Subtirelu et al., 2019). For students receiving multiple opportunities to test, they are able to take feedback from their scores to target development of specific language subskills to increase their overall proficiency by senior year. In comparison, if students are only provided one opportunity to sit for the STAMP exam in their senior year, they are not provided the opportunity to strengthen specific subskills and reattempt completion of the exam.

Lack of strategic communication systems also negatively impacts the fall testing window for seniors. Each year, every high school is allotted up to 25 STAMP testing licenses exclusively for seniors in GSD who have not yet received the SoBL. With just the senior window alone, GSD should be able to qualify 750 candidates annually across the 30 high schools in the district. Though many high schools have high percentages of current or former MLs, not all schools

consistently identify 25 seniors to sit for the annual fall administration of the STAMP, while some schools are unable to test all the students who are interested (Empathy Interview II, personal communication, September 11, 2024; Empathy Interview III, personal communication, October 22, 2024; Empathy Interview IV, personal communication, March 10, 2025). With the current lack of a clear communication strategy, it is not uncommon for students to be unaware of the award and the logistics for how it is implemented within the school and for coordinating staff to be unable to anticipate the number of students who are interested (Castro, 2020; Burnet, 2020).

Additionally, this is likely exacerbated by the lack of established data systems for SoBL data (Burnet, 2020; Fisk, 2020). Currently, historical STAMP scores are not included in the official record for each student, and there is no standardized procedure for how STAMP scores are communicated to students and families. As a result, the identification of potential senior candidates is left to the school-based point of contact (Empathy Interview II, personal communication, September 11, 2024; Empathy Interview III, personal communication, October 22, 2024). If the school-based point of contact is unaware of a student or their language skills, they will likely not be considered for the fall administration window. The lack of established data systems also limits counselors' ability to enroll students in language classes based on their proficiency levels (Castro, 2020). Without clear and consistent access to this information, STAMP data is currently not considered in the scheduling process for high school students.

Analysis of SY23-24 STAMP data, as seen in Figure 5, highlights that there are many underclassman students across language levels that score within one point of achieving an overall score of a six on STAMP, which is required to achieve the SoBL. Based on these scores, they would be ideal candidates to target specific domains for growth and retake the assessment in their senior year.

Figure 5

Source: GSD, 2024c

However, without streamlined procedures, students, teachers, and counselors are inconsistently made aware of the potential of these students. Therefore, students who are likely to pass the STAMP exam, may be unaware that opportunity to test, or in some cases retest, is available during the fall of their senior year.

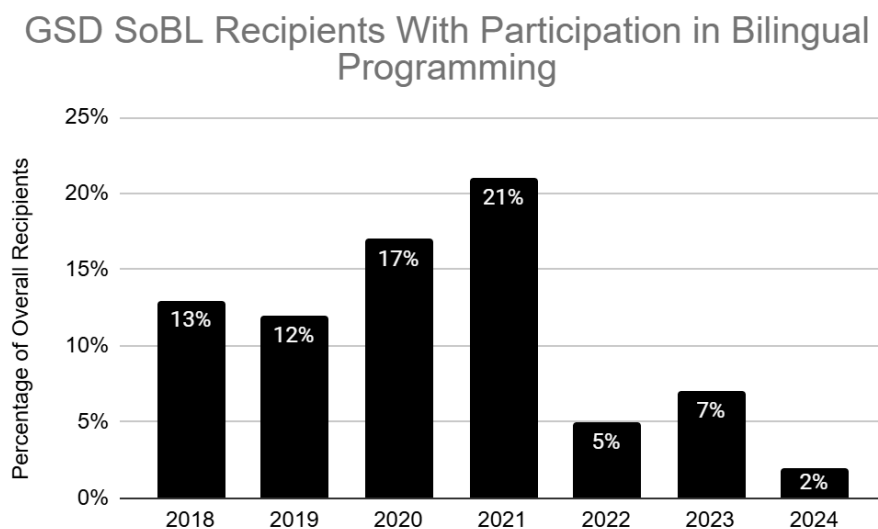
Limited Opportunities to Develop Biliteracy

In addition to the policy and procedural concerns at the state and district level, there are limited opportunities for MLs to develop literacy in their first language and there is an intensive focus for students to develop their English skills (Collier & Thomas, 2006). There is overwhelming research that supports the cognitive benefits for MLs who are literate in their first language (Collier & Thomas, 2009). This research is supported by the academic outcomes of the dual-language programs in GSD. 35% of current MLs enrolled in dual-language programs in GSD score proficient on the English State Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) reading

assessment, compared to 12% of MLs in GSD overall (GSD, 2023a). Despite these notable outcomes, less than 1,000 of the 50,000 MLs in the state are enrolled in dual-language programs (Century Foundation, 2023). This enrollment data highlights that while the programming is proving to be effective, a small percentage of ML students have access to the programs within GSD.

Within the limited bilingual programming, which is application based in GSD, students have daily opportunities to develop their biliteracy and multiple opportunities to sit for qualifying exams, since students are tested annually (GSD, 2024b). Additionally, interviews conducted with GSD leadership for immersion programs highlighted the clear and consistent data that is shared with families (Empathy Interview V, personal communication, September 27, 2024). A sample of the annual letter that is provided to families is included in Appendix A. This letter provides a detailed breakdown of students' scores by language domain, whether or not they met the qualifying score required for SoBL, and what level language course they are being recommended for the following year.

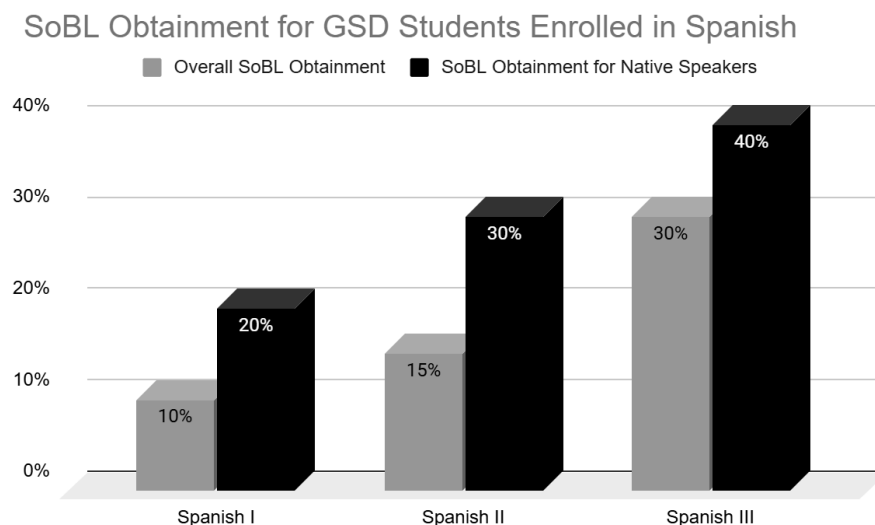
Despite the consistent academic outcomes of MLs enrolled in dual-language programs in GSD, Figure 6 highlights a rather small and inconsistent percent of the SoBL recipients annually participating in the programming. Inconsistency in percentages is likely a result of students, MLs and English-dominants, formerly enrolled in bilingual programming choosing not to continue upper language courses, leaving GSD altogether, or inconsistent data reporting due to procedures outlined in the prior section. The current structure of the immersion program is not producing a sizable number of SoBL candidates annually.

Figure 6

Source: GSD, 2024c

Studies, across districts in the United States, conclude access to extended course sequences is the top priority for building and sustaining robust SoBL programs (Davin, 2020). However, less than half of elementary schools in GSD offer world language instruction (GSD, 2023b). Research shows that initiating second language coursework solely at the high school level is not sufficient to develop proficiency levels required for the state requirements (Baker, 2006). Nationally, annual reports, compiled by Avant, for STAMP testing data highlight that even with five years of world language study in the secondary grades, the average score is still lower than the required score of a six to obtain the SoBL in the state (Avant, 2023).

Within GSD, while students who report speaking the language in the home are more likely at all levels to reach the level of proficiency required for SoBL, still less than 50% achieve a composite score of six or higher by the end of Level III Spanish, as shown in Figure 7. Even by the end of the third year of language study in high school, only 40% of test takers who report speaking Spanish at home received a qualifying score on STAMP assessment.

Figure 7

Source: GSD, 2024c

Within the monolingual system, there is a dominant focus on the limited English proficiency of students, and students' bilingualism and biliteracy is rarely viewed as an asset when preparing students for college or future careers. Districts often neglect the linguistic capital of MLs throughout their educational experience, contributing to ultimate disparities seen in college and career readiness rates (Kanno, 2018). As a result, MLs are often heavily tracked and excluded from college preparatory and enrichment activities, such as high-level or AP language courses (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Subtirelu et al., 2019). In GSD, nearly 50% of SoBL recipients qualify by receiving a four or higher on the AP exam (GSD, 2024c). National STAMP testing data shows the average composite score does not reach six until AP (Avant, 2023). However, current MLs are largely excluded from these classes. According to the GSD Equity Dashboard, only 4% of current MLs enroll in an AP course, and a mere 2% take the qualifying exam (GSD, 2021a). MLs are less likely to have access to the courses required to adequately prepare to pass qualifying exams to earn the SoBL (GSD, 2023a). In School Year 2023-2024,

less than 170 MLs were enrolled in an AP language course. When including former MLs, the number only increases to 300 students. (GSD, 2024c). This disparity highlights that the vast majority of MLs in GSD do not have access to the extended course sequence required to acquire the proficiency levels expected for the SoBL. Additionally, if any senior is enrolled in an AP course, the College board does not release scores until July (College Board, 2025). Therefore, while students may receive the SoBL on their transcript retroactively, there is no opportunity to include their hard earned accomplishment on college, career, or scholarship applications throughout their senior year.

In many respects, the current state of SoBL reflects overall college and career readiness research for MLs. For example, without consistent exposure to bilingual programming, which would provide adequate opportunity for MLs to develop literacy skills in their first language, these students often do not feel confident enough to sit and pass a literacy exam for their first language (Davin, 2021). Yet, when students are provided the opportunities to demonstrate their linguistic strengths, they see an increase in their overall confidence and self-perception as college-ready students (Mihaly, 2022). In GSD, of the MLs who are enrolled in AP courses, 58% passed the AP Exam, which is categorized as an “overrepresentation,” because this percentage is higher than the overall passage rate for the district (GSD, 2023a). However, without consistent access to enrollment in these courses, the majority of MLs cannot access these opportunities.

Lack of Role for ELD Students, Families, and Educators

Currently, there are no formal opportunities for ELD students, families and educators to discuss the SoBL throughout the K-12 experience. Without these formal opportunities to inform current and former ML students, they are potentially unaware of the award and the benefits,

underprepared for qualifying assessments, and denied the right to thoughtfully integrate the required preparation for SoBL into their personal goals and plans for graduation.

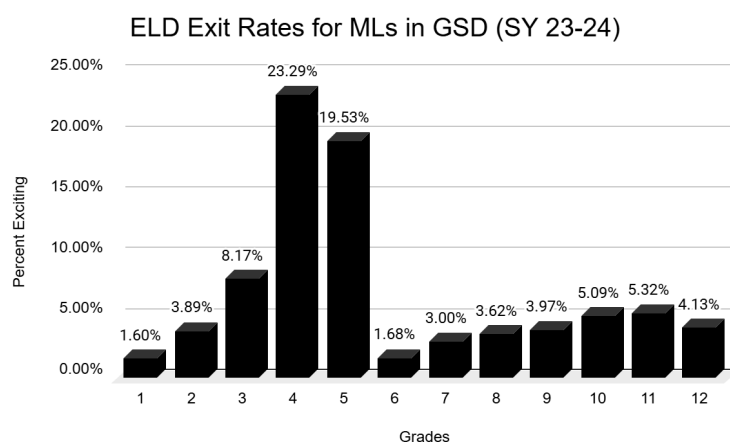
Though world language courses are the primary way students are informed about the SoBL in GSD, these courses are not required in middle school nor high school if students choose to pursue another SDE approved sequence, such as a College and Technical Education (CTE) program (GSD, 2025). Current and Former ML students should not have to forego meaningful career building opportunities, such as certificate programs, if they have familial and community support to pursue the proficiency required to meet the SoBL. Enrolling in world language classes, which may be below some students current skill level, should not be a requirement to receive information. This current strategy only serves 12% of current MLs who graduate from GSD annually, and leaves the vast majority of this large and diverse population largely absent from the planning and implementation of the SoBL initiative in the district (GSD,2024c).

This isolated method of communication fails to facilitate the essential collaboration needed across departments, most commonly between world language and ELD, that is required throughout the elementary, middle, and high-school grade bands (Heineke, & Davin, 2024; Sherf et al., 2020). Currently, there is no centralized effort in GSD to streamline communications and procedures across departments to approach SoBL from a systematic effort (Empathy Interview II, personal communication, September 11, 2024; Empathy Interview III personal communication, October 22, 2024; Empathy Interview VI, personal communication, November 6, 2024). The need for streamlined communication between the world language and ELD departments at the high school level is even more important now than in prior years, since the state recently added composite scores of 4.0 or higher WIDA ACCESS, as an approved pathway for current MLs in high school to demonstrate their English proficiency (SDE,2025). Inclusion

of this exam is an opportunity for ELD educators to elevate the value of testing out of ELD services and promote the value of biliteracies with MLs. Failure to establish these consistent opportunities to engage staff, students, and families throughout the K-12 experience neglects a foundational step to increasing current and former MLs awareness within a reasonable timeframe to establish the requisite skills and confidence to demonstrate proficiency (Sherf et al., 2020;Heineke, & Davin, 2024).

GSD’s current practice of informing students at the beginning of their senior year or while a student is enrolled in a world language class fails to effectively leverage the high-concentration of ELD students exiting language services in elementary school (GSD, 2024c; Empathy Interview IV, March 10, 2025). In alignment with national and state trends, nearly 60% of MLs in GSD are enrolled in elementary school (SDE, 2023;National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; GSD, 2024c). With the vast majority initially enrolling in grades K-2, over 40% of MLs are able to demonstrate English proficiency by 4th and 5th grade and exit ELD services, as noted in Figure 8.

Figure 8



Source: GSD, 2024c

Once students demonstrate the required level of proficiency, they no longer receive ELD services from a certified educator, and their progress only continues to be monitored for the following two school years (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Within the district and across the state, these students tend to go on and outperform their monolingual peers on standardized assessments, in middle and high school (SDE, 2023; GSD, 2023c). While research in other large districts, like Chicago Public Schools, note the power of educating students about power of their bilingualism and the SoBL opportunity at the onset of their educational career, there are currently no systems in GSD to promote this opportunity and foster a deep appreciation for their bilingualism prior to exiting services in upper elementary grades (Heineke & Davin, 2024; personal communication, Empathy Interview VI; November 6, 2024). ML students in GSD can spend their entire elementary school career focused on developing their English language skills, without any explicit mention of the importance of fostering their first language literacy skills and the future opportunity provided with the SoBL.

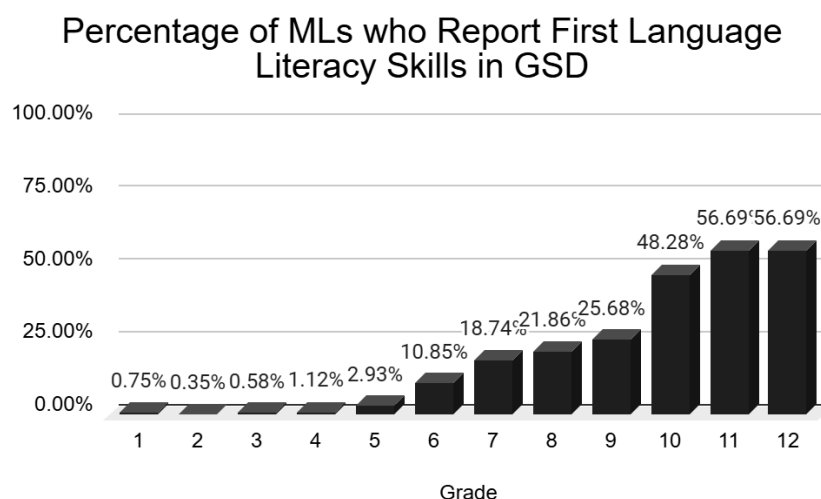
Failure to empower students at an early age about the benefits of their bilingualism also harms current MLs, whether in elementary or upper grades, who may be struggling or are unmotivated to meet English proficiency requirements (Kolar, 2022). Research highlights that when MLs perceive their first language and literacy skills are not valued within the school system, students may lose motivation to demonstrate their true potential for English proficiency when they feel their full language skills are not recognized in the school (Hancock & Davin, 2021). Many MLs, across grades, are unaware of how fulfilling ELD requirements often become a gatekeeper to enrolling in college-preparatory pathways (Castro, 2014; Kanno, 2018).

Currently, GSD has 6,210 LTMLs that are only informed of the SoBL opportunity in high school if they enroll in world language class, or if they attend a senior assembly for graduation

(GSD, 2024c; personal communication, Empathy Interview IV, March 10, 2025). This minimal approach neglects an opportunity to further incentivize students to achieve qualifying scores on WIDA ACCESS Assessment, which is required to exit ELD services (Hancock & Davin, 2021). Without explicit information, MLs, who historically have underperformed compared to their non and former ML peers, may be less incentivized to achieve their best score on the tenth grade MCAP reading assessment, which is required to demonstrate English proficiency for the SoBL (Kolar, 2022; SDE, 2019; GSD, 2023c).

Throughout ML students' K-12 experiences, there is also lack of family and community partnerships to leverage the linguistic and cultural assets of the community (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Analysis of ML students who report first language literacy skills, as shown in Figure 9, highlights how the number of MLs with first language literacy skills increases within the upper grades. However, currently there are no systems within GSD that track how families continue to develop their students' first language literacy skills once they are enrolled in GSD (personal communication, Empathy Interview VI; November 6, 2024).

Figure 9



Source: GSD, 2024c

Best policy practices suggest students need an extended sequence of learning in order to be able to demonstrate the proficiency required on standardized assessments (Davin, 2020). Given that GSD is not able to offer an extended sequence for all 97 languages, it is imperative that families receive information regarding the importance of developing biliteracy and the benefits of the SoBL award well before their senior year. In other linguistically diverse districts, like those in Minnesota, district teams collaborate with families and communities to expand access and connect students to heritage language classes outside of the school (Oraski et al, 2020). While GSD expanded the Fall testing window to include speakers of any language offered by STAMP for the first time in school year 2024-2025, the vast majority of ML candidates, particularly those of minority language groups, remain unidentified or not made aware at the onset of their educational career about the opportunity.

Failure to integrate information about the SoBL through the K-12 experience further perpetuates the dominant narrative that the education system solely values English literacy and language skills. These subtractive schooling practices have a cumulative effect on students' self-perception and confidence. While students who receive the SoBL report an increased sense of interest in pursuing post-secondary education, many students are anxious to evaluate their first language literacy skills through standardized assessment (Davin et al., 2024; Davin, 2021). In addition to testing fatigue, and reduced confidence from subtractive language policies, students are fearful of disappointing their families and communities if they are unable to meet the required level of proficiency (Davin, 2021). When students are not informed about the opportunity until it is time to complete the required assessments, low confidence in their first language literacy proficiency may hinder efforts to leverage their familial and community support while preparing for the examination. In an empathy interview with a SoBL recipient who

recently graduated from GSD, the recipient did not inform family about the opportunity until after passing the examination out of fear of perceived failure (personal communication, Empathy Interview IV, March 10, 2025). In the absence of consistent and affirming messaging regarding their first language proficiency, many students may forgo the opportunity or limit support from key networks.

Sparse and delayed communication with current and former MLs and their families contributes to slow growth of SoBL obtainment and the disparities in percentage of graduates receiving the award compared to RSD. Though the ML population enrolled in GSD has increased by 4% since 2019, there has been no effort to project the number of eligible candidates annually or expand the number of testing licenses since GSD piloted participation in the award in SY18-19 (Empathy Interview II, personal communication, September 11, 2024).

In summation, these four causal factors outline that the core of the disparity within GSD is not that English-dominant students have greater access to the award than MLs. Rather, the lack of policies, systems, and accountability measures at the state and district level limit everyone's potential to receive the SoBL in an ML-dominant district.

Theory of Improvement

GSD's mission speaks to the organization's commitment to create an inclusive and empowering system that nurtures all students to reach their full academic and holistic potential (GSD, 2021c). This mission includes not only ensuring that students graduate from the system, but also have a meaningful path forward after completion of high school. Expanding equitable access to the SoBL for all MLs is in direct alignment with the Student Learner Profile outlined by GSD. This profile serves as the guiding foundation for the county's overall strategic plan, and details how the school system seeks to develop global citizens, clear communicators, problem

solvers, critical thinkers, and creators with a clear goal-oriented outlook (GSD, 2021c). When students are able to leverage their full linguistic capital, as promoted by the SoBL, they are stronger problem solvers, communicators, and global citizens (Collier & Thomas, 2009).

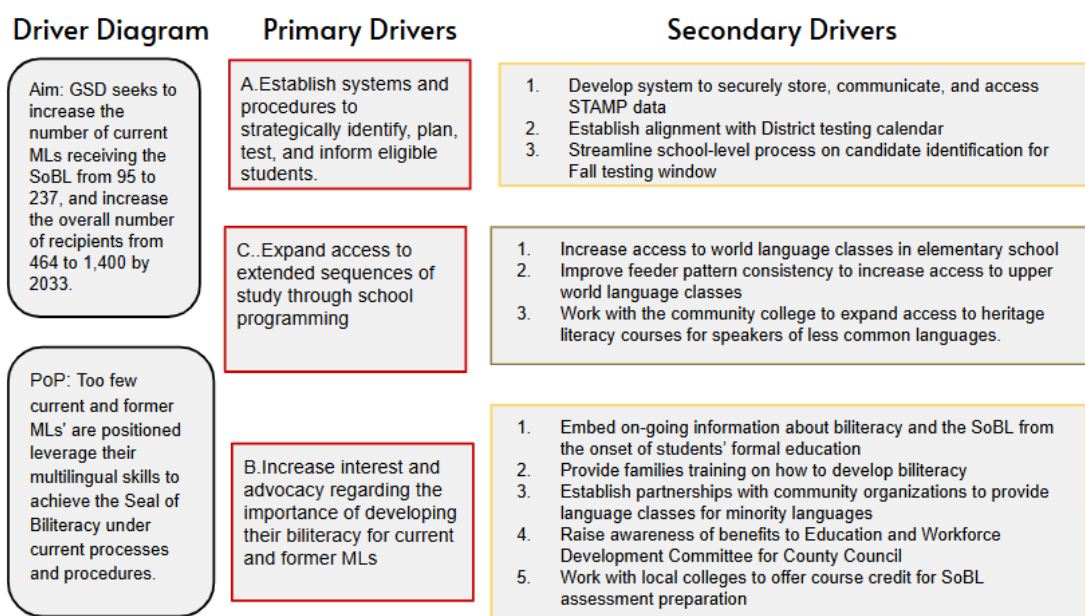
Therefore, the proposed AIM statement seeks to increase the number of current MLs receiving the SoBL from 95 to 237 annually and to increase the overall number of recipients from 464 to 1,400, with the majority of whom are former MLs, by 2033. Reaching this aim would ensure at least 30% of MLs who graduate receive the SoBL, and nearly 20% of graduates overall receive the award. Obtainment of such percentages would close the gap between the current disparity between GSD and RSD.

Driver Diagram

The Driver Diagram, included in Figure 10, addresses foundational tenets to ensure clear and consistent pathways and procedures are in place to expand their learner profile to include their first language and literacy skills.

Figure 10

Driver Diagram



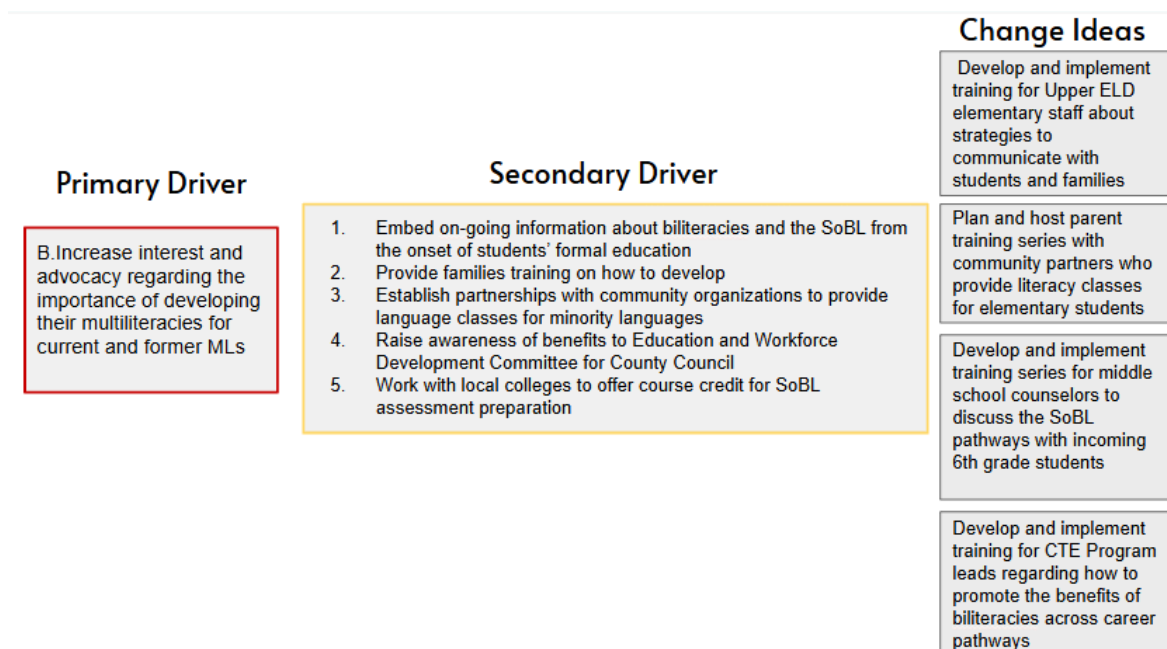
The first primary driver addresses the policies, procedures, and communication between high schools and the central office in GSD. Within this driver, secondary drivers address specific gaps in procedures and communications as outlined in Causal Factor II. Consistent data storage and communication systems are implemented to facilitate on-going access to key data sources, such as prior STAMP results, for all shareholders. Additionally, The STAMP test is aligned with the district testing calendar to reduce the number of incomplete assessments during the spring testing annually. The district may also consider scheduling district-wide testing days on the weekend and/or by language to avoid conflicts within the school day (Davin & Heineke, 2022a). Finally, a district-wide system must be established on how to identify the pool for eligible candidates for the Fall testing window that reduces waste of the 750 licenses allocated annually.

The second primary driver seeks to address Causal Factor III and expand access to extended sequential language courses within the K-12 experience. Within this driver, world language courses, specifically for heritage language learners, are expanded to more elementary schools and a comprehensive review of feeder patterns is conducted to build a pipeline to rigorous coursework. Additionally, partnerships are established with institutions of higher learning to develop course sequence with minority language speakers. Additionally, the second primary factor seeks to materialize the proposed benefits of the SoBL by establishing college credit for recipients in the state, and partnering with local businesses to highlight the value of the award and language and literacy competence required to achieve the award. The third primary driver focuses on increasing interest and advocacy among ML students, their families, and the larger community. Causal Factor IV details the lack of formal opportunities for ELD students, families, and educators to discuss the SoBL throughout the K-12 experience. This lack of formal discussion regarding the SoBL, leaves MLs largely unaware of the award and the benefits,

potentially underprepared for qualifying assessments, and denied the right to thoughtfully integrate the required preparation for SoBL into their personal goals and plans for graduation. Additionally, Causal Factor IV highlights that ML students are so negatively impacted by subtractive schooling policies, which label their bilingualism as a deficit, that MLs often lack the confidence to demonstrate their biliteracy on the required exams (Davin, 2021). Within this driver, secondary drivers focus on asset-based communication with MLs and their families throughout the K-12 experience.

While there is a need to address all drivers in the outlined driver diagram, expanding advocacy efforts regarding the importance of biliteracy for MLs sense of identity, efficacy, and future endeavors, as outlined by the third primary driver, is the most critical linchpin to the wider expansion of the SoBL in GSD, and the focus of the current theory of improvement.

At its core, the SoBL was created as an advocacy tool to elevate the multidimensional talents of ML students. The student-learner profile asserts that a comprehensive education cultivates goal-directed learners (GSD, 2021). Therefore, GSD must embrace a more holistic, district-wide approach that fosters students' full linguistic repertoire. Change ideas that would bring this approach to fruition, such as training upper elementary ELD staff or middle school counselors, are outlined through several possible changes in Figure 11.

Figure 11*Driver Diagram with Change Ideas*

There is no tool more powerful than nurturing confidence in students from the onset of their educational career to build a sustainable coalition of advocates. Therefore, if GSD trains elementary ELD teachers on the SoBL policies and provides opportunities to workshop ideas for generating awareness among current and former MLs in upper elementary school, then GSD will have a strong foundational coalition to establish a pipeline of eligible candidates. With elementary school ELD teachers serving as the champions for biliteracy development and the SoBL, they are likely to extend their understanding into on-going school and community events; making celebration of biliteracy as a tenant of the elementary experience. Additionally, such championing may lead to the implementation of pathway assessments, such the STAMP4se, which is intended for students 12 and below (Avant, 2024). These assessments help young learners understand their proficiency at a young age and provide feedback on which skill domains students need additional practice and development.

With this clear foundation established in upper elementary school, these students have adequate time, the full seven years recommended by research, to decide how they want to pursue further development of their first language literacy. Empowered with the current understanding of their students' English and first language proficiency, current and former MLs have a right to decide how they want to achieve proficiency in tandem with their other personal goals. They may choose to pursue middle school world language classes, and/or upper or Advancement Placement in high school or utilize familial and community support to reach proficiency in their first language literacy skills (Borowczyk, 2020). When this information is shared, elementary students and their parents understand how the school systems value their biliteracy and how continued development of these skills is a valued asset for themselves and their futures.

While eventual training is recommended for all GSD teachers and instructional support staff, like counselors and Community Schools' Coordinators, establishing the initial training with the elementary school ELD teachers is critical for three key reasons. First, students must know early in their career that their bilingualism is valued. Over 40% of MLs who enroll in elementary school, test out of services by the time they reach upper elementary school (GSD, 2024c). Once they exit services, their first language skills may be unknown to future educators or counselors, unless MLs are informed early that they should share information regarding their linguistic assets with secondary school staff. Second, elementary school instructional staff, like ELD teachers, in the elementary grades are uniquely positioned to facilitate an inclusive introduction to the SoBL because of the frequency they meet with their students and the nature of their work in developing students' English language proficiency (Oraski et al., 2020; Davin, 2020). These teachers lay the foundation for how students' perceive the value of their biliteracy and have an established repertoire with students and families, unlike a counselor who only meets with students on

occasion (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Finally, research indicates that parental involvement is highest at elementary school levels, and that multilingual families, particularly parents who are immigrants, view their role as developing skills that are not taught in schools, such as first language skills, literacy skills, as well as sharing cultural knowledge (Snell, 2018). Therefore, communicating information to families in elementary school is a pivotal opportunity to establish partnerships with families, while developing students' skills (Moll, 2014).

For these key reasons, the present theory of change asserts if GSD trains elementary ELD teachers on the SoBL policies and provides opportunities to workshop ideas for generating awareness among current and former MLs in upper elementary school, then GSD will have a strong foundational coalition to establish a pipeline of eligible candidates. In order to establish this pipeline, this research study sought to address the following question:

1. What do teachers know about the Seal of Biliteracy and how does the training session expand their knowledge?
2. How do ELD teachers disseminate information about the Seal of Biliteracy to ML students and families after participating in the training session and what are their recommendations for future expansion?

The Student Learner Profile seeks to cultivate a system that provides sustained opportunities for students to leverage their full-linguistic repertoire to engage in meaningful opportunities to establish a role for themselves in the school and greater community. The SoBL should not only be about students demonstrating competency, but also about students knowing how to use their bilingual skills within society. Therefore, clear messaging and specific action steps are the foundation for building the pipeline of advocates who feel seen and seek to ensure the same is established for the next generation.

Section II

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand what elementary ELD teachers in GSD schools know about the SoBL, and how these educators could further integrate information and promotion of the SoBL into existing grade and school-level activities for MLs and their families. GSD currently enrolls over 33,000 of which 19,050 are elementary schoolers (GSD, 2026). With nearly 100 languages represented among the ML students, GSD elementary schools are rich with linguistic and cultural diversity (GSD, 2021b). The intervention focused on providing explicit training to elementary ELD teachers about the SoBL. This change idea was generated from the third primary driver and directly addresses Causal Factor IV, with a focus on embedding opportunities for MLs and their families to learn about the value of the SoBL and the power of biliteracy throughout the K-12 educational experience. This study was designed to address the following inquiry questions:

1. What do teachers know about the Seal of Biliteracy and how does the training session expand their knowledge?
2. How do ELD teachers disseminate information about the Seal of Biliteracy to ML students and families after participating in the training session and what are their recommendations for future expansion?

The following section outlines the description of action, researcher's positionality, the participants, the description of instruments used, methods, processes to ensure reliability and validity, as well as a description of the analysis techniques.

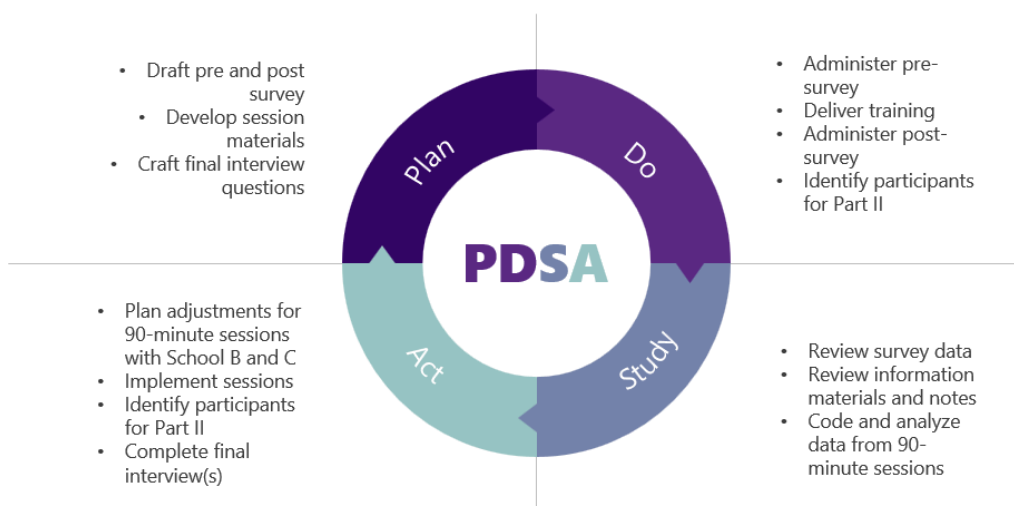
Methodology

This study used the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Protocol to test the intervention (Langley and Associates, 2009). The PDSA protocol is rooted in Improvement Science and focuses on efficiently testing and refining change ideas to ensure the changes implemented are truly improvements aligned with specific organization's overall goals. PDSA models gather robust data to propose a localized theory of improvement that is rooted in the culture and operations of the specific school system (Himnant-Crawford, 2020; Langley et al, 2009).

Therefore, this study sought to better understand what elementary ELD educators in GSD know about the SoBL. Additionally, this study sought to learn how these educators plan to disseminate information with MLs and their families after explicit training and workshopping ideas for integration into daily, monthly, or annual school-level activities within GSD. In order to answer this question, the researcher engaged in a learning cycle detailed in Figure 12, where a plan was developed, initial implementation occurred, preliminary data was analyzed, and adjustments were taken to refine the intervention.

Figure 12

PDSA Cycle Steps



Plan

The tenants of language education policy informed the planning of materials and instruments utilized in this study. This framework was also utilized in the only known study regarding SoBL policies and practices expanding to the elementary school context (Heineke & Davin, 2024). Language education policy asserts that language norms within the school community, including those of students and staff, are determined by both formal and informal factors (Johnson, 2013). More current approaches to language education policy assert that shareholders, within each specific school community, influence the policy and daily practice of how bilingualism and biliteracy may be implemented or discussed (Shomamy, 2006). The intervention designed, for the current qualitative study, addressed teachers' knowledge regarding the formal policies in the county and state regarding the SoBL, as well as informal practices teachers implement. Pertinent formal information includes how the SoBL is obtained in GSD, and current progress towards increasing the number of recipients annually. To develop and capture the informational knowledge, the training included opportunities for participants to plan how they might infuse information about the SoBL into their practices, activities, or events held within their individual school contexts. By studying both the formal knowledge that ELD educators need to know about the SoBL and the school-based plans educators create, this study explored both the formal and informal aspects of education language policy within the context of expanding SoBL access.

Do

The intervention consisted of three parts; for a maximum of four required hours from participants. Part I included a one-time 90-minute training session held in Fall 2025 with all the ELD teachers participating in each PDSA Cycle. PDSA Cycle I participants were offered the

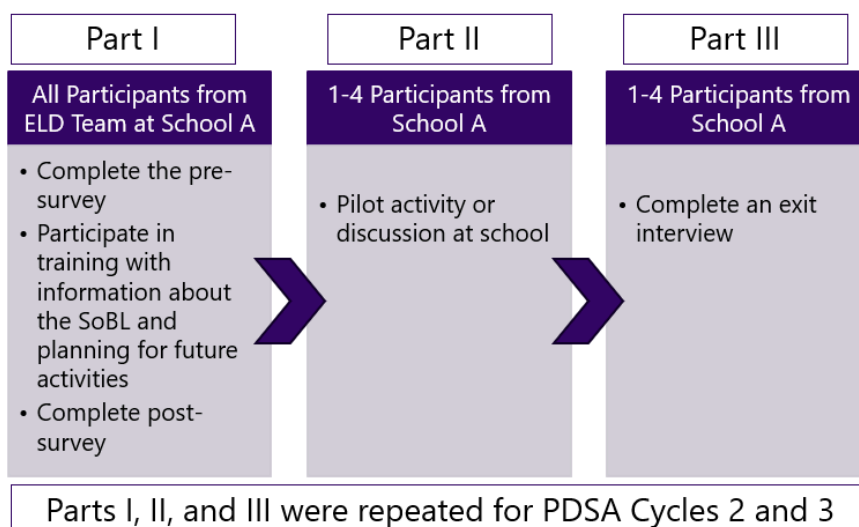
option of in-person or Zoom training. Participants for Cycle I chose to participate in the training through a virtual format. This training session informed participants about the SoBL and provided opportunities for participants to plan ways to introduce the information to students and/or families within their school community. Participants completed a digital pre and post survey, detailed in Appendix B and C, at the beginning and end of the session. Appendix D includes the three sample SoBL activities previewed to participants during the training.

During Part II, participants had the option to continue participation in the study by independently implementing a mini-lesson focused on the SoBL with their students and/or students' families. Participants were instructed that the mini lesson should be 30 minutes to one-hour in length. In Part III, all participants who implemented the mini-lessons, completed a 30-minute exit interview with the researcher conducted over Zoom. Final interview questions are included in Appendix C.

The complete study was conducted across three schools to complete three PDSA Cycles as seen in Figure 13.

Figure 13

PDSA Cycle Components



The first 45 minutes of the training were dedicated to establishing a foundational competency about the SoBL for ELD educators. This included the following: the purpose and value of the SoBL, the proficiency required to obtain the SoBL, the time needed to develop this proficiency, the importance of establishing pathway programs for MLs to assess their progress throughout their K-12 educational experience, and the different pathways MLs can leverage to develop mastery. The final 45 minutes of the session were focused on planning how they might integrate information about the SoBL into grade-level and school-level activities. ELD teachers previewed a sample of activities curated by the researcher, and brainstormed events and programs held at their school. Sample activities were developed using recommendations from the book “Promoting Multilingualism in School: A Framework for Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy, (Davin & Heineke, 2022a). Additional featured activities were developed from ideas from the researcher’s own elementary school.

Study

Pre and post survey data, transcripts, and session artifacts from PDSA Cycle I were analyzed and coded to assess participants’ opinions and knowledge about the SoBL, and how participant knowledge evolved after the information session within Part I of the study. This initial analysis guided changes for the training session in the second and third PDSA cycle. Transcripts from the first PDSA cycle highlighted that only 4 of the 5 participants routinely contributed to the conversations during the virtual training session. Additionally, several of the participants chose to have their cameras off which made it difficult to read facial expressions and further facilitate conversation. After the conclusion of the initial planning session, the researcher reflected that Cycle I participants were only given oral opportunities to share their opinions

during the virtual training. Additionally, initial review of post-survey data from Cycle I indicated the absence of a survey question that assessed how likely participants were to immediately implement an activity with MLs and/or families. Therefore, there was initially no instrument to capture any hesitations or concerns participants may have regarding the upcoming implementation. Finally, due to participants' teaching and school schedules, the lesson implementations and final interviews were conducted after the implementations of the training sessions for all three PDSA cycles. Therefore, the analysis of this data was used to answer the research questions and make final recommendations, but the data was not available to inform additional changes for the information session in the second and third PDSA cycles.

Act

In alignment with the traditional PDSA model, analysis of pre and post survey data, transcripts, and session artifacts informed opportunities for intervention improvement in the second and third PDSA cycle, as well as guided recommendations for short and long-term next steps. To facilitate more opportunities for discussion and equitable participation, participants in the second and third PDSA cycle were not offered an option to participate in the training virtually, and were only offered the option on an in-person training session. To offer additional opportunities for participants to share their learning during the training, four guiding questions were pre-written on chart paper and participants were encouraged to write their thoughts on a post-it for at least one question during the information session conducted in the second and third PDSA cycle. The in-person format allowed for greater organic dialogue between participants, and made it easier for the researcher to read facial expressions and further prompt participants if they would like to orally build on the conversation.

An additional post-survey question, as noted in Appendix E, was added to capture how likely participants were to continue their participation. After the conclusion of the first final interview, a follow-up question was added to inquire about what additional resources or materials educators would like to have for future lessons with MLs and/or families. No further changes were made for the third PDSA cycle, which was also conducted in-person.

Context and Participants

While MLs are enrolled throughout the district, the present study focused on targeting ELD educators at elementary schools with a high-percentage of MLs in GSD. Therefore, participants were required to be employed as an ELD teacher in GSD for the duration of the study. Schools with the highest number of interested participants were selected to participate. The initial study design sought to recruit 5-10 participants for each PDSA cycle for a total of 10-20 participants in the overall study. Upon completion of the training, the researcher then sought to identify one to three participants from each cycle to independently implement an activity and complete a final interview.

As of School Year 2022-2023, 27 elementary schools in GSD had an ML population comprising at least 50% of their overall population (GSD, 2024c). Over 20 of these elementary schools exit at least 40 ML students from ELD services annually each year (GSD, 2024c). While more than 70% of ML students enrolled in GSD schools are Spanish speakers, there are also sizable populations of minority language communities, like those who speak Dari and Pashto (GSD, 2021b). In order to equitably serve all MLs in the district, it is important to conduct PDSA cycles not only within schools with a predominantly Spanish speaking population, but also within schools with additional linguistic diversity. Of the 20 elementary schools with at least 30% MLs, who exit at least 40 MLs annually, only two of these elementary schools had a sizable

ML population who speak minority languages, like Dari and Pashto. One of these elementary schools could not be considered because the researcher was employed there.

Instructional Review Board (IRB) requirements for GSD district required principal approval prior to contacting educators directly to participate in the study. Descriptions of the research study and permission request forms were sent to the principals of the twenty 20 schools with ML student populations comprising at least 50% of the overall population. Information regarding the study was sent to the principal of one other school with a total ML population of 40%, but a higher population of minority language speakers. Of these requests, three principals provided consent. Once consent was provided, the researcher coordinated directly with the ELD chairs at each school to share materials for study recruitment. Participants were compensated with a box lunch, value not exceeding \$15.00, for their participation in Part I of the study. Participants were entered to win a \$50.00 giftcard for their participation in Part II and III of the study. Schools were assigned to the first, second, or third PDSA cycle based on which school provided the first availability for the training session. In total, 16 ELD educators participated in the training session. One participant from PDSA Cycle I, four participants from PDSA Cycle II, and one participant from PDSA Cycle III implemented a mini-lesson and completed the final interview.

All five ELD educators from School A agreed to participate in the voluntary study for PDSA Cycle I. As of SY25-26, School A enrolls 559 students, of which 43.5% are MLs and 94% qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (FARMS). While the overall ML population is less than 50%, 13.8% of the overall student population is Asian; making School A one of the largest student populations of Dari and Pashto speakers in GSD. In SY24-25, 73.4% of MLs at School A

met or exceeded their growth target on the annual ACCESS test (GSD, 2026). Table 2 details the demographics of the ELD teacher participants from School A.

Table 2

Demographics for Participants from PDSA Cycle I

Participant	Years Teaching	Years Teaching ELD	Certification Status	Other Languages Spoken
A1	> 10	> 10	Certified	Tagalog
A2	0-3	0-3	Conditional	Tagalog, Bisaya
A3	7-10	4-6	Certified	Filipino, Spanish, Ilocano, Bisaya
A4	> 10	0-3	Certified	Tagalog, Visayan
A5	0-3	0-3	Conditional	Spanish

Nine of out the 15 ELD educators from School B agreed to participate in the voluntary study for PDSA Cycle II. As of SY25-26, School B enrolls 639 students, of which 77.8% are MLs and 96.2% of students qualify for FARMs. In SY24-25, 51.8% of MLs enrolled at School B met or exceeded their growth target on the annual ACCESS test. 97.2% of the student population is Hispanic, and nearly 100% of the MLs are native Spanish speakers (GSD, 2026). Table 3 details the demographics of the ELD teacher participants from School B.

Table 3*Demographics for Participants from PDSA Cycle II*

Participant	Years Teaching	Years Teaching ELD	Certification Status	Other Languages Spoken
B1	>10	4-6	Certified	None
B2	>10	>10	Certified	Spanish
B3	0-3	0-3	Certified	American Sign Language
B4	0-3	0-3	Conditional	Russian
B5	>10	4-6	Certified	None
B6	>10	0-3	Certified	None
B7	>10	>10	Conditional	Spanish
B8	>10	>10	Certified	Spanish, Portuguese
B9	>10	>10	Certified	None

Two out of the five ELD Educators from School C agreed to participate in the voluntary study for PDSA Cycle III. As of SY25-26, School C enrolls 586 students, of which 64.5% of students are MLs and 92.3% of students qualify as FARMS. 82.6% of the student population are Hispanic, and nearly 100% of the ML population are native Spanish speakers (GSD, 2026). The participants from School C noted a growing population of ML students from African countries,

but could not cite specific numbers or languages. Table 3 details the demographics of the ELD teacher participants from School A.

Table 4

Demographics for Participants from PDSA Cycle III

Participant	Years Teaching	Years Teaching ELD	Certification Status	Other Languages Spoken
C1	>10	>10	Certified	Spanish
C2	>10	>10	Certified	Spanish

One participant from PDSA Cycle I, four participants from PDSA Cycle II, and one participant from PDSA Cycle III independently completed a mini-lesson with MLs and/or families and completed a final interview with the researcher. Table 5 highlights that while these participants had varying years of service at their current school, they all had at least five years of experience within GSD.

Table 5*Demographics for Participants from Part II*

Participant	Years with GSD	Years at School	Grade Taught
A1	4	1	2nd Grade
B1	15	7	2nd and 3rd Grade
B2	21	16	4th and 5th Grade
B9	5	1	2nd and 3rd Grade
C1	12	1	3rd Grade

Positionality

In alignment with the goals of improvement science and the PDSA, the researcher is also a full-time employee as an elementary school ELD teacher in GSD. As a current educator in an elementary school with a high population of MLs, the researcher utilized her knowledge of events and opportunities to discuss the SoBL in her current context as the basis of examples featuring in the training session.

Though the study is not conducted with individuals the researcher works with on a regular basis, the researcher acknowledges that the researcher may be perceived as an insider in the district due to employment status. This may result in participants responding more openly if the researcher is perceived as a fellow educator. If viewed in this light, educators may feel more comfortable sharing their knowledge and opinions. Alternatively, since the researcher is a

participant in a district-sponsored doctoral cohort, the researcher may be perceived as an extension of the district office. This may restrict how comfortable educators feel with openly discussing their opinions regarding the SoBL.

Prior to accepting their current teaching position, the researcher worked at the central office for a nearby urban district. While there, the researcher oversaw the logistics and data management of the world language proficiency assessment, called STAMP. Over the course of three years, the researcher gained in-depth knowledge and understanding of how to implement the test and develop student and staff capacity regarding how to understand proficiency scores. This knowledge of various district policies and the capabilities of the STAMP data reporting policies has informed the development of the causal systems analysis, the driver diagram, and the current study. Finally, the researcher completed an apprenticeship in Fall 2025, as part of a requirement for the doctoral degree. During the apprenticeship, the researcher worked on the creation of a promotion video for the SoBL with the support of the GSD ELD Office.

Instruments and Data Collection

This study utilized a pre and post survey, artifact review, transcriptions of the audio recordings, redacted student artifacts, and final interviews as the key sources of data. Descriptions for each data source are outlined below.

Pre and Post Surveys

The pre-survey consisted of five demographic questions and five open-ended questions that focus on understanding elementary ELD current knowledge about the SoBL in the district. Descriptive data collected for each participant includes: name, years of experience teaching overall, years serving as an ELD teacher, and other languages spoken. The open-ended questions

captured participants' general knowledge about the SoBL and what information they might share with students and families. These pre-survey questions also sought to understand how the educators currently discuss biliteracy in their specific school context from each individual's perspective. The post-survey originally included the same five open-end questions. Based on analysis of data from PDSA Cycle I, a sixth post-survey question was added to capture how likely educators were to participate in the development of a mini-lesson for students and/or families. Post-survey data was analyzed to see how educators' knowledge of the purpose and value of the SoBL, the proficiency required to obtain the SoBL, the process for how students demonstrate their proficiency, and where additional information for the district process can be found grew during the session.

Participant Artifact Review

Artifacts from the initial training and brainstorming session, such as anchor charts, were reviewed to provide insight regarding participant reflections on the current number of students obtaining the SoBL in GSD, the correlation between award obtainment and year of language study, as well as ELD exit data by grade. Planning calendars were reviewed to capture which events and instructional periods educators identified as potential opportunities to share information about the SoBL with students and families. Any materials created by educators for their mini-lessons were also reviewed to see how educators chose to convey information to students and/or families.

Audio Recordings from Training Session

The researcher transcribed the audio recordings from the training sessions. Transcripts from the sessions informed specific details for the types of events educators view as

opportunities to discuss the SoBL. Additionally, the transcripts provided specific phrases and connections that the educators made regarding the purpose of the SoBL and the value. Since the information sessions were conducted during all three PDSA cycles, the transcripts provide specific details to summarize how each group identified opportunities to integrate knowledge about the SoBL into the school and grade-level activities. Additionally, these transcripts provided insight to needed revisions to improve each PDSA cycle. In all three PDSA cycles, all participants consented to recording for the sole purpose of transcription. Participants were informed that pseudonyms were to be used for the district name, school names, and individual participant names.

Redacted Student Work Artifact Review

Since the educators independently implemented their mini-lessons, the educators were asked to bring sample materials of the activities implemented with the students to the final interview. All personal information regarding the students was redacted prior to review with the researcher. Analysis of these materials provided additional insight into how educators chose to illuminate the content for their students.

Final Interviews

Final interviews were conducted with six educators, including one from PDSA Cycle I, four from PDSA Cycle II and one from PDSA Cycle III, who implemented a lesson with MLs and/or students' families regarding the SoBL. Questions asked in the final interview, as noted in Appendix D, extended upon post-survey questions and explored future ideas for how ELD educators envisioned integrating discussions of the SoBL with the current and former MLs. Each semi-structured interview did not exceed 30 minutes, and was conducted via Zoom.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study utilized thematic analysis to determine major themes from the data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to answer the first research question, *What do teachers know about the Seal of Biliteracy and how does the training expand their knowledge?*, the analysis identified themes addressing the formal knowledge of elementary ELD teachers regarding the SoBL. In order to answer the second research question, *“How do ELD teachers disseminate information about the Seal of Biliteracy to ML students and families after participating in the training session and what are their recommendations for future expansion?”*, the analysis identified themes regarding the informal practices they use to promote awareness of the award. First, the researcher engaged in multiple rounds of analysis to code the four data sources including, pre and post-surveys, artifacts, transcripts, and final interviews. The researcher then developed categories from the initial codes and finally corresponding themes, as outlined in Table 6, for each research question.

Table 6*Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 1 and 2*

Research Question	Codes	Categories	Themes
Q1: What do teachers know about the Seal of Biliteracy and how does the training session expand their knowledge?	Cognitive, economic, social, native language, cultural events	Benefits of multilingualism School structures	Theme 1: Limited Prior Formal Knowledge
	Proficiency, award, high-school, domains, elementary school, literacy, courses	Requirements Timeline Pathways	Theme 2: Proficiency Requirements to Obtain the SoBL
	Subtractive, college, confidence, website, value	Dominant messaging Benefits	Theme 3: Tangible Benefits of SoBL
Q2: How do ELD teachers disseminate information about the Seal of Biliteracy to ML students and families after participating in the training session and what are their recommendations for future expansion?	Domains, video, practice, growth, literacy, writing, exiting, awards	Skills needed for WIDA ACCESS Goal setting	Theme 1: Alignment with WIDA ACCESS Preparation
	Biliterate, video, vocabulary, scaffold, context, strategy, struggle, high school	Content Instructional Moves	Theme 2: Lessons Prioritizing Foundational Concepts
	Consistency, alignment, reinforce, vision, video, district-wide	Approaches to messaging Core message	Theme 3: Streamlined Approach in the Future

The analysis continued for multiple iterations until the researcher identified clear themes to conclude the qualitative analysis and answer the research questions. For example, the review of pre-survey results identified three specific codes for how participants previously conceptualized the benefits of multilingualism. These codes and corresponding categories led to the subsequent theme that participants had prior general knowledge, but did not have explicit knowledge about the SoBL prior to training. In accordance with the principles of Improvement Science and PDSA cycle, the first rounds of data review occurred throughout the first PDSA

cycle to ensure opportunities to address misconceptions with the participants of the first cycle and to implement changes for the second PDSA cycle (Perry et al, 2020). For example, data analysis conducted after the information session for PDSA Cycle I identified the need for an additional survey question, in-person session delivery, and additional modes for participant feedback.

Reliability and Validity

In order to test the reliability and validity of the instruments, all instruments were tested with a small group of individuals at the researcher's school placement, prior to the initial implementation cycle in Fall 2025 (Perry et al, 2020). Sample interviews assisted with vetting questions, developing clear wording, and avoiding redundancy. To ensure the data from the information sessions and the final interviews are captured in a valid and reliable way, audio recording and transcription was used (Lee et al, 2015; Surrain, 2021). To ensure triangulation of data, individual surveys, transcripts, artifact reviews, and final interviews were reviewed for codes and themes related to each research question as noted in Table 7.

Table 7*Triangulation of Data Sources*

Research Question	Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3	Data Source 4
What do teachers know about the Seal of Biliteracy and how does the training session expand their knowledge?	Staff Pre-survey	Staff post-survey	Session Transcript	Exit Interview
How do ELD teachers disseminate information about the Seal of Biliteracy to ML students and families after participating in the training session and what are their recommendations for future expansion?	Staff Post- survey	Session Transcript	Materials created by the teachers, students, or families	Exit Interview

Through use of these systems, the researcher ensured the collection of authentic data that could be analyzed in a consistent manner and triangulated in accordance with the tenets of thematic analysis.

Section III

This qualitative study sought to address the problem of practice that within GSD too few current and former MLs are positioned to leverage their multilingual skills to achieve the SoBL under current processes and procedures. This problem of practice is understood through four causal factors, and addressed by three primary drivers. Casual Factor IV, detailed in Figure 3, notes the lack of opportunities for MLs, their families, and ELD educators to learn about the SoBL. Compounding this issue, MLs and their families are met with subtractive school policies, which frequently assert bilingualism is a deficit when English is not the first language.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand what elementary ELD teachers in GSD schools know about the SoBL, and how these educators can further integrate information and promotion of the SoBL into existing grade and school-level activities for MLs and their families once they are trained. This change idea connects to the third primary driver and addresses Causal Factor IV, by providing explicit opportunities for ML students and families to learn about the SoBL throughout the K-12 educational experience. This study sought to answer two inquiry questions:

1. What do teachers know about the Seal of Biliteracy and how does the training session expand their knowledge?
2. How do ELD teachers disseminate information about the Seal of Biliteracy to ML students and families after participating in the training session and what are their recommendations for future expansion?

The following section details the overall findings, relevance, implications, limitations, recommendations, and final reflection.

Findings

This qualitative study utilized the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA, Langley and Associates, 2009) Protocol to test the intervention, a one-time 90 minute training regarding the SoBL, with elementary ELD educators in GSD. In order to answer the inquiry questions, the researcher engaged in an iterative learning cycle wherein a plan was developed, initial implementation occurred, preliminary data was analyzed, and adjustments were taken to refine the intervention. This intervention was implemented with 16 ELD educators across three different elementary schools in GSD. Each elementary school was assigned to PDSA Cycle I, II, or III. After implementing the training with PDSA Cycle I participants, the researcher completed initial thematic analysis to identify opportunities to further enhance the intervention with the second and third PDSA cycles. Upon completion of the training across all three PDSA cycles, six participants, featuring at least one from each PDSA cycle, self-selected to independently implement a mini-lesson with MLs and/or their families and completed a final interview with the researcher.

After the collection of all the data from the training sessions and the final interview, the researcher utilized thematic analysis to develop initial themes through analysis of key ideas and phrases across various data resources. The analysis continued for multiple iterations until the researcher identified clear themes connected to the research questions. These themes, outlined below, address the purpose of this study to better understand what elementary school ELD educators know about the SoBL and how explicit training impacts this knowledge and how they disseminate information about the award with MLs and families.

Research Question 1: What do teachers know about the Seal of Biliteracy and how does the training session expand their knowledge?

To answer this question, the researcher identified three key themes: (1) educators had limited prior formal knowledge before the training, (2) the training expanded educators' knowledge regarding the proficiency requirements to obtain the SoBL, and (3) the training expanded educators' knowledge related to the benefits of obtaining the SoBL. These themes connect back to theory of improvement which asserts that ELD educators have the necessary background knowledge to connect with the content presented in the training and therefore build capacity among ML populations regarding the SoBL.

Theme 1: Limited Prior Formal Knowledge.

At the onset of the study, educators had very little knowledge regarding the specifics of the SoBL, but referenced enhanced cognitive, social, and economic outcomes as benefits when asked more generally about multilingualism. Most participants had questions about what the seal was and how it connected to students in elementary school. Few educators initially bridged connections between the award, and the overall benefits of speaking multiple languages. Prior to the training, the majority participants identified specific opportunities that they use routinely to promote multilingualism within their school communities. Upon completion of the training, the majority of participants reported that they were likely or highly likely to integrate one or more of the activities presented during the training into upcoming lessons or family events.

When asked on the pre-survey what they know about the SoBL prior to the training, the most common response from participants was that they had never heard of the designation. Few participants referenced high school, graduation, or multilingualism in their responses. Only one participant, Participant B5, referenced specific domains, such as reading and writing and

used the word proficiency, noting “shows that students demonstrate proficiency in 2 languages in the domains of reading and writing” (Participant B5, personal communication, November 11, 2025). Of the few that had some background knowledge, they explained that they would like to know more about the specific requirements and benefits of the SoBL. For example, on the Pre-survey, Participant B8 wrote, “I know it is something given to bilingual students when they graduate high school. I would like to know more about the benefits of obtaining this seal” (Participant B8, personal communication, November 11, 2025).

In contrast to the vague descriptions of what the SoBL entails, educators across all three PDSA cycles were able to reference the cognitive, social, and economic benefits of multilingualism in their pre-survey responses. For example, eight educators referenced the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, specifically mentioning neural plasticity, richer language and vocabulary development, and higher brain function on their pre-surveys. Six educators referenced stronger social connections. For example, Participant B9 explained that multilingual individuals can “communicate with more people and understand other cultures better” (Participant B9, personal communication, November 11, 2025). Six educators described multilingualism as a way to expand opportunities for careers and higher pay. When asked how they might explain the SoBL if asked by a student or parent, two educators leaned on this background knowledge, Participant C2 wrote, “speaking more than one language will help you get ahead in this world” (Participant C2, personal communication, December 10, 2025). Similarly, Participant B4 stated they would share the “ways being bilingual is important” (Participant B4, personal communication, November 11, 2025).

Participants, who had taught at their school-site at least one year, noted they promote multilingualism through cultural events, programs, and family engagement activities on their

pre-survey results. When prompted during the training to elaborate on the programing, transcripts revealed that participants from all three schools cited their annual hispanic heritage events, and noted translated materials and content are provided to families during other family engagement nights such as, math, literacy, or ELD nights. Participants, who were new to their school, initially struggled to identify ways the school prompted multilingualism. For example, Participant B3 stated on the pre-survey, “I honestly don't know, I've only been at this school a little over 50 days. I'm new to it all” (Participant B3, personal communication, November 11, 2025). This distinction was consistent across PDSA Cycle I and II, which both included participants in their first year at the school-site.

Upon completion of the training in PDSA Cycles II and III, nine out of the 10 participants cited that they were likely or highly likely to implement one or more of the activities presented during the training. Participant B4 noted, “given the fact that all my students are already ML, I think it is really important for them to be aware of this program and how it would benefit the students to obtain this recognition” (Participant B4, personal communication, November 11, 2025). Building on this sentiment, Participant B3 wrote, “likely, because I love encouraging my students to be the best versions of themselves that I know they can be” (Participant B3, personal communication, November 11, 2025). These comments reflect the sentiment that ELD educators previously viewed their students’ multilingualism as a benefit and, following the training, could clearly see the bridge between the SoBL and overall success for their students.

The theory of improvement asserts training elementary ELD educators on the SoBL is a foundational tenant of expanding access to the SoBL because of the alignment of their work, the frequency with which they meet with their students, and the higher levels of parental

involvement at the elementary level (Davin, 2020; Snell, 2018; Oraski et al., 2020). The pre-survey data highlights that elementary ELD educators have the necessary background knowledge pertaining to the benefits of multilingualism to initiate conversations and activities with students and families. The pre-survey results also show elementary ELD educators are already involved with the programming at the schools which focuses on promoting multilingualism. With this background knowledge and on-going participation in the events, participants quickly made connections between their existing work and the SoBL within a 90-minute training and found the content relevant to overall student success.

Theme 2: Proficiency Requirements to Obtain the SoBL.

The training session illuminated the demands of the reading and writing proficiency required to achieve the SoBL. Once participants understood the required proficiency, they were then able to better articulate the importance of early and consistent messaging regarding developing first language literacy skills throughout the K-12 experience. By the end of the training, across all three PDSA cycles, participants were largely unanimous in asserting that MLs and their families should be informed about the SoBL before they leave elementary school, and that they must continue to receive consistent messaging throughout the K-12 experience. More specifically, participants highlighted the importance of communicating with students and their families prior to exiting ELD services in fourth and fifth grade. Participants showed understanding of the distinction between students demonstrating competency in only their listening and speaking skills in their first language versus demonstrating competency across all four skill domains, including reading and writing. Educators articulated that full development of reading and writing skills in the first language is not achieved by pure osmosis of living in a multilingual environment, but rather through intentional and consistent practice and instruction.

When asked on the pre-survey when students should be informed about the SoBL, the majority of respondents stated they were not sure or did not have enough information to provide a response. Additionally, only two educators specifically referenced encouraging families to read at home with their students as a way the school promotes multilingualism on their pre-survey.

Upon the conclusion of the training, 10 respondents noted ML students and families should be informed of the SoBL in elementary grades, most notably 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade, with Participant B4 explaining that is when “students tend to exit the ELD program” (Participant B4, personal communication, November 11, 2025). Seven respondents noted as soon as possible or across grades, with Participant B7 explaining, “Early awareness gives students enough time to plan their coursework and language study to meet proficiency requirements” (Participant B7, personal communication, November 11, 2025). This evidence from the post-surveys documents educators’ growth pertaining to their understanding of the time needed to develop the proficiency required to achieve the SoBL.

In each PDSA cycle, participants were asked to reflect on what MLs may view as the pros and cons of enrolling in a world language course for their native language in middle or high school. During PDSA Cycle II participant B8, a native Spanish speaker, shared:

“Another con with the students that speak Spanish is that they are a little familiar with the language. They use it at home with their families, but they may not have had formal education. As a formal Spanish student, I know that the grammar and the syntax is very difficult. So they know the language and can speak it fluently, but it can be very intimidating for students. Oh wait a minute, I can speak Spanish, but now I'm doing subjunctivo and asked to write in the correct form” (Participant B8, personal communication, November 11, 2025).

This participant’s reflection highlights the distinction between the demands of solely speaking the language socially, and the demands of demonstrating proper grammar and syntax in a formal setting. This reflection provides evidence of the educators’ understanding of the shock

and challenges ML and former MLs face when they are not exposed to formal instruction in their first language until high school. When reflecting on why only 40% of native Spanish speaking students achieve the required score of six on the STAMP assessment by the conclusion of Spanish III, participant B8 went on to state:

“ It comes back to what I was saying before. I've seen work that our kids in 4th and 5th grade do... I could guess what said phonetically, but spelling wise those were not the letters that needed to be. So you could see a real disconnect between them knowing the language, and mind you it made perfect sense. This was not gibberish. This was an actual story and paragraph... We are not just looking at speaking and listening but also writing and reading, and they might not be exposed to either reading nor writing. Because they listen to music or talk to grandma. They don't sit down and write a letter to grandma. You get her on the phone, and you talk to her. But that does not translate to me getting the perfect score on the writing test because the skills in writing are not there” (Participant B8, personal communication, November 11, 2025).

Again, the educator provides insight that MLs often have the language and comprehension to formulate responses, but they are not provided the instruction in elementary school, nor the feedback to develop their writing skills to the level required for the STAMP assessment.

During PDSA Cycle III, participant C2 provided additional insight into how this lack of feedback may contribute to inappropriate placement of MLs in high school language classes. When looking at the same STAMP data they noted, “If they are getting the award in Spanish I, they probably shouldn't be in Spanish I” (Participant C2, personal communication, December 10, 2025). This comment captures participants’ understanding that MLs need to be aware of their own language and literacy proficiency prior to middle and high school in order to enroll in the appropriate level of classes that will adequately develop the reading and writing skills they need to demonstrate proficiency to receive the SoBL.

The theory of improvement highlights that even MLs require up to seven years of instruction to achieve the level of proficiency required (Avant, 2023; Baker, 2006). Therefore, students and families must be informed about the opportunity before the start of middle school. Local and nationwide data indicates a large population of MLs exit services in upper elementary, and therefore may not have anyone in middle or high school considering the value of the multilingual skills (SDE, 2023; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). The comparisons between pre and post-survey data highlight that through rich discussion, facilitated by the presentation of key data points, participants gained deeper understanding of the importance of early exposure to explicit opportunities for reading and writing instruction in the first language in order to empower students to have the autonomy to plan for the appropriate pathway for them to achieve the SoBL, if they desire (Borowczyk, 2020).

Theme 3: Tangible Benefits of SoBL.

The training session articulated the research-based benefits associated with obtaining the SoBL including: improved graduation rates, increased college enrollment, and increased self-efficacy. Once participants understood these benefits, educators' were better equipped to engage in discussions with the students and families with a focus on the tangible benefits of the SoBL. By the conclusion of the training, participants understood the SoBL as a valuable opportunity to counter largely negative messaging MLs and their families, particularly those who are immigrants, received pertaining to multilingualism and their education in the United States. Educators reflected that at the elementary level, this commonly shows up as MLs' families expressing concern or embarrassment that they cannot support their students with development of their English language and literacy skills at home. After learning about the benefits, participants emphasized that the benefits should be explicitly stated in the materials provided to

MLs and their families. Most notably, participants provided feedback during the training that the official GSD webpage for the SoBL failed to mention the tangible benefits of the SoBL discussed in the training.

At the onset of the training, educators referenced general cognitive, social, and economic benefits of multilingualism, but none of the participants' explicitly referenced the benefits when asked what they would say if a MLs or family members asked them about the SoBL. By the end of the training, four participants expanded their description of the benefits to specifically reference college and/or scholarships and three participants expanded their benefits to include emotional benefits, such as connection to heritage or strengthened personal identity. For example, at the onset of the study, Participant B3, a novice educator in their first year with GSD, stated they would share “A google link to what it is” if asked about the SoBL. By the end of the training, Participant B3 wrote “It [the SoBL] is an award for a student who is able to pass an exam in all four language domains that certifies them as bilingual. It is a pathway for them to get higher education, better jobs, more money, etc. and I highly encourage any and every student to try to achieve this goal” (Participant B3, personal communication, November 11, 2025). This evidence provides insight regarding educators’ growth in the ability to articulate the benefits of the SoBL.

Across pre-surveys, transcripts, and final interviews, educators in all three PDSA cycles expressed concern that students are too frequently faced with external pressures, particularly in the current political climate, to forgo their first language skills and are rarely informed of the benefits of developing literacy skills in their first language. For example, participant C2 from PDSA Cycle III shared, “I mean if you speak English and another language great. That's good for you, but that's not the message that our immigrant kids are getting. Especially right now. If

you speak Spanish, then you should go back to your country (intimating their perception of the dominant subtractive narrative) ” (Participant C2, personal communication, December 10, 2025).

None of the elementary educators reported evidence that their students openly expressed concerns, but they did note the concerns expressed by families, particularly during parent-teacher conferences, which were held during the PDSA cycles. During the pre-survey,

Participant B9 shared:

“This morning in [the] parent teacher conference, two parents apologized because they were native Spanish speakers and Spanish is their only language. They were apologetic because they could not read to their children in English at home or encourage them in their English Language acquisition ... I want parents to know that what they share is valuable and necessary as their children learn the new language” (Participant B9, personal communication, November 11, 2025).

At the conclusion of the study, educators noted the benefits of the SoBL as a clear action step to counter the subtractive language. During their final interview Participant B9 shared:

“This [the SoBL] is not intangible....This is actually something that they can grasp... some of my students were sharing... the lady was interpreting on the video. ‘Well I do that for my mom all the time. My mom's job sends her text messages in English, and I translate them into Spanish (recounting words of the student)’. Yea, you already have those skills” (Participant B9, personal communication, December 18, 2025).

Educators also highlighted the SoBL and its benefits as a way to positively engage MLs’ families. During her final interview, participant C3 shared:

“When I sit in parent-teacher conferences, the parents are willing to help their students, but they come from a thought of handicapped when it comes to helping their students with English. So if they are aware that they can work with the students at home in another language, say for reading comprehension, then they will know they can help their students” (Participant C3, personal communication, January 23, 2026).

During the training, educators reviewed the official SoBL webpage for GSD, while five participants referenced the website as a resource to provide MLs and families, several expressed feedback that the page should explicitly note the benefits. Participant A5 commented the webpage language was

“very academic focused [and] not really parent or student focused ... Here is a lot of information about what the program is, but very little on how it benefits the child. Helps them get into college would be nice.... If you are sending things home to me, I am going to be thinking about what needs immediate attention and why does this benefit my child” (Participant A5, personal communication, October 17, 2025).

During PDSA Cycle II, Participant B8 expressed a very similar sentiment when they shared, “Where could we find more information about the benefits because that would entice parents more. Because all the website says is that they are getting a medal. How do we translate what the medal is going to do” (Participant B8, personal communication, November 11, 2025). Participant feedback provides evidence of their understanding that MLs and their families need to see concrete examples of how to cultivate these skills, and how this cultivation, particularly in the current political environment, will provide an actual benefit to them. While the educators improved their own understanding of the benefits, they still wanted resources to reinforce the benefits with students and families.

The theory of improvement highlights that in order to counter the largely subtractive narrative current and former MLs receive within the K-12 experience and larger society, MLs and families need on-going consistent messaging within the school community to encourage the development of their first language and literacy skills (Davin et al., 2024; Davin, 2021). Evidence from multiple data sources, including the pre-survey, transcripts, post-surveys, and final interviews, overwhelmingly supports the argument that elementary school ELD educators are uniquely poised to engage in those conversations because of the relationships they build with families (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Snell, 2018). Participants provided valuable insight into how the vulnerabilities presented by MLs’ families during the elementary school years manifest into the insecurities reported in the research conducted with adolescent MLs struggling with anxiety when pursuing the SoBL. From the training, the educators explored the tangible benefits of the

SoBL and connected how discussions and resources for ML students and families must lead with those benefits.

Researcher Question 2: How do ELD teachers disseminate information about the Seal of Biliteracy to ML students and families after participating in the training session and what are their recommendations for future expansion?

To answer this question, the researcher identified three key themes: (1) Alignment with WIDA ACCESS Preparation, (2) Lessons Prioritizing Foundational Concepts, and (3) Streamlined Approach in the Future. These themes connect back to the theory of improvement which asserts that elementary ELD educators' work and priorities align with the smooth integration of information to ML populations regarding the SoBL.

Theme 1: Alignment with WIDA ACCESS Preparation.

All six educators, who implemented a lesson, chose to introduce the SoBL in alignment with preparation for the annual WIDA ACCESS assessment, which was scheduled for the two months immediately following the training. Most commonly, educators saw alignment between how they already emphasize the need to practice all four domains with ML students and families in order to reach proficiency targets on the WIDA ACCESS assessment. Additionally, educators saw parallels between the medals provided to students when they exit ELD services with the medals students receive when they achieve the SoBL. Finally, participants noted that in the future they plan to integrate information regarding the SoBL within the existing goal setting structure for the WIDA ACCESS.

Three of the six implementation participants chose to utilize the sample activity of having students and/or families explore ways they practice their first language and literacy skills across

the four domains. When reflecting on why they selected that activity, participant B5 stated, “[the activity] applied to getting information about the Seal of Biliteracy out to the universe of [GSD] and starting to get our families to think about preparation for WIDA [ACCESS]” (Participant B5, personal communication, December 18, 2025).

Though presented in the training as an activity for students to complete within the ELD classroom, this educator adapted the activity to meet the goals of the school’s family night. Over the course of three 25-minute rotations, over 25 families were introduced to the SoBL and provided an opportunity to reflect on how they practice the four language domains by writing their routines on chart paper. As various participants moved through the session, they also viewed the practices noted for each domain from the previous participants.

Similarly to Participant B5, Participant A3 also collaborated with the school ELD team to introduce the SoBL as part of their ELD WIDA ACCESS information night. Presentation slides from the evening state that the objectives were to “educate families about the WIDA ACCESS assessment, including its purpose,” and “inform families about the Seal of Biliteracy, highlighting its benefits and requirements for students” (Participant A3, personal communication, January 23, 2026). This evidence shows the activity presented in the training session was low-lift, versatile across contexts, and provided educators with the opportunity to integrate information about the SoBL into a previously scheduled family night.

Participant A3 viewed the SoBL video that was featured in the training with their MLs during an instructional small group. After viewing the video, Participant A3 used Sample Activity 2, where students create their own SoBL medals to demonstrate their understanding of the meaning of the award. During the final interview, Participant A3 stated

“I said if they [achieve the SoBL they] can get a medal because I am always talking to the students about the medal they will receive when they test out of ELD. Then I showed

the video and you know the video has the medal...I wanted to show you the seals that they created because it shows they have an understanding. It shows they have pride. Before we made our medals, we looked at the medals on the video. Instead of the [state] flag, they drew their Mexican, Honduran, and El Salvadorian flag” (Participant A3, personal communication, January 23, 2026).

Figure 14 provides examples of the medals created by the second grade MLs. These example medals highlight how the educator used the sample activities, and made their own explicit connections to the ELD medal and the SoBL medal to present the content in a familiar and age-appropriate way for the second grade students.

Figure 14

Sample SoBL Medals created by Second Grade Students



During the training sessions and in the final interview, educators across PDSA Cycles I and II saw alignment between the existing goal-setting process and the discussion of the SoBL with students. One participant during the training session in PDSA Cycle II noted, “We did set goals in the beginning. So you could do it [introduce the SoBL] at the beginning of the year” (Anonymous, personal communication, November 11, 2025). Participant A3 noted, “their goal is to exit ELD and then they can pursue any other kind of language goal. Realistically, I think in the beginning, the middle, during the WIDA [ACCESS] time, and then during the exit

ceremonies” (Participant A3, personal communication, January 23, 2026). These participant reflections highlight how the educators saw SoBL discussions as a tool to promote biliteracy overall and achievement on the WIDA ACCESS assessment, as well as an introduction to the idea of future language goals with students and families.

The theory of improvement recognizes that over 40% of MLs test out of services by 4th grade, yet a small percentage of these families report first language literacy skills upon enrollment (GSD, 2024c). While there are positive cognitive benefits for students’ who develop their first language literacy skills, research highlights that even native speakers require six to seven years of instruction to reach required competencies (Avant, 2023; Baker, 2006; Collier & Thomas, 2009). The participants’ implementation choices highlight how the educators viewed alignment between their primary focus of promoting English language and literacy development, as well as an opportunity to connect the SoBL to future goals and pathways for their students. Research shows information regarding first language biliteracy development must be communicated to students and families throughout the elementary school years (Avant, 2023; Davin 2020). Participants’ choice to implement during the WIDA ACCESS family nights, classroom lessons, and goal-setting conversation provide three clear examples of how the educators integrated SoBL activities while also building early awareness of the importance of developing first language literacy skills with students and families.

Theme 2: Lessons Prioritizing Foundational Concepts.

The educators created lessons that prioritized establishing a foundational understanding of the skills that are required to achieve the SoBL. All six implementation participants determined the word biliterate was critical vocabulary to establish with MLs when introducing the award. Across the PDSA cycles, educators noted their primary focus was to plant a seed

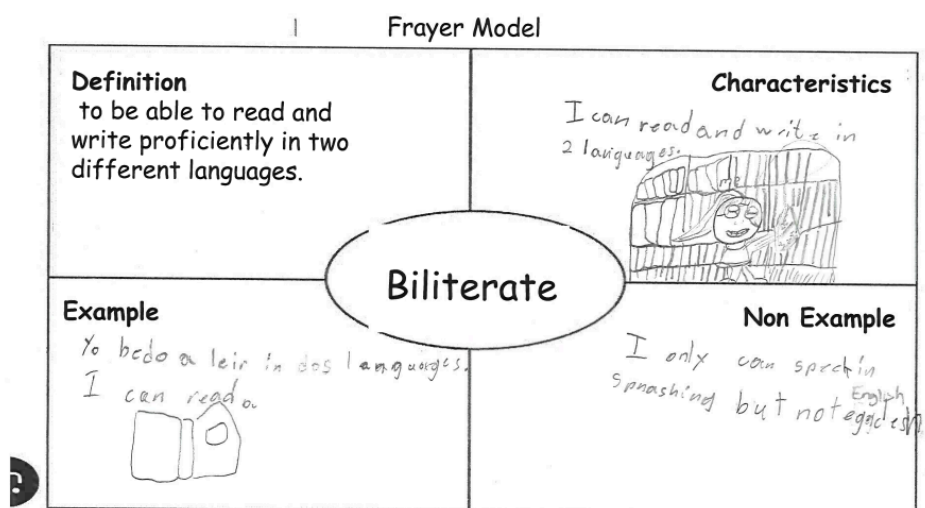
regarding the concept of biliteracy and establish foundational understanding with students that their present learning builds and contributes to future learning in middle and high school.

To deepen and assess students' understanding, educators implored different strategies such as the Frayer Model, letter writing, and timelines to conceptualize key concepts for the MLs.

The training session included three sample activities for educators to try with their students and/or families, but educators were prompted to independently plan and select any modes they deemed appropriate for their specific students for implementation. At School B, Participants B1, B6, and B9 all supported small groups of ELD students in second and third grade. These three participants collaborated to introduce the concept of biliteracy using the Frayer Model, as shown in Figure 15. During her final interview, Participant B9 explained, "We started out by asking if they [the students] have heard about literacy and then we talked about bi meaning two and we talked about what languages we speak" (Participant B9, personal communication, December 18, 2025). This explanation provides evidence regarding how the ELD educator scaffolded the concept for students by leaning on students' background knowledge in school and their general lived experience. The students used a familiar learning strategy, the Frayer Model, to apply their understanding of the new vocabulary. Figure 15 shows an example of a student who chose to complete the activity demonstrating their Spanish and English literacy skills.

Figure 15

Sample Work Sample of the Frayer Model from a 3rd Grade ML



To further apply their new knowledge, Participants B1, B6, and B9 assigned students to write letters, a structure and writing purpose students were familiar with, to family members or someone they know in high school sharing what they had learned. Participant B6 reflected that “The kids love to help each other. The students connected with the idea that their parents are learning English and they can help them” (Participant B6, personal communication, December 18, 2025). Echoing a similar sentiment, Participant B9 stated, “They [the students] really connected to the idea that they have someone in high school and they wanted to share their information with that person” (Participant B9, personal communication, December 18, 2026). This insight from educators provides evidence of how their knowledge of students enhanced the intentional planning for the lessons to aid in building students’ interest and comprehension of how the concept applies to high school and throughout life.

Similarly to the participants from School B, Participant A3 introduced the SoBL by grounding the lesson in the concept bi meaning two and also considered how to help MLs

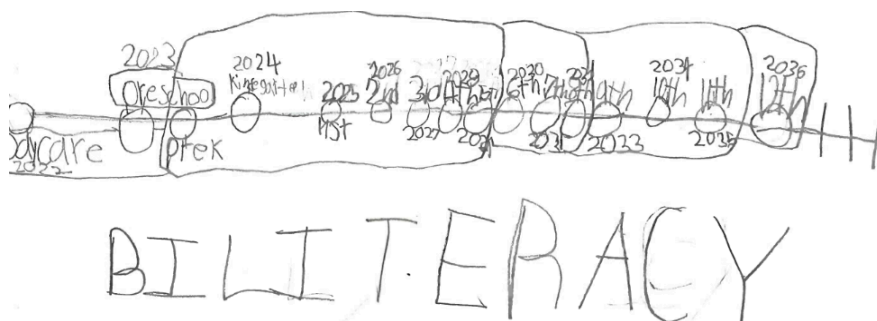
visualize what it means to be in high school. While one of the sample activities included a visual roadmap, as shown in Appendix D, for students to chart their language goals throughout the K-12, Participant A3 reflected that their second grade students needed additional support with visualization. When planning the other activities for second grade students, Participant A3 stated:

“When planning I assumed that they might have trouble with understanding the long-term goal. So I had them make a timeline where they started with daycare and preschool and mapped second grade and each grade then they could see how this would apply in high school. I think it made it easier for them to connect with the program” (Participant A3, personal communication, January 23, 2026).

To aid in student understanding, Participant A3 had students complete a timeline, as shown in Figure 16, to help students think about how much of their education they have completed thus far and how they will progress to middle and high school in the future.

Figure 16

Sample Timeline from Second Grade ML



The theory of improvement asserts that ELD educators are uniquely poised to introduce the SoBL to MLs because of the nature of their work with language development. Across the three implementation sites, educators expanded and adapted the sample activities to ensure their elementary students grasped the foundational concepts of what it means to be biliterate and how they can think about biliteracy from kindergarten to high school. To teach these concepts, the educators used strategies to make content comprehensible and age-appropriate for their

elementary students. Educators anticipated potential student misconceptions and planned lessons that facilitated elementary students' understanding of what skills they would need to develop to achieve the SoBL and when they would be achieving the award.

Theme 3: Streamlined Approach in the Future.

Throughout the training and final interviews, educators thoughtfully shared ideas for future opportunities to promote greater awareness of the SoBL in GSD. As educators expressed these ideas, they noted the importance of streamlined communication across the district to ensure continuity and equity. First, educators reflected that future SoBL lessons should build sequentially as students progress through their K-12 experience. Additionally, educators expressed interest in microcredentials that ML students could earn in elementary school to establish a baseline understanding of their proficiency. Finally, educators shared a need for more promotion that focused on clearly illustrating the powerful influence that ML families play in helping ML students achieve this award. Across these recommendations, there was a central theme that any recommendations be implemented across the district for a unified message.

PDSA Cycle II participants suggested using the district's approach to the National Board Certification (NBCT) as a model to replicate to further develop awareness of the SoBL in GSD. With the financial support of the State Blueprint, GSD has implemented robust NBCT candidate training that has raised the standard for educator professional development in GSD. Participants reflected on the power of how a district-wide vision and programming has resulted in successfully building awareness and obtainment for NBCT, and suggested that following a similar model in GSD may be helpful for improving outcomes for the SoBL.

Educators in PDSA Cycle II also recommended a series of lessons that builds on concepts as students matriculate through the grades. Participant B9 shared "I definitely feel like this is

something I could make a plan around for heavy scaffolding, medium scaffolding, and light scaffolding. I would not do this for just 30 minutes but I would build on it” (Participant B9, personal communication, December 18, 2025). With this model, students would reduce scaffolding to support the lessons in alignment with their current English language proficiency levels. Another member in PDSA Cycle II further built on the idea by sharing, “I think they need it every year as a reminder to reset... but as they get older they can continue to make connections to their present career goals. For example in 5th grade, middle school, and high school” (Participant B6, personal communication, December 18, 2025). These ideas reflect how educators' prioritized recommendations that sequentially build as MLs' linguistic and developmental milestones. With a clear district vision, as with NBCT, and these sequential steps, participants felt the district could achieve greater promotion and achievement for SoBL.

During PDSA Cycle III, participants inquired about the availability of an age-appropriate assessment that could be administered to students in upper elementary grades. When reflecting on how ML students might use that data, Participant C2 shared “You could get so much buy-in from the kids if there was not necessarily an official credential, but some kind of lead in that could be used at the elementary level. And if you moved between schools, it was consistent across elementary schools. You could call it [the micro credential] multilingual scholars” (Participant C2, personal communication, December 10, 2025). This evidence suggests participants' recommendation for the future pathways to provide students, families, and educators with meaningful data regarding students' progress with their first language literacy development. Additionally, the educators' recognize the importance of maintaining continuity across schools so that all MLs build the momentum towards their ultimate obtainment of the SoBL.

Finally, across PDSA cycles, participants reflected on the power of building a central message for ML families that they are central figures in promoting students' achievement of the SoBL. While all implementation participants chose to use the SoBL promotional video because it was created by the ELD office, they provided feedback that it could have incorporated more images of familial support. When reflecting on why they shared the video with students, Participant A3 noted

“I hoped they [the elementary students] could see themselves in the students [featured in the video]. It would be good for the parents to also see how they help at home. For example, they see a picture of a parent reading at home. So they see it is not just what we do with biliteracy at school but also at home” (Participant A3, personal communication, January 23, 2026).

Along with the video, several participants expressed that they would like print materials that were translated that could be shared with families. Educators iterated the importance of materials emphasizing “we can take it to the next level and you [families] are the key to making sure they get to that next level” (Participant B5, personal communication, December 18, 2025). Across the PDSA cycles, educators stated they would direct families to the GSD SoBL webpage and ELD office for more information. These suggestions highlight educators' recommendations to review central materials to ensure messaging directly towards families.

In alignment with the theory of change, ELD elementary educators have the power to lay a foundation for MLs that is age-appropriate, linguistically appropriate, and culturally and economically relevant to families. Without prompting, educators suggested a need for future implementation of benchmark proficiency assessments, such the STAMP4se, which are intended to provide primarily proficiency levels for students 12 and below (Avant, 2024). Additionally, they recognized existing programming, such as that for NBCT, that has effectively championed a

message and inspired change. Finally, their insight from partnering with families provided direct and actionable next steps to refine the quality of digital and print materials.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand what elementary ELD teachers in GSD schools know about the SoBL, and how these educators can further integrate information and promotion of the SoBL into existing grade and school-level activities for MLs and their families once they are trained.

The first research question sought to address what teachers know about the Seal of Biliteracy and how the training session expanded their knowledge. Analysis of data, from the onset of the study, found educators had limited prior formal knowledge about the SoBL before the training but were able to broadly reference the cognitive, social, and economic benefits of multilingualism. As a result of the training, educators expanded their knowledge regarding the proficiency requirements to obtain the SoBL. Specifically, educators were able to more clearly articulate the importance of developing reading and writing skills throughout the K-12 experience. Educators also expanded their knowledge on the benefits of obtaining the SoBL, and emphasized the importance of communicating the tangible benefits to MLs and their families as a counter to the dominant subtractive messaging pertaining to multilingualism and biliteracy.

The second question sought to answer how ELD teachers disseminate information about the SoBL to MLs and their families after participating in the training session and their recommendations for future expansion. Analysis of data from the six educators, who implemented the lessons, found educators chose to introduce the SoBL to elementary ML students and families in alignment with existing classroom and familial activities focused on WIDA ACCESS assessment preparation. Additionally, educators prioritized implementing

lessons that developed elementary students' understanding of foundational concepts, like the meaning of the word biliterate. Educators used their knowledge of language development and knowledge of the students' developmental levels to select instructional strategies, like the Frayer Model, to build students' understanding. Finally, when asked to provide recommendations for how the GSD district can improve SoBL obtainment outcomes for MLs, participants recommended the need for a clear and consistent approach across the district. Referencing the district's approach to the NBCT process, educators suggested annual lessons with sequential objectives that are vertically planned as students' matriculate through grades. Participants also suggested future implementation of pathway assessments (e.g., STAMP4se) to build momentum and provide ML students with a benchmark for their progress of first language literacy development.

Relevance of the Study

The findings from this study are relevant for addressing the localized problem of practice, as well as the greater need for more research focused on specific interventions that increase SoBL awareness and achievement, particularly at the elementary level. The findings from both research questions in this study align with the assertion from the theory of change that states elementary ELD educators have the necessary language development expertise and the relationship with MLs and their families to build awareness about SoBL at the elementary level. All of the participants reported alignment with their current work, and an overwhelming majority stated they were highly likely to implement activities with their students. Most notably, participants viewed the SoBL as a way to enhance their support for students' short and long-term language goals. Immediately following the training, participants demonstrated increased understanding regarding the proficiency requirements to obtain the SoBL and the tangible

benefits for why this award is meaningful for MLs and families. These findings support the assertion that elementary ELD educators have the inclination and capacity to clearly articulate the value of the SoBL and what steps are needed to achieve the award.

Participants' use and expansion of the sample activities provide keen insights into how GSD can effectively scale this intervention. Educators observed alignment between SoBL activities and goal-setting conversations with students that occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Additionally, educators noted alignment with annual events for families, such as cultural celebrations, WIDA ACCESS information nights, and end of year award ceremonies. These observations provide a clear, sustainable, and low-cost way for GSD to disseminate on-going information about the SoBL to students and families.

Beyond relevance in GSD district, this study is only the second known SoBL study that includes elementary educators, students, and families at the time of completion. While the first study, including elementary schools, notes the implementation of pathway assessments and recognition during awards ceremonies across schools in Chicago, the present study builds on those findings by identifying the specific take-aways educators gained from the training and specific strategies educators chose to develop students' understanding. Within the month immediately following the completion of this study, a newly released book, written by leading SoBL researchers, will focus on establishing pathways for the SoBL in elementary and middle school (Heineke & Davin, 2026). While the timing did not allow for incorporation of those findings into the present study, the topic alignment further reiterates the importance of studying SoBL awareness within the elementary context.

Implications

Several key short-term, intermediate, and long-term implications are concluded based on the findings of this study. These implications range from expanding training efforts with elementary ELD teachers to implementing pathways assessments in elementary schools for MLs to benchmark their progress. These implications build sequentially to gradually scale the district to reach the AIM Statement of increasing the annual number of SoBL recipients to 1,400, comprising at least 30% of MLs who graduate, and nearly 20% of graduates overall. Obtainment of such percentages of the graduating classes would close the gap between the current disparity between GSD and RSD.

Short-Term Implications

First, the SoBL promotional video, created by the GSD ELD Department and featured in this intervention, should be added to the official SoBL webpage for GSD. All six implementation participants chose to use the video with students and families because they found the messaging was clear and relatable for MLs and families. Therefore, adding the video to the official SoBL webpage is the first short-term recommendation to maximize the utilization of this current resource and to address participants' concern that the current information featured on the webpage is not student or family friendly.

In preparation for the SY26-27 School Year, the second short-term recommendation is to provide the 90-minute training to the five elementary ELD coaches and two elementary instructional specialists that support the 119 elementary schools in GSD. These individuals are responsible for the development of ELD curriculum in GSD and facilitate the majority of training for elementary ELD educators in the district. The ELD coaches are the target audience to

deliver the training to ELD educators because they have the content knowledge and the existing relationships with the ELD school teams. This includes knowledge of student demographics, scheduling models, and school-based events held at the school. Additionally, they are content experts to create or modify additional instructional materials or units about bilingualism and biliteracy in the future. Upon completion of the training, the district instructional team should plan the 90-minute training for elementary ELD school teams during the pre-service training week. Data from the training and the implementation activities highlighted the 90-minute training's effectiveness to refine educators' knowledge of the content and how to implement the sample activities. Pre-service week is an optimal time for educators to consider how to integrate the information throughout the school year. Required training with the entire ELD school team is the recommended format to ensure educators have the opportunity to discuss an implementation plan specific to their school contexts. As findings from the intervention highlighted, even novice teachers benefited from hearing the annual events held at their school that promote bilingualism. Given that the sample materials are already created, this is a low-lift way to reach elementary ELD educators across all elementary schools.

As an on-going reference for ELD educators, the facilitators should record a virtual, asynchronous version of the training for elementary school educators to reference independently. As more elementary ELD educators begin to integrate the activities and lessons in their schools, a feedback tool, such as a survey, is recommended to gather additional feedback and examples of other implementation activities designed by educators. Since the elementary ELD instructional team already has current systems in place to collect feedback and samples of educators' materials, collecting feedback will not involve significant time or cost to establish and monitor (GSD, 2025). Collecting feedback and examples from educators in the localized context builds

the repository of resources for educators to utilize in the future, and fulfills the original intent of the SoBL as a collaborative advocacy effort to promote bilingualism and biliteracy in the school system.

Intermediate Implications

Once GSD builds capacity with their elementary ELD educators, intermediate steps, recommended to occur in the next two to three school years, include training opportunities for other relevant support staff in elementary schools, such as community schools coordinators, school counselors, and administrators. In order to maximize collaboration across workstreams and supports, it is important that all relevant parties that work to plan and host family and community events are aware of the value and proficiency required to achieve the SoBL. Once students and families are informed about the benefits of the award and the benefits of developing biliteracy, it is important all school staff, like counselors and community schools coordinators, are working to expand access to resources that develop the necessary first language reading and writing skills through school-based and community mechanisms. This may include after-school programming, establishing world language classes during the school day, or collaborating with local partners that offer first language literacy development services for students.

Training middle school ELD teachers, high school ELD educators, and secondary school counselors on the SoBL is a second recommended intermediate step to further develop the role for ELD students and families in the SoBL pipeline, as noted in Causal Factor IV. Such training would continue to build ML students and families' understanding as they matriculate through middle school into high school. Prior to this training, GSD should review sample activities and adapt the materials to ensure the content is developmentally appropriate for middle school students. Additional research is needed regarding how frequently middle school counselors meet

their students in GSD. Once the structure of their advising is known, an implementation plan for middle school counselors should be developed in alignment with the current advising structure.

Long-Term Implications

Finally, once GSD has implemented foundational training for elementary ELD educators, community schools coordinators, and counselors, and once access to first language literacy supports are implemented, as noted in the intermediate implementations, long-term implications include the establishment of elementary pathway assessments and micro-credentials, like the one recommended by this study's participants. These final steps would further legitimize and celebrate the biliteracy of elementary ML students, and better inform counselors supporting these students in middle school and ultimately high-schools. As more current and former MLs enter middle and high schools with higher proficiency levels of first language literacy skills, it is expected that middle and high schools would need to allocate more instructional periods to higher level language classes and courses specifically for heritage speakers. Therefore, it is important that middle and high school counselors are aware of students' proficiency levels to facilitate not only placement in language courses that meet students' current proficiency levels.

Beyond the realization of the complete advocacy pathway in traditional ELD programs, as outlined in Casual Factor IV, this intervention lays the foundation to address three other causal factors specified in the Fishbone Diagram. As more shareholders, such as MLs, their families, educators, and school staff, are informed about the direct benefits of the SoBL, there will be increased accountability to address Causal Factor II through streamlined testing procedures across GSD, and expanded access to test licenses. Additionally, as more students seek to obtain the SoBL and reference the award in their college application, there will be greater awareness about the importance of ensuring college credit is granted in the state for award recipients;

addressing Causal Factor I. Finally, more informed shareholders will result in increased advocacy for bilingual and immersion programs; addressing Causal Factor III. Ultimately, if GSD seeks to promote biliteracy and overall educational outcomes for MLs, investing in these programs is the most effective way to serve MLs (Collier & Thomas, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

Delays in securing permission from principals to recruit for the study shortened the timeline for research. Additionally, two of the three schools in the study had already established objectives for their professional development, and were unable to identify dates for the full team of ELD educators to participate in the training. As a result of the permission and scheduling delays, PDSA cycles did not begin until October. Therefore, educators were not offered the opportunity to introduce information about the SoBL to students and families during Hispanic Heritage events that were scheduled for September. Additionally, since the PDSA cycles are only intended to span several weeks, the researcher was not able to capture any data regarding SoBL integration during end of year awards/promotion ceremonies. Finally, implementation activities for the study were scheduled based on the participant and school availability, and the implementations across the three cycles were not sequential. Therefore, the researcher was not able to include teacher-created materials or insight from final interviews with participants from the first PDSA cycle into the training with the second and third PDSA cycles, as originally intended.

Recommendations for Future Work

Future studies are recommended to monitor the on-going progress to establish each tenant of the aforementioned implications. Just as the present study piloted the training and sample

activities with the elementary ELD educators, a future pilot study is recommended for subsequent training on the SoBL with support staff like elementary and middle school counselors and community schools coordinators. Additionally, implementing pilot interventions with middle and high school ELD teachers is also recommended prior to full implementation. Feedback from participants in the current study provided keen insight regarding recommendations for how to implement SoBL promotional activities in alignment with current goal-setting structures during the beginning, middle and end of the school year. Conducting future pilot studies with each support staff group is a critical step to gathering feedback regarding the alignment and feasibility of future SoBL activities implemented by these support staff groups. Incorporating feedback from each support staff group is a meaningful way to build buy-in, maximize utility, and ensure the sustainability of future SoBL promotion.

As schools expand access to resources that develop the necessary first language reading and writing skills through school-based and community mechanisms such as, after-school programming, world language classes, or initiatives with local partners, more in-depth studies are recommended to track the impact these supports have on improving first language literacy proficiency rates with elementary students. Such studies would be easiest to implement once schools adopt standard measures to monitor benchmark proficiency growth, like the Stamp 4se assessment. Comparing the cost and impact of the different models adopted by schools can provide valuable insight regarding which models have the greatest impact on improving first language literacy rates. Reviewing proficiency data across elementary schools and feeder patterns is an essential step to informing which sequences of language courses would be most appropriate in the middle and high schools based on the proficiency scores of the incoming students. Finally, as more elementary MLs participate in SoBL activities and matriculate into

upper middle grades and high school, long-term studies are needed to track how these supports inform students' decision to pursue the SoBL.

Final Reflections

Expanding equitable access to the SoBL for all MLs in GSD is in alignment with the organization's mission to create an inclusive and empowering system that nurtures all students to reach their full academic and holistic potential (GSD, 2021c). Empowering more MLs with timely access to information and the resources needed to demonstrate the proficiency required to obtain the SoBL is a critical opportunity to actualize the district's student learner profile by developing global citizens, clear communicators, problem solvers, critical thinkers, and creators with a clear goal-oriented outlook (GSD, 2021c). When MLs leverage their full linguistic capital, as promoted by the SoBL, they are stronger problem solvers, communicators, and global citizens (Collier & Thomas, 2009). Given that research shows even MLs require years of sequential learning sequence to develop their first language literacy skills, large-scale implementation of the intervention in the present study is an essential piece of achieving the AIM statement by 2033 (Avant 2023; Davin 2020). The present study identified a clear and easily replicable intervention for elementary ELD educators to establish the foundation of what it means to be biliterate and why it is meaningful to thousands of MLs and their families in GSD. Large-scale implementation supports the materialization of the intended spirit of the SoBL to promote MLs' linguistic assets, while simultaneously advancing the district's overall goals of excellence and equity.

Appendix A



July 30, 2024

Dear Parents and Guardians of Immersion Eighth Graders;

As you are aware, all eighth grade students' reading comprehension, writing, speaking and listening skills in their Immersion language were evaluated earlier this year using the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency test (STAMP).

The final results of this test are used to determine each student's placement level for school world language classes and may be used to determine qualification of the Seal of Biliteracy recognition. The Seal of Biliteracy requires that students attain Intermediate High (6) composite score. Students also need to pass the 10 English Language Arts requirement and graduate from [redacted]

Student Name:

Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking
6	6	6	6
Composite Score		6	
Recommended HS World Language Level		5	
Pre-Qualified for Seal of Biliteracy		Yes	

Please keep a copy of this letter to help your child register for the correct level of world language when entering high school and for your child to apply for the Seal of Biliteracy, if qualified, on his/her high school diploma.

Sincerely,

Appendix B

Pre-survey Questions (digitally administered)

Demographic questions

1. Name
2. Please select the number of years of teaching experience? (0-3, 4-6, 7-10, More than 10 years)
3. Please select the number of years as an ELD Teacher? (0-3, 4-6, 7-10, More than 10)
4. Please select your ELD certification status (Certified, Conditional)
5. Do you speak any other languages other than English? If so, what languages?

Other questions:

1. What do you know and what would you like to know about the SoBL?
2. What do you think are the benefits of multilingualism/bilingualism?
3. If one of your students or their family members were to ask you about the SoBL, what information would you share with them?
4. Can you describe some of the ways your school promotes the benefits of multilingualism?
5. When should students and families be informed about the Seal of Biliteracy? Please explain your answer.

Appendix C

Post-survey questions (Digitally administered)

1. What do you know and what would you like to know about the SoBL?
2. What do you think are the benefits of multilingualism/bilingualism?
3. If one of your students or their family members were to ask you about the SoBL, what information would you share with them?
4. Can you describe some of the ways your school promotes the benefits of multilingualism?
5. When should students and families be informed about the Seal of Biliteracy? Please explain your answer.

Added After PDSA Cycle 1:

6. How likely are you to implement an activity with students or families regarding the Seal of Biliteracy? Please explain your answer.

Appendix D

Sample SoBL Activities in Training

Activity 1: Students work in groups or pairs to brainstorm routine activities they current do in their everyday lives that develop the four language domains in their first language

Template provide:

 Reading	 Writing
 Listening	 Speaking

Activity 2: Students design their own SoBL award that illustrates why being biliterate is important to them (Davin & Heineke, 2022a).

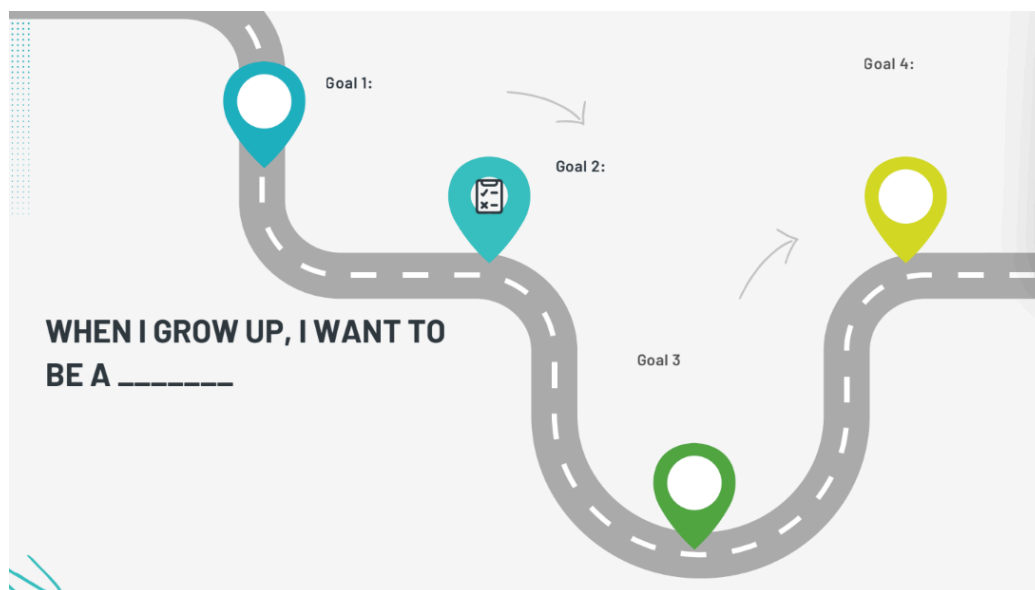
Template provided:



Appendix D (Continued)

Activity 3: Students think about what they want to be when they grow up and backwards map how to build their biliteracy skills to meet their goal

Template Provided:



Appendix E

Interview Questions

Semi-structured Interview Questions (Face-to-Face virtually or in-person).

1. Describe the activity/activities you completed with your students to enhance their knowledge about the Seal of Biliteracy.
2. Reflect on your lesson or activity related to the Seal of Biliteracy, what were some strengths and challenges you faced with the lesson?
3. What do you believe the students/families took away from the lesson?
4. What questions, if any, did the students/families have after the lesson?
5. How do you envision integrating information about the Seal of Biliteracy into future classroom practices and routines?
6. What opportunities do you see for integrating information about the Seal of Biliteracy into school-wide practices and routines?
7. Based on your knowledge about the Seal of Biliteracy, what changes or advancements do you think the district could make to improve the outcomes for ML students?

Question added as a follow-up to questions five and six after the first interview was completed:

8. What additional resources would help with implementation?

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