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Promising Practices from the Field

Academic Preparation for Success in the DLBE Classroom: Project SEMBRAR Provides a Grow-Your-Own Bilingual Educator Pathway

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Project SEMBRAR (Sustaining Equity through Mentorship for Bilingual Teacher Recruitment and Retention) is a five-year (2024-2029), collaborative initiative led by Dual Language Education of New Mexico (DLeNM) and the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education (MABE) with support from Educators for a Multilingual Multicultural America (EMMA™), with the goal of creating a Grow-Your-Own (GYO) pathway for expanding



The New Mexico team of faculty and mentor leaders met on the campus of New Mexico Highlands University.

the dual language bilingual educator (DLBE) workforce in two areas of the country: New Mexico and New England. With initial financial support from a federal National Professional Development grant, the hope is that the U.S. Congress will approve funding for the remainder of the initiative.

The Project SEMBRAR model is built on targeted mentorship and professional development for preservice and inservice DLBE teachers and draws from the expertise and experience captured in the National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation

or EMMA Standards (em mastandards.org). Expanding the number of quality DLBE educators available to dual language programs across the United States will allow schools and districts to more justly serve

a “growing and vibrant population of [multilingual] students so they can reach their potential and thrive” (U.S. DOE, 2023).

Project SEMBRAR is

focused on three primary goals:

1. Teacher recruitment – with the focus on first-generation and/or low-income preservice or working bilingual teachers.
2. Targeted DLBE professional learning - that aligns with the National Dual Language Education Teaching Preparation or EMMA Standards (NDLETPS).
3. Teacher collaboration and retention - to build local and regional capacity within participating districts to train and retain qualified DLBE teachers.

Bridging academic preparation for success in the DLBE classroom

There are many strong educator preparation

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programs found in universities across the United States that offer high-quality coursework. Often, experienced teachers who are willing to support new teachers in dual language bilingual education programs are identified as mentors. However, there is little consistency across these programs in the competencies being developed for future educators. While the EMMA Standards provide “a sound framework of standards, anchored in relevant theory, to support” and guide DLBE teachers toward more effective professional practices” (emmastandards.org), Project SEMBRAR views university teacher preparation as only a part of the “teacher pathway”. The most committed schools/school districts ensure that newly certified teachers have a clear pathway to being recruited and received into a professional community that ensures continual professional learning through relationship building with colleagues, and access to the expertise and commitment of seasoned educators—often referred to as a community of practice (CoP). The Project SEMBRAR Grow-Your-Own model and pathway provides preservice teachers a community of practice in the district and school where they will accept their first assignment as a dual language bilingual educator.

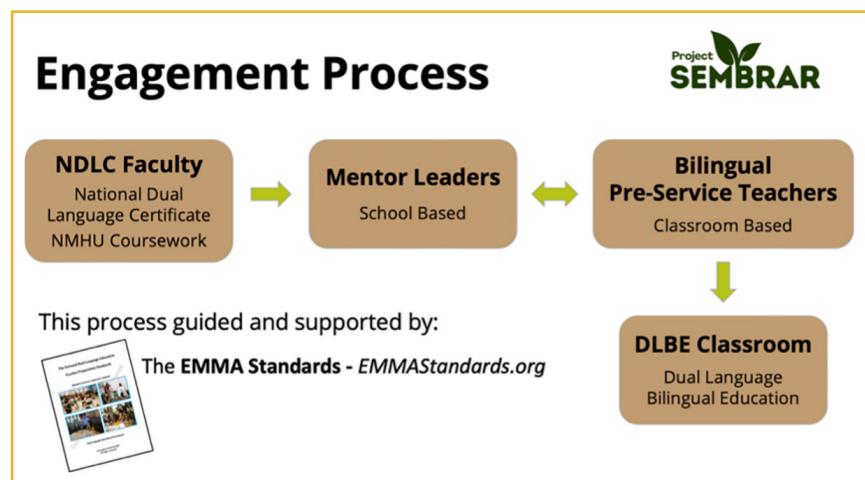
The Grow-Your-Own Model

Project SEMBRAR has identified and recruited participants for its Grow-Your-Own model from identified school communities, as there are unquestionable advantages to preparing educators who know the community and are familiar with its needs and goals. Educators from the community often have the same cultural and linguistic profile as the younger members and are committed to preserving and improving the quality of life for their neighbors.

Participating educators must be attending or have attended teacher preparation programs that are built on a foundation of relevant theory and high-quality competencies like the EMMA Standards. They may be licensed teachers working toward their bilingual endorsement and/or completing their language proficiency requirements, education majors completing their licensing credential, or

student teachers beginning their field experience. Candidates will be welcomed into a CoP where they will receive targeted mentoring from identified seasoned bilingual teachers from their district and/or school who are committed to dual language bilingual education and are willing to share their knowledge and expertise with them.

The model looks like this:



Cohort #1 - 2025-2026

Project SEMBRAR's first cohort is made up of 114 mentor leaders and bilingual preservice teachers from 14 school districts in Northern New Mexico, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. 68% of Cohort #1's bilingual preservice teachers are first-generation university attendees, with 81% self-reporting as being from a lower socioeconomic community. This not only meets Project SEMBRAR's specific goal of having at least 50% of its participants as first-generation university students and/or coming from a lower socioeconomic background, it ensures the development of a richly diverse group of effective teachers.

In June of 2025, mentor leaders and bilingual preservice teachers from Cohort #1 gathered to participate in a Jump-Start Orientation with Project SEMBRAR grant team members, including National Dual Language Consortium Faculty and Project Coordinators. One meeting was held in Las Vegas, NM at the New Mexico Highlands University Campus for participants from Bernalillo, Santa Fe, Las Vegas, and Chama Valley. A second meeting was held in Sturbridge, MA where participants from the New England



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gathered. Project faculty and identified mentor leaders met for two full days, while preservice teacher candidates joined for the last half of the second day.

The agenda for the Jump Start Orientation included opportunities to:

- ❖ meet participating faculty and mentor leaders and work together.
- ❖ explore high-quality professional learning through mentorship models, including the specific needs of various educator roles (i.e., paraeducators, permanent substitutes, classroom teachers, ancillary staff, etc.).
- ❖ learn approaches to professional learning appropriate to CoP for which the mentor leaders will be responsible.
- ❖ familiarize themselves with the six modules of the EMMA Standards and the on-line platform where mentor leaders will learn the content and access module resources for CoP sessions and mentoring.
- ❖ meet their preservice teacher candidates, get to know each other, and begin organizing their future CoP sessions.

Feedback was gathered from key stakeholders.

From faculty members:

...The modules [grounded in the EMMA Standards] offer practical, research-based strategies that bilingual preservice teacher and instructional coaches can directly implement in their classroom...

From representatives of participating school districts:

Having opportunities for preservice teachers to develop understanding of DL will be a huge benefit for DL programs. Currently, most teachers leave their teacher prep program with minimal to no understanding of dual language or even bilingual education, which means they

have a much larger amount to learn their first year than other teachers who are in an English-only classroom. They need to manage all the challenges of being a first-year teacher while also learning about DL instructional practices and bilingual pedagogy.

From mentor leaders:

Whenever teachers feel supported and encouraged to pursue further certification, given the chance, they will. Inservice teachers and preservice teachers need support and guidance throughout different stages of their career. Project SEMBRAR does that.

Teacher participants will be surveyed mid-school year for their feedback. Feedback from the various role groups involved in the initiative will inform the work moving forward. The hope is that over the course of this initiative, Project SEMBRAR will serve a total of 80 mentor leaders who will provide support to 400 bilingual preservice teachers working to complete their teacher licensure program and/or bilingual credential.

It is the sincere hope of everyone involved in Project SEMBRAR that the federal grant supporting this work will be fully funded by the U.S. Congress, as was intended in 2023. With the appropriate financial support, this work will significantly help to improve teacher preparation programs and establish GYO pathways for dual language bilingual educators across our country.



Participants from the New England states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut met in Sturbridge, MA.

