

# Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners Administrator Brief



THE  
MCKNIGHT  
FOUNDATION



This brief was generated and synthesized by Dina Castro, Ph.D., Eugene Garcia, Ph.D., and Amy Markos, Ph.D. from the papers commissioned for the National Research Summit on Early Care and Education for Dual Language Learners.

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## Introduction

Millions of young children are acquiring more than one language in the home, community and early care and education (ECE) settings. The population of young children from immigrant and refugee families in the U.S. rose from 14 percent in 1990 to 25 percent in 2013. Nationally, close to one third of preschoolers ages three to five in Head Start live in homes where a language other than English is spoken. These children, between the ages of 0-5 who are exposed to and use more than one language, are identified as dual language learners (DLL). With the growing number of DLLs in ECE, preschool Directors play a key role in supporting the educational, linguistic and socioemotional outcomes for this diverse population of young learners.

## Supporting Teachers of DLLs

ECE Directors play an important role in supporting teacher competencies for effectively teaching DLLs. Directors allocate resources (time and money) for ongoing

professional development and choose the content of in-service education and training (opportunities that take place while teachers are working with children) for teachers. Typically, national accreditation or certification organizations focus on five core areas in the development of effective early educators: (1) knowledge of child development and learning including knowledge of specific content areas, (2) the ability to build positive family and community relationships, (3) the capacity for meaningful observation and assessment of young children, (4) the ability to understand and use positive relationships with children and families, and (5) the ability to conduct themselves as members of a profession. Yet, in order to help DLLs reach similar gains in English as their monolingual English-speaking peers, teaching DLLs requires additional support and pedagogical accommodations beyond what is often thought of as “effective teaching.”

Therefore, when ECE environments include DLLs, directors must ensure educator competencies go beyond the five core areas to include:

- knowledge of language development;

- knowledge of the relationship between language and culture;
- skills and abilities to effectively teach DLLs;
- skills and abilities to use assessments in appropriate and meaningful ways for DLLs; and
- knowledge of how to work with linguistically and culturally diverse families.

Furthermore, since a teacher's competency interacts with their personal attributes, ECE Directors must consider a teacher's background characteristics when developing a teacher's competency to work with DLLs. For personal attributes, Directors can consider:

- a teacher's language capability: is the teacher a monolingual English speaker, a bilingual speaker of English and a child's home language, or bi-literate in English and a child's home language;
- a teacher's acculturative status: is the teacher mono-cultural, meaning she comes from a US mainstream perspective, or is she bicultural, meaning she shares socialization experiences from US mainstream culture and another culture; and
- a teacher's years of experience in working with DLLs.



With an emphasis on a teacher's attributes partnered with their competencies specific to the effective teaching of DLLs, Directors can move away from a "one-size fits all" model of in-service education to create professional development opportunities that address and build upon the particular experiences and knowledge of their specific teachers.

Along with in-service opportunities geared towards teachers' knowledge and experiences, many Directors focus on mentoring or coaching opportunities as a method to individualize ongoing teacher development. Although research on the effects of coaching in improving teacher practices holds promise, its use with teachers serving DLLs requires further scrutiny. When using coaching or mentoring to develop teachers' competencies specific to DLLs, Directors must consider:

- What are the qualifications of coaches who assist teachers in understanding DLLs? Do they have the necessary competencies specific to DLLs: knowledge of language development and the relationship between culture and language and skills to

effectively teach DLLs and use assessment appropriately for DLL.

- What types of experiences do coaches have with biliteracy, bilingualism, and biculturalism? What is their experience working in environments populated by DLLs?
- What are coaches' attitudes and beliefs regarding multiculturalism, bilingualism and DLLs? Are a coach's attitudes and beliefs in sync with the teachers they assist?

Finally, in order to support teachers in developing their competencies for effectively teaching DLLs, Directors themselves should also possess the knowledge, experiences and attitudes described above or be willing to seek them out, alongside of their teachers.

### Resources

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Zepeda, M. (October, 2014). *Human resource support for those serving young dual language learners.*

### Additional Resources

Garcia, E. E. & Markos, A. (2015). Early childhood education and dual language learners. In W. E. Wright, S. Boun, & O. Garcia (Eds.) *Handbook of Bilingual and Multilingual Education*. Wiley Blackwell.

Scanlan, M., & López, F. (2012). ¡Vamos! How school leaders promote equity and excellence for culturally and linguistically diverse students. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48, 583-625.

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### National Research Summit on the Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners

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# Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners

## Parent Brief



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## Introduction

*“No quiero niños en inglés nunca más!” [I do not want children in English ever again!].” This is what Enrique told his mother crying when she picked him up from his first day at an English only preschool. Enrique did not know any English, his only language until that day had been Spanish. A talkative, happy four year-old turned into a shy, quiet child throughout his elementary school years. Although, he eventually learned to communicate in English, he did not have friends and felt that he did not fit in when interacting with other children.*

Being in an environment in which no one speaks their language and where they perceive, or are explicitly told, that their home language should not be spoken, can be a traumatic experience for young children that can leave a mark on their self-esteem and motivation for learning. Discussions about ECE for young DLLs rarely include the socio-emotional aspects of the experience of learning a second language in a monolingual environment. Moreover, young children who are DLLs are also learning about the values, beliefs and behaviors associated with the language of schooling. They have to learn how to live between two cultures. These are complex processes and children need supportive environments at school and at home to successfully adapt to the new situation.

In this brief we provide information for parents of DLLs to help parents make informed decisions when choosing an ECE program for their children. We discuss the characteristics they should look for in an ECE program to ensure that their children have a high quality ECE experience, one that provides a positive and supportive socio-emotional climate while promoting children’s development and learning.

## What is High Quality Early Education?

Early education should provide all children the opportunity to develop to their potential; to do that ECE needs to offer activities that take into consideration children’s characteristics and cultural experiences. This is important because learning happens when children can participate in activities that are meaningful to them; when activities are related to what children already know. For children who are DLLs, this means that ECE should support development in

children's two languages and develop curriculum that reflects children's cultural experiences. The reason is that children growing up with two languages think and learn using their two languages. They learn things at home, they learn things at the school and they learn things wherever they go in the community. When ECE programs force DLLs to use only one language, the language of schooling, children begin to lose abilities in their first language. As a consequence, without the foundational support from their first language, the process of learning a second language may be more difficult; this may in turn affect children's learning of content knowledge, and they may fall behind.

### Bilingual Development in the Early Years

Some DLLs have families in which everyone speaks a language that is not English, and thus, they begin learning English in an ECE program. Other DLLs learn two languages at the same time from birth or soon after. In both cases, there will be a need to support the development of a DLL's two languages. Recent research has increased our knowledge about how bilingualism influences children's development. We know from research that:



- The development of DLLs is different from monolinguals' development. Their brain functions in a different way because they are learning with their two languages.
- Young children have the capacity to learn more than one language, it does not confuse them or hinder English language development.
- Bilingualism has no inherent negative consequences for children's development. To the contrary, it may benefit young children, cognitively, linguistically, and socially.
- Strong language skills in the first language will facilitate English language development for DLLs.
- Early exposure and use of a language is necessary to develop that language. Thus, if DLLs reduce or stop speaking in their home language they will lose it, and with that the possibility of being bilingual.
- DLL children in bilingual programs typically score higher on tests of English than do DLLs in English-only programs.

### What Does This Mean For Early Education?

- ECE programs need to support DLLs' development in their two languages.
- Parents should look for ECE programs that have bilingual teachers and provide instruction in two languages.



- When dual language or bilingual programs are not available in DLL communities, at least English instruction with first language support should be provided.
- Parents and other family members should provide support in the first language at home (i.e., reading, singing, and talking a lot!!), especially, when their DLL children are not attending a bilingual program.

Remember that to benefit from bilingualism children should not only talk but also learn to read and write in both languages.

- Since these children are learning through two languages, assessments of development and academic performance should be conducted in their two languages.

### Conclusion

There is no reason to believe that children growing up with two languages will fall behind in school or have language delays. What they need is strong support to take advantage of the opportunity to become bilingual. Speaking to children in the home language is not enough for children to become competent bilinguals. Not only to children need to listen, they need to speak and eventually read and write in both languages to become competent bilinguals. Bilingualism will increase children's chances to perform well in school and get better job opportunities in the new global market, while keeping them connected to their family and rooted in their culture.



### Resources for Parents

#### Books

Rodriguez Bellas, M. *Cómo criar niños bilingües. Una guía práctica*. Atria.  
Steiner, N., & Hayes, L. S. (2009). *7 Steps to Raising a Bilingual Child*. AMACOM.

#### Online Resources

Beneficios de criar un niño bilingüe

<http://noticias.univision.com/article/2103550/2014-09-24/educacion/pequenos-y-valiosos/beneficios-de-criar-un-nino-bilingue>

Colorín Colorado

Para familias <http://www.colorincolorado.org/familias/>

Familias bilingües <http://www.colorincolorado.org/recursosweb/bilingues/>

Dual Language Program Questions and Answers: What does research say?

<http://www.boerne-isd.net/uploaded/faculty/vossm/Microsoft Word - Dual Language QA.pdf>

Halgunseth, L. (2010). How children learn a second language.

<http://www.education.com/reference/article/how-children-learn-second-language/>

Los 5 mitos mas comunes de criar niños bilingües.

<http://espanol.babycenter.com/a12500001/los-5-mitos-más-comunes-de-criar-niños-bilingües>

Multilingual parenting

<http://multilingualparenting.com/2014/09/19/12-cosas-padres-criando-ninos-bilingues-necesitan-saber/>



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Zepeda, M. (October, 2014). *Human resource support for those serving young dual language learners.*

## Additional Resources

Castro, D. C., Ayankoya, B., & Kasprzak, C. (2010). *The New Voices ~ Nuevas Voces Guide to Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Early Childhood.* Baltimore: Brooks Publishing, Inc.

Espinosa, L. M. (2010). *Getting it Right for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds, Applying Research to Improve Practice.* Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Gillanders, C., Castro, D. C., & Franco, X. (2014). Learning words for life: Promoting vocabulary in dual language learners. *The Reading Teacher*, 68 (3), 213-221.

Gillanders, C. & Castro, D. C. (2011). Storybook reading for young dual language learners. *Young Children*. January, 91-95.

López, A., Zepeda, M. & Medina, O. (2012). *Dual Language Learner Teacher Competencies (DLLTC) Report.* Los Angeles, CA: Alliance for a Better Community.

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# Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners

## Policy Makers Brief



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### **Policy Advances & Levers Related to DLLs in PreK-3rd Grade**

The field of early childhood education is amassing a body of science to inform policy and practice for dual language learners (DLLs), children who are learning two languages, in preschool through 3rd grade. Three major categories of policy are considered most significant for DLLs and are addressed here: 1) access to preschool through 3rd grade (PreK-3) services, 2) quality of PreK-3 services, including staff qualifications, and 3) standards and assessment used in PreK-3 settings. Each of these areas are multifaceted, they are interconnected and overlap.

### **The PreK-3 Landscape: Access to Services for DLLs**

Since 2002, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has collected information on state-funded preschool program policies. In recent years, they have added what information the states could provide on service to DLLs. Of the 53 state-funded preschool programs in 40 states and Washington, DC, only 22 collect data on the number of DLLs served.

Thus, doing an analysis of access and attendance in state PreK for DLLs is not possible. Recent analyses of national data on access and participation in early childhood center-based programs more broadly, including publicly supported child care and other private providers, reveal that three to four year old DLLs are less likely to participate in center-based programs than any other sub-group at that age. It seems likely that lack of access to quality programs is as important as factors such as income, parental education, and other family characteristics.

### **Quality of Services to the PreK-3 DLL Population**

It is clear that there are cognitive and social benefits for children who attend high quality preschool and growing evidence indicates that DLLs benefit more than others from effective preschool education. Factors influencing effectiveness of early education include class size, intensity and duration of the intervention, teacher qualifications, curriculum and fidelity of curriculum implementation, parental engagement and educational leadership.

The State Preschool Yearbook reports on a number of state policies regarding quality of services for DLLs in state-funded PreK. Of the 53 state-funded PreK programs include in the State Preschool Yearbook, 19 have no regulations specific to

services for DLLs. While no regular means that state guidance is missing that might directly support specific services for DLLs, it also means that at least instruction in multiple languages is not prohibited. The majority of state programs expressly support/allow bilingual instruction and 19 allow monolingual home language instruction. Of significance, no state policies require English-only instruction. State policies for 20 of the programs require that a home language survey be administered but only 14 programs have policies that require that programs develop a systematic, written plan for how they will serve DLLs. Twenty-one programs require that information to parents be available in the home language and 17 require that bilingual staff be provided if children's home language is not English.

### **DLLs, Their Families and School Engagement**

The importance of parental engagement with schools is not unique to DLL populations. However, the convergence of several factors common to many Hispanic families are worthy of special attention as they relate closely to DLL achievement. These factors include low levels of educational attainment, low levels of English proficiency, low paying and inconsistent employment, and poverty. Hispanic families also have characteristics which can be used as powerful resources such as strong "familialism" and high incidence of two-parent or extended family situations. Still, studies have found that for language minority parents, negative effects stemming from a lack of parental engagement persist through the end of kindergarten; when DLLs have the benefit of parental engagement in their education, they fare better.

Parental engagement can be hampered by specific "determinants": parents' beliefs regarding the support roles they have in their children's education, the extent to which parents believe that they possess the knowledge and tools they need as educators and parents' perceptions of a school's willingness to have them participate. Hispanic immigrant groups score lowest on measures of both school and home involvement. Barriers include low English proficiency and functional literacy, a lack of public funding to support language acquisition, cultural access or other immigrant family specific needs, a lack of alignment between efforts in ECE and K-12 leading to parent alienation after preschool, and variability in attitudes towards immigrants across communities and districts.

### **Landscape of Standards and Assessment for DLLs in PreK-3**

Perhaps the biggest push towards an agenda of well-aligned and beneficial experiences for DLLs is the existence of an infrastructure that uniformly guides best practices and accountability. Levers here include well developed standards and assessment practices that adequately and validly measure progress and inform practice. In addition, a compilation of information that also encompasses both policy and relevant resources could be helpful for systemic decision-making. What currently exists however is a set of well-intentioned, but disjointed policies,



each regulating different aspects of the landscape with little guidance on delivery for states. Standards pertaining to general academic progress for young DLLs fall into three major, distinct categories.

These include individually developed state early learning standards (used in PreK and ECE settings), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS: used on K-12 settings), and for Head Start, the Child Development and Early Learning Standards (used on Head Start PreK settings). The National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (NCCLR) analyzed how state preschool standards address DLLs and found that only three states (CA, KY, and MA) have guidelines specifically for DLLs, nine states have sections for addressing DLLs within their guidelines and 8 states at least mention DLLs in the Language and Literacy areas of their guidelines. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which are now adopted by 43 states excludes any specific standards for DLLs and instead includes guidelines for applying the standards to DLLs that basically describes DLLs as a heterogeneous group who should receive individualized “diagnosis” and instruction. They advise teachers to recognize that it is possible to achieve the standards for reading and literature, writing and research, language development, and speaking and listening without manifesting native-like control of conventions and vocabulary.

Another set of standards are those mandated by Title III for identification and intervention for English proficiency. Lack of cohesive standards for assessment of English proficiency is compounded by incoherent and at times, ineffective, reclassification assessments to determine accurately who DLLs are, and when they are ready to exit support programs.

Federal policy dictates through Title III that states develop or adopt English language proficiency standards and that an annual test of English proficiency be administered for DLLs in grades K-12. As part of its accountability provisions the updated ESEA requires that states define criteria about progress in English, create English proficiency standards for performance and set annually increasing performance targets for the population of DLLs meeting the criteria. The US Department of Education released the National Evaluation of Title III Implementation Supplemental Report: Exploring Approaches to Setting English Language Proficiency Performance Criteria and Monitoring English Learner Progress in 2012 as means of support to state policy-makers in their efforts to generate empirically- based standards and assessments to meet the Title III requirements. In large part, the release of this report acknowledges a gap between the goals of the legislation and states’ capacity to adequately meet its provisions.

The World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium has begun to disentangle this problem by outlining standards, performance definitions, guiding principles for grades K-12, with PreK standards soon to come. Though the WIDA website reports that 36 states are currently members, it remains largely unclear how states are incorporating the resources created by the Consortium.







### Potential Policy Levers to Enhance Access and Quality in PreK-3 Education for DLLs

In summary, attention to DLLs' access to and the quality of their PreK-3 education experiences should include policies such as the following:

- inclusion of preparing teachers to teach DLLs in certification requirements
- adoption of the CEDS data standards and use of geo-mapping or other methods to ensure access to DLLs
- inclusion of home language as an eligibility criterion for state PreK or offering universal access
- using acceptable methods for identifying and placing DLLs in language development programs based on systematic and valid assessment of a

child's proficiency in their home language and English

- implementation of state-sponsored methods to improve and increase the opportunities teachers have for professional development specific to best practices for DLLs
- program evaluation and monitoring that includes administration of classroom assessments of teacher supports for DLLs that are based on best practices
- inclusion of DLL best practices as criteria in the state QRIS
- specific policy guidance aimed to increase dual language instruction in PreK-3 classrooms
- requirement that programs and districts have DLL improvement plans and have developed continuity of education PreK-3
- guidance and regulations that support language minority parents' engagement in their child's learning

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Castro, D. C., Garcia, E. E. & Markos, A. (2013). *Dual language learners: Research informing policy*. Available at <http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/document-library>

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# Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners Teachers Brief



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### Changes in Early Childhood Education

Ms. Morrison has been a PreK and kindergarten teacher for over twenty years. A few years ago the demographic composition of children in her classroom began to change. Now about half of the children in her classroom come from families that speak a language other than English, either exclusively or in addition to English. Most of the time these youngsters begin the school year with limited or no abilities in English and their level of ability in their first language varies. Ms. Morrison is not bilingual and is pleased to see that the dual language learners (DLLs) in her class are learning English quickly, but at the same time, she is concerned because they seem to not understand when she talks about subject area content; on average, DLLs' learning is slower than that of the other kids in her class, although, some of them are doing well. Ms. Morrison feels frustrated because she is using the strategies that have always worked well with other children and wishes she could do more to support the DLLs in her classroom. This scenario represents a situation that occurs often across the United States: DLLs attend early care and education (ECE) programs where their teachers are not bilingual and there is no support for them in their home language. However, we know that even a monolingual English-speaking teacher like Ms. Morrison, prepared with the knowledge about how growing up bilingually influences children's development and which strategies will work to support DLLs and how to implement them, can help facilitate DLLs development and learning.

There is an increased awareness in the field of early childhood about the need to address the growing cultural and linguistic diversity among children and families being served in ECE programs. Current federal and state level policies are in place that require ECE programs to be accountable for the implementation of high quality early childhood practices that promote positive outcomes for all children, including DLLs (see the Policy Maker Brief and Policy Thinker Brief for a discussion of ECE-DLL policies). As important as policy is, the most challenging step is to make changes to classroom practices in response to the policy regulations. Even though there is still a need for further research, the current knowledge base allows us to identify some elements of high quality early education for DLLs, and those are related to program characteristics, teachers' knowledge and skills, curriculum and instruction, and partnerships with families. In this brief, we will focus on what teachers need to know about principles to teach DLLs and effective classroom practices to support these children.

Language and culture are interrelated, therefore, DLLs' experiences are not only about communicating and learning in two languages, but also about dealing with two cultures that may or may not hold the same values and expectations. The particular characteristics and experiences of DLLs require that teachers use

of teaching approaches and strategies that may differ from those used to support monolingual children. For instance, research has found that when compared to monolinguals, DLLs can present different patterns and rates of development in certain domains. These differences often depend on a DLL's age of acquisition of the second language and their levels of exposure to that language. Importantly, these differences are part of a DLL's typical development. Thus, it is critical that ECE programs implement appropriate teaching strategies with DLLs, so that DLLs can fully benefit from participation in ECE programs.



#### Effective teachers of DLLs need to be knowledgeable about:

- The development of DLLs' first and second language, including all aspects of language development;
- The role of bilingualism across developmental domains;
- The relation between language and culture and its linkage to DLLs' developmental domains;
- How to promote positive teacher-child interactions and peer interactions with bilingual children;
- How to implement effective instructional practices to promote development and learning in two languages;
- How to implement appropriate assessment strategies with DLLs and how to use DLLs' developmental assessments to inform instructional planning ; and
- How to build partnerships with families of DLLs. Family members will be the best partners to learn about DLLs' experiences at home, the community they belong to, and to better understand DLLs' context of development.

#### There are some premises that can guide teachers' work with DLLs:

- A pedagogical approach for DLLs should be based on children's strengths and not on what they are lacking.
- Avoid comparing DLLs with how monolingual children develop and perform academically.
- Children's bilingualism is a characteristic that can serve as a protective factor in promoting DLLs' development and school success.
- Practices with DLLs need to be intentional and systematic. Lesson plans need to include explicit activities targeting DLLs and effective practices for DLLs should be embedded throughout the curriculum.



## Resources

Castro, D. C. (October, 2014). *Research base on best practices for dual language learners in PreK-3rd grade: Instructional strategies and language of instruction approaches.*

Espinosa, L. (October, 2014). *Perspectives on assessment of DLLs development and learning, PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> grade.*

Frede, E. & Figueras-Daniel, A. (October, 2014). *Policy advances and levers related to DLLs in PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> grade.*

Lopez, F. (October, 2014). *The critical role of leadership in programs designed for DLLs, PreK-3.*

Zepeda, M. (October, 2014). *Human resource support for those serving young dual language learners.*

## Additional Resources

Castro, D. C., Ayankoya, B., & Kasprzak, C. (2010). *The New Voices ~ Nuevas Voces Guide to Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Early Childhood.* Baltimore: Brooks Publishing, Inc.

Espinosa, L. M. (2010). *Getting it Right for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds, Applying Research to Improve Practice.* Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Gillanders, C., Castro, D. C., & Franco, X. (2014). Learning words for life: Promoting vocabulary in dual language learners. *The Reading Teacher*, 68 (3), 213-221.

Gillanders, C. & Castro, D. C. (2011). Storybook reading for young dual language learners. *Young Children*. January, 91-95.

López, A., Zepeda, M. & Medina, O. (2012). *Dual Language Learner Teacher Competencies (DLLTC) Report.* Los Angeles, CA: Alliance for a Better Community.

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### National Research Summit on the Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners

In the Spring of 2014, the Heising-Simons and McKnight Foundations each awarded \$30,000 towards a National Research Summit on the Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners. The goal of the two day summit was to engage and extend the established knowledge base accrued by the Center for Early Care and Educational Research Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL), while simultaneously informing the future potential efforts by the Heising-Simons and McKnight Foundations specific to the early care and education of dual language learners.