

Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners

Policy Makers Brief



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

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In the fall of 2014, the Heising-Simons and McKnight Foundations provided support for a National Research Summit on the Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners in Washington, DC. 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 while simultaneously informing the future potential policy efforts specific to the early care and education (ECE) of dual language learners (DLLs). The Summit focused on new directions in research, policy and practice related to DLLs in ECE settings and included discussion of five commissioned papers: Research Based Models and Best Practices for DLLs across PreK-3; Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs, PreK-3; Human Resource Development; The Critical Role of Leadership in Programs Designed for DLLs, PreK-3; Policy Advances & Levers Related to DLLs in PreK-3. This brief provides a short summary and synthesis of the policy implications addressed in these papers and the discussion generated at The Summit.

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 (Frede, & Figueras-Daniel, 2014).

Quality of Services to the PreK-3 DLL Population

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. The majority of state programs expressly support/allow bilingual instruction. 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 (Frede, & Figueras-Daniel, 2014).

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 (Garcia & Garcia, 2012).

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 (Lopez, 2013).

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 (Frede, & Figueras-Daniel, 2014). 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 (Castro, 2014).

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 (Espinosa, 2014).



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



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

Resources

The following papers commissioned for the National Research Summit on Early Care and Education for Dual Language Learners are available at www.cal.org/dllsummit.

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-3rd grade.*

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

Garcia, E. E. & Garcia, E. H. *The Early Education of Hispanic Children in the United States.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

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.

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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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. Although the McKnight and Heising-Simons Foundations sponsored the National Summit and the Briefs' development, the ideas expressed in the Summit Papers and Briefs are solely that of the authors.