

Dual Language Learner Professional Development

Grantee Convenings: Policy Implications

The 2018 California State Budget included a one-time \$5 million investment to provide early childhood educators with professional development (PD) to support their work with dual language learners (DLLs). The California Department of Education (CDE) is administering these funds through the DLL-PD grant. Many of the field's leaders in this work are engaged in the DLL-PD initiative to ensure successful implementation. To date, the investment has resulted in the following: new DLL-PD curriculum; expansion of existing PD modalities (e.g., online, in-person, coaching, and peer-to-peer); and extending the reach of available PD across the state. Throughout the grant period, which ends in June 2020, CDE and Early Edge California (EECA) will also host four grantee convenings that aim to:

- Identify implementation successes, challenges, and lessons learned;
- Allow participants to identify opportunities for learning and collaboration; and
- Inform and improve statewide policy and PD efforts.

In March 2020, grantee programs experienced major disruptions to their planned activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the statewide shelter-in-place order. In the third convening, which was facilitated virtually, grantees shared that as early childhood educators have shifted to virtual learning practices in recent weeks, new insights into the unique needs in supporting the educational success of DLLs via distance learning emerged. Although the shift to virtual learning was unexpected, the lessons reflect important implications for future distance learning efforts.

This document provides an overview of the themes and policy implications that have emerged during the DLL-PD implementation and convening conversations to-date.¹

Cross-Cutting Themes from the First Three Grantee Convenings

California is at a turning point regarding DLLs. The passage of Proposition 58 in 2016 repealed nearly two decades of restrictions on bilingual instruction in California. This change in state law laid a foundation for linguistically- and culturally-appropriate education for DLLs, and there is growing support from CDE, private foundations, and other state and local efforts for DLLs and their families. Dr. Linda Espinosa – a long-time researcher, policy advocate, and champion for DLLs – noted during the first grantee convening that the state has done “a complete 180” on educating DLLs. She also added, however, that there is more work to be done to help educators understand what a “strong, capable DLL looks like in kindergarten.”

Demand for DLL-PD is high, but systemic issues present challenges to implementation.

Grantees note a widespread and increasing demand for high-quality professional development across the state. However, systemic barriers to developing a workforce with these new skills and competencies exist. The challenges include: high early childhood educator turnover; insufficient paid release time and substitute teachers; and the absence of a state mandate for all early childhood educators to receive DLL-specific preparation or training. Participants also reported the importance

¹ The DLL-PD grantee convenings were held on May 23, 2019 and November 19, 2019 in Sacramento, and virtually via Zoom on May 1, 2020. See Appendix A for a list of participants.

of leadership buy-in and engagement to ensure sustainability, including expanding the reach of such efforts and overcoming structural challenges.

Further awareness in the understanding of the term ‘Dual Language Learner’ across early learning and K-12 program may be needed. Dual Language Learners (DLL) are children, birth to age 5, who are learning two (or more) languages at the same time, or are learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (or home) language². However, there is still inconsistent use and understanding of the term across both early learning and K-12 settings. Historically, there has been confusion regarding the distinction between the terms DLL and English Learner (EL), the term commonly used in K-12 settings to refer to students whose primary language is one other than English and who have not yet fully mastered English. In addition, some often confuse “DLL” to refer to children who are enrolled in dual language programs, regardless of their linguistic background. Although the field has advanced in understanding the distinction, grantees reported that there is more work to be done. In addition, it is important for all education professionals — including educators, leaders and administrators, specialists, and university professors who teach the next generation of early childhood educators — to gain a critical understanding of the unique learning milestones of DLLs.

There is a need for consistent, asset-based messaging about DLLs. A shift in legislation requires a parallel shift in culture and practice. Empirical research finds benefits of early bilingualism, both in language development and the related brain development. Ongoing and explicit asset-based messaging related to DLLs requires increasing access to such research for educators, lawmakers, and communities, alike, so that myths around language learning (e.g., learning two languages can cause confusion or language delays) can be debunked. It is also important for all education professionals to deepen their understanding of the learning trajectories for DLLs and strategies to support dual language learning. The shift will also require updating assessment tools, such as the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), to incorporate DLL competencies, measures, and guidelines.

DLL-PD results in indirect benefits across the early childhood education system. The professional development provided by grantee programs has benefited more people than just those directly participating. Grantee programs shared their observations on the systems-wide changes taking place due to the indirect effects of the professional development. For example, colleagues of early childhood educators who have participated in PD have adopted best practices learned through their peers and implemented these tools in their own classrooms. Participants shared a desire to capture this spillover effect and its impact on non-participating early childhood educators, their school systems, and parents. The evaluation of the initiative will highlight this and identify the pathways through which indirect effects have been impactful.

Distance learning creates new challenges for early childhood educators supporting DLLs. Several common challenges emerged as grantees discussed shifting to distance learning. First, disparities in access to technology make distance learning prohibitive to many DLLs. Similar to challenges faced by low-income families across the country, these gaps in access include both the availability of devices to support video-based learning as well as internet connections. Second, early childhood educators are finding it necessary to take a dual generational approach to supporting DLLs. These efforts include engaging families in their children’s education, which is particularly challenging when parents’ and teachers’ primary languages are not the same. Third, these technology and communication gaps will further exacerbate the disparities experienced by DLLs as they prepare for the next school year. Finally, although not specific to DLLs, early childhood educators are not prepared for distance learning and need more resources and training on how to adapt classroom lessons for this context.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Policy Statement on Supporting The Development of Children Who are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs*. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/dll_policy_statement_final.pdf

Policy Implications

State and local policies that facilitate the expansion of DLL-PD will further support the diverse needs of DLLs and their families, the educators who teach them, and the students who learn with them. The following policy implications identified during the grantee convenings to-date will help to capitalize on the momentum garnered by Proposition 58, the California English Learner Roadmap³ state policy, and the DLL-PD initiative.

Train early childhood educators in dual language development
<i>Core educator training</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate DLLs into the <i>core</i> of early learning training, given that most children in the state (60%)⁴ are DLLs, and it is imperative that early learning educators are prepared to meet their needs • Incorporate DLL-specific requirements in the California Teacher Credential (CTC) Child Development Permit • Reinforce that in order to utilize developmentally appropriate strategies for early learners in California, strategies must include those that support DLLs' unique developmental trajectories • Ensure early childhood educators are trained with an understanding of the history of California policy, specifically as it relates to bilingual development and multilingualism • Develop a system that allows early childhood educators to count stackable college units towards DLL-specific teaching credentials
<i>Ongoing professional development and coaching</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate high-quality DLL modules into existing PD • Continue to utilize multiple DLL-PD modalities (e.g., online, in-person, communities of practice) to increase access • Streamline coaching initiatives by integrating DLL-PD into all coaches' training, creating transdisciplinary coaches • Extend DLL-PD to all education professionals' – educators, leaders and administrators, specialists, university professors who teach the next generation of early childhood educators – to increase their capacities to support DLLs
Align efforts across education initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update measurements to incorporate DLL-specific indicators (e.g., Quality Counts partners, QRIS) • Consider opportunities to extend the learnings from the DLL-PD initiative to K-12 efforts to implement the California English Learner Roadmap state policy • Connect early investments in DLLs to a broader picture of student success explicitly; frame this work as a long-term investment that will generate returns on K-12 accountability measures
Align efforts across educational systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase data and information sharing between early learning settings and the K-12 system
Distribute resources and best practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a statewide clearinghouse of resources and best practices for supporting DLLs and their families
Invest in additional resources

³ California Department of Education. (2019). *English Learner Roadmap*. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/rm/>

⁴ Park, M., O'Toole, A., & Katsiaficas, C. (2017). *Dual Language Learners: A Demographic and Policy Profile for California*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

- Further invest in DLL-PD to expand access for early childhood educators and other education professionals
- Increase early childhood educators' paid release time for PD, including DLL-specific PD
- Increase the pool of qualified substitute teachers available to release early childhood educators for PD

Distance learning for DLLs. The policy implications of COVID-19 and distance learning on early childhood education are only just beginning to emerge. Early Edge California, Heising Simons Foundation, and Sobrato Family Foundation will convene a group of stakeholders from the DLL-PD grantees and research partners during the summer of 2020 as a workgroup to identify policies and practices that best support the needs of DLLs, their families, and their educators during these unprecedented times. The workgroup will focus on the transition back to in-person learning as well as the expected future periods of distance learning