FIRST 5 CALIFORNIA
Dual Language Learner
PILOT STUDY

Research Brief: Approaches to Supporting Dual Language Learners in California's Early Learning and Care Programs

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Dual language learners (DLLs), or children who are learning another language in addition to English, make up approximately 60% of children under age 5 in California.[1] Nearly all center-based early learning and care programs, and over two thirds of family child care homes, across the state serve at least one DLL.[2] DLLs' diverse languages and cultures enhance the experience of all children in early learning programs. The experiences of DLLs in early learning programs are largely shaped by not only the diversity of the DLL population and the workforce serving them, but also by more macro-level policies and attitudes about educating DLLs.

Beliefs about bilingualism and policies in place to support DLLs have been evolving, with the latest guidance highlighting the value of supporting dual language development.[3] California's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care,[4] for example, emphasizes the importance of providing DLLs in early learning and care programs with culturally relevant experiences and high-quality language exposure in both English and their home language. The DLL Policy Platform developed by Early Edge California and Advancement Project California[5] also emphasizes the importance of supporting children's home languages—to prevent language loss, strengthen family relationships, and promote positive identity development, as well as to give children the opportunity to experience the benefits of bilingualism.

Key Findings

- Early learning programs serve children from a wide array of language backgrounds, and many do not have staff who speak the home language of their DLLs—especially non-Spanish speaking DLLs.
- Although most program directors report valuing bilingualism and demonstrate some knowledge about dual language learning, many program's policies and priorities for their DLLs seem to be misaligned with their beliefs.
- Though many program directors reported that their program uses at least some home language with their DLLs, more than a third are implementing an English-only approach to instruction.
- Early learning programs utilize some dual language resources and strategies to support DLLs, but few use home language assessments, and more bilingual books and home language supports are needed.

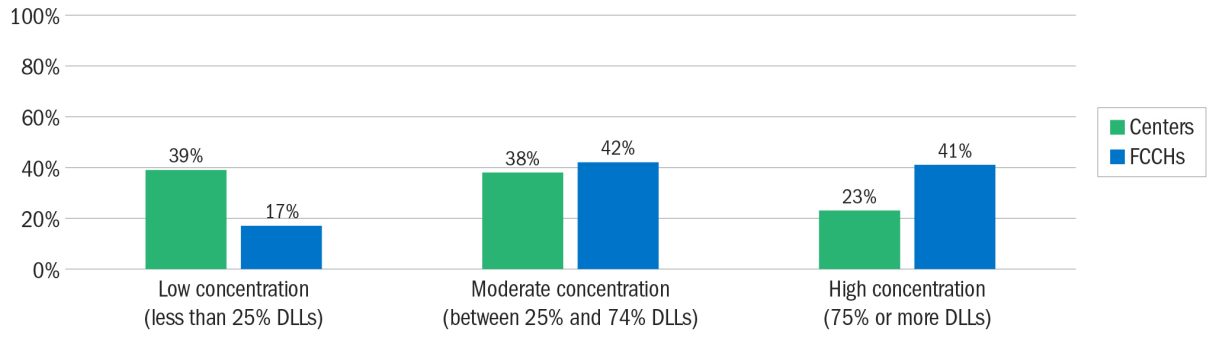
This brief describes the complex landscape of DLL policies, priorities, and populations served in California's early learning programs. Specifically, we describe the linguistic diversity of children and staff in early learning programs that serve DLLs; programs' beliefs, policies, and priorities that guide their support for DLLs; and their general approaches to instruction and support for DLLs. Findings reinforce the California Master Plan goals of providing more professional development, guidance, and access to teaching resources for educators to help them deliver high-quality, effective early education for DLLs.

Using data from the First 5 California DLL Pilot Study survey of a representative sample of 744 administrators of licensed early learning centers and family child care homes (FCCHs) across California,[6] we examine language diversity and programs, policies, and approaches to supporting DLLs in the 98% of centers and 70% of FCCHs that serve at least one DLL. Although these data were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic,[7] this brief highlights the broader conditions and constraints that need to be considered as California's early learning and care system begins to rebuild post-COVID.

What Is the Linguistic Diversity of Children and Staff in Early Learning Programs That Serve DLLs?

Early learning programs serving DLLs vary widely in terms of the number of DLLs they enroll. Some programs serve only a few DLLs, while others serve almost exclusively DLLs (Exhibit 1). Among DLL-serving programs, FCCHs are more likely than centers to serve high concentrations of DLLs (defined as 75% or more DLLs)—23% of centers versus 41% of FCCHs. This is likely because FCCHs serve far fewer children in total (up to 14 children) compared to centers, which tend to have larger group sizes (for example, State Preschool classrooms may enroll up to 24 children per classroom) and may have multiple classrooms.

Exhibit 1. Percentage of DLL-Serving Programs, by Concentration of DLLs and Setting Type



There are more than 220 languages spoken in California,[8] and DLLs representing over 50 different languages are served by the 744 early learning programs that responded to the survey for this study. The most commonly served language group was Spanish, followed by Mandarin, Tagalog/Pilipino, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Korean, Hmong, Russian, and Hindi. Centers, in particular, often have rich language

diversity; more than half of DLL-serving centers have children from three or more languages groups enrolled. On the other hand, DLL-serving FCCHs are more likely than centers to serve DLLs who all speak the same language (though 17% of DLL-serving FCCHs also serve children representing three or more languages; see *Snapshots From the Field* below for two examples of multilingual FCCHs).

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN FAMILY CHILD CARE SETTINGS

Two family child care homes in Northern California exemplify the linguistic diversity often found in early learning programs in the state.

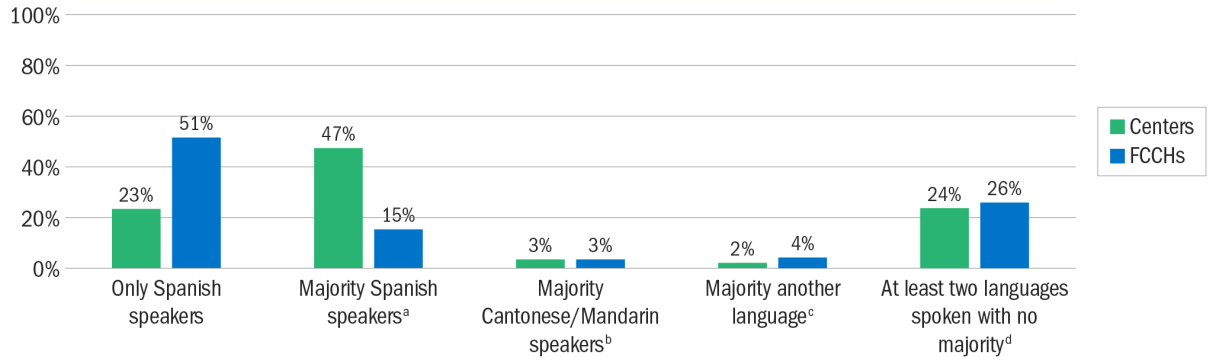
In two FCCHs in Northern California, staff speak both Russian and English, and although some of the children also speak Russian at home, the linguistic and ethnic backgrounds of children enrolled vary from year to year. In one of the two programs, children's home languages also included Ukrainian, English, Spanish, and a Chinese dialect. In the second—a small FCCH—children's home languages included Korean and Spanish as well as Russian and English. One of these providers shared that when she first began teaching, she expected to be primarily serving children of Russian immigrants, but her program quickly became much more diverse. She is proud to be serving a group of culturally diverse children.

Although the program staff use English for the vast majority of the day, they will translate materials into Russian for Russian-speaking children if they sense they do not understand what is being said. One of the providers told us she does her best to learn key words and phrases in the other children's home languages, and she gauges children's understanding and makes necessary accommodations. For example, when she reads books in English aloud to the children, she makes an effort to clearly pronounce the words. She added, "After that, if I see the eyes looking through me [as if they're not understanding], then I translate for them in Russian."

Many programs serve Spanish-speaking DLLs *exclusively,* while others are characterized by more language diversity. Although California is linguistically diverse, Spanish speakers still represent the majority of DLL children in the state's early learning programs. Three quarters of programs serve Spanish-speaking DLLs, and within these, FCCHs are more likely than centers to serve DLLs who *all* speak Spanish (51% of FCCHs versus 23% of centers; Exhibit 2).

While Spanish is the most common language spoken by California's DLLs, some programs serve primarily other language groups. Programs where the majority of DLLs speak Cantonese or Mandarin represent a small percentage of DLL-serving programs (3% of centers; 3% of FCCHs). An additional 2% of centers and 4% of FCCHs serve populations where the majority of DLLs speak a different language, such as Vietnamese, Arabic, Tagalog/Pilipino, Korean, Hmong, or Russian. Reflecting California's language diversity, multilingual environments—those with at least two languages spoken but no language representing a majority—are also common, found in 24% of centers and 26% of FCCHs (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2. Percentage of DLL-Serving Programs, by Language Makeup of DLLs and Setting Type

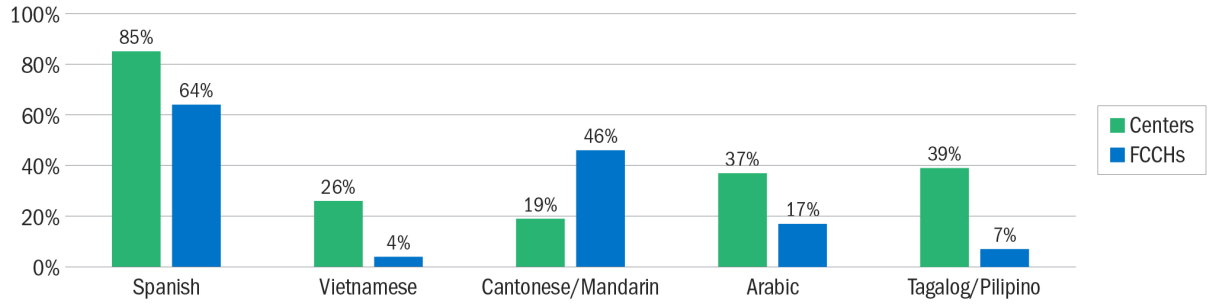


Notes:
[a]At least one other language spoken at the program.
[b]Only 1% of the sites served DLLs who were *exclusively* Cantonese or Mandarin speakers.
[c]Majority languages included Vietnamese, Arabic, Tagalog/Pilipino, Korean, Hmong, and Russian.
[d]Languages included were Spanish, Cantonese/Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, Tagalog/Pilipino, Korean, Hmong, and Russian.

Most programs that serve Spanish-speaking DLLs also have Spanish speakers on staff; however, bilingual/multilingual staff are not always available for other language groups or in all setting types. We looked at the extent to which early learning programs have at least one staff member, either a program director or educator, who speaks the home language of one or more of the DLLs enrolled. Given that Spanish is the most common non-English language spoken in California—among adults *and* children—it is not surprising that programs with Spanish-speaking staff and children accounted for the majority of programs with a match between staff and children's languages (85% of centers; 64% of FCCHs; Exhibit 3).

There are far fewer programs that have at least one staff member who speaks the same language as non-Spanish-speaking DLLs enrolled, though this varied by setting. It is more common for FCCHs to have staff who speak Cantonese or Mandarin when children speaking these languages are enrolled; only 19% of centers that serve Cantonese- or Mandarin-speaking children have staff that also speak one or both of these languages, compared to 46% of FCCHs. However, centers are more likely than FCCHs to have staff who speak the language of other Asian-language-speaking DLLs. Compared with FCCHs, the percentage of centers with staff that speak the home language of their DLLs is higher for Vietnamese (26% vs. 4%), Arabic (37% vs. 17%), and Tagalog/Pilipino (39% vs. 7%) (Exhibit 3). These patterns may reflect variations in background among the workforce in centers compared with FCCHs, as well as the selection of children and families from different backgrounds into these programs.

Exhibit 3. Percentage of DLL-Serving Programs Where One or More Staff Members Speak the Same Home Language as the DLLs Enrolled, by Setting Type



Note: Percentages are based on the total number of programs that serve DLLs who speak a given home language.

Educators may encounter challenges in providing consistent and targeted supports for DLLs of different language backgrounds in the same classroom, particularly if there are no staff members who speak those children's home languages. Across the board, the majority of program directors (75% of centers; 62% of FCCHs) reported challenges in having enough staff who speak the home languages of DLLs. The language diversity described here highlights a need for continued investment to attract, prepare, and retain native speakers to the state's early learning workforce, as well as provide training focused on supporting DLLs for staff who do not speak the home language(s) of their students.

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD: INNOVATIVE WAYS TO SUPPORT HOME LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Some community-based programs, such as one library program participating in the study, have addressed the need to support children from different home language backgrounds in innovative ways.

One library program, located in Northern California, offers a weekly early literacy story time program for children birth to 5 years old in Spanish, Russian, and Chinese. The program's bilingual and bicultural staff and volunteers share books, rhymes, and songs in both English and one of the other three languages. Parent participation is encouraged and facilitated by offering activities that involve both the adults and the children, and presenters also share handouts on how parents can support early literacy at home. This library program draws on community volunteers, including young people. The director noted: "We find great young people who are enthusiastic and learn quickly and bring new ideas and new cultural awareness to us. That's just been great, too."

What Are the Beliefs, Policies, and Priorities That Guide Early Learning Programs' Approaches to Serving DLLs?

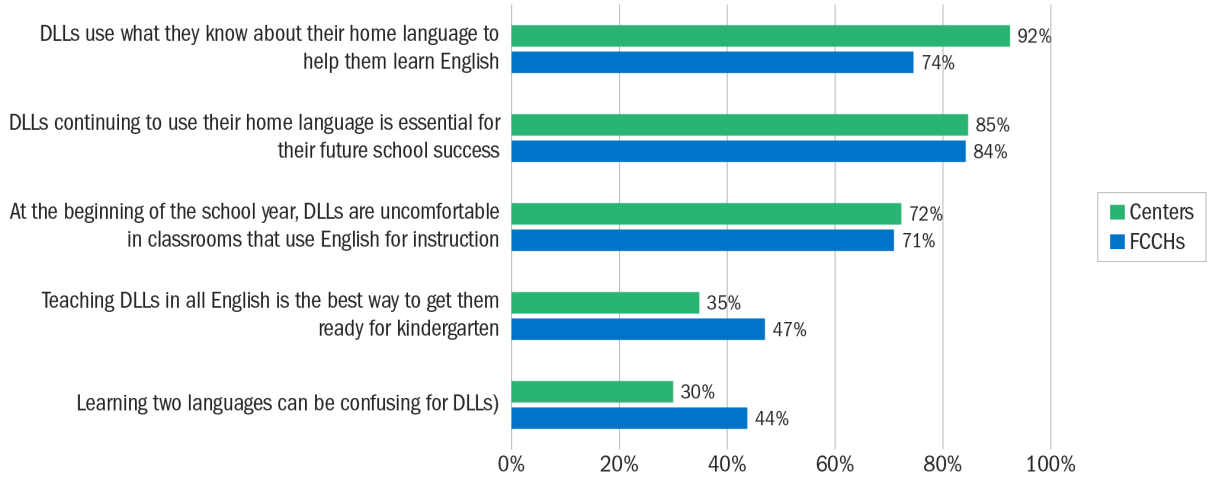
Beliefs and attitudes regarding bilingualism among program directors, families, and the broader community, in addition to written policies at the district, state, or national level, may all influence how programs approach instruction for DLLs. While there has generally been a movement in the field towards valuing bilingualism and the home language,[9] a disconnect still exists between directors' positive beliefs about dual language learning and programs' policies and priorities at the site level, which do not prioritize bilingual development. This section describes program directors' stated policies, priorities, and beliefs related to supporting DLLs.

Directors value bilingualism and demonstrate a solid understanding of how DLLs develop language, though there remains some opportunity for continued knowledge building. The majority of program directors (85% of centers; 84% of FCCHs) said that they believe that the continued use of the home language is essential for children's future success (Exhibit 4). Fewer programs (35% of centers; 47% of FCCHs) reported that they believe that teaching DLLs entirely in English is the best way to get them ready for kindergarten; these lower percentages indicate support for instruction in languages other than English. These beliefs often corresponded to the type of instructional program they implemented, particularly at centers.

In addition to valuing the home language, most site directors across programs also demonstrated some knowledge of dual language learning. For example, the majority understand that DLLs use what they know in their home language to help learn English. This process, based strongly in the cross-language transfer theory literature,[10,11,12] appeared to be more commonly understood in centers (92%) compared to FCCHs (75%). Directors of both centers and FCCHs largely agreed that English-speaking classrooms can create discomfort for DLLs, particularly at the beginning of the school year (72% of centers; 71% of FCCHs). This highlights an attunement to the social-emotional needs of DLL children as those needs relate to language use in the classroom. Although young DLLs are very adaptable, it can be difficult for them to integrate into classroom activities where only English is spoken, so educators should make intentional efforts to help include them, especially if teachers do not speak the home language.[13,14]

Despite a broad understanding of the role of the home language in helping DLLs learn English, a substantial proportion of program directors still believe learning two languages can be confusing for children (30% of centers; 44% of FCCHs). While historically this was thought to be true, more recent research has demonstrated that young children, particularly in the first 5 years of life, have a profound capacity to learn multiple languages, which can lead to advantages in cognitive, social-emotional, and linguistic skills.[15,16,17] These results underscore the need for continued training and education for early learning providers on the benefits of bilingualism and dual language learning, as well as on how to support DLLs.

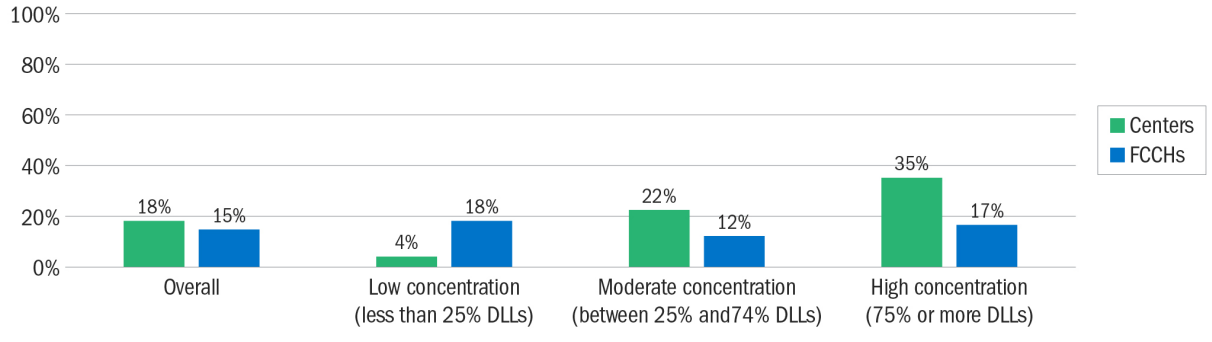
Exhibit 4. Percentage of Directors of DLL-Serving Programs Agreeing With Statements About Dual Language Learning, by Setting Type



Despite the number and diversity of DLLs served in early learning programs in California and directors' understanding of the importance of supporting DLLs, very few programs have an explicit plan for supporting DLL learning. Directors in fewer than one in five programs (18% of centers;15% of FCCHs) reported having a formal policy statement or strategic plan focused on how they will serve DLLs. This reflects a disconnect between director beliefs and formal program policies.

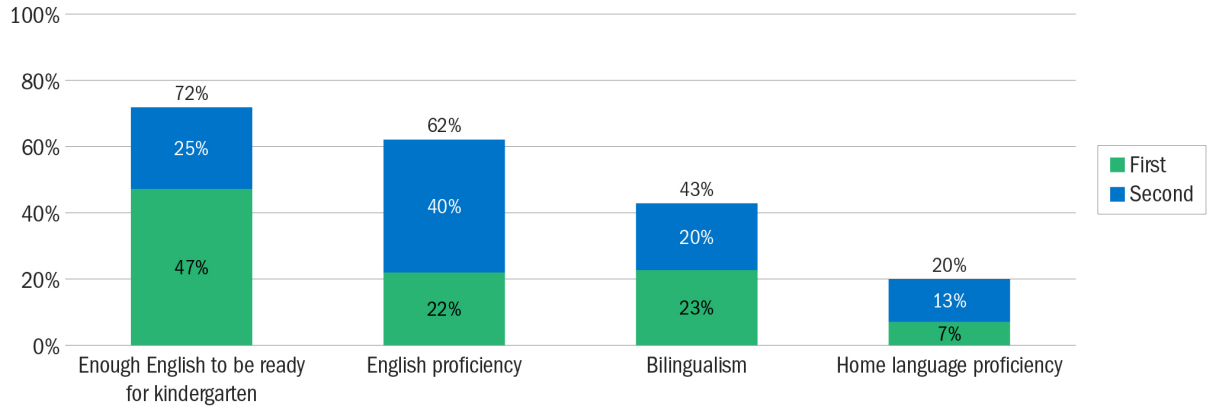
Centers serving higher proportions of DLLs are significantly more likely to have a DLL policy or plan in place. More than one third (35%) of directors of centers with a high concentration of DLLs (more than 75% of enrollment) reported having a formal policy, but only 4% of those with a low concentration of DLLs (less than 25% of enrollment) did (Exhibit 5). Conversely, there is no significant relationship between the concentration of DLLs and the presence of a formal policy in FCCHs.

Exhibit 5. Percentage of DLL-Serving Programs Reporting Having a Formal Policy Statement or Strategic Plan for Serving DLLs, by DLL Concentration and Setting Type



Although site directors generally express their support of bilingualism, they nevertheless prioritize English over home language or bilingual development. The large majority of directors (72%) reported that ensuring children know enough English to be ready for kindergarten was their first or second priority, and almost two thirds of directors (62%) rated overall English proficiency for DLLs as their first or second priority. Fewer respondents identified bilingualism as their first or second priority for DLLs (43%). The least common priority program directors noted was home language proficiency; only 20% of sites rated this as a first or second priority (Exhibit 6). These priorities may reflect the reality that children will enter a largely English-speaking school system. Still, findings suggest some misalignment between director beliefs and learning priorities for DLLs at many sites.

Exhibit 6. Program Directors' Rankings of Their Priorities for DLLs' Learning



Directors report that parent and community attitudes about dual language learning are a challenge, which may contribute to the misalignment between positive beliefs about bilingualism and actual site policies and priorities. More than half of site directors (59% of centers; 56% of FCCHs) reported that parents' preferences to have their children learn English over maintaining the home language was a challenge in their implementation of best practices for supporting DLLs. A similar number (50% of centers; 66% of FCCHs) said that community attitudes about bilingualism and DLLs also created challenges.

Parent and community attitudes focusing on the importance of English instruction and a lack of formal policies and priorities for DLLs at the program level may reflect the lingering effects of older policy decisions and beliefs. In particular, although Proposition 227, which dismantled bilingual instruction in California's K–12 system in 1998 and mandated an English-only approach to instruction, did not directly impact early learning settings, it did reflect the prevailing attitudes in the state at the time, and may have influenced how early learning programs thought about preparing children for kindergarten. And even though Proposition 58 overturned this legislation in 2016, it takes time for changing attitudes to be translated into school policies. However, research shows that instructing DLLs only in English could hinder home language development,[18,19,20] and in turn, undercut the benefits of knowing two languages. Early learning programs can play an important

role in helping parents to understand the benefits of bilingualism and in encouraging them to use the home language with their children at home to help them develop their bilingual skills. Shifts in attitudes among parents and community members about the value of bilingualism may make it easier for early learning programs to implement evidence-based practices with DLLs.

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD: SUPPORTING BILINGUALISM AND KINDERGARTEN READINESS IN A MIGRANT PROGRAM

The majority of site directors reported valuing bilingualism, while prioritizing the preparation of children for kindergarten. The director of one migrant program in Central California shared how staff have tried various dual language approaches in order to support bilingualism and promote kindergarten readiness.

Migrant workers' unique work schedules often do not align with traditional school calendars and schedules, making it difficult for these families to find early care and education for their children. For example, in one county in Central California, migrant families' work typically runs between mid-March and mid-October. The federal Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program was implemented to address the needs and unique work schedules of families whose primary income comes from agricultural production or harvesting.[21] The program operates in 38 states, including California.

One Migrant Head Start program in Central California addresses migrant families' unique needs by operating both child care centers and family child care homes that match the parents' schedules. Many of the program's staff are fluent Spanish speakers, and some have also worked in agriculture prior to their career in early childhood education. Because most of the children in the program come from households in which at least some Spanish is spoken, children often share a home language with their teachers.

The program started a dual language learning approach for its preschoolers approximately 5 years ago, and expanded the approach to its infants and toddlers about 2 years ago. Staff have tried different strategies for the dual language learning approach, with varying degrees of success. For example, when they first started with the dual language approach, they designated one teacher in each classroom as the "English language model" and tried to establish specific times of day in which that person would speak/model English. However, there was resistance from staff who did not feel comfortable with this approach because their primary language was Spanish and they had always taught in Spanish as well. Now the program no longer designates one specific person as an English language model; instead, all teaching staff in a classroom are asked to speak English 50% of the time and Spanish 50% of the time.

The site director shared that one goal for the 50/50 approach was kindergarten readiness. She explained,

> *"We need to expose children to the English language, because as they get to kinder[garten], it's going to be harder for them if they don't have any [English skills]. They'll do well because there's been research that children who [speak English and their home language] actually do very well in school. We want to be able to expose them before they go to kinder[garten]."*

How Do Programs Approach Instruction and Support for DLLs?

Early learning programs draw on a variety of approaches to support DLLs in terms of their use of home language. In this section, we describe how language models and curricula, access to and use of classroom materials and resources, and use of assessments vary across programs.

Language Models and Curricula Used in Early Learning Programs

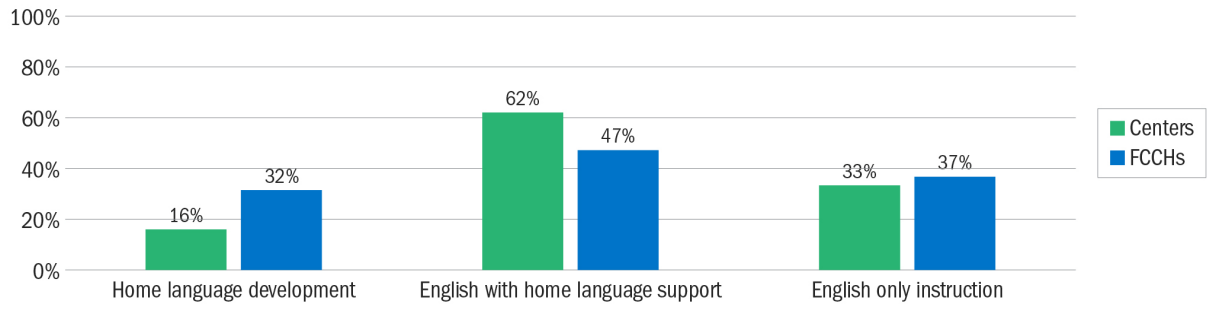
The majority of programs use the home language to some degree, but at least a third of programs in California use English-only instruction with their DLLs. The use of a child's home language enhances fluency in that language, can promote learning and transfer to knowledge and skills in English, and helps build cultural identity, among other advantages.[22,23]

Some programs reported using an approach with the explicit goal of developing the home language (16% of centers; 32% of FCCHs; Exhibit 7). This could include implementing a balanced dual language development approach, in which English is taught half of the time and home language the other half (a 50/50 model); a dual language development approach with a greater emphasis on one language (e.g., a 90/10 model); or an approach that uses only the home language, which was far less common.

A larger percentage of programs (62% of centers; 47% of FCCHs) reported using English with some home language support, an approach in which English is the language of instruction, and the home language is used to support learning.[24] For example, some directors reported that their educators teach in English and translate the concepts to the home language as needed, especially at the beginning of the year. Others said that they promote home language development by incorporating the home language through music, poetry, and movement.

Fewer program directors, though still a notable number (33% of centers; 37% of FCCHs), reported using *only* English for instruction. Therefore, in at least a third of programs, DLLs may be missing out on opportunities to strengthen their home language skills. The use of an English-only approach could be a function of staffing constraints, particularly in programs where children speak many different languages.

Exhibit 7. Percentage of DLL-Serving Programs, by Language Approaches for DLLs and Setting Type



Note: These are not mutually exclusive categories. Some respondents selected multiple language approaches, indicating that different approaches may be used in different classrooms or with different groups of children.

Programs that intentionally use the home language (either a home language development model or English with home language support) tend to serve significantly larger proportions of DLLs. Conversely, programs with English-only instruction tend to serve smaller proportions of DLLs.

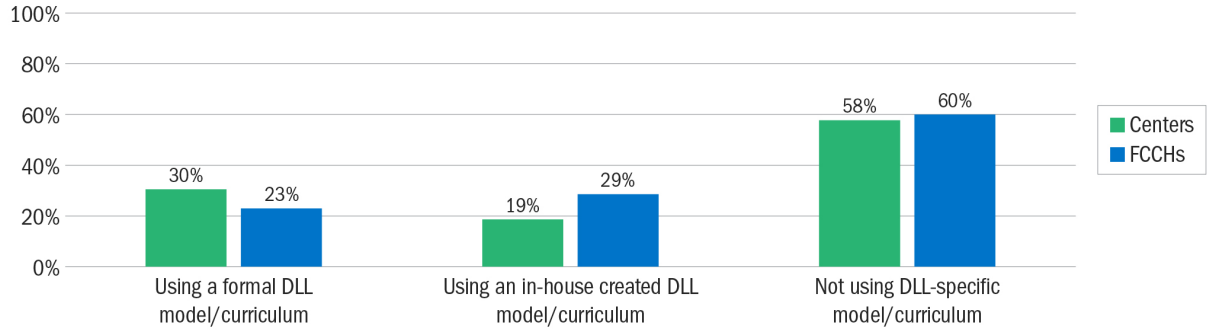
SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD: ADOPTING A HOME LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Survey data showed that programs approach home language development in different ways, sometimes using intentional dual language models, which might take the form of a balanced (50/50) model, an approach with a greater emphasis on one language (e.g., a 90/10 model), or even using the home language exclusively. The director of one program in Northern California shared how their program has implemented a dual language approach.

In 2018, an established State Preschool program in a rural county in Central California adopted a dual language approach in Hmong and English for one of its classrooms, because of the area's large population of Hmong families. The backgrounds and home languages of the children in this classroom vary, but about a third of the children speak Hmong, with varying degrees of English fluency. Teachers integrate Hmong throughout the day in the classroom, and particularly during circle time. When the program first began, there were some challenges. At least one teacher at first felt uncomfortable speaking Hmong to children who did not already speak the language, but gradually grew more accustomed to the approach. Some parents were also initially hesitant about the dual language model. However, parent interest has been increasing, and Hmong families are now requesting that their children be placed in this particular classroom. One teacher noted that parents now share that their children who never spoke Hmong before are now speaking Hmong at home—a success the staff take pride in.

Even if they reported an intentional home language development approach, the majority of programs reported not using a specific DLL curriculum or model. More than half of program directors (58% of centers; 60% of FCCHs) said that they are not following a specific curriculum to support DLLs in their care (Exhibit 8). Almost a third of centers (30%) and a quarter of FCCHs (23%) reported that they use a formal curricular approach or model for DLLs (such as the Sobrato Early Academic Language [SEAL] program or Nuestros Niños), and a smaller number said that they are using a curriculum or model they created themselves to support DLLs. Those programs that reported using an intentional DLL curriculum or model (whether published or self-developed) tend to serve a significantly higher proportion of DLLs. Moreover, centers that receive Head Start or Title 5 funds are more likely to use a published DLL curriculum or model compared with those that do not receive these public funds. FCCHs that receive Title 5 funds are more likely to report using their own DLL curriculum than those not receiving Title 5 funds. These findings suggest there is variation in the intentionality and structure of programs' support for DLLs, and additional guidance on how to support DLLs may be needed.

Exhibit 8. Percentage of DLL-Serving Programs That Reported Using a DLL-Specific Model or Curriculum, by Setting Type



Materials and Other Resources to Support DLLs in Early Learning Programs

Physical materials in the classroom, including linguistically and culturally appropriate curricular items, visual supports, and family and cultural photos and artifacts, are important for DLLs to feel comfortable and included in the classroom environment.[25] Programs included in this study reported using a variety of such materials.

Programs have some linguistically supportive materials for DLLs, but more resources are needed. Providing books and other materials that reflect the language and cultural background of DLLs served in a program is critical for children to feel comfortable and to demonstrate that their language and cultural background is valued.[26] A substantial percentage of program directors, at least three out of five, reported that they have bilingual books (64% of centers; 70% of FCCHs) or books in the home language (62% of centers; 61% of FCCHs; Exhibit 9). Despite many program directors noting they have some books to support home language development, about three quarters of programs (73% of centers; 77% of FCCHs) still reported moderate or significant challenges related to having access to high-quality books in the home language or bilingual books. These challenges may vary across programs as well. For example, programs that serve larger proportions of DLLs are more likely to report having books in the home language and bilingual books available for DLLs. Resources may also be more limited for programs serving children who speak languages other than Spanish, as bilingual and home language books may be less available in other languages.

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FIELD: RESOURCES IN THE HOME LANGUAGE

Finding high-quality books in the home language or bilingual books—especially in languages other than Spanish—can be difficult. One center-based program found ways to address this challenge.

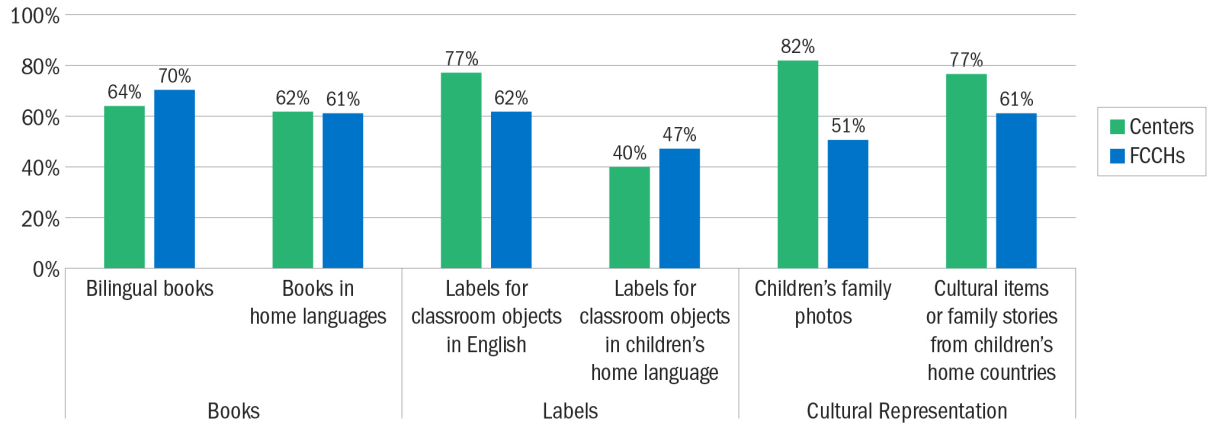
For one center-based preschool in Northern California, a primary goal is to support children's Armenian language and culture through a dual language, English/Armenian approach. The majority of the children served come from homes in which one or both parents speak Armenian, and although there are two Armenian dialects (Western and Eastern), they share an alphabet and are similar enough that speakers of each dialect can understand one another.

The site has access to a curriculum and books in Western Armenian; however, finding age-appropriate materials in the language can be a challenge. For example, one teacher explained that although the program has storybooks in Armenian, they are quite wordy, and the children tend to lose focus. To keep the children engaged, teachers retell the stories in their own words. Finding resources on particular topics has been another challenge. To address this challenge, when teachers cover particular topics in math and science, teachers will use books in English but explain the concepts in both English and Armenian. Program staff also support the language through a weekly parent newsletter, which shares the concepts or topics children are learning in the program so that parents can reinforce them at home.

Programs tend to have more environmental print in the classroom in English than in the home language. Many program directors reported providing environmental print for children by labeling objects throughout the classroom, a common strategy to support children's language development and early reading skills.[27] More programs provide these labels in English (77% of centers; 62% of FCCHs) than in the home language (40% of centers; 47% of FCCHs).

Cultural items and family stories from the children's home country are commonly used in DLL classrooms, especially in center-based programs. Three out of four center directors (77%) and 61% of FCCH directors reported incorporating cultural items from children's home countries (e.g., play food items, dolls/puppets, and musical instruments that represent the cultural background of the children in the class) in their classroom settings (Exhibit 9). Most centers (82%) and about half of family child care homes (51%) also incorporate pictures of children's families, and programs with larger proportions of DLLs enrolled are even more likely to do so. Cultural artifacts and family pictures are elements that can help children feel included and at ease, which are important for their learning.[28]

Exhibit 9. Percentage of DLL-Serving Programs With Different Books, Labels, and Cultural Materials, by Setting Type



Use of Assessments for DLLs in Early Learning Programs

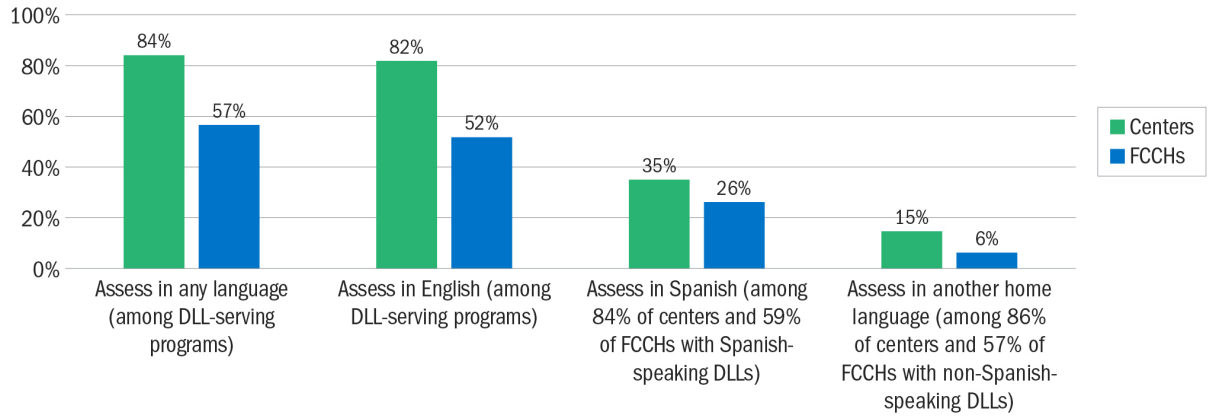
Many centers and FCCHs use assessments to monitor DLL learning, but few assess their DLLs in their home languages. The DLL Policy Platform calls for collecting and using data to support DLLs, and research supports the practice of assessing bilingual learners in both English and their home language to fully understand their development and monitor their progress.[29,30]

Administering assessments to DLLs in both of their languages will help educators understand the full set of language, social-emotional, and other academic skills of their DLLs.[31] Overall, the majority of DLL-serving programs (84% of centers; 57% of FCCHs) reported assessing their children, but most of these reported conducting these assessments in English (82% of centers; 52% of FCCHs; Exhibit 10).

Far fewer programs assess their DLLs in a language other than English. Those that do are more apt to assess children in Spanish, likely because Spanish assessments are more readily available.[32,33] More than one third of centers (35%) serving Spanish speakers assess those children in Spanish; but a smaller percentage of FCCHs (26%) do so. Far fewer programs that serve children from other language groups assess them in their home language; only 15% of centers and 6% of FCCHs do so. One reason for these low percentages may be because fewer assessments exist in other languages. Programs where children are not being assessed in their home language may not get an adequate evaluation of those children's full knowledge and skills.

Most program directors reported assessing children's skills in multiple domains, including school readiness, early literacy, early math, language, and vocabulary. Use of home language assessments did not vary by type of skill assessed.

Exhibit 10. Percentage of DLL-Serving Programs Reporting Conducting Assessments in Various Languages, by Setting Type



HOW HAVE EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS SUPPORTED CHILDREN'S LEARNING DURING COVID-19?

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the early learning and care system experienced immense challenges due to program closures and reduced capacity, which undoubtedly created strain for the families and children being served, many of whom are DLLs. Many programs, however, made concerted efforts to continue to serve their children and families, including efforts to make sure their DLL children were not falling through the cracks. Through a supplemental state representative survey administered in June and July of 2020, program administrators were asked about how their program supported children and families, including DLLs, during the COVID-19 pandemic.[34]

Most programs engaged in a variety of activities to help parents support their children's learning during the disruptions:

- 86% of centers and 62% of FCCHs offered parents ideas for activities to do with their children
- 69% of centers and 39% of FCCHs reported providing books or other hands-on learning materials to families
- 74% of centers and 29% of FCCHs provided real-time interaction with children via video-call

Additionally, some DLL-serving programs provided support in the home language:

- 42% of centers and 27% of FCCHs provided books or other hands-on learning materials in the home language
- 43% of centers and 20% of FCCHs provide real-time virtual interactions provided in the home language

Read more about California's early learning system and its dual language learners during the COVID-19 pandemic at https://www.air.org/covid-early-learning

Conclusions and Recommendations

Drawing on data from the First 5 California DLL Pilot Study, this brief describes the diversity of California's early childhood programs in terms of the languages children and staff speak, their priorities and beliefs, and overall instructional approaches and supports for DLLs provided in the classroom. Data from the study's survey of program directors suggest a few key findings:

- **Early learning programs serve children from a wide array of language backgrounds, and many do not have staff who speak the home language of their DLLs—especially non-Spanish speaking DLLs.** While Spanish is by far the most common language spoken by DLLs across the state, programs serve children from many language backgrounds, often in the same classroom. Programs sometimes do not have bilingual staff who speak the home languages of the DLLs, and this is especially true for DLLs who speak languages other than Spanish, such as Vietnamese, Cantonese or Mandarin, Arabic, or Tagalog/Pilipino. Only about a fifth of centers that have Cantonese or Mandarin speakers have staff who speak one or both of those languages, and fewer than a quarter of centers that serve Vietnamese speakers have a staff member who speaks Vietnamese.

- **Although most program directors reported valuing bilingualism and demonstrated some knowledge about dual language learning, many programs' policies and priorities for their DLLs seem to be misaligned with their beliefs.** More than eight in 10 program directors reported they believe the continued use of the home language is essential for children's future success, but only half as many identified bilingualism as a top priority for their DLLs. Even fewer reported having a formal DLL policy statement or strategic plan for DLLs. Program directors cited parents' preferences to have their child learn English as well as mixed community attitudes about bilingualism as challenges for their programs, and these factors may influence their priorities.

- **Though many program directors reported that their program uses at least some home language with their DLLs, at least a third are implementing an English-only approach to instruction.** The most common language approach used in DLL-serving programs across the state relies on English as the primary language of instruction, with the home language used to support learning. A small number of programs also use an approach with the explicit goal of home language development, including dual immersion programs. However, an English-only approach is used in at least one third of the state's DLL-serving early learning programs. This means that DLLs in these programs may be missing out on opportunities to strengthen their home language skills.

- **Early learning programs have access to some dual language resources to support DLLs, but few use home language assessments, and more bilingual books and home language supports are needed.** The majority of program directors reported that they have some bilingual or home language books, but many also noted that access to high-quality books in children's home languages was a moderate or significant challenge for them. In addition, while many programs use assessments to monitor their DLLs' learning, few program directors reported assessing DLLs in their home language. This may reflect limited staff capacity to conduct assessments; it may also reflect a need for

additional valid and developmentally appropriate assessments in languages other than English—including languages other than Spanish—that can adequately assess DLLs' learning across school readiness domains. Overall, the majority of programs reported challenges in funding when it came to supporting DLLs, including for resources such as professional development, instructional materials in multiple languages, and translators. These challenges may impact the ability of programs to effectively and comprehensively implement best practices for supporting DLLs.

Overall, although we see some evidence of shifting attitudes toward valuing bilingualism and greater investments in instructional resources for supporting DLLs,[35] actual program policies and practices remain somewhat behind this movement. These still-developing practices may reflect a lag in the effects of recent policies that support the use of children's home languages and signal a more inclusive learning environment (such as Proposition 58). There remains a disconnect between directors' positive beliefs about bilingualism and the actual learning priorities that programs have in place for DLLs, which may reflect a lack of funding or incentives to implement more formal DLL policies and instructional approaches and the reality of the largely English-focused K–12 school system.

Several policy considerations emerge from these findings:

- With the number and diversity of DLLs in the early learning and care system, stronger policies may be needed to encourage the hiring and retention of bilingual staff and to provide training focused on supporting DLLs for staff who do not speak children's home languages.
- Given the benefits of bilingualism and the reliance on an English-only model in some settings, early learning programs may need additional supports to help them implement formal, consistent approaches to support DLLs' dual language development. These supports might come in the form of professional development for educators and administrators on language models and strategies for building dual language development.
- Investments in the development and distribution of dual language materials and resources are also needed. For example, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of DLLs' skills, there is a need for more valid and developmentally appropriate assessments in multiple languages that can adequately assess DLLs' learning across school readiness domains.[36] Bilingual or home language books that are culturally relevant are also needed to ensure that classroom libraries are well stocked with stimulating materials that meet the learning needs of young DLLs. Early learning programs need funds to acquire books, but directors' challenges in this area may also reflect a larger need in the field for authentic children's literature in languages other than English.

California's new Master Plan for Early Learning and Care calls for programs to require specialized training for teachers to support DLLs and for program guidelines to be expanded to account for the unique learning of DLLs. Efforts to implement the priorities in the Master Plan will be key to integrating beliefs, policies, and practices in the interest of supporting DLLs and their home languages. Our findings that identify challenges programs face in accessing DLL-focused professional development, retaining educators, and finding educational materials in children's home languages support this call to action.

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About the First 5 California DLL Pilot Study

In 2015, First 5 California committed $20 million for the DLL Pilot Study to support effective and scalable strategies in early learning and care programs to promote learning and development for DLLs and their families. A key component of this overall initiative seeks to describe and evaluate the range of strategies to support DLLs, including three strategies of particular interest: instructional practices, PD for early educators, and family engagement. The study is examining the range of practices, by age, setting type, and diverse language groups, and how various practices are supportive of child and family outcomes. The study includes 16 counties selected to be broadly representative of the state's DLL population: Butte, Calaveras, Contra Costa, Fresno, Los Angeles, Monterey, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Sonoma, Stanislaus, and Yolo. The study is being conducted by AIR and its partners at Juárez & Associates; CRI; School Readiness Consulting; Allen, Shea & Associates; and Stanfield Systems, Inc.; with guidance from the DLL Input Group, which comprises stakeholders, advocates, and state and national experts on DLLs.

For more information about the study and to read other study briefs and reports:

https://californiadllstudy.org/

www.ccfc.ca.gov/

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