



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**POLICY STATEMENT ON SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN WHO
ARE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS**

PURPOSE¹

The purpose of this policy statement is to support early childhood programs and States by providing recommendations that promote the development and learning of young children, birth to age five, who are dual language learners (DLLs).² The statement also provides support to tribal communities in their language revitalization efforts within tribal early childhood programs. National estimates indicate that there is a large and growing population of children who are DLLs – children who have a home language other than English and are learning two or more languages at the same time, or learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. Early childhood programs should be prepared to optimize the early experiences of these young children by holding high expectations, capitalizing on their strengths- including cultural and linguistic strengths - and providing them with the individualized developmental and learning supports necessary to succeed in school.

Over half of the world’s population is estimated to be bilingual or multilingual. Research indicates that supporting bilingualism from early ages can have wide ranging benefits, from cognitive and social advantages early in life, to long term employment opportunities and competitiveness in the workplace later in life.³ At the same time, data indicate that children who are DLLs in the U.S., on average, lag behind their monolingual English-speaking peers in academic achievement. These patterns may suggest that there is a mismatch between the learning experiences these children *need* to meet their potential, and the quality of experiences they are *currently receiving*. Given the growing number of young children who are DLLs and the sizable proportion of the workforce they will make up in the coming years, ensuring they are prepared for school and do well once they arrive is an economic imperative that will directly influence the competitiveness of the U.S. in an evolving global economy.

¹ This document does not address the obligations of States and school districts towards "English learners" (ELs) under Titles I or III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (see definition in 20 USC §7801(20)) or under the Federal civil rights laws. For further information regarding such obligations and rights see Dear Colleague Letter, English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents (01/7/2015) at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>. <. While this document includes recommendations on best practices informed by research for supporting DLLS, including promoting home language development and identifying and implementing language use models for young DLLs in early childhood settings, this document does not recommend any particular curricula, program of instruction, or instructional materials, nor does it prohibit any language instruction educational program used with ELs, consistent with Title III of the ESEA or other laws.

² Early childhood programs or early childhood settings include any program that provides early care and education to young children birth to age five, prior to Kindergarten entry. These settings include but are not limited to private child care, family child care, Head Start, faith-based child care or preschool programs, and public and private Pre-K or preschool programs. ³ Callahan, R. M., & Gándara, P. C. (Eds.). (2014). *The bilingual advantage: Language, literacy and the US labor market* (Vol. 99). Multilingual Matters.

³ Callahan, R. M., & Gándara, P. C. (Eds.). (2014). *The bilingual advantage: Language, literacy and the US labor market* (Vol. 99). Multilingual Matters.

It is the vision of the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED) that all early childhood programs adequately and appropriately serve the diverse children and families that make up this country. Programs should foster their cognitive, linguistic, social emotional, and physical development and prepare them for success in school and beyond.

This joint HHS and ED policy statement advances that vision by:

- Setting an expectation for high-quality and appropriate supports and services specifically designed for young children who are DLLs;
- Increasing awareness about the benefits of bilingualism and the important role of home language development;
- Reviewing the research on the unique strengths of and challenges faced by this population, and strategies that are effective in promoting their learning and development;
- Providing recommendations to early childhood programs, tribes, and States on establishing policies and implementing practices that support the learning and development of children who are DLLs;
- Providing considerations for tribal communities engaged in Native language revitalization, maintenance, restoration, or preservation efforts within their early childhood programs; and
- Identifying free resources to support States, tribal communities, programs, teachers, providers and families in supporting the development and learning of children who are DLLs.

OVERVIEW

Definition of Dual Language Learner

Across the research and policy sectors, a number of different terms and definitions have been used for children who are DLLs.⁴ For the purpose of this policy statement, children who are DLLs are those who are learning two (or more) languages at the same time, or learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. Children who are DLLs come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. For some, both a language other than English *and* English may be spoken at home. Children who are DLLs are a very diverse group by many measures, and have varying levels of proficiency in their home language and in English. In the context of this statement, the term "Dual Language Learners" may encompass or overlap substantially with other terms frequently used, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), bilingual, English language learner (ELL), English learner (EL), and children who speak a Language Other Than English (LOTE). The broader DLL population also includes children from many different backgrounds, including children who speak heritage languages, such as children from American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN) or Native Hawaiian communities.

⁴ Baird, A.S. (2016, May 11). Introducing the Dual Language Learners Reader: Post #1 [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://dev-edcentral.pantheonsite.io/dllreader1/>

Description of the DLL Population

As many as 22 percent of children ages 5 to 17 in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home, a figure that has more than doubled in the past three decades.⁵ Though estimates for children under age 5 are less reliable,⁶ the number of children who are DLLs in this age group may be even larger. For instance, according to 2000 Census data, 27 percent of children under age 6 come from homes where at least one parent speaks a language other than English.⁷ In Head Start, 29 percent of preschool-age children come from a home where a language other than English is spoken.⁸ Children who are DLLs are a highly varied group from diverse family backgrounds with a wide variety of life experiences. The majority of school-age children who are DLLs come from homes where Spanish is spoken (71 percent).⁹ Children who are DLLs – particularly those from immigrant families – are more likely to live in two-parent households.¹⁰ They are also more likely than their monolingual English-speaking peers to live in multi-generational or multi-family households.¹¹

There is not a comprehensive estimate of AIAN children who speak a heritage language at home. According to the U.S. Census, of AIANs age 5 and older, 27 percent speak a language other than English at home.¹² In 2015, Head Start programs served approximately 45,000 children of AIAN heritage. Of those, only 2 percent had an AIAN language as their primary home language.¹³ This number has fallen in recent years, from about 8 percent in 2001, underscoring the fact that heritage languages are in danger of being lost in many communities.

The Legal Foundation

Several Federal laws apply to serving young children who are DLLs and their families, including children with disabilities who are DLLs. While the recommendations in this policy statement (discussed below) do not confer any legal obligations, here we provide a brief description of several laws that may be applicable to early childhood programs serving young children who are DLLs.¹⁴ At their foundation, most of these policies reflect important underlying principles about equal

⁵ Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2015). *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-being, 2015*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁶ Matthews, H. (2011). *Meeting the Early Learning Challenge: Supporting English Language Learners*. Washington, DC: CLASP.

⁷ Capps, R., Fix, M., Ost, J., Reardon-Anderson, J., & Passel, J. S. (2004). *The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

⁸ Administration for Children and Families. (2013). Report to Congress on Dual Language Learners in Head Start and Early Head Start programs: Executive Summary. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

⁹ Ruiz Soto, A. G., Hooker, S., & Batalova, J. (2015). *Top Languages Spoken by English Language Learners Nationally and by State*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

¹⁰ Hernandez, D. J., & Napierala, J. S. (2012). *Children in immigrant families: Essential to America's future*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

¹¹ Castro, D. C., Garcia, E. E., & Markos, A. M. (2008). *Dual language learners: Research informing policy*. Chapel Hill, NC: Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners.

¹² U.S. Department of Commerce. (2012). *Profile America Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month*. U.S. Census Bureau News. Retrieved from: http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/cb12ff-22_aian.pdf.

¹³ Administration for Children and Families. (2015) *Information Memorandum: Native Language Preservation, Revitalization, Restoration, and Maintenance in Head Start and Early Head Start*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

¹⁴ This document does not address Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), 29 U.S.C. § 794, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101-12213, two Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on disability. ED's Office for Civil Rights (ED/OCR) and HHS' Office for Civil Rights (HHS/OCR) enforce Section 504, which prohibits discrimination based on disability by recipients of Federal financial assistance, including in early childhood programs receiving Federal financial assistance from ED or HHS. Additionally, ED/OCR and HHS/OCR, along with the Department of Justice (DOJ), share authority to enforce Title II of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12131-12134, which prohibits discrimination based on disability by state and local governments, regardless of whether they receive Federal financial assistance. In addition, DOJ enforces Title III of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12181-12189, which prohibits disability discrimination in most private early childhood programs. States and early childhood programs must comply with the nondiscrimination requirements of these laws. Finally, Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which is enforced by HHS/OCR prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in certain health programs and activities, which may apply if there is a health component to an early childhood program. More information about these laws can be found at: <http://www.lep.gov>, <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr>, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>, and <http://www.ada.gov>.

opportunity for all children and equal language access, for both parents and children, in education settings.

- The *Head Start Act* requires programs to develop procedures for identifying children who are DLLs; ensure that they progress in their development and learning, including English language development; and make appropriate accommodations when assessing their development; provide parents of children who are DLLs information that is in a language they understand, to the extent practicable. The law also authorizes funds for professional development activities specific to serving children who are DLLs and their families, and requires programs to provide trainings for teachers on promoting early language and literacy development in children’s native languages. Regulations that govern Head Start programs also have specific requirements for responsiveness in serving children and families who speak a language other than English, including supporting and respecting the home language of each child to foster their wellbeing.
- The *Child Care and Development Block Grant* requires States to develop child care plans that include training and professional development opportunities for child care providers. To the extent practicable, these opportunities must include a focus on working with children who are DLLs. Further, the law authorizes the development of a national website and hotline that ensures the widest access to families who speak a language other than English at home.
- *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*: Part C of the IDEA, the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, provides formula grants to assist states in implementing comprehensive, coordinated, statewide systems that provide early intervention services to eligible children with disabilities and their families. Under Part B of the IDEA, States and school districts must make available a free appropriate public education (FAPE), including special education and related services designed to meet the unique needs of each eligible child with a disability, in the least restrictive environment. Each child's entitlement to FAPE under Part B begins at the child's third birthday.
- *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its Implementing Regulations (Title VI)*,¹⁵ prohibit recipients of Federal financial assistance (recipients) from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Among other things, school districts and States have an obligation to ensure meaningful communication with LEP parents in a language they can understand and to ensure that English Learner (EL) students can meaningfully participate in programs and services. In addition to ensuring EL children have access to the core curriculum, States and school districts must not discriminate against EL students with regard to access to programs and activities, whether curricular, co-curricular, or extracurricular, including prekindergarten programs.

¹⁵ ED’s Office for Civil Rights and HHS’ Office for Civil Rights enforce several Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in early childhood programs receiving Federal financial assistance from their respective departments, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d - 2000d-7 (prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, or national origin by recipients of Federal financial assistance) and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 – 1688 (prohibiting discrimination based on sex by recipients of Federal financial assistance). ED’s regulations effectuating Title VI and Title IX are set forth at 34 C.F.R. Parts 100 and 106, respectively. HHS regulations effectuating Title VI and Title IX are set forth at 45 C.F.R. Parts 80 and 86, respectively.

- The *Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA)* of 1974 requires state and local educational agencies to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede students' equal participation in the agencies' instructional programs.¹⁶
- Title III, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)* awards grants to States to improve the education of children who are "English Learners" (ELs) as defined in ESEA, so that they learn English and meet the same challenging State academic standards as non-EL students. The recent passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* updates Title III to include the goal of assisting preschool teachers of ELs, and the option to design and implement early childhood language instruction education programs.
- The *Native American Languages Act* states that it is the policy of the United States to preserve, protect, and promote Native Americans' rights to use their indigenous languages anywhere, including as a medium of instruction in schools.
- The *Native American Programs Act of 1974* established the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), which aims to promote self-sufficiency for Native Americans by providing funding for community projects including Native language instruction, preservation, maintenance, and revitalization projects, as well as training/technical assistance to eligible tribes and native organizations.

In addition to these laws, the Federal government has also issued executive orders related to language access and the education of children who are DLLs. For example, President Obama's early learning agenda included Executive Order 13592, which sets the goal of increasing the number of AIAN children who enter kindergarten ready for success through improved access to high quality early learning programs and services, including Native language immersion programs, that encourage the learning and development of AIAN children from birth through age 5.

With respect to language access more broadly, [Executive Order 13166](#) was issued in 2000,¹⁷ consistent with the national origin protections under Title VI, tasking Federal agencies with improving accessibility for individuals who are LEP in all programs and activities, and ensuring that entities that receive Federal funding ensure meaningful access for individuals who are LEP. In addition, Federal agencies have released guidance ensuring that individuals who are LEP can participate meaningfully and equally in federally assisted programs and services.¹⁸

The Research Foundation

Brain Development for Children Learning More Than One Language

During the first five years of life, children's brains develop rapidly, highly influenced by the experiences they share with the adults and peers in their lives. Exposure to language is a unique experience because it is continuous and constant. Children are surrounded by language during many of their waking hours. Constant exposure makes language highly consequential for brain development and learning.

¹⁶ The Department of Justice enforces the EEOA and issued guidance to state and local education agencies' regarding their obligations toward EL students and LEP standards under 20 U.S.C. § 1703(f) of the EEOA in the joint *Dear Colleague Letter, English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents (01/7/2015)* at <https://www.justice.gov/crt/about/edu/documents/eldcleng.pdf>.

¹⁷ See 65 Fed. Reg. at 50,121

¹⁸ More information can be found at: <http://www.lep.gov>, <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr>, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>, and <http://www.ada.gov>.¹⁹ Werker, J. F., & Byers-Heinlein, K. (2008). Bilingualism in infancy: First steps in perception and comprehension. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 12(4), 144-151.

Advances in neuroscience have revealed important findings on how children acquire language, whether one or more than one, and how this acquisition further impacts brain development. This research demonstrates that the average human brain is equally equipped to learn multiple languages, and that it is possible to learn multiple languages at the same time, or to learn a new language while continuing to develop the first language.¹⁹ In fact, studies show that children are born with the ability to identify sounds (a foundational ability in language learning) from *every* language. As they develop and grow, their skills narrow to focus on the language or languages used in their surroundings.²⁰ Children exposed to two languages early in life develop two separate, but inter-related language systems. Learning more than one language at the same time does not confuse young children; rather, the human brain is capable of learning multiple languages at very young ages. In fact, this learning is often easiest at young ages, under the right conditions.²¹ These findings also apply to young children with disabilities.²² In addition, there is no scientific research that suggests that learning multiple languages – or being bilingual – can lead to a developmental delay for children.²³

Neuroscientists have studied differences in brain structure and development between bilingual children and their monolingual peers. Individuals who have continuous, high-quality exposure to more than one language from a young age have greater grey matter density and more efficient synaptic connectivity in regions of the brain associated with language processing, as well as memory, attention and other executive functions.²⁴ The extent of these differences, some studies have found, is greatest among individuals who were exposed to two languages before the age of five, and is dependent on how proficient the individual is in his or her second language, and at what age exposure to a second language began.²⁵

Advantages in Development for Children Learning Multiple Languages

Differences in brain structure between bilingual and monolingual children may be associated with findings that indicate bilingual children demonstrate more advanced executive functions than their monolingual peers.²⁶ Among those are more effective cognitive control, greater abilities to control and shift attention, enhanced problem solving abilities, greater working memory, and increased ability to focus on pertinent information, ignore distracting information, and apply known concepts to new situations.²⁷ Experts suggest that the effort required to manage two language systems may

¹⁹ Werker, J. F., & Byers-Heinlein, K. (2008). Bilingualism in infancy: First steps in perception and comprehension. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 12(4), 144-151.

²⁰ Kuhl, P. K. (2011). Early language learning and literacy: neuroscience implications for education. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 5(3), 128-142.

²¹ Conboy, B. T., & Kuhl, P. K. (2011). Impact of second-language experience in infancy: brain measures of first-and second-language speech perception. *Developmental science*, 14(2), 242-248.; Conboy, B. T., Brooks, R., Meltzoff, A. N., & Kuhl, P. K. (2015). Social Interaction in Infants' Learning of Second-Language Phonetics: An Exploration of Brain–Behavior Relations. *Developmental neuropsychology*, 40(4), 216-229.; McCabe, A., Bornstein, M., Wishard Guerra, A., Kuohirko, Y., Paez, M., Tamis-Lemonda, C., et al. (2013). *Multilingual children: Beyond myths and toward best practices*. Society for Research in Child Development, 2013.

²² HHS (2015) *Presentation Summary for Supporting Children with Disabilities Who Are Also Dual Language Learners*. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/practice/docs/dd-webinar-05-2015-Followup.pdf>

²³ DEC (2010) *DEC Position Statement on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness*. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20Learners/disabilities/inclusion/position-statement.pdf>

²⁴ Kaiser, A., Eppenberger, S., Smieskova, R., Borgwardt, S., Kuenzli, E., Radue, E., ... & Bendfeldt, K. (2015). Age of second language acquisition in multilinguals has an impact on grey matter volume in language-associated brain areas. *Name: Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 638.

²⁵ Mechelli, A., Crinion, J. T., Noppeney, U., O'Doherty, J., Ashburner, J., Frackowiak, R. S., & Price, C. J. (2004). Neurolinguistics; Structural plasticity in the bilingual brain. *Nature*, 431.

²⁶ Adesope, O. O., Lavin, T., Thompson, T., & Ungerleider, C.. (2010). A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Cognitive Correlates of Bilingualism. *Review of Educational Research*, 80(2), 207–245.

²⁷ Abutalebi, J., Della Rosa, P. A., Ding, G., Weekes, B., Costa, A., & Green, D. W. (2013). Language proficiency modulates the engagement of cognitive control areas in multilinguals. *Cortex*, 49(3), 905-911.; Li, P., Legault, J., & Litcofsky, K. A. (2014). Neuroplasticity as a function of second language learning: anatomical changes in the human brain. *Cortex*, 58, 301-324.; Poulin-Dubois, D., Blaye, A., Coutya, J., & Bialystok, E. (2011). The effects of bilingualism on toddlers' executive functioning. *Journal of experimental child psychology*, 108(3), 567-579.; Barac, R., Bialystok, E., Castro,

contribute to enhanced executive functions. Children who are exposed to and speak two (or more) languages constantly have both languages activated in their minds.²⁸ At any given time, the child must choose which language system to attend to, and which to inhibit, across a variety of daily situations.²⁹ This constant need to attend to, choose between, and inhibit languages may transfer to other skill areas, including those areas of cognitive functioning described above. Executive functions are critical to school readiness because they represent “*how*” children learn, which is the foundation upon “*what*” children learn is built. Recent cognitive studies suggest that executive function differences between bilingual individuals and their monolingual peers, are present early in life, and persist through childhood and into adulthood.³⁰ This advantage in executive functioning is primarily seen for children who are *balanced bilinguals* – those children who are exposed to and speak both languages approximately equally well. It is unclear whether the same advantages exist for children who are still learning their second language.³¹

A growing body of research also indicates that children who are DLLs may have advantages in social emotional development, including better self-regulation and fewer behavior problems, compared to their monolingual English speaking peers. Some studies find that these advantages in social emotional skills persist into elementary school, while others find that these skills are dependent on the English proficiency of children who are DLLs, with those who are more proficient in English displaying fewer externalized behavior problems over time, relative to those with less English proficiency. Other studies have found that children who are DLLs have social-emotional skills that are on par with their monolingual English peers. Though the mechanisms for this potential advantage are not fully understood, research indicates that maintenance of the home language has important cultural value in families,³² and facilitates the development of closer relationships between children and their caregivers and peers.³³ These relationships influence child well-being and the development of self-concept, positive social adjustment, and identity formation.³⁴

D. C., & Sanchez, M. (2014). The cognitive development of young dual language learners: A critical review. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29, 699-714.; Castro, D. C., Garcia, E. E., & Markos, A. M. (2008). *Dual language learners: Research informing policy*. Chapel Hill, NC: Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners; Kovács, Á. M., & Mehler, J. (2009). Flexible learning of multiple speech structures in bilingual infants. *Science*, 325(5940), 611-612; Yoshida, H. (2008). The cognitive consequences of early bilingualism. *Zero to Three*, 29(2), 26-30; Bialystok, E. (2011). Reshaping the mind: the benefits of bilingualism. *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology/Revue canadienne de psychologie expérimentale*, 65(4), 229.

²⁸ Gutentag, R. E., Haith, M. M., Goodman, G. S., & Hauch, J. (1984). Semantic processing of unattended words by bilinguals: A test of the input switch mechanism. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 23(2), 178-188.

²⁹ Martin-Rhee, M. M., & Bialystok, E. (2008). The development of two types of inhibitory control in monolingual and bilingual children. *Bilingualism: language and cognition*, 11(01), 81-93.; Bialystok, E. (2001). *Bilingualism in development: Language, literacy, and cognition*. Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ Ferjan Ramírez, N., Ramírez, R. R., Clarke, M., Taulu, S., & Kuhl, P. K. (2016). Speech discrimination in 11-month-old bilingual and monolingual infants: a magnetoencephalography study. *Developmental Science*; Arredondo, M. M., Hu, X. S., Satterfield, T., & Kovelman, I. (2015). Bilingualism alters children's frontal lobe functioning for attentional control. *Developmental science*; Abutalebi, J., Della Rosa, P. A., Green, D. W., Hernandez, M., Scifo, P., Keim, R., ... & Costa, A. (2011). Bilingualism tunes the anterior cingulate cortex for conflict monitoring. *Cerebral Cortex*; Stocco, A., & Prat, C. S. (2014). Bilingualism trains specific brain circuits involved in flexible rule selection and application. *Brain and language*, 137, 50-61.

³¹ Espinosa, L. M. (2013). *PreK-3rd: Challenging Common Myths about Dual Language Learners: An Update to the Seminal 2008 Report*. Foundation for Child Development.

³² August, D., & Shanahan, T. (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on language-minority children and youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

³³ Halle, T. G., Whittaker, J. V., Zepeda, M., Rothenberg, L., Anderson, R., Daneri, P. & Buysse, V. (2014). The social-emotional development of dual language learners: Looking back at existing research and moving forward with purpose. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(4), 734-749; Espinosa, L. M. (2013). *Early education for dual language learners: Promoting school readiness and early school success*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute; Child Trends Databank. (2014). *Dual Language Learners*. Available at: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=dual-language-learners> - See more at: http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=dual-language-learners#_ednref5; Office of Head Start. (2008). *Dual language learning: What does it take?* Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. - See more at: http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=dual-language-learners#_ednref5.

³⁴ E. Bialystok - *Bilingualism in development: Language, literacy, and cognition*. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY (2001); Espinosa, L.M. (2006). *Young English language learners in the U.S.* Parents as Teacher News. Fall 2006.; D.K. Oller, L. Jarmulowicz Language and literacy in

In the case of AIAN children, immersion programs that blend Native language, culture, and traditions in instruction may contribute to improvements for children in educational achievement, family involvement, and social-emotional skills through the support of cultural identity.

Gaps in Achievement for Children who are DLLs

Long-term educational performance data is not readily available for the broader group of DLLs; there is data and research, however, that speaks to the educational achievement of ELs. Therefore, most of the research in this section draws on the group of children that are categorized as ELs. Despite potential advantages in certain executive functions and social-emotional skills for bilingual children, research indicates that in the U.S., there is still a stubborn achievement gap between these children and their monolingual English speaking peers.³⁵ On average, children who are DLLs enter kindergarten behind their peers, particularly in the areas of language, literacy, and math. Research is inconsistent on the developmental trajectories of these children across elementary school – some find that there are increasing disparities between these groups in academic achievement as they progress through school, including higher high school and college drop-out rates,³⁶ while others find that children who are DLLs narrow the achievement gap in certain skill areas in elementary school.³⁷ The discrepancies in these findings may result from the fact that school readiness and achievement patterns vary greatly depending on many factors. For instance, children who are DLLs who are more proficient in English at kindergarten entry,³⁸ or who come from families of higher-socioeconomic status (SES), appear to do well in elementary school, relative to other groups of children who are DLLs.³⁹ Further, inconsistent research findings may also be related to the lack of long-term data on educational outcomes for children who are ELs, due to the “revolving door” issue: As ELs achieve English language proficiency, they exit the EL subgroup and thus, data on academic achievement and high school graduation for these children is often no longer easily identifiable.

Importantly, many of the studies on this topic have failed to separate SES from dual language learner status. The few studies that have successfully separated these two variables have concluded that family income and education play a larger role in children’s outcomes than whether or not they are DLLs.⁴⁰ Research on children who are monolingual English speakers indicates that children from low-income families are exposed to fewer words and engage in lower-quality caregiver-child interactions than their peers from higher-income backgrounds. This phenomenon is referred to as

bilingual children in the early school years E. Hoff, M. Shatz (Eds.), Blackwell handbook of language development, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA (2007), pp. 368–386.

³⁵ Murphey, D. (2014). *The Academic Achievement of English Language Learners: Data for the U.S. and Each of the States*. Child Trends Research Brief.

³⁶ Espinosa, L. M. (2013). PreK-3rd: Challenging common myths about dual language learners: An update to the Seminal 2008 Report. *New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development*.

³⁷ Lesaux, N. K., Rupp, A. A., & Siegel, L. S. (2007). Growth in the reading skills of children from diverse linguistic backgrounds: Findings from a 5-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*, 821-834.

³⁸ Halle, T., Hair, E., Wandner, L., McNamara, M., & Chien, N. (2012). Predictors and outcomes of early versus later English language proficiency among English language learners. *Early childhood research quarterly, 27*(1), 1-20.

³⁹ Espinosa, L. M. (2013). *PreK-3rd: Challenging Common Myths about Dual Language Learners: An Update to the Seminal 2008 Report*. Foundation for Child Development.

⁴⁰ Halle, T., Whittaker, J. V., Zepeda, M., Rothenberg, L., Wessel, J., Anderson, R., Buysse, V. (2014). The social-emotional development of dual language learners: Looking back at existing research and moving forward with purpose. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 29*, 734-749.; Winsler, A., Burchinal, M. R., Tien, H-C., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Espinosa, L., Castro, D., De Feyter, J. (2014). Early development among dual language learners: The roles of language use at home, maternal immigration, country of origin, and socio-demographic variables. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 29*, 750-764.

“the word gap.”⁴¹ A similar phenomena may exist in lower-income families who also happen to speak a language other than English at home, though more research is needed in this area.

The lack of proven instructional practices and evidence-based models that effectively support the development and learning of children who are DLLs is also a contributor to the achievement gap. Early childhood systems cannot prepare children for school and set them up for success once they arrive without implementing policies and practices that are based on evidence and are effective for supporting the development of language and learning more broadly. Not recognizing children’s cultures and languages as assets may also play a role in the achievement gap. Research suggests that the low social prestige of minority languages in the U.S., particularly for low-income families, may contribute to this gap as well. In countries where two or more languages have social prestige and bilingualism is common, achievement gaps between monolinguals and bilinguals, holding other variables constant, are much less pronounced, if they exist at all.⁴²

Language Development of Young DLLs

Research indicates that there are supports we can offer young children who are DLLs at home and in early learning contexts to help prepare them for school and promote their academic achievement. High-quality, intentional, and consistent exposure to the home language and to English can set children on a positive trajectory toward school success *and* bilingualism, a desirable trait in the job market. Language growth in bilingual children is associated with the quality and quantity of language exposure they experience in each language.⁴³ “Language exposure” is directing speech to children through reading, singing, or talking. There are several features of language exposure that determine its quality. The adults who are exposing children to language should be proficient in or comfortable speaking the language they are using. When adults speak to children in a language they are not proficient in or do not feel comfortable speaking, they may provide lower-quality language input, including speaking less, avoiding complex concepts, and using limited vocabulary.⁴⁴

The quality of adult-child interactions is also critical and an important contributor to children’s development. High-quality interactions are social in nature, and encompass features like child directed speech; adult responsivity to child cues and interests; joint engagement or sharing interest and enjoyment, verbally or nonverbally; and the fluency and connectedness of each conversational exchange.⁴⁵ Frequency of these interactions is also important. Each time a parent or caregiver engages in a high-quality interaction with a child, it builds and strengthens important connections in the child’s malleable brain, which in turn, impacts development and learning. These interactions are enabled by securely attached relationships, and can happen with all of the adults in a child’s life, and across all settings where a child spends time. These interactions predict language development and

⁴¹ Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1999). *The Social World of Children: Learning To Talk*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285-0624.

⁴² Gathercole, V.C.M., & Thomas, E.M. (2009). Bilingual first-language development: Dominant language takeover, threatened minority language take-up. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 213–237.; Hoff, E. (2013). Interpreting the early language trajectories of children from low-SES and language minority homes: Implications for closing achievement gaps. *Developmental psychology*, 49(1), 4-14.

⁴³ Ferjan Ramirez, N., Ramirez, R. R., Clarke, M., Taulu, S., & Kuhl, P. K. (2016). Speech discrimination in 11-month-old bilingual and monolingual infants: a magnetoencephalography study. *Developmental Science*

⁴⁴ Gathercole, V.C.M., & Thomas, E.M. (2009). Bilingual first-language development: Dominant language takeover, threatened minority language take-up. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 213–237.

⁴⁵ Hirsh-Pasek, K., Adamson, L. B., Bakeman, R., Owen, M. T., Golinkoff, R. M., Pace, A., ... & Suma, K. (2015). The contribution of early communication quality to low-income children’s language success. *Psychological science*, 26(7), 1071-1083.; Hirsh-Pasek, K., Adamson, L. B., Bakeman, R., Owen, M. T., Golinkoff, R. M. ... Suma, K. (2015). The contribution of early communication quality to low-income children’s language success. *Psychological Science*, 26, 1071-1083.; Goldstein, M. H., & Schwade, J. A. (2008). Social feedback to infants’ babbling facilitates rapid phonological learning. *Psychological Science*, 19, 515-523.; Kuhl, P. K. (2007). Is speech learning ‘gated’ by the social brain? *Developmental science*, 10(1), 110-120.

school success later in life.⁴⁶ DLLs who have rich language experiences in their home language, and as such have strong competencies in their first language, tend to develop strong second language competencies.⁴⁷ That is, research indicates that strong home language skills help build- and transfer to- developing English language skills.⁴⁸

DLLs and Participation in High-Quality Early Childhood Programs

There is ample evidence that participation in high-quality early childhood programs is beneficial for children’s learning and development, and can reduce achievement gaps.⁴⁹ Supporting children early helps set them on a positive trajectory that may reduce the need for more costly interventions later in life. Children from low-income families who attend high-quality early learning programs show more advanced skills in a variety of developmental domains upon kindergarten entry, compared to peers from similar backgrounds that did not attend such programs.⁵⁰ Children who are DLLs also benefit from high-quality early education.⁵¹ In fact, studies suggest that children who are DLLs, particularly those who are less proficient in English, may benefit more from participation in high-quality early learning programs relative to their peers.⁵²

Additionally, research finds that if given access to a comprehensive high-quality program, like Head Start, parents and families of children who are DLLs are *more* likely to enroll in, and their children are more likely to attend the program, compared to their monolingual English-speaking peers.⁵³

Approaches for Supporting the Language Development of DLLs in Early Education Programs

Multiple bodies of literature – including developmental and cognitive psychology, education research, and neuroscience – point to the benefits of supporting the home language of young children who are DLLs, alongside their English language development, in early childhood settings.⁵⁴ Though much of the research on specific language models within learning settings has been focused on and conducted in the K-12 space, there have been some studies conducted with preschoolers in early childhood programs. Many of these have examined the differences between variations of English only or English immersion models and variations of bilingual or “dual immersion” models. In an English only or English immersion model, children who are DLLs are placed in a setting where English is the only language used in the classroom for instruction, with little to no support for home language development. There are several bilingual models for instructing children who are DLLs which offer varying levels of support for and use of the non-English language. In dual immersion

⁴⁶ Hoff, E. (2013). Interpreting the early language trajectories of children from low-SES and language minority homes: Implications for closing achievement gaps. *Developmental psychology*, 49(1), 4-14.

⁴⁷ Sparks RL, Patton J, Ganschow L, Humbach N, Javorsky J. Early first-language reading and spelling skills predict later second-language reading and spelling skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 2008;100(1):162–174. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.100.1.162.

⁴⁸ Carlo, M., Barr, C., August, D., Calderon, M., & Artzi, L. (2014). Language of instruction as moderator for transfer of reading comprehension skills among Spanish-speaking English language learners. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 37(3), 287-310.; Luo, Y. C., Chen, X., & Geva, E. (2014). Concurrent and longitudinal cross-linguistic transfer of phonological awareness and morphological awareness in Chinese-English bilingual children. *Written Language and Literacy*, 17, 89-115; Ramirez, G. (2011). Cross- language transfer of morphological awareness in Chinese-English bilinguals. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 34, 23-42.

⁴⁹ Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M. R., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, W. T...Zaslow, M. J. (2013). *Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education*. Foundation for Child Development; Society for Research in Child Development.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Buisse, V., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Pérez, M., Hammer, C. S., & Knowles, M. (2014). Effects of early education programs and practices on the development and learning of dual language learners: A review of the literature. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(4), 765-785.; Gormley, W. T. (2008). The Effects of Oklahoma’s Pre-K Program on Hispanic Children*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 89(4), 916-936.

⁵² Gormley, W. T. (2008). The Effects of Oklahoma’s Pre-K Program on Hispanic Children*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 89(4), 916-936.

⁵³ Espinosa, et al. (2013). Child care experiences among dual language learners in the US: Analyses of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey-Birth Cohort.; Halle, T., Hair, E., Wandner, L., McNamara, M., & Chien, N. (2012). Predictors and outcomes of early versus later English language proficiency among English language learners. *Early childhood research quarterly*, 27(1), 1-20.

⁵⁴ McCabe, A., Bornstein, M., Wishard Guerra, A., Kuohirko, Y., Paez, M., Tamis-Lemonda, C., et al. (2013). *Multilingual children: Beyond myths and toward best practices*. Society for Research in Child Development.

models, two languages are used intentionally to interact with and instruct children with the goal of supporting academic achievement and bilingual and biliterate development. These models differ from other bilingual models in that DLLs and their monolingual English-speaking peers learn together and both receive instruction in two languages.⁵⁵

Studies have found that high-quality preschool and elementary school dual immersion models can produce favorable cognitive, achievement, and social outcomes for children who are DLLs and their monolingual English-speaking peers.⁵⁶ In particular, studies examining variations of dual immersion models in preschool programs indicate that children who are DLLs in such programs do as well or better on English language skills and significantly better on home language skills, than their peers in settings where only English is used.⁵⁷ Age of exposure to the second language also appears to matter. In one study, children who were exposed to two languages before the age of three performed better in reading, phonological awareness, and competence in both languages in elementary school, compared to their peers who were exposed to their second language after the age of three.⁵⁸ Research further indicates that preschool-age DLLs who receive more instruction in their home language, within high quality early learning settings, do better in reading and math, compared to their DLL peers who receive less home language support.⁵⁹ One study examining preschool and early elementary aged children found no gap or significant differences in achievement gains between native English speakers who receive English-only instruction, and native Spanish speakers in a dual immersion model.⁶⁰ A longitudinal study of more than 200,000 elementary-age children examining models of instruction with varying exposure to English and children's home language suggested that those placed in variations of English immersion programs, with little to no home language support, demonstrated the lowest achievement, whereas children in bilingual programs scored the highest and were the most likely to reach achievement national norms, in both English and their home

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Dual Language Education Programs: Current State Policies and Practices*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition.

⁵⁶ Barnett, W. S., Yarosz, D., Thomas, J., Jung, K., & Blanco, D. (2007). Two-way and monolingual English immersion in preschool education: An experimental comparison. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, 277–293.; Howard, E. R., Christian, D., & Genesee, F. (2004). *The Development of Bilingualism and Biliteracy from Grade 3 to 5: A Summary of Findings from the CAL/CREDE Study of Two-Way Immersion Education*. Santa Cruz, CA: CREDE, University of California at Santa Cruz.; Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2002). *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-term Academic Achievement*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence; Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2009). *Educating English learners for a transformed world*. Dual Language Education of New Mexico/Fuente Press; López, M. G., & Tashakkori, A. (2004). Effects of a two-way bilingual program on the literacy development of students in kindergarten and first grade. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 28(1), 19-34.; Senesac, B. V. K. (2002). Two-way bilingual immersion: A portrait of quality schooling. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 26(1), 85-101.; Durán, L. K., Roseth, C. J., & Hoffman, P. (2010). An experimental study comparing English-only and transitional bilingual education on Spanish-speaking preschoolers' early literacy development. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 207-217.; McCabe, A., Bornstein, M., Wishard Guerra, A., Kuohirko, Y., Paez, M., Tamis-Lemonda, C., et al. (2013). *Multilingual children: Beyond myths and toward best practices*. Society for Research in Child Development Barac, R., Bialystok, E., Castro, D. C., & Sanchez, M. (2014). The cognitive development of young dual language learners: A critical review. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29, 699-714.; Valentino, R. A., & Reardon, S. F. (2015). Effectiveness of four instructional programs designed

to serve English Learners: Variations by ethnicity and initial English proficiency. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

⁵⁷ Vitello, V., Downer, J., & Williford, A. (2011). Preschool classroom experiences of dual language learners: Summary findings from publically funded programs in 11 states. In C. Howes, J. Downer, & R. Pianta (Eds.) *Dual language learners in the early childhood classroom*. Pp. 45-68. Baltimore, MD. Brookes Publishing.; Farver, J., Lonigan, C., & Eppe, S. (2009). Effective early literacy skill development for young Spanish speaking English language learners: An experimental study of two methods. *Child Development*, 80, 703-719; Barnett, W. S., Yarosz, D., Thomas, J., Jung, K., & Blanco, D. (2007). Two-way and monolingual English immersion in preschool education: An experimental comparison. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, 277–293.; Valentino, R. A., & Reardon, S. F. (2015). Effectiveness of four instructional programs designed to serve English Learners: Variations by ethnicity and initial English proficiency. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

⁵⁸ Kovelman, I., Baker, S., & Pettito, L. (2008). Age of first bilingual language exposure as a new window into bilingual reading development. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 11, 203-223.

⁵⁹ Burchinal M., Field S., López M. L., Howes, C., & Pianta, R. (2012). Instruction in Spanish in pre-kindergarten classrooms and child outcomes for English language learners. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27, 188–197.

⁶⁰ Stipek, D., Ryan, R., & Alarcón, R. (2001). Bridging research and practice to develop a two-way bilingual program. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16(1), 133-149.

language.⁶¹ More recently, researchers conducted a longitudinal, random assignment study to investigate language use models in Portland Public Schools. The study followed children from kindergarten through middle school and found that children in dual immersion programs outperformed their peers in English reading in fifth and eighth grade, and that English learners in these programs were more likely to become proficient in English.⁶² Research also indicates that variations of dual immersion models can yield positive social benefits for children, such as facilitating friendships between peers of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.⁶³

Taken together, research on language use in early childhood programs, and on the aforementioned benefits of supporting home language development, including fostering bilingualism,⁶⁴ maintaining cultural connections and communication with family members,⁶⁵ and the transferability of home language skills to English language acquisition,⁶⁶ suggests that systematic and deliberate exposure to English, paired with supporting home language development within high quality early childhood settings, can result in strong, positive outcomes for children who are DLLs, as well as positive outcomes for native English speakers.⁶⁷

Children who are DLLs with Disabilities

Limited data and research exist on children who are DLLs with disabilities. However, there is a body of research and data on ELs with disabilities in grades K-12. Therefore, this section focuses on the existing research on ELs. Based on reported data, 9.3 percent of all K-12 students are ELs and 8.5 percent of students with disabilities are ELs.⁶⁸ Despite this, there is a limited body of research that examines the development of this population. Without appropriate training and familiarity with dual language development and the language acquisition process, it may be difficult for educators and specialists to distinguish between a delay due to a disability, as opposed to a delay due to the language acquisition process.⁶⁹

Instruction for young children who are DLLs and who also have a disability under IDEA should take into account their specific early intervention or special education and related services needs, as well

⁶¹ Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence

⁶² Steel, J., Slater, R., Zamorro, G., Miller, T., Lee, J., Burkheiser, S. & Bacon, M. (2015). The Effect of Dual-Language Immersion on Student Achievement: Evidence from Lottery Data.

⁶³ Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2003). The multiple benefits of dual language: Dual language programs educate both English learners and native English speakers without incurring extra costs. *Educational Leadership*, 61(2), 61-64.

⁶⁴ Adesope, O. O., Lavin, T., Thompson, T., & Ungerleider, C.. (2010). A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Cognitive Correlates of Bilingualism. *Review of Educational Research*, 80(2), 207-245.; Bialystok, E. (2001). *Bilingualism in development: Language, literacy, and cognition*. Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁵ Espinosa, L. M. (2013). *PreK-3rd: Challenging Common Myths about Dual Language Learners: An Update to the Seminal 2008 Report*. Foundation for Child Development.; August, D., & Shanahan, T. (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on language-minority children and youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum

⁶⁶ Hoff, E. (2013). Interpreting the early language trajectories of children from low-SES and language minority homes: Implications for closing achievement gaps. *Developmental psychology*, 49(1), 4-14.; Sparks, R. L., Patton, J., Ganschow, L., Humbach, N., & Javorsky, J. (2008). Early first-language reading and spelling skills predict later second-language reading and spelling skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100, 162-174.

⁶⁷ McCabe, A., Bornstein, M., Wishard Guerra, A., Kuohirko, Y., Paez, M., Tamis-Lemonda, C., et al. (2013). *Multilingual children: Beyond myths and toward best practices*. Society for Research in Child Development, 2013; Halle, T., Hair, E., Wandner, L., McNamara, M., & Chien, N. (2012). Predictors and outcomes of early versus later English language proficiency among English language learners. *Early childhood research quarterly*, 27(1), 1-20.; Kuhl, P. K. (2011). Early language learning and literacy: neuroscience implications for education. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 5(3), 128-142; August, D., & Shanahan, T. (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on language-minority children and youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

⁶⁸ Watkins, E, Kline Lku, K. (2013) *Who are English Language Learners with Disabilities?* Retrieved from the Web site of the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota (<http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/261>). Citation: Liu, K., Watkins, E., Pompa, D., McLeod, P., Elliott, J. & Gaylord, V. (Eds). (Winter/Spring 2013). *Impact: Feature Issue on Educating K-12 English Language Learners with Disabilities*, 26(1). [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration].

⁶⁹ Artiles, A. J. & Klingner, J. K. (2006). Forging a knowledge base on English language learners with special needs: Theoretical, population, and technical issues. *Teachers College Record*, 108, 2187-2194.

as their language needs. As with all children who are DLLs, it is critical that teachers working with these children have an understanding of the second language acquisition process, and how this might be influenced by the child's individual development, and their disability.⁷⁰ For instance, if there is a disability, it should be present in both languages, not just in English.

Challenges in Policy and Practice

The early childhood system has not universally implemented appropriate policies or practices to foster the teaching, learning and development of children who are DLLs, as evidenced by pervasive gaps in development and school readiness between some subgroups of DLLs and their peers. While some States and communities have made significant strides in their efforts to support the development of young children who are DLLs, others are lagging behind. Several challenges contribute to this. Among them are:

- **A Deficit-Based View of Bilingualism:** In some States, communities, early education programs, and schools, being bilingual may be perceived as a risk factor, as opposed to a strength. The extent to which bilingualism is valued or devalued, and thus supported or thwarted, however, seems to be based on many factors, including ethnic and racial background, immigrant status, and socio-economic status. Community norms may also play a role. Children who arrive at school with the natural asset of bilingualism are often not sufficiently supported in their bilingual development, and instead only supported in their English language acquisition; as a result, their home language skills deteriorate. At the same time, there is growing popularity for dual immersion programs that promote dual language development, where both languages are supported; but many of these models are more accessible to higher-income families. Furthermore, in an effort to have their children quickly adapt and assimilate to the broader culture in the U.S., or to avoid the stigma often associated with having a home language other than English, families may prioritize the learning of English for their young DLLs, and children may inadvertently lose their home language.⁷¹
- **The Lack of Workforce Professional Development and the Shortage of Linguistic Diversity in the Workforce:** There is a lack of cultural and linguistic diversity among the qualified early childhood workforce. The workforce is being tasked with serving an increasingly diverse pool of young children and families. Language and cultural barriers between educators and the families they serve can have significant impacts on family engagement, communication with children, and effective teaching practices, and make it more difficult for young children who are DLLs, on a broad scale, to receive the learning and developmental supports they need to thrive. The early childhood workforce faces significant barriers to accessing professional development in general, such as cost. In addition, the lack of available pre-service or in-service professional development opportunities that are specific to supporting the learning and development of children who are DLLs is another challenge. There is also a shortage in qualified bilingual early educators, which may be partially attributed to the lack of diversity in the workforce, a lack of incentives for professionals to pursue credentials in bilingual education, a shortage of supports for bilingual early educators, and a scarcity of job opportunities in settings that practice bilingual early education. Those in

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Fillmore, L. W. (1991). When learning a second language means losing the first. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 6, 323-346.

the workforce who are bilingual are often in support positions, as opposed to lead positions,⁷² and may face barriers to gaining the credentials they need to advance to lead teaching positions.

- **The Lack of Valid and Reliable Tools and Curricula:** Valid and reliable developmental and behavioral screening tools and assessment that measure children’s progress in learning across domains are critical for providing high-quality, individualized early learning experiences. Similar to measurement tools, there is a lack of culturally responsive classroom or program curricula and parenting supports for this population. Without these critical tools, it is difficult to provide individualized high-quality early learning experiences. Most tools are not normed and have not been validated for use with children who are DLLs and their families, and most are not translated into the many languages America’s children speak at home. Additionally, in instances where valid and reliable tools are available – such as tools in Spanish – staff may not have the capacity to interpret and communicate the findings in a meaningful way.
- **Implicit and Explicit Biases:** Families who are limited in their English proficiency, immigrant families, children of color, and children who are DLLs often face explicit and implicit bias and discrimination across many societal institutions, including early learning and education institutions. This may manifest itself through institutional policies and through practices and uneven power dynamics at the individual level. In both cases, these dynamics stand in the way of attending to the developmental and learning needs of these populations.
- **Unique Challenges in Tribal Communities:** In many tribal communities, centuries of discrimination against the use of AIAN languages have led to loss of languages and a need for revitalization. Where speakers still exist, many of the remaining native speakers are elders. Some tribes are struggling to document languages while these elders are able and willing to participate. If a tribal community decides to engage in language preservation or revitalization, once a language is documented, tribes may have to find ways to generate new fluent speakers. While the best way to generate new fluent speakers is by starting when children are young, that is challenging when there are not many adults who are fluent themselves. There may be adults who are actively trying to learn, but they may be unable to implement a truly bilingual environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATES

States can play a central role in remedying these challenges and others, and proactively developing a high-quality early childhood system that meets the developmental and learning needs of all children. Creating such a system is a multifaceted effort that begins with strong partnerships with families. It requires a climate that is respectful of each child and family, embraces diversity, and assumes that every child and family has strengths that can be built on; an understanding of the population of young children who are DLLs in the State, including their language backgrounds and learning needs; the development and implementation of policies that address those needs; and an appropriate

⁷² New America analysis of United States Census Bureau data. “Summary File.” 2014 American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey Office, 2014.; Kominski, R., Shin, H., Martoz, K. (2008). Language Needs of School-Age Children. Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, New Orleans, LA.

allocation of resources to implement those policies and support the professional development of the early childhood workforce. Together, the Departments are providing the following recommendations and examples of promising practices to help States set the foundation for a system that meets the needs of all children, including those who are DLLs.⁷³

Develop and Implement a Plan for Supporting Young Children who are DLLs

All early childhood State plans and policies, including Child Care and Development Fund plans, State pre-k plans, State IDEA Part C and B 619 policies, among other applicable plans, should take into consideration children who are DLLs, including DLLs with disabilities and AIAN children residing in the state. In addition, States should consider developing a specific written plan – with the input of all relevant stakeholders, including families of children who are DLLs and tribal governments- and use that plan to guide action that addresses the learning and developmental needs of DLLs across all early learning systems. The plan could include: policies that will promote their learning and development; requirements for communicating with families of DLLs in a language they understand; outreach and recruitment strategies for DLLs and their families; and steps to enhance the quality of their early learning experiences. The plan could also include expectations for early childhood programs with regard to DLLs, and how the State will assist programs in meeting those expectations. The following are components of a strong DLL strategy that States should plan for and implement:

Identify DLLs in the Community to Guide Policy and Inform Resource Allocation

States should compile data on the number of children who are DLLs in their State to inform outreach and recruitment strategies, resource allocation, professional development efforts, and technical assistance. It is important that States understand the number of children who are DLLs in their State, both those who are served by the early childhood system, and those who are not but are eligible and could benefit from early learning programs. In addition, it is critical that States have up to date data because of demographic shifts.⁷⁴ States can use Census data, in combination with other administrative data that are already collected by the State or research partners.⁷⁵ Many States or school districts use home language surveys. States could consider building off of this work and establish a home language survey policy that would require or encourage all early childhood programs to determine the home language of children at enrollment. A common home language survey used across early childhood programs may enable States to have a more accurate estimate of the number of young children who are DLLs and which languages they understand and speak. States could also engage in consultation with Indian tribes in the State to coordinate efforts related to accurate data to inform State-wide efforts. Better data can assist State leadership in deciding how to allocate limited resources, such as resources for engaging in culturally and linguistically responsive outreach and enrollment, training staff, and developing new valid and reliable tools for screening and assessment.

Establish State-Wide Policies that Appropriately Support Children who are DLLs

State Early Learning Guidelines/Standards (ELG): States should ensure that children who are DLLs are incorporated across all domains in their ELGs; *and* that their ELGs have

⁷³ These recommendations do not constitute legal advice. States should independently ensure that their early childhood system complies with all applicable Federal, State and local laws.

⁷⁴ Pendall, R. (2015). *Kids in the US, 2015-2016: Growth and diversity*. Presentation at the 2015 Meeting of the Child Care Policy Research Consortium (CCPRC).; Gelatt, J., & Adams, G. (2015). *Immigration and the Changing Landscape for Local Service Delivery: Demographic Shifts in Cities and Neighborhoods*. Presentation at the 2015 Meeting of the Child Care Policy Research Consortium (CCPRC).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

specific indicators unique to DLLs. For example, one indicator unique to children who are DLLs from the Birth to Five Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework reads “Children who are DLLs may demonstrate more complex communication and language in their home language than in English.” Language incorporated into ELGs specific to children who are DLLs should do more than mention DLLs. States could begin by reviewing their current ELGs to determine if they are appropriate for use with children who are DLLs. ELGs that were developed with only English monolingual children in mind are unlikely to address all areas of development and learning sufficiently for children who are DLLs. States should consider ELGs that include specific guidelines for language development in both English *and* children’s home language. States should also include components of home language development as a normative part of the early education experience for young children who are DLLs. States should consider how various aspects of development may differ across monolingual and bilingual children, and adjust standards and expectations to fit these developmental differences. States should partner with experts and rely on research in this process. States should consult the [Birth to Five Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework](#) for examples of standards that appropriately include DLLs. Where there are Indian tribes in a State, States and tribes should engage in consultations to ensure unique issues related to Native languages are incorporated in State ELGs.

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: States should include indicators for children who are DLLs in their quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). States could establish tiered reimbursement systems where programs that meet higher benchmarks receive greater compensation. Examples of indicators specific to supporting children who are DLLs might include:

- Having a systematic process for identifying children who are DLLs at program enrollment;
- Establishing written plans for working with DLLs and procedures to enhance and continuously improve communication with their families, across all aspects of the early childhood program;
- Providing information to families in their primary language;
- Implementing an evidence-based curriculum as well as a clear and intentional plan for how to support children’s home language development and English language development in the early learning environment and at home;
- Requiring professional development for staff in culturally and linguistically responsive practice; supporting the early learning and comprehensive development of DLLs, including strategies to support the continued development of the home language and promote English language development; and appropriate trajectories for English acquisition; and
- Employing at least one bilingual staff person with appropriate credentials who is proficient in the home language of most of the DLLs in the program.

Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEA): States should ensure KEAs are appropriate for use with children who are DLLs, including ensuring that assessment tools are psychometrically sound for this population. As with all assessments and screenings, KEAs should be culturally appropriate, take into account children’s language abilities, and be administered by professionals who have cultural competence and speak the language in which children are most proficient. Families should be involved in the process as sources of information and valuable partners in interpreting results. Caution should always be taken when interpreting results, particularly if the tool has not been normed or validated with the specific population for which it is being used and/or if those conducting the assessments do not have sufficient cultural or linguistic competence.

Engage in Outreach, Recruitment, and Enrollment Strategies

States should engage in outreach, recruitment and enrollment strategies for families of children who are DLLs, informed by current data on the demographic composition of the community. States should partner with trusted community organizations that may assist them in reaching families who may be less engaged with traditional social service systems. States should work with their partners to inform families of the importance of high-quality early learning, and opportunities to access such programs in their local communities. All outreach materials should be available and accessible in a language families understand and in-person efforts should be conducted by staff that are trained in culturally responsive practice and who can speak the preferred language of the families, either directly or with the help of an interpreter.

Engage Families

States should treat all families with respect and as competent partners in children’s learning and development. The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education published a policy statement on family engagement. Its core principles apply to States and early childhood programs serving all children and families, including families of children who are DLLs. States should adopt these principles and encourage early childhood programs to adopt them as well, across settings – including school-based, center-based, and family child care programs – and across systems – including child care, Head Start, and State pre-K.

States should ensure that the diverse array of families served by the early childhood system, including families that may be limited in their English proficiency, have meaningful opportunities to provide input in State plans and priorities. States should also ensure that early childhood consumer education efforts, whether in-person or electronic, are linguistically accessible to all families in the system, including families who may be limited in their English proficiency. State staff should be sensitive to potential barriers to children’s participation in high-quality early learning programs, such as families’ unfamiliarity with public programs and systems, and cultural and linguistically related barriers.

States can also ensure that any existing public engagement efforts to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood development include information specific to children who are DLLs, including explaining the benefits of bilingualism and the importance of maintaining the home language.

Invest in Workforce Development

All staff from directors and principals to teachers and providers, aides and the array of support staff—whether monolingual or multilingual – should be aware and have clear directives and supports about how the program values home language development and what the program’s policies are for supporting children who are DLLs. Staff who work directly with children and families, as well as program leaders, should have the knowledge, competencies and support needed to foster the learning and development of children who are DLLs and their families, consistent with the Institute of Medicine report [*Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Eight*](#).

States should ensure that credentials and certificates for directors, principals, and others in leadership positions in early childhood programs include a thorough understanding of cultural competence, dual language development, and strategies that support the development of children who are DLLs, including AIAN children. They should understand how to establish a learning environment that embraces diversity, supported by appropriate resource allocation, effective policies, and professional development opportunities for staff.

Teachers and providers should have a strong understanding of child development, including dual language acquisition, and should be linguistically and culturally responsive to the children and families they serve. States should ensure that entry level credentials for teachers and providers require training and demonstrated competency specific to meeting the needs of children who are DLLs. States should partner with institutions of higher education to ensure that AA, BA, and advanced degree programs for early education professionals include both content in dual language development and cultural competence; and practicum to ensure that knowledge gained translates to practice. Content related to children who are DLLs should not be exclusively contained in one or a small group of courses; rather, the content should be woven throughout all courses. In addition, institutions of higher education should ensure that graduates have strong English language skills and encourage students to take courses on a second language.

States should partner with Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities and encourage them to establish or strengthen their higher education programs in early childhood education. These partnerships may help States increase their pool of early educators who are qualified in early childhood development and speak the language and/or share the cultural background of children who are DLLs in the community. Additionally, states could partner with international teacher preparation programs to support teacher exchange efforts, where bilingual early childhood teachers from other countries would work in the U.S. for a specified period of time, partnered with a monolingual English-speaking early childhood teacher in a U.S. early childhood program.

Finally, given the growing need and existing shortage of bilingual early educators and leaders, States should partner with communities to expand professional development opportunities to bi- and multilingual aides, paraprofessionals, support staff, and other members of the community. These individuals are existing language assets in programs and should be supported in advancing in their field. States and communities should develop plans targeted at ensuring that more of these individuals are on a career pathway, starting with an entry-level credential, and that they are offered technical assistance and supports. To that end, staff education, training, and technical assistance should be offered in the preferred language of providers, so that the language minority workforce has access to opportunities for training and career advancement. In addition, as needed, the language

minority workforce should be supported in their English language acquisition and proficiency, so that they can serve as strong language models for young children who are DLLs in both their home language and in English.

Invest in Statewide Technical Assistance that Incorporates Support for Children who are DLLs

States should ensure that existing technical assistance (TA) efforts include specific supports for teachers and providers who serve children who are DLLs. Supports should help build teacher and provider capacity to enable them to better engage and partner with families who may be limited in their English proficiency; implement curriculum and assessment; conduct screenings; foster social-emotional and behavioral development; and promote language and literacy development, and learning more broadly, for children who are DLLs. States should provide specific TA supports to monolingual English speaking teachers and providers who are delivering services to young children who are DLLs and their families, as well as to bilingual teachers and providers who are implementing variations of bilingual models. In addition, States should access the resources available from existing national networks, such as Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs), Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC), and resources developed by Head Start technical assistance providers on cultural and linguistic responsiveness.⁷⁶

Coaches and consultants who are part of the State's TA efforts should understand how cultural and language considerations inform their services, and be able to build teachers' capacity in serving all children, including DLLs. For example, mental health consultants should be able to articulate how building secure relationships or addressing challenging behavior may differ for DLLs, due to the potential effects of language barriers. Inclusion specialists should be able to coach providers on how to include children with disabilities who are also DLLs in everyday learning and social activities. States should invest in building the capacity of coaches and consultants to ensure that they are culturally and linguistically responsive, and that their services are effective for teachers and providers serving this particular population of young children.

Support Children with Disabilities Who are DLLs

States have an important responsibility to ensure that young children with disabilities who are DLLs are appropriately identified and provided with the services and supports they need to thrive.

IDEA Part C lead agencies, State Educational Agencies and school districts must ensure that all children who may have a disability and need services under IDEA Part C or Part B 619, including children who are DLLs are identified and evaluated for early intervention services or special education and related services in a timely manner. When conducting evaluations, school districts must consider the English language proficiency of students in determining the appropriate assessment and evaluation materials. School districts must not identify or determine that a child who is a DLL has a disability because of their limited English proficiency.⁷⁷ Moreover, ED and HHS recently published a policy statement on the inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood settings. Per this guidance, States should ensure that children with disabilities who are DLLs are incorporated in all State early childhood and inclusion plans, and that their needs are specifically considered and addressed within those plans and professional development systems.

⁷⁶ For Head Start materials, see: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic>.

⁷⁷ For more information on federal obligations regarding EL students with disabilities, see Section F of the *Dear Colleague Letter, English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents* at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>.

Support Community Hubs and Encourage Shared Services

There is a shortage of bilingual early childhood professionals that can meet the needs of the large and growing population of children who are DLLs, including professionals who can administer assessments and screenings in English and the many languages children speak; coaches and consultants who can provide professional development on culturally and linguistically responsive services; and family service workers who can directly communicate with families about their children's learning and development, social services available to them in the community, and other important topics.

Given the scarcity of language resources currently in the system, States could partner with tribes, local communities, and programs, to establish or expand community hubs that would have language resources- both human and material- that could be used by all of the programs involved. These hubs could be staffed by professionals who would assist programs in screening and assessing young children who are DLLs; family service workers that could partner and work with families who may be limited in their English proficiency; and coaches who could conduct shared trainings and coaching to teachers and providers. These hubs could also serve as lending libraries, where families could find books, music, and other materials to promote language and literacy development, in all of the native languages of the families in their community. In addition, they could facilitate peer learning and the development of communities of practice for local early education leaders, teachers and providers, and families. Hub strategies can be especially helpful in communities with families that speak many different languages.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Supporting the learning and development of children who are DLLs requires more than implementing a single policy, gesture, or practice. It requires program-wide considerations. The set of inter-related recommendations below can help early childhood programs systemically incorporate supports that promote the development and learning of children who are DLLs. Leaders should begin by assessing their program's climate, having a thorough understanding of the children and families they serve and staff needs, and reviewing their policies and the current state of the services and supports they provide to DLLs. Informed by these assessments, leaders should develop a plan, with input from families, and timeline for implementing each of the connected recommendations below.

Create a Climate that is Strengths-Based and Embraces Diversity

Program and school leaders set the climate in early childhood programs. They communicate values, policies, and expectations to staff, families, and the community, and ensure that staff have the information, skills, and support they need to implement services consistent with those values and applicable laws.

Early childhood leaders should intentionally promote a climate and values that are respectful of each and every child and their family, welcoming and inclusive to all, and assumes that every child has strengths that can be built on to help them meet their potential. Leaders should communicate that bilingualism is an asset, not only for DLLs, but for all children. Learning two or more languages is not a risk factor; it is a strength that should be fostered. Families, regardless of their English proficiency, should be seen as capable partners in promoting children's learning and development and should be provided language assistance services to ensure they can act as the most important

advocates in their children’s educational experience. (In some cases, language assistance services may be required to be provided.) The program should not only demonstrate respect for peoples of all cultures; it should embrace and celebrate their diversity. Leaders should communicate these messages clearly and consistently to all staff, including teachers, aides, specialists, administrative support staff, and custodial staff; families; and community partners. Leaders should adopt a set of principles that reinforce these values, such as Head Start’s Multicultural Principles, to ensure that the program is held accountable for providing services aligned with those values.

Partner with Families

Early childhood program leaders should promote partnership between teachers and families and establish policies and procedures to support those partnerships. HHS and ED released a policy statement on family engagement that identifies core principles of family engagement that are relevant for all programs, families, and children. Programs should adopt those principles and recommendations, and use them to guide their family engagement efforts.

Programs should also incorporate family engagement policies and procedures specifically for families whose native language is other than English. Given the many pervasive myths about bilingualism and English language acquisition, programs should provide clear information to families on:

- The benefits of bilingualism;
- The importance of home language development;
- Families’ central role in home language development and tips on providing a high-quality language environment in the home language, at home and in the community.

In addition, early childhood programs should identify each family’s preferred language for communication at enrollment and ensure that communication with the family is elicited and taken into account regularly. Schools are already required to develop and implement a process for determining whether parents are LEP and what their language needs are. Recipients of Federal financial assistance, such as State and local agencies administering child care subsidies, must provide language assistance to LEP parents effectively with appropriate, competent staff – or appropriate and competent outside resources, such as professional translation services for written materials or readily available telephonic interpreter services.

Programs should learn from families about children’s language background in order to provide individualized developmental and learning supports to the child. Specifically, staff should ask about:

- Children’s language background, including their home language and English language exposure in the home and in the community;
- If they are sequential or simultaneous DLLs⁷⁸;
- What their dominant language is;
- Individual characteristics of the child, including strengths and challenges;

⁷⁸ Simultaneous bilingual development: Children who learn two or more languages from birth or who start within one year of being born; sequential bilingual development: Children who begin to learn an additional language after three years of age (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004).

- The families' culture; and
- Strategies used at home to promote children's learning and development.

Identify and Implement an Intentional Approach to Language Use in the Classroom to Provide a Rich Language Environment

Programs should identify and implement an intentional approach to language use in the classroom, such that the use of the language is carefully planned and executed across activities. To assist in meeting this goal, programs can select a classroom language model (CLM)⁷⁹, a general approach to facilitate intentional language use in early childhood settings, developed by Head Start's National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. A CLM determines what language/s adults use for instruction and communication with children and families, and how the use of the language/s promotes learning. Programs should use an evidence-based curriculum and identify an appropriate CLM that guides the language/s the curriculum is delivered in. CLMs are part of a program-wide, planned approach that promotes children's optimal language and literacy development. Early childhood programs should carefully choose their CLM, based on the composition of the home language/s of the children in their program and their learning needs, and the language proficiencies of their lead teachers and providers, informed by input from families. Four CLMs that programs could choose from based on these considerations, include:

- **Dual immersion:** This approach provides instruction in both English and a second language at alternating times of the day, on alternating days, or on alternating weeks. To effectively use this approach, teachers must be fluent in both languages and teaching materials must be available in both languages. Research pointing to the cognitive, social, and later economic benefits of bilingualism,^{3,25,28,30,31} and the need for substantial exposure to two languages to attain those benefits, suggests that this approach or a variation of it, delivered in a high quality setting, is optimal for DLLs and confers the most benefits to DLLs and their peers alike. Research demonstrates that this approach can be implemented and is appropriate to use with children who are DLLs and monolingual English-speaking peers.
- **Home language with English support:** Under this model, instruction is primarily provided in children's home language, but there is support for English language acquisition, through intentional exposure to English, the availability of learning materials in English, and the display of English words. This approach can be appropriate for infants and toddlers who are DLLs. This model may be most feasible in programs where most of the DLLs in a program speak a common language at home. Infants and toddlers are still in the early stages of developing their first language. A strong foundation in a DLL's first language is important in its own right, and facilitates English language acquisition through the transferability of language skills. It is also important that in these early years, infant and toddler DLLs be offered experiences in English. As such, this approach can also confer important benefits to young children who are DLLs through intentional exposure to both their home language and English. To effectively use this approach, teachers should be fluent in the home language

⁷⁹ The CLM is not a specific model, but rather refers to a strategic use of language models in the learning environment based on program goals, the needs and skills of children, and the skills of the teaching staff in Head Start Programs. It was originally developed by a Head Start national technical assistance center and is used in Head Start programs. For more information, see: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/docs/pps-language-models.pdf>.

selected and should be proficient in English or recruit the assistance of other qualified staff or volunteers who are proficient in English.

- **English with home language support:** Under this model, instruction is primarily provided in English, but there is support for the home language through intentional exposure to- and some instruction in- the home language, the availability of learning materials in the home language, and the display of multicultural pictures and words in the home language. This approach can be appropriate for preschool children who are DLLs whether or not the program also serves monolingual-English-speaking children. It is important for preschool children to acquire English skills in earnest, with the goal of being ready for the transition into elementary school. And, as reviewed, home language support can facilitate learning concepts and the acquisition of English, supports continued bilingual development, and helps maintain cultural connections and communication with family members. The intentional support for both English and the home language provided through this model, within the context of a high quality early learning program, can confer important benefits to young children who are DLLs. Teachers should be fluent in English and should be proficient in the home language of most of the children in their care or recruit the assistance of other qualified staff or volunteers who are proficient in children’s home language. Additionally, programs could partner with parents and families to ensure they support their children’s native language development at home.
- **Use of English-only:** In this model, instruction and all activities are carried out in English only, without home language or cultural support. Not supporting development of the home language means that DLLs who speak that language are less likely to receive the benefits discussed above, including developing bilingualism, maintaining cultural connections and communication with family members, and the transferability of home language skills to English. In addition, for some DLLs, the use of English-only could inhibit their opportunities to benefit fully from the program, alongside their peers, due to their limited understanding of English.

Research indicates that early childhood is the ideal developmental time period for learning a second language and developing proficiency in more than one language. Given the literature that describes the short- and long-term benefits of bilingualism, support for both home language and English language development is recommended. In particular, models, such as dual immersion, can expand the opportunities of bilingualism to all participating children, whether their families are monolingual English speakers or speak a language other than- or in addition to- English at home. Implementing dual immersion necessitates a proficient bilingual staff, as well as learning materials in both selected languages.

Research indicates that models that do not provide home language support do not optimally promote the language and cognitive development of children who are DLLs. The extent of support for the home language may depend on the abilities and language proficiencies of staff, and the number of home languages present in the program, among other factors. If the lead teacher or caregiver is not proficient in either English or the home language/s of the children in his or her care, the program should aim to enlist other appropriate staff (e.g. teacher’s aides), families, or members of the community who are proficient in the lacking language who can provide high-quality language

exposure. Programs that serve children who are DLLs should work toward having a qualified staff person who is proficient in children's home language/s in every classroom.

Once an appropriate CLM is selected, programs should provide a high-quality language environment in the selected language/s through explicit instruction, talking, reading, singing, playing and other developmentally appropriate methods. Family partnerships are critical to ensuring that these learning experiences are continued at home, in the home language. Strategies that *monolingual or bilingual* adults can employ to enrich the language environment for all children, particularly for DLLs, include:

- Expanding on children's utterances, words, and phrases;
- Exposing children to new words and defining them in developmentally appropriate ways;
- Engaging in joint attention and back and forth verbal and nonverbal interactions;
- Exposing children to early literacy activities, such as dialogic reading and singing;
- Repeating new concepts and words often, connecting them to children's lives, and providing ample opportunities to practice using them;
- Labeling objects, actions, concepts, emotions, and other things in the child's environment and pairing those labels with pictures or real representations; and
- Exposing children to new concepts in their home language before introducing them in the second language. For example, pre-read or ask families to pre-read books in the home language prior to introducing the English versions in class.

Establish a Culturally Responsive Learning Environment

Programs should promote continuity between children's home environment and their early learning environment. This continuity is important for fostering children's sense of belonging, social connectedness, and emotional attachment – particularly for DLL children – and results in a climate that is conducive to learning. In addition to implementing a CLM, programs should:

- Incorporate visuals, such as pictures, posters, and art work, that reflect diversity of the children in the classroom, and the diversity of America more broadly;
- Display pictures of children and their families, and visual representations of their cultural traditions; use these displays in learning opportunities throughout the day;
- Ensure learning materials and toys reflect the languages and cultures of children in the program;
- Ensure learning materials and the environment support home and English language development;
- Use music, songs, and stories from cultures that represent the children and families; and

- Partner with families and community members who speak children’s home language and invite them to serve as language models during specific planned activities, consistent with the CLM.

Ensure that the Workforce has the Competencies to Support Dual Language Learners

Programs should ensure that their workforce has appropriate credentials and demonstrated competencies in supporting all young children. All teachers and providers should have the appropriate degrees or credentials, and a thorough understanding of child development and the competencies necessary to support children’s learning and development across all domains, aligned with the Institute of Medicine report [*Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age Eight*](#). Linguistic accessibility and cultural competence enable staff to provide this support. Programs should ensure that all staff is competent about the cultures of the children and families they serve, and open to learning and incorporating families’ cultures and traditions into their programming.

Programs should consider the language background of the children in the community when making hiring decisions. Hiring bilingual staff can be a significant asset to all programs, especially those that serve children who are DLLs. It is a necessity in programs that implement a dual immersion CLM. While this may be more challenging in programs that serve children of many different language backgrounds, as opposed to programs that serve children with a common home language, it is a worthy goal that enables direct communication and stronger relationships with families, and more effective support for young children who are DLLs. Given the importance of strong, high-quality adult language models, programs should also assess and support staff language proficiency in the language necessary to implement the program’s CLM.

Staff should receive ongoing training and coaching across topic areas including:

- Early language development, including practices to promote the development of first and second languages;
- Assessment, including specific cautions and recommendations for assessing children who are DLLs, and how to use assessments to guide instruction; and
- Communicating with families, preferably directly or through other qualified staff, using relationship-based competencies and considering the influence of implicit biases and power dynamics in building relationships.

In addition to ongoing training and coaching, program leaders should provide staff with opportunities to pursue higher levels of education, particularly existing staff that are bilingual but may not have the appropriate credentials to serve as lead teachers or aides. Providing a career pathway for bilingual staff who are serving in capacities other than teaching can increase programs’ linguistic capacity.

Ensure Developmental and Behavioral Screening and Assessments are Appropriate

Developmental and Behavioral Screening: Early and periodic developmental and behavioral screening that is culturally appropriate is critical to tracking children’s development, celebrating milestones, and identifying concerns and the need for further evaluation and early intervention. An accurate understanding of children’s skills and development is critical to the screening process. Clear communication with families is equally important. Programs should screen all children, including

DLLs, on a regular schedule and in partnership with families. Ideally, programs will have access to developmental and behavioral screening tools that are valid and reliable for use with the specific population/s they work with. If valid and reliable *screening* tools are not available in their dominant language(s), a qualified bilingual staff member or other qualified community partners, such as the medical home or early intervention professionals, can work with families to fill out the information for the screener. If there is no qualified bilingual staff or community partner, programs should use a qualified interpreter.

Assessments: All children, including DLLs, should be assessed in all domains of development, including English language development, to monitor growth over time. Assessment tools should be normed, and valid and reliable, with populations similar to children in the program. Assessments that measure children's skills in domains other than English language development should be given in the child's preferred or dominant language. Language assessments should be given in English and the child's home language, preferably by qualified bilingual staff. Assessing children's skills in both languages is critical for providing an accurate portrayal of children's progress. Assessing DLLs only in English does not allow them the opportunity to fully demonstrate their range of knowledge, skills and abilities across both languages. If assessment tools are not available in the home language, a qualified bilingual staff member or an interpreter should translate the assessment for the child. Programs should also be cognizant of assessment biases, particularly in instances where there is not a linguistic match between the assessor and the child.

In general, for screenings and assessments, programs should exercise caution in interpreting results when: they have not been validated for use with specific populations; they are not translated in the family's home language; and interpreters or staff that do not directly work with the child are assisting with the screening or assessment. Young children who are DLLs may be misidentified as having disabilities or delays, or developmental progress may be inaccurately captured, for a variety of reasons. For instance, while children who are DLLs may demonstrate a faster rate of development in some areas, they may demonstrate a slower rate of development in other areas, and this may not necessarily be an immediate cause for concern. Programs should first reflect on the support they are providing children who are DLLs, to ensure that it is appropriate, of high quality, and is effective in fostering children's learning and development. Qualified staff, however, should understand the difference between typical variation in development for DLLs and developmental concerns that may require additional support. In particular, programs should seek further evaluation if children are having difficulty with *both* languages to determine whether they qualify as a child with a disability under IDEA. Programs should collect information from a variety of sources to inform the results of screening and assessment, including family input, teacher observation, and with family permission, discussion with the child's other service providers, such as the medical home. Relying on multiple sources of information will provide programs with a more holistic view of the development of children who are DLLs.

Ensure the Selected Curriculum is Appropriate

Any selected curriculum should be evidence-based and promote children's development across all domains, including social-emotional, cognitive, language and literacy, physical, and approaches to learning. Programs should also support English language development in children who are DLLs. Teaching should always be individualized to children's developmental levels. Lead teachers and appropriate staff should review children's assessment data frequently, to ensure that all children, including children who are DLLs, are making progress in all areas of development. This is

particularly important for DLLs, as research indicates that the rate of development across many individual skills may differ from that of monolingual English speaking children.

Curricula materials should reflect the cultures of the children in the program to the extent possible, and be written in the language designated by programs' chosen CLM. Minor modifications to curricula may be necessary to ensure their cultural appropriateness, but any significant adaptation should only be done in consultation with researchers. If significant adaptations are necessary, programs should determine whether there are other curricula more appropriate for the populations served.

Promote Positive Teacher- or Provider-Child Relationships

Experts agree that the adult-child relationship is the most robust predictor of positive child outcomes. These features of adult-child interactions are important for supporting children's positive developmental growth, regardless of language background:

- Being warm and consistently responsive to children's needs;
- Identifying and providing rich learning opportunities across all routines and activities;
- Supporting social-emotional and behavioral development.

These features may be even more critical for relationships between monolingual English speaking teachers and children who are DLLs. Language barriers may present an obstacle to developing these important relationships. Children may also feel less secure in an environment that is less familiar to them.

Importantly, part of fostering healthy relationships with young children includes culturally appropriate behavioral guidance and support for social-emotional development. Teachers and caregivers should exercise caution when interpreting and responding to challenging behaviors, particularly for children who have difficulty communicating with others in their surroundings. Adults should consider that difficulty following directions may be due to the child not understanding the directions; challenging behaviors may be underpinned by the frustration of not being able to communicate. Program staff should also be vigilant of implicit biases that may affect their relationships with young children who are DLLs and identify mechanisms for identifying and correcting all biases in practice.

Support Monolingual English Speaking Staff in Serving Children who are DLLs

In some communities, having staff that are qualified in early education and also speak the home language or languages of children in the program is more difficult. As discussed elsewhere in this statement, programs should prioritize and allocate resources to ensure that children have high quality language models in English and in the language/s they speak at home and can communicate with families in a language they understand. Programs should first look to existing language assets in their programs, such as teacher's aides, families, or volunteers who share a home language with the DLLs in the program. Programs should not only use these individuals to support children's language development and communicate with families, they should also provide those who are interested with opportunities to receive formal training in early childhood development, and prioritize their advancement in the field through professional development plans and supports to achieve their goals.

Monolingual English speaking teachers should be supported in their second language development to improve their abilities to work with young children who are DLLs and communicate with families. In addition, even without proficiency in children's home languages, they can foster learning and development, with support from others who speak children's home language/s, by:

- Ensuring a culturally responsive environment with plenty of visuals that represent the child's culture, pictures of the child and children who look like the child, snacks and meals the child is familiar with, learning materials in the home languages, and inviting volunteers who speak the child's home language;
- Pairing gestures, real objects and pictures, with new English words;
- Partnering with families to expose children to new concepts or new activities (e.g. new books) in their native language at home, so that children have time to familiarize themselves with the concept prior to its introduction in the early learning program in English;
- Learning key words in the child's home language to communicate basic needs like asking to use the bathroom, asking for a drink, or asking for help; and
- Ensuring speakers of children's home languages are regularly included in classroom activities intentional and meaningful ways.

Programs that face a shortage of bilingual lead teachers should adopt a team approach where monolingual English-speaking teachers are paired with adults who are proficient in children's home language/s so that each classroom or home has a high-quality language model in English and children's home languages. Programs should intentionally plan how these individuals can provide children with exposure to high quality language during planned play or activities throughout the day, so as to maximize their asset and the benefit to children. Roles in a team approach should be clearly delineated and aligned with the chosen CLM.

Accurately Identify and Support Children with Disabilities who are DLLs

Navigating the disability identification process and the service delivery system can be an overwhelming and challenging task for any family. It can be especially stressful if families face a linguistically inaccessible system. Early childhood programs have an important role in ensuring that families successfully navigate this system and that children receive the services and supports they need, as soon as possible. Disability can be a very sensitive topic that is perceived differently and with varying levels of stigma among different cultural groups. Programs should approach the topic in a culturally appropriate way, being sensitive to cultural perceptions and communicating in the families' primary language.

Programs should accurately track the development of all young children, and work with the children's medical homes and other partners to ensure accurate identification of disabilities. Identifying children with disabilities among DLLs can be challenging due to the difficulty of accurately assessing their skills often resulting from the lack of appropriate and translated screening, assessment, and evaluation tools; the lack of a qualified bilingual workforce; and educators misunderstanding the second language acquisition process. Multiple sources of information should be used when determining disabilities, including input from parents and early childhood teachers or providers. Once children are identified as having a disability, programs should continue to work with

families throughout the referral and service coordination process to ensure that they are able to navigate the system and that children receive services to meet their educational needs. With respect to DLLs with disabilities identified under IDEA, the school district must “take whatever action is necessary to ensure that the parent understands the proceedings of the Individualized Education Program team meeting, including arranging for an interpreter for parents with deafness or whose native language is other than English.”⁸⁰

Programs should provide high-quality, inclusive early learning experiences to children with disabilities, including those who are DLLs, based on their individual needs. Children should receive the appropriate supports, services, and accommodations that enable them to progress in their learning and development and meet high expectations, alongside their peers without disabilities. Working with specialists, who speak English and families’ home language, could be especially beneficial to building teacher capacity, promoting child development, and strengthening teacher and provider- family relationships. The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education published a Federal Policy Statement on the inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood settings that provide several detailed recommendations that can facilitate high-quality early childhood inclusion.

Facilitate Smooth Transitions Within and Across Programs

Transitions between early childhood programs and to elementary school can be difficult for young children and their families. The difficulty may be exacerbated for children who are DLLs and their families due to the need to adjust to a new environment and build a new relationship with a teacher who likely does not speak their home language. Early childhood programs and schools can help make these transitions smoother by establishing transitions teams that can facilitate communication between families and new settings before a transition occurs. The team can foster familiarity by encouraging child and family visits to new settings to meet new teachers. These meetings should include conversations in families’ primary language about child strengths, challenges, and needs, including language needs. Programs can seek family consent or encourage families to directly provide new teachers with assessment data and information on the previous curriculum used, and on the child’s developmental level across all domains, including English language acquisition. Families should be made aware of their options for supporting the continued language development of their young DLLs in elementary school, including any native language support programs offered by local public schools, or opportunities to enroll children in dual language immersion programs, where both their home language and English can be acquired. For AIAN children, programs should work with tribes to develop transition processes that would be appropriate and supportive for students transitioning from tribal programs to non-tribal local education agencies.

⁸⁰ For more information about school districts’ IDEA and civil rights obligations to LEP parents and LEP students with disabilities, see the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education Dear Colleague Letter at Sections F and J at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>; see also 34 C.F.R. § 300.322(e); and see also id. §§ 300.9, 300.503(c)(1)(ii), 300.612(a)(1).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION, MAINTENANCE, AND PRESERVATION EFFORTS IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES⁸¹

While many of the recommendations listed for general early childhood programs are appropriate for promoting the development and learning of all children, it is important to recognize that children from tribal communities have unique experiences and face distinct challenges, relative to other DLLs, in developing their Heritage language, a language spoken by their ancestors. Children in tribal communities are often in a situation where English is their home language, and their Heritage language may no longer be spoken by many individuals in the community due to a long history of efforts to suppress and exterminate Native American Heritage languages. In other, fewer cases, children may have a Heritage language as their home language. In either case, tribes may be interested in engaging in language *revitalization, preservation, or maintenance* efforts. HHS supports the full integration of tribal language and culture into *every* aspect of early childhood programming, through revitalization, preservation, and maintenance efforts.

The *Native American Languages Act of 1990* found that the "lack of clear, comprehensive, and consistent federal policy on treatment of Native American languages...has often resulted in acts of suppression and extermination of Native American languages and cultures." Through the Act, the federal government affirmed their position that the United States should "preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages" and "encourage and support the use of Native American languages as a medium of instruction."⁸²

As the early childhood years are optimal for learning languages, tribes who are interested in and decide to engage in language revitalization, preservation, and maintenance efforts should support their early childhood settings in implementing these efforts. With support and guidance from tribal leadership, programs should consider implementing the program-level recommendations presented in this statement, as applicable and appropriate.

Subsequent recommendations in this section are focused on supporting *language revitalization* efforts in tribal early childhood education programs. These recommendations are adapted from *A Report on Tribal Language Revitalization in Head Start and Early Head Start*.⁸³ Readers are encouraged to read this full report which includes expanded discussion and recommendations. These recommendations can be useful in tribal early childhood programs where the majority of children primarily speak English, a Heritage language, or a combination of the two, as their home language.

Assess the Current State of the Heritage Language in the Community

Prior to developing a specific plan, the early childhood program should consider the current status of the Heritage language in the community, including available language resources.

- What speakers of the language are there in the community? What other resources exist?

⁸¹ We acknowledge that a full discussion of the unique experiences and challenges of tribal communities related to Heritage language preservation, maintenance, and revitalization are beyond the scope of this policy statement. We encourage readers to access the Office of Head Start's [Cultural and Linguistic Responsive Resource Catalog: Volume Two, Native and Heritage Language Preservation, Revitalization, and Maintenance](#), for additional resources.

⁸² Public Law 101-477. Native American Languages Act of 1990.

⁸³ Administration for Children and Families. (2015). A report on tribal language revitalization in Head Start and Early Head Start. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- Are there local higher education programs that are particularly interested in language revitalization that might be interested in working with the program?
- Are there local volunteer or other community organizations that could be useful?
- Are there other efforts in the community to revitalize the language?

Program should also gauge the views and attitudes in the community about revitalizing or preserving the Heritage language – is the community supportive of the revitalizing or preserving the Heritage language? Is the tribal government supportive of language revitalization efforts? Are there community stakeholders who are opposed to language revitalization? Understanding these issues may help programs anticipate challenges and assess their goals’ feasibility.

Develop a Plan to Promote Language Revitalization that Involves Multiple Stakeholders

Once a tribal community decides that it would like to engage in tribal language revitalization and has assessed the current state of the language, it is critical to develop a plan. The program should partner with many stakeholders, including families, members of the tribal government, and other community leaders to develop the plan. Programs should ensure that all stakeholders, especially families are supportive of their efforts, and communicate the value of learning and speaking the heritage language, advantages of bilingualism, both for children’s cognitive development, as well as social-emotional and identity development.

The plan should include *program-specific and community-specific, interim and long-term goals*. Each goal should be paired with a timeline and responsible parties. All stakeholders should feel that the goals are important and feasible. For instance, should the goal be for children to become fluent in the Heritage language, in addition to English? Or is the goal for children to learn a few basic greetings and phrases to be able to communicate with elders and others that speak the language? Interim goals may include increasing the pool of fluent Heritage speakers who are also appropriately trained in working with young children and early education.

Consider Challenges that May be Encountered during the Language Revitalization Process

In planning for Heritage language revitalization, tribal early childhood programs may encounter challenges that should be carefully considered. For instance, in order to integrate the Heritage language into the program, there should be access to qualified staff or volunteers that speak the language and also have appropriate training in early childhood. Many tribal programs are located in rural areas, and native speakers who could be helpful to the program have difficulty physically getting to the program on a regular basis. There may not be full community or leadership support for the effort, which can create challenges for programs that are interested in connecting with and receiving support from community or government resources. Language resources may not exist, or language resources may exist outside of the tribal community, but there may be dialect differences or distrust between the tribal and other communities that make it difficult to maximize use of these outside resources.

As part of their planning process, programs will want to anticipate as many of these challenges as possible, and develop strategies for handling each. If the program and Heritage language speakers are located in a rural area with limited transportation options, the program could speak with the higher education community about options for distance learning. If other stakeholders in the community are less supportive of language revitalization, the program may decide to hold a focus

group or discussion session, where they hear input from multiple stakeholders, and also take the opportunity to explain why language revitalization is important to their program and their families.

CONCLUSION

Policies and practices should be reflective of the growing diversity of the early childhood population. Promoting the learning and development of young children who are DLLs begins by creating a climate that is based on their strengths, recognizes the benefits of bilingualism, embraces diversity, and recognizes the importance of fostering connections with families as children's first and most important teachers. States, tribes, communities, and early childhood programs should work together and partner with families, coordinate their data collection and allocate adequate resources, and support the early childhood workforce in attaining the knowledge and competencies necessary to foster the learning and development of all children who are DLLs. The growing diversity of our nation's children requires that we shift the status quo and, informed by science, intentionally address the specific needs of each and every child and family served by the early childhood system, including children from tribal communities. This is an issue that requires prioritization and collaboration at all levels- including the national level, and across the public and private sectors. We must proactively address the barriers presented here, invest in science that can further inform best practices, develop better assessment measures, interventions and curricula that are appropriate and effective for this growing population, and ultimately deliver a higher-quality of services to the millions of children who are DLLs and their families. Combined, these steps will help ensure that each child arrives at school prepared to excel, eager to learn, and ready to build a future workforce that is rich in diversity, heritage, cultural tradition, and language.