

Home Language for Success in School and Life-Animation

[Music]

Narrator: These children are our future. They speak over 140 languages. They attend 87 percent of the Head Start and Early Head Start Programs across the United States. They are one-third of the Head Start population. They are 310,000 children strong. These children are dual language learners.

Children learning two or more languages have a bright and promising future, especially when their culture and home languages are supported. This animation explains why children need to continue to learn their home language as they also learn English, for success in school and life.

Some children learn two or more languages from birth. Other children learn their home language first and a second language is introduced later. A child's sense of who she is begins to form at birth and develops in and through her culture and home language. Infants learn social skills when listening to their families speak their home languages and through the customs and routines of their families and culture. Social skills expand rapidly throughout the preschool years as children interact more and more with others. A positive sense of self and strong social-emotional skills are the foundation of school readiness and life success.

As a child acquires her home language and cultural ways, she is also learning many important thinking and school readiness skills, such as classification, cause and effect, and categorization. Over time, these concepts and other school readiness skills transfer from her home language as she learns English. When children begin to learn a new language, for example English, they may not initially know all the English words to use to extend the concepts, knowledge, and ideas that they have already developed in their Home Language; For example, a child may be able to describe her block structure using shape names in her home language but not yet be able to say the shape names in English. However, it may take some time before children learn the new words and are able to express the ideas and concepts in English that they first learned in their Home Language.

What happens when home language is not supported? There is a common myth that a child's Home Language gets in the way of learning English. However the opposite is true. When their home language is taken away, children's family and cultural identity can be weakened or lost. Children can no longer build upon the skills and concepts that they have developed in their home language from birth. Their ability to be ready for school and to learn English well is at risk.

Without the support of their Home Language, children enter school at a disadvantage. Many struggle to catch up as they move through each grade. When children have uninterrupted social and cognitive development in their home language as they learn English, they are more likely to be ready for school and be able to read in English. They will more likely have long-term success in school and life.

What does the Office of Head Start say about why children need to maintain and fully develop their home language? Multicultural Principle 6 states that: Effective programs for children who speak languages other than English require continued development of the first language while the acquisition of English is facilitated. There are many ways programs can support young children's home language development -- not just one. The strategies used depend on each child's language skills and the kind of support families and teachers can provide.

Dual language learners succeed in school and life when they continue to develop their home language and master English. What Head Start and Early Head Start programs do today to promote home language, directly impacts children's future school success.

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