



Elementary Teachers' Feedback on the Dual Language Program, 2016–2017

Austin Independent School District

In Fall 2016 and Spring 2017, several focus groups (that included between two and twelve participants) were conducted to gather dual language (DL) elementary teachers' opinions and recommendations about the program. In addition, some teachers who were not present during the focus groups were asked to provide individual responses to the questions used in the focus groups. A total of 140 teachers provided feedback about the program. All feedback was collected and analyzed, and the most common response themes are summarized in this report.

What is working well in this year's DL implementation?

When asked about what aspects of the DL program were working well, teachers frequently mentioned:

- Bilingual strategies (e.g., teaching for transfer, bridging)
- The various trainings and professional development opportunities available
- More freedom than in previous years (e.g., to adapt aspects of the program to their students and schools, focus more on content than on rules, aesthetics, and checklists; focus on the components that are essential to the program)
- Better understanding of the model and implementation plan
- Having receptive and positive teachers who support each other
- Having more support from campus administrators and from the Multilingual Education Team
- Separation of languages

In addition, several teachers mentioned they had observed better student outcomes. For example, one teacher reported that her students “are improving their Spanish little by little, and most feel excited about it,” whereas another indicated that 5th graders were applying what they had learned in prior years in their native language. Furthermore, some teachers mentioned that parents seemed more engaged, and others noted that the program was helping students feel stronger about their bilingualism and understand that bilingualism is advantageous to them.

How is your campus handling the three DL principles?

1. Commitment to implementing DL from prekindergarten (pre-K) through 5th grade

When asked how campuses were handling the commitment to implement DL from pre-K through 5th grade, respondents had mixed feelings. Many indicated their campus was committed to implementing DL, but that there were several issues related to

implementing the program. For example, some teachers felt they needed more training and support, and others mentioned that implementation in grades 3 through 5 was more challenging because of standardized testing and the presence of mixed classrooms.

2. A minimum of 50% instruction in Spanish or Vietnamese through 5th grade

A number of teachers who answered this question indicated they were teaching close to 50% of the time in Spanish or Vietnamese and 50% in English, and some indicated they were actually teaching more often in Spanish than in English (e.g., in pre-K and kindergarten). However, a similar number of teachers indicated they were not able to teach at least 50% of the time in Spanish. These teachers listed several challenges related to maintaining a 50/50 ratio of English and Spanish. For example, teachers indicated that (in their school):

- There were not enough English language learners (ELL) to support the Spanish language learners.
- Most of their children were not proficient in their native language, so the idea of 50/50 did not work because the students lacked exposure and experiences and were missing vocabulary.
- Administration was pushing for more English.
- The upper grades struggled due to testing. The push to administer tests in English resulted in less than 50% of the day's instruction in Spanish.
- Teaching math in Spanish was challenging because the students did not have any vocabulary in Spanish for math, this included Spanish-dominant students.

3. Strategic separation of languages: in what language(s) are you teaching math, science, and social studies?

In most cases, teachers reported teaching math in English, and science and social studies in Spanish, however, in a few cases, both science and math were taught in English. In addition, several participants reported teaching math and/or science in both English and Spanish. In such cases, teachers typically adopted a 2-week English and 2-week Spanish cycle. Lastly, one teacher reported teaching math and social studies in Vietnamese, and science and language arts in English.

Are you implementing teaching for transfer, and if so, when does it occur?

Nearly half of the teachers who responded to this question indicated they were implementing teaching for transfer. Teachers' reports on when it occurred in the teaching cycle varied. For example, some teachers indicated that teaching for transfer occurred at the end of the lesson, at the end of the unit, after language/vocabulary had been introduced, when needed by students, or at a specific time of the day (e.g., "for 20 minutes after lunch"). However, a similar number of teachers indicated they were not implementing teaching for transfer, typically because of time constraints or because they still needed training on this method.

What requests do you have about the DL program implementation options moving forward?

The following are the main themes mentioned by teachers who responded to this question, as well as the most frequent suggestions within those themes:

Professional development and training sessions for teachers and administrators:

- More training opportunities for more experienced teachers as well as for new teachers

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- More training on teaching for biliteracy
- More opportunities for teachers to observe classrooms where the DL program is being implemented well
- More training about the program before the school year starts so teachers can be better prepared for implementation at the beginning of the year
- More clarification on how the trainings tie into the DL program goals and the 11 DL elements (e.g., biliteracy, teaching, for transfer, cooperative learning), and more opportunities to practice and to learn strategies in those training sessions
- A requirement that administrators attend trainings with teachers, including bridging and biliteracy framework, so they can better support their teachers and students
- Mini workshops on campus to review and share how things are going with biliteracy strategies

More resources:

- More equitable support from the specialists across all campuses implementing DL
- More math, science, and social studies resources in Spanish and Vietnamese
- More books, workbooks, authentic reading materials (at many grade levels), and high-quality translation of documents and tests into Spanish and Vietnamese
- More online and technological resources (e.g., videos and apps) in Spanish and Vietnamese
- More support in the curriculum areas and timeline of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)
- DL instructional coaches on every DL campus
- More social studies resources (e.g., an adapted curriculum) in Vietnamese
- Exemplar lessons posted frequently
- More special education resources
- A centralized location to find the available resources (e.g., an online resource hub)
- More teachers

Eliminate mixed classrooms (where ELLs in DL and students not in DL are placed in the same class).

Provide more clarity about the DL program and various options to principals, teachers, and parents.

In addition, some teachers provided the following suggestions: incorporate Response To Intervention in classroom work, align kindergarten curriculum and rubric, create a bilingual curriculum, change the curriculum units to allow for appropriate pacing, and allow more time for English-speaking and DL teachers to meet and plan bridging.

Teachers' input were combined with principals' input (https://www.austinisd.org/sites/default/files/dre-surveys/rb/RB16.13_Principals_Platicas_on_Elementary_Dual_Language_Program.pdf) to inform the work of the DELL team as they plan DL program implementation for 2017–2018.

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