

# Dual Language/Immersion Brief

## Overview

Research shows that dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs benefit every student, regardless of language background. They are the most successful bilingual program in meeting EL students' need and have also been shown to better support students who come from traditionally low-performing groups than monolingual education settings. Additionally, these programs fill in academic achievement gaps and boost engagement and learning.

## What is it?

Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) education is defined as academic programming that delivers curricular content in two languages—English and a partner language. The learner goals of DL/I include biliteracy, bilingualism, intercultural competency and academic proficiency in both English and the partner language. DL/I education can benefit all students across all demographics, providing important language learning in English and another language from an early age. No other intervention model holds greater promise to narrow the achievement gap more effectively between high and low performing populations than dual language/immersion (Collier, W. and Thomas, G. (2012). *Dual language education for a transformed world* (pp.44-46). Albuquerque: Fuente Press. Haj-Broussard, M.G. (2003). *Language, identity and the achievement gap: Comparing experiences of African American students in a French immersion and a regular education context* (Doctoral Dissertation). Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College).

## Benefits: What the Research Says

Dual Language Immersion programs can be highly successful in academically preparing students whose first language is English, and students who are dominant in another language and may be English Learners (ELs), as well as students who may be learning a third language. Key research findings include:

- 1) Students' development of a second language does not impede first language development (Alanís and Rodríguez, 2008).
- 2) Students in DL/I programs outperform their monolingual peers in reading, writing, math, and science (Alanís and Rodríguez, 2008; Cobb et al., 2006; Marian et al., 2013; Umansky and Reardon, 2014).
- 3) Students who remain in elementary programs from Kindergarten through Fifth grade outperform students in conventional programs, both in English Language Arts and in general English proficiency (Umansky and Reardon, 2014).
- 4) Students perform as well as or better than their monolingual peers on other academic content assessments (Collier and Thomas, 2012).
- 5) Bilingual students, especially those whose families are immigrants, are less likely to drop out of high school, more likely to go to college, have fewer behavior problems at school, and obtain higher paying jobs than their peers who were not in a DL/I program (Gándara and Escamilla, 2017).

Students in Dual-Language/Immersion programs often perform higher than monolingual peers on state assessments. Due in part to the cognitive demands placed on students who learn



content in two different languages, **DL/I is also the intervention model that holds the greatest promise to narrow the achievement gap most effectively between high and low performing populations** (Collier, W. and Thomas, G. (2012). Dual language education for a transformed world (pp.44-46). Albuquerque: Fuente Press. Haj-Broussard, M.G. (2003). Language, identity and the achievement gap: Comparing experiences of African American students in a French immersion and a regular education context (Doctoral Dissertation). Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.) Additionally, given that ELs comprised approximately seven per cent of the student population in Oklahoma in 2017 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), educational programs that address an EL's native language help provide equitable opportunities through intentional language and literacy development in English and their native language simultaneously. Another key finding is that instruction in a child's native language is paramount to fulfillment of academic potential (Collier and Thomas, 2012, 2017; Genesee et al., 2005; Thomas and Collier, 2003). However, even if the partner language is not the ELs' native language, the students will still benefit from the additional, explicit focus on aspects of academic language development and are able to make multiple linguistic connections to English and to their native language. Bringing together English-speaking students and students whose dominant language is one other than English provides for both groups to develop critical, effective, multi-lingual communication skills.

Notable research studies have examined the impact of DL/I education on student achievement and provide evidence of the benefits for students across all demographics. Prominent benefits evidenced from research studies of students in DL/I programs include:

- Increased executive functioning and cognitive control
- Higher learner engagement
- Closing of achievement gaps
- Proficiency in more than one language
- Intercultural competence
- Personal, social and civic benefits
- Economic benefits for both the learner and community through stronger competitiveness within the job market and a return on the investment in D-L/I programs

The following positive correlations between bilingualism and student cognition and behavior as compared to monolinguals, regardless of age, are evidenced:

- Empathy and sensitivity toward others
- Cognitive development, selective attention and memory skills
- Executive function, intelligence, and IQ
- Verbal, non-verbal, and spatial abilities
- Pattern recognition, problem solving and mental flexibility
- Delay in onset of age-related cognitive loss or dementia
- Metalinguistic and transferable skills between their languages
- Ability to learn additional languages more easily

(Alladi, et al., 2013; American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL); Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA); Cummins, 2000; Fortune, 2012; Garcia and Nanez, 2011; Thomas and Collier, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017).

## Supporting All Students

Finally, DL/I programs provide extra support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds whose primary language is English. However, as discussed above, **all** students can benefit from these programs. In today's globally connected world where societies that strive to solve similar problems and economies are



interdependent, bilingualism and multilingualism is an asset to students and their communities which is most achievable when they participate in DL/I education starting at a young age.

## Guiding Principles for Dual Language/Immersion Education

Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) education is academic programming that delivers curricular content in two languages—English and a partner language. The learner goals of DL/I include biliteracy, bilingualism, intercultural competency and academic proficiency in both English and the partner language. DL/I education can benefit all students across all demographics, providing important language learning in English and another language from an early age. No other intervention model holds greater promise to narrow the achievement gap more effectively between high and low performing populations than Dual Language/Immersion (Collier, W. and Thomas, G. (2012). *Dual language education for a transformed world* (pp.44-46). Albuquerque: Fuente Press. Haj-Broussard, M.G. (2003). *Language, identity and the achievement gap: Comparing experiences of African American students in a French immersion and a regular education context* (Doctoral Dissertation). Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College).

The model is made up of three pillars described by learning goals representing the core components: bilingualism and biliteracy (language), grade-level academic achievement (content), and intercultural competence for all students (culture) (Chestnut and Dimitrieska, 2018; Howard et al., 2018). A major goal within the bilingualism and biliteracy pillar is full proficiency in both the partner language and English. Achievement of these goals requires at least six full academic years to develop proficiency in the full complement of the three learning goals. These programs primarily serve native speakers of English acquiring a partner language and speakers of the partner language acquiring English but may include students learning a third language. DL/I programs may be implemented schoolwide or as a strand within the school. As Dual-Language/Immersion expands in the state, it is essential for planning and implementation of new programs to provide definitions and unified guidelines for schools interested in implementing a DL/I program, including determining learner goals, student population, content delivery, language ratio and program length.

## Language Proficiency Levels in Oklahoma

The proficiency level goals for language in Oklahoma DL/I programs are dependent on the school's/district's partner language and other goals of the program. In general, the goal is to show growth in both languages, and in some programs to maximize students' proficiency in a world language in order for them to develop advanced-level language skills in secondary schools. Students may achieve high levels of world language proficiency in the immersion language and English. Students are on a pathway to read, write, speak, and listen in a language other than English up to an intermediate high proficiency level by the ninth grade. By continuing study of the same language in high school, they can achieve advanced language proficiency skills and possibly earn credit towards a language minor at Oklahoma colleges and universities.

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