

# Dual Language Immersion for Young Learners:

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LESSONS IN LITERACY AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION  
FOR EDUCATORS



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## ABOUT HELIOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Helios Education Foundation is dedicated to creating opportunities for individuals in Arizona and Florida to achieve a postsecondary education. Our work is driven by our four fundamental beliefs in Community, Equity, Investment, and Partnership, and we invest in initiatives across the full education continuum.

In Arizona, where Latino students comprise the largest percentage of the K–12 public school population, the Foundation is implementing its Arizona Latino Student Success initiative focused on preparing all students — especially Latino students — for success in college and career. Through our Florida Regional Student Success Initiative, Helios is helping first-generation, low-income and minority students from the state's large population centers in Miami, Orlando and Tampa achieve a postsecondary education.

Since 2006, the Foundation has invested over \$200 million in education programs and initiatives in both states. To learn more about our efforts, visit us online at [www.helios.org](http://www.helios.org).

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Dear Colleague,

Helios Education Foundation believes all students, regardless of zip code, can realize their full potential through a high-quality education that prepared them for completion of a postsecondary degree or credential. Our fundamental belief in equity affirms this work.

Success in postsecondary education starts with success in the early learning years, when a child's brain is most receptive and adaptive to stimuli. To ensure all students are supported to achieve success, Helios Education Foundation, in partnership with the Orlando Repertory Theatre, Orange County Public Schools, and Arizona State University, embarked on implementation of two-way dual language learning (DLL) instruction in voluntary pre-kindergarten classrooms in Orange County. The classrooms split instruction between English and Spanish with curriculum delivered in each language fifty percent of the time. The results of our four-year partnership are explored in this brief.

Leveraging the diversity of our communities, the variety of languages spoken, and the cultural richness many students bring to the classroom enhances their education, their understanding of each other, and serves to instill the premise of equity at a very young age.

Effective dual language environments leverage students' potential by positioning their native language as an asset to be shared. In this regard, native Spanish speakers shared not only linguistics but insight into their home environments and traditions. So too did native English speakers, giving equal importance and relevance to everyone.

We hope this brief helps facilitate conversations about how to effectively use dual-language learning strategies to bring equity to the classroom, leading to improved educational outcomes for all students.

Sincerely,



Vince Roig

Founding Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vince Roig".



Paul J. Luna

President & CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul J. Luna".

Helios Education Foundation (Helios) recognizes the importance of addressing the needs of our youngest learners and works to create more equitable and impactful education systems. Over the past five years (2015–2020), Helios implemented two robust professional development research projects, one in Arizona and the other in Florida, aimed at improving the language acquisition and emergent literacy of children entering kindergarten, using a two-way language immersion model. In two-way immersion, children who speak English and children who speak Spanish learn content together, through both languages. This report includes initial data on how dual language learning (DLL) is influencing classroom practices and children’s learning in classrooms ranging from pre-K through Grade 3 in Florida.

To guide our work, Helios commissioned a multi-year research study with our partners. The goal was to examine the implementation of the program and, more importantly, its impacts on teachers’ use of high-quality teaching strategies and on children’s acquisition of language and emergent literacy skills in a range of grade levels. We believe this work will be instrumental in the identification of innovative and effective instructional strategies for our youngest English Language Learners (ELLs), helping to ensure their success in their pre-K programs, upon entering kindergarten, and beyond.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This brief, the third in the DLL project series, highlights the Helios Dual Language Learner Project that began in voluntary pre-K (VPK) classrooms and is expanding to third grade. The first two briefs shared the project as implemented in Arizona, while this piece focuses on our work in Orlando, Florida. There are five sections. In Part I we describe the context of this project and highlight the literacy challenges too many of our youngest students face each year. In Part II, we define the program as implemented over the four years and identify its expansion into the upper grades and other schools within the district. In Part III, we analyze the data with a primary focus on teachers’ instructional practices. In addition, this section analyzes data from: (1) the variance in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores; (2) GOLD (previously known as Teaching Strategies Gold); (3) PreLAS 2000 Español; and (4) Bright Beginnings. In Part IV, we synthesize the learnings from the project and highlight successes leading to sustainability. Part V identifies a set of recommendations for educational leaders that can lead to scalability and replicability of DLL programs.

## LITERACY

In the United States there is a recognition of a “literacy crisis” (Jacobson, 2019). Too many of our young children struggle with written text, not just decoding words, but understanding what they read. As a result, they have difficulty learning from text-based information, which is the main way students gain knowledge starting in fourth grade.

Literacy is a common topic among parents, educators, philanthropy organizations, non-profits, and policymakers. However, to understand the depth of the challenge of improving the ability of our youngest children to learn to read, we need to look at myriad social values and ideologies that impact this area. Literacy begins much earlier and is more involved than placing a list of words in the front of a classroom and having children repeat the words. Instead, it is a process that exposes infants to sounds and gestures, to new experiences, and to conversations. Literacy also includes sights, sounds, text, conversations, and related activities that create a

space for a child to speak and explore with support from knowledgeable adults (parents, grandparents, caregivers, educators). Building an age-appropriate foundation for language and emergent literacy is not limited to learning one language or being instructed in only one language. A recent study by the RAND Corporation found that ELLs in dual language programs are more likely to succeed academically in a number of key areas. In comparison to English learners who were not enrolled in dual language programs, these students were found to outperform their peers on state reading tests and be more likely to be classified as “English proficient” by Grade 6 (Steele, Slater, Zamarro, Miller, Li, Burkhauser, & Bacon, 2017).

The United States has not kept pace with other industrialized countries in key social indicators that are seen as peripheral to children’s academic success. For instance, issues such as health care, safe neighborhoods, food security, and healthy family environments all play essential roles in how a child comes to school with the best chance of succeeding (Kristof & WuDunn, 2020). The United States possesses a vast economic and political standing in the global market, but other countries surpass it in the exposure of children and young adults to other languages in addition to their family language. Research has shown that children in environments where multiple languages are spoken learn more than one language, and their ability to process two languages contributes to the development of higher-order thinking skills. The educational field recognizes these as essential tools to reading comprehension and the ability to understand and internalize new information (Saifer, 2018).

In the United States, an increasing number of children entering preschool come from families who speak multiple languages in their home environment. In Florida and Arizona those two languages commonly are English and Spanish. The United States has the opportunity to embrace this diversity as an asset to be nurtured through access to DLL classrooms, but it is far behind other countries in supporting the continued development of a child’s family language along with English.

Learning a second language does not eliminate the first language, and educators and policy makers should be dissuaded from thinking so (Steele et al, 2017). Early childhood education can take different approaches to instructional strategies. As mentioned in a prior Helios Education Brief (Bernstein, Kilinc, Perrault, Ortiz, & Kelley, 2019), researchers use the term “translanguaging” (Garcia & Wei, 2014), meaning the continued support for the use of both the family and new language components that naturally occur with both bilingual children and adults. These experts recommend that this enhanced use of the two languages to support communication is further evidence the developing child needs early support of both English and home language development.

Knowing of these challenges, Helios conducted a review of the literature and chose an innovative design that has the potential to be a model for other DLL programs. To carry out this work, Helios contracted with Orlando Repertory Theatre (ORT), Orange County Public Schools (OCPS), Arizona State University (ASU), and Childsplay Inc. (Childsplay) to implement a two-way immersion (TWI) DLL program. The work engaged students in the development of language and literacy skills through the delivery of subject content in both English and Spanish, and also included a robust research component.





## TWO-WAY IMMERSION

In the United States, TWI models integrate English speakers with speakers of another language. Ideally, this would be a 50:50 ratio of English-speaking students to non-English speaking students, but, due to demographics, this exact split is not often achievable. Instruction takes place in both languages, with some models splitting the day in half (e.g., English in the morning and Spanish in the afternoon), while other models alternate days or split the use of the two languages by academic subject. The classes may be taught by a teacher who is bilingual and biliterate or with the assistance of another teacher or paraprofessional who is more proficient in one of the two languages.

Two-Way Immersion provides benefits to both English-speaking students and ELLs. In a dual language classroom, the ELL students are able to use their family language, which contributes to more classroom participation. This allows the students to feel positive about their family heritage and maintain a healthy sense of personal identity. In comparison, the English-speaking students have the benefit of hearing a new language frequently spoken and have the support of their peers to participate verbally and in other classroom learning activities. As students' self-confidence increases, so does their willingness to communicate in their family and new languages. DLLs are able to have a shared class experience with their classmates and teacher.

Successful implementation of this model, as noted by researchers and educators, shows that it is important to include teachers' experiences and to clarify the use of all terminology to parents, to program staff, and all partner organizations (Mora, Wink & Wink, 2001). It is imperative that there is a clear understanding among the ideology of what the administrators want the program to be, the reality of the implementation, and the actual

elements of the program. An effective TWI program has three specific characteristics: 1) a pedagogically sound model of instruction that fits the demographic realities and resources of the school community; 2) fidelity to the model in all aspects of implementation; and 3) a timely and appropriate means of addressing any incongruity between the model, school/community needs, and systems of implementation. (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003, p.6).

From the initial stages of planning and at the onset of implementation, OCPS committed to administering and implementing this project with fidelity. OCPS created a program that is culturally sensitive and aligned to the needs of their students and community. The OCPS project team describes the program as follows:

*The goal of the Two-Way Dual Language Program is for students to develop bilingualism and biliteracy in both English and a partner language, demonstrate high levels of academic achievement, and cultivate positive cross-cultural attitudes. Balanced numbers of native English speakers and native speakers of the target language are taught literacy and academic content in both languages so that each group serves in the role of the language model and language learner as they acquire knowledge in core academic areas. Students who enroll in the OCPS Two-Way Dual Language Program will learn to read, write, and speak in English and Spanish. Classroom demographics begin with 50% ELLs and 50% native English speakers in kindergarten/ first grade. If an ELL student exits the ESOL program, they may continue in the Two-Way Dual Language Model. <https://www.ocps.net>*

## II. HELIOS DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNER PROJECT THROUGH THE LENS OF OUR PARTNERS

### ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Orange County Public Schools recognized that there are too few culturally appropriate and accurate resources available for use by teachers of students whose home language is not English. While the focus has been on creating opportunities for students to be proficient in speaking and reading English, a growing body of work shows the benefits of learning two languages. More often than not, this type of learning setting is available only to a small population of students. To address this issue Dr. Barbara M. Jenkins, Superintendent of OCPS, enthusiastically supported the implementation of the Helios Dual Language Learner Project:

*The grant from the Helios Education Foundation allowed Orange County Public Schools to expand opportunities for our linguistically diverse community. Through our Two-Way Dual Language program, more of our VPK students have become better prepared for kindergarten and also acquired vocabulary and preliteracy skills in both English and Spanish. We have seen students demonstrate high levels of academic achievement and cultivate positive cross-cultural attitudes. This has been another enriching pathway by which we are ensuring our students have a promising and successful future (B. Jenkins, personal communication, July 2, 2020).*

The project began in 2016, and, over the last four years, OCPS along with its partners, ORT, ASU, and Childsplay, implemented and gathered research. The initial year (2016–2017) was a planning and demonstration year for OCPS. The district selected nine elementary schools as sites. The criteria for selection of these schools included the desire to have a 50:50 ratio of Spanish and English-speaking students and dedicated support of the administrators and teachers. OCPS leadership identified 11 VPK classrooms with approximately 20 children in each to initially implement the district's Two-Way Dual Language program.

Upon completion of the pilot, OCPS and its partners focused on building and strengthening teacher instructional strategies and delivering content in English and Spanish on alternating days. To support delivery OCPS expanded its Multilingual Department and designated resources for ways, methods, and techniques of teaching the VPK standard in both languages. ORT teaching artists

provided in-class coaching and modeling of the Childsplay Early Years Educators at Play professional development program (EYEPlay) strategies. Ultimately, the project partners' goals for this program were for students to achieve high levels of language proficiency in English and Spanish (biliterate and bilingual), and to enhance or develop a better understanding and appreciation for other cultures.

### EYEPLAY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BY THE ORLANDO REPERTORY THEATRE

A key component of implementation for the teachers was EYEPlay, which integrates drama strategies into literacy practices in the pre-K and K–3 classrooms. Incorporating EYEPlay into the professional development of the Helios Dual Language Learner Project added an innovative and energizing method of delivering language and literacy content. This method places professional teaching artists in the classroom with the teacher to scaffold teachers' drama facilitation. The program includes three drama frames, or purposeful pairings of a drama strategy (pantomime, character development, and group story building) with specific language and curricular objectives (receptive language, expressive language, and problem-solving). These drama frames provide the teachers with a unique set of tools to be used with any subject (see Figures 1 and 2).

The EYEPlay strategies as a professional development tool serve a pivotal role for the teachers developing dual language literacy activities for the first time and contribute to the engagement of all students regardless of their language and literacy proficiency in Spanish or English.

To support language and literacy development in both English and Spanish, the EYEPlay Dual Language Learning Professional Development program integrates drama strategies into literacy practices in DLL preschool classrooms. The program has three goals for teachers: 1) to develop teachers' knowledge, performance skills, and dispositions toward using drama strategies (i.e., pantomime, character development, group story building) as tools in literacy practices; 2) to support enhancing young children's literacy

and language development in both English and Spanish; and 3) to build sustainable personal and professional growth by teachers, such that they continue to employ drama strategies after the completion of the project (Kilinc, Kelley, Adams & Millinger, 2016). The EYEPlay strategies were delivered by professional theatre teaching artists working with the preschool teachers throughout the year to scaffold teachers' drama facilitation. The drama frames were paired with specific language and curricular objectives (receptive language, expressive language, and problem-solving).

A teaching artist is a practicing professional artist who possesses the skills of an educator and who, through the use of drama, can engage the teacher by demonstrating new instructional supports and engage the students in new ways of learning.

"I love drama because it is a secret way to have the students covering content. They are so engaged that they aren't realizing that they are learning. Learning the drama structures has been a great addition to my teacher tool belt!" (Teacher, OCPS)

"Through this work we've seen what we've known in our hearts for a long time – that art, and specifically theatre, can enrich a child's education in a way nothing else can. It is a joy to expand our work beyond the stage and into our schools and shine a light on the importance of early childhood education." Chris Brown, Executive Director, ORT

Using drama as an arts integrated teaching method within the classroom, ORT contracted with Childsplay to utilize EYEPlay strategies to support language and literacy development in both English and Spanish. Drama in the classroom provides opportunities for students to develop and explore rich vocabulary, as well as context and setting, which are needed to build understanding. Additionally, teachers are able to assess language and reading comprehension in action. When teachers were asked why they used drama in their classrooms they shared:

To learn more about EYEPlay and teaching artistry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mC08MyGyDo&feature=youtu.be>

In years two through four the Two-Way Dual Language Program continued to have strong district support, and participating teachers expressed their increased comfort with creating instructional activities in the two languages. The teachers shared with their coaches that EYEPlay was a critical tool for them in gaining and maintaining their students' interest in language and literacy activities. In addition, staff from more elementary schools were asking for the dual language program to be implemented at their sites in the VPK classrooms. Each year the program expanded to the next grade level, growing from pre-K to second grade over the life of the grant with plans to continue into third grade in 2020-2021. At the conclusion of the grant, the Two-Way Dual Language Program was being implemented in 13 VPK, 7 Kindergarten, 6 first grade, and 5 second grade classrooms with OCPS funding the cost of the program.

FIGURE 1

### OCPS Two-Way Dual Language VPK Program

2016-2017 VPK	2017-2018 VPK	2018-2019 VPK	2019-2020 VPK	2020-2021 VPK
Apopka ES	Apopka ES	Apopka ES	Apopka ES	Apopka ES
Chickasaw ES	Chickasaw ES	Chickasaw ES	Chickasaw ES	Chickasaw ES
John Young ES	John Young ES	John Young ES	John Young ES	Little River ES
Lake Weston ES	Little River ES	Little River ES	Little River ES	Ventura ES
Little River ES	Oak Hill ES	Oak Hill ES	Oak Hill ES	Wetherbee ES
Oak Hill ES	Ventura ES	Ventura ES	Ventura ES	Zellwood ES
Ventura ES	Wetherbee ES	Wetherbee ES	Wetherbee ES	WSPLC
Wetherbee ES	Zellwood ES	Zellwood ES	Zellwood ES	Union Park ES
Zellwood ES	WSPLC	WSPLC	WSPLC	Shingle Creek ES
		Union Park ES	Union Park ES	Castle View ES
		Shingle Creek ES	Shingle Creek ES	



FIGURE 2

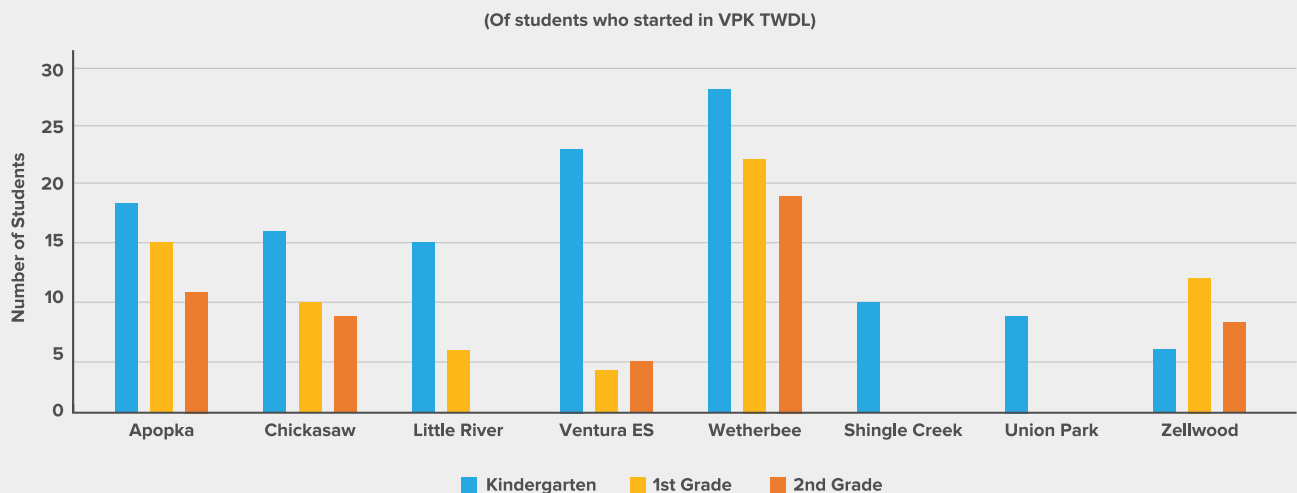
## OCPS Two-Way Dual Language Program Progression

2016-2017 VPK	2017-2018 Kindergarten	2018-2019 1st Grade	2019-2020 2nd Grade	2020-2021 3rd Grade
Apopka ES Chickasaw ES John Young ES Lake Weston ES Little River ES Oak Hill ES Ventura ES Wetherbee ES Zellwood ES  <b>Planning Year for:</b> Kindergarten	Apopka ES Chickasaw ES Ventura ES Wetherbee ES Zellwood ES  <b>Planning Year for:</b> Little River ES (K) First Grade	Apopka ES Chickasaw ES Little River ES (K) Ventura ES Wetherbee ES Zellwood ES  <b>Planning Year for:</b> Shingle Creek ES (K) Second Grade	Apopka ES Chickasaw ES Little River ES (1 <sup>st</sup> ) Shingle Creek ES (K) Ventura ES Wetherbee ES Zellwood ES  <b>Planning Year for:</b> Castle View ES (K) Wyndham Lakes ES (K) Third Grade	Apopka ES Castle View ES (K) Chickasaw ES Little River ES (2 <sup>nd</sup> ) Shingle Creek (1 <sup>st</sup> ) Ventura ES Wetherbee ES Wyndham Lakes ES (K)  <b>Planning Year for:</b> Fourth Grade

Figure 3 shows the number of students who entered the Two-Way Dual Language Program and remained in the program at the schools where the program progressed. A key learning was that the schools with a highly engaged coordinator retained many of the students in the program. The coordinator along with faculty informed parents of the benefits of participating, as well as the research behind the program.

FIGURE 3

## Students Continuing in the TWDL



As a result of three years of implementation, 560 pre-K students will have been exposed to DLL and EYEPlay, and early childhood education practitioners throughout the district will have a shared vocabulary and learning community.

III. WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

THE STUDY

From 2016 to 2020, ASU has been collecting data on the implementation and outcomes of the EYEPlay DLL strategies for the project. Our study included 10 DLL pre-K classrooms with each of the four years having a different instructional focus. In 2016–2017, the initial focus was on building a strong foundation of teachers’ drama facilitation skills. The following school year supported teachers’ instructional strategies while expanding the use of drama within multiple activities (e.g., transition, outdoor, and breakfast time) throughout the day. The third year of the program continued to focus on (a) extending EYEPlay strategies, particularly inquiry and feedback strategies, outside of story time and into the rest of the school day, and (b) developing and implementing child-centered lesson plans that meet the diverse needs of teachers’ classrooms. Throughout the project, teachers emphasized children’s acquisition of robust academic language in both English and Spanish.

In the following sections, we share initial findings from the first two years of the study.

THE FINDINGS

The use of drama improved teachers’ ability to lead literacy lessons.

Using a teacher facilitation rubric, we measured teachers’ skills in implementing drama into their dual language literacy settings. Our goal was to determine the fidelity of the drama professional development and whether teachers were using the drama skills robustly over time. On each of the 14 skills, an ORT teaching artist and an independent observer rated teachers from Beginning (1 or 2) to Developing (3 or 4) to Achieving (rated as 5), in which “the teacher clearly understands the concepts underlying the elements and implements them well with clear evidence of student success” (Kilinic, et al, 2016).

Throughout the first year, the teaching artist and the independent observer scored teachers six times in each language—English and Spanish. We found that teachers increased their scores over time in both languages (see Figures 4 and 5). This provides evidence that the drama professional development was effectively preparing the teachers to understand and deliver the drama strategies to their DLLs.

The graphs show that teachers made gains across all the units in both languages, with drama facilitation scores fairly consistent across both languages.

FIGURE 4  
Year 1 Drama Facilitation in English; N= up to 11 teachers

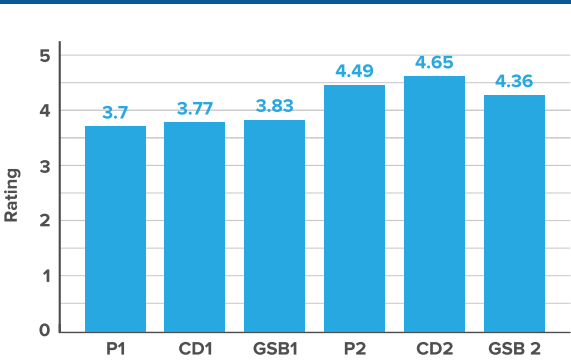
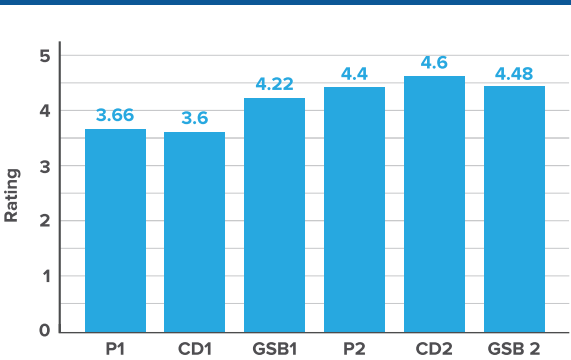


FIGURE 5  
Year 1 Drama Facilitation in Spanish; N= up to 8 teachers



P1 –Pantomime 1.0                      P2 – Pantomime 2.0  
CD1 – Character Development 1.0    CD2 – Character Development 2.0  
GSB1 – Group Story Building 1.0    GSB2 – Group Story Building 2.0

Teachers saw some modest improvement in their skills over time.

The CLASS is an observation tool assessing quality in preschool classrooms. It measures three domains: emotional support (ES), classroom organization (CO), and instructional support (IS). The ES domain focuses on (a) responding to students’ social and emotional development through fostering a positive climate, (b) being aware of students’ academic and emotional concerns, and (c) building interactions and learning activities around students’ interests, motivations, and points of view. Classroom Organization deals with effective behavior management, levels of classroom productivity, and learning activities that support student engagement and learning. The IS domain is about teachers providing and supporting the use of rich language through concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). The results from the study for each year are described on page 9.

Year 1. Two certified bilingual assessors scored full CLASS video-based assessments (pre- and post-tests) using a Likert scale. Every CLASS video observation was conducted in four cycles of observing and note-taking that lasted 15–20 minutes each.

Complete pre- and post-test CLASS data were obtained for teachers in English and Spanish. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the mean scores for both the pre- and post-tests. As shown in Figures 6 and 7, pre- and post-test mean scores rose slightly for each of the three domains of interest in English and in Spanish, with the IS domain rated the lowest. However, none of these differences were statistically significant.

Year 2. Because the scores in IS started and remained low in both English and Spanish, the EYEPlay professional development strategies in Year 2 specifically paired drama with instructional support strategies such as concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling. Full CLASS video-based assessments (pre- and post-tests) were conducted again. Complete pre- and post-test CLASS data were obtained for teachers in English and in Spanish.

As shown in Figure 8, pre- and post-test means rose slightly for ES and CO. However, the IS domain post-test score was still considered low on the CLASS scale.

As shown in Figure 9, pre- and post-test means declined slightly for the ES and CO domains in Spanish, with the IS domain remaining low.

FIGURE 6

Year 1 CLASS Scores in English; N= up to 9 teachers

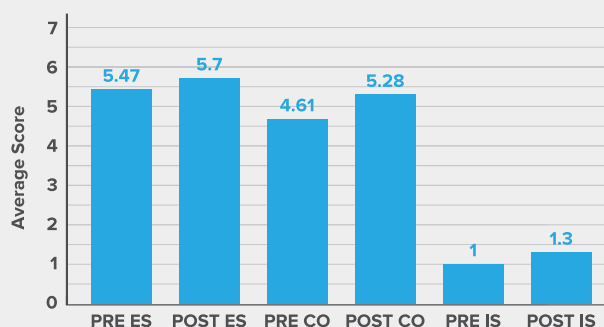


FIGURE 8

Year 2 CLASS Scores in English; N= up to 9 teachers

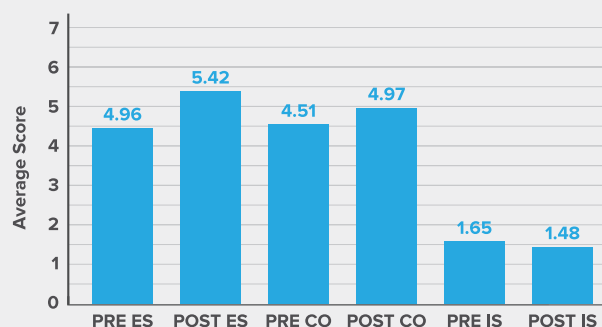


FIGURE 7

Year 1 CLASS Scores in Spanish; N= up to 7 teachers

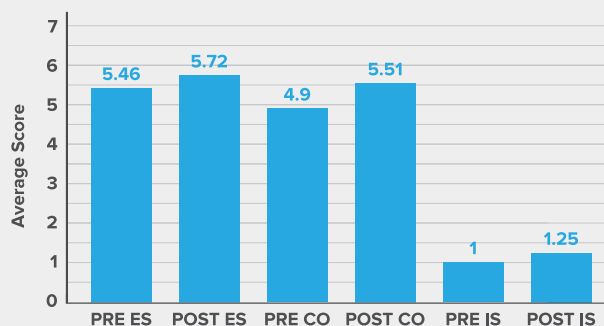
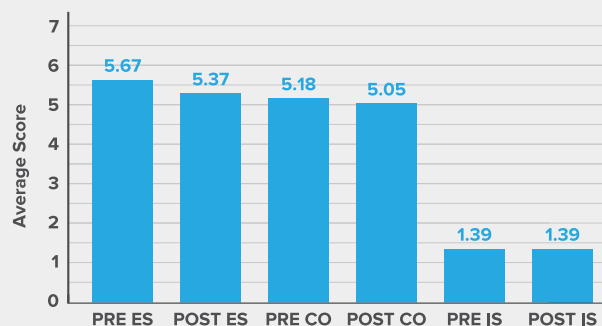


FIGURE 9

Year 2 CLASS Scores in Spanish; N= up to 9 teachers



The CLASS results for Year 2 implementation show a slight gain for the ES and CO. The teachers in both languages are maintaining relatively robust scores for both domains across the 2 years of DLL; however, the IS domain continues to remain low.

### **GOLD DATA: CHILDREN MADE GAINS ACROSS BOTH YEARS**

GOLD is a formative, observation-based assessment system developed to assist teachers in evaluating the skills and knowledge of children from birth through Kindergarten age whom they teach (Heroman, Burts, Berke, & Bickart, 2010; Lambert, Kim, & Burts, 2015). It is comprised of 51 research-based objectives and accompanying rating scales that are separated into 10 categories of development and learning: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, the arts, and English language acquisition (Heroman et al., 2010). The rating scales consist of a 10-point progression of development and learning ranging from not yet – Level 0 – to progressing beyond kindergarten expectations – Level 9 (Kim, Lambert, & Burts, 2013).

Early Head Start, Head Start, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten teachers use these objectives and rating scales, along with a child assessment portfolio, assessment opportunity cards, and an on-the-spot observation recording tool, while they are observing young children, conducting conversations with children and their families, and evaluating samples of children's work, such as drawings and writing (Kim, Lambert, Durham, & Burts, 2018; Lambert et al., 2015). Eight Spanish language and literacy objectives are also provided (Heroman et al., 2010). Teachers use the collected documents and information to conduct evaluations three times per academic year, typically during the fall, winter, and spring (Kim et al., 2018).

Participating teachers used GOLD to evaluate their students' development and learning in many of the categories described above. However, as the project focused on providing rich language and literacy experiences to preschool children, only the mean scores for the language and literacy objectives are presented. As seen in Figures 10 to 13, preschool students made gains across both years.



FIGURE 10

Year 1 English Language Objectives in Fall, Winter, Spring; N=167

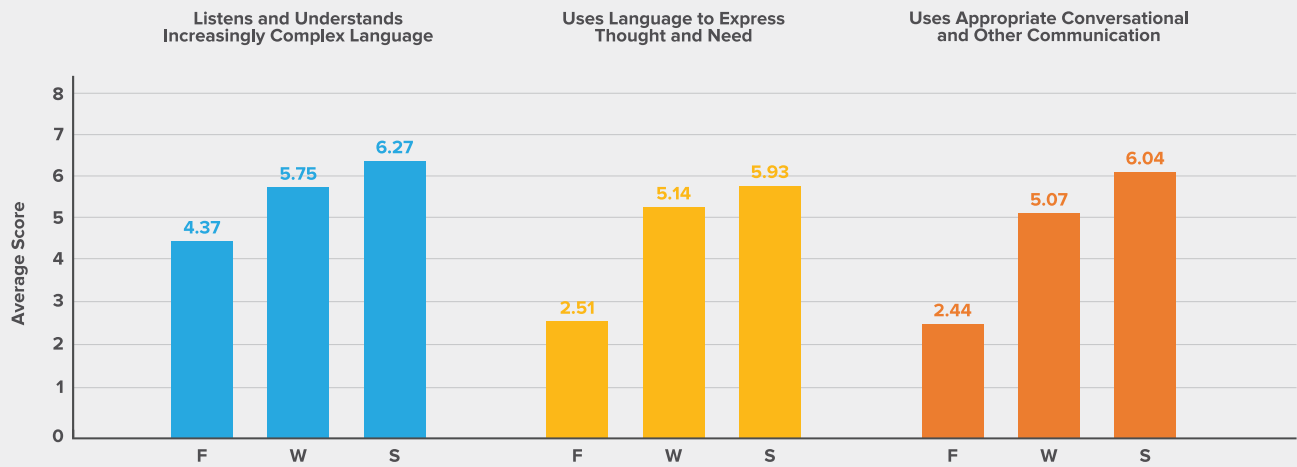


FIGURE 11

Year 1 English Literacy Objectives in Fall, Winter, Spring; N=167

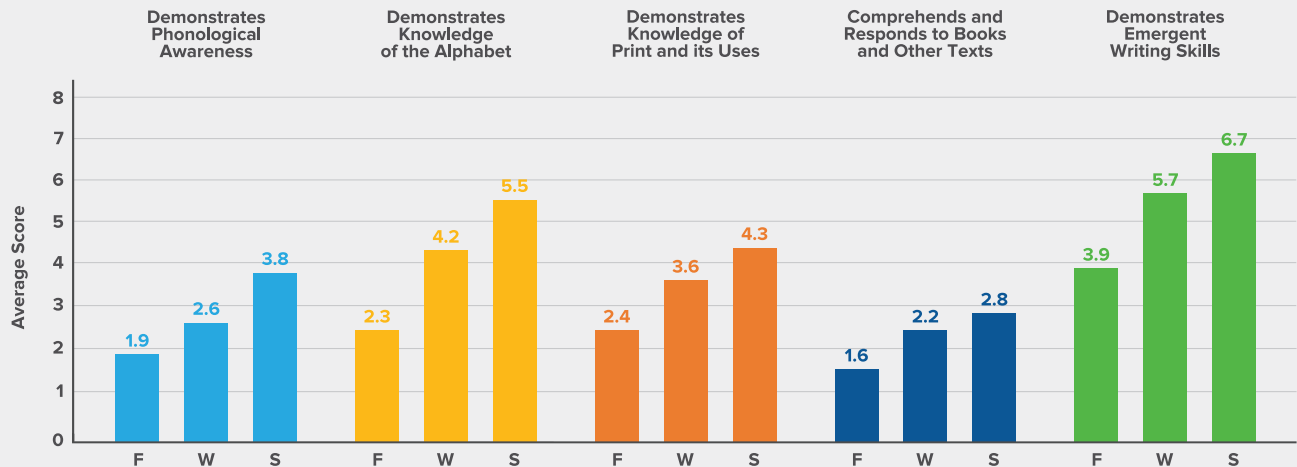




FIGURE 12

## Year 2 English Language Objectives in Fall, Winter, Spring; N=192

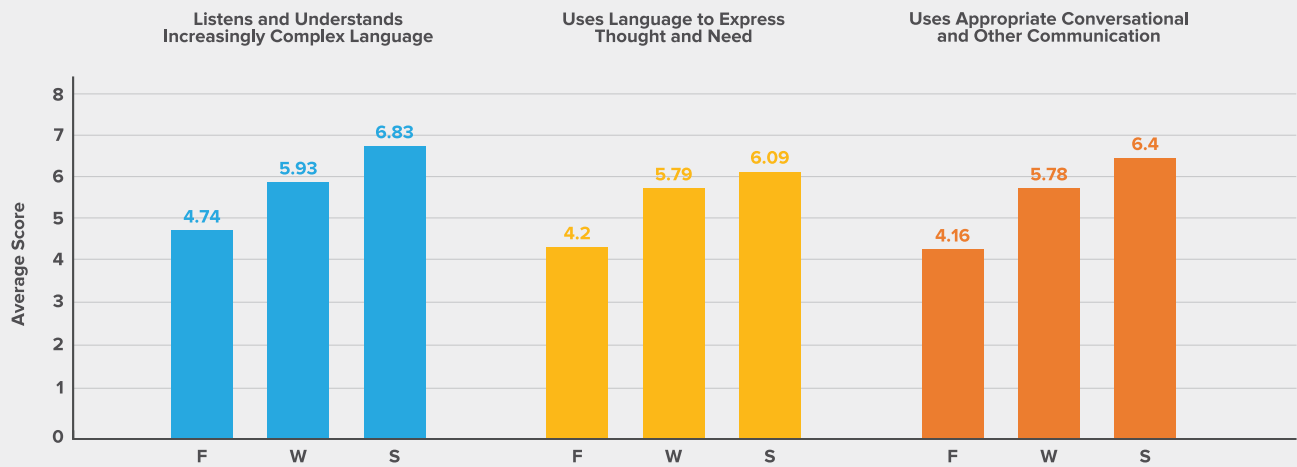
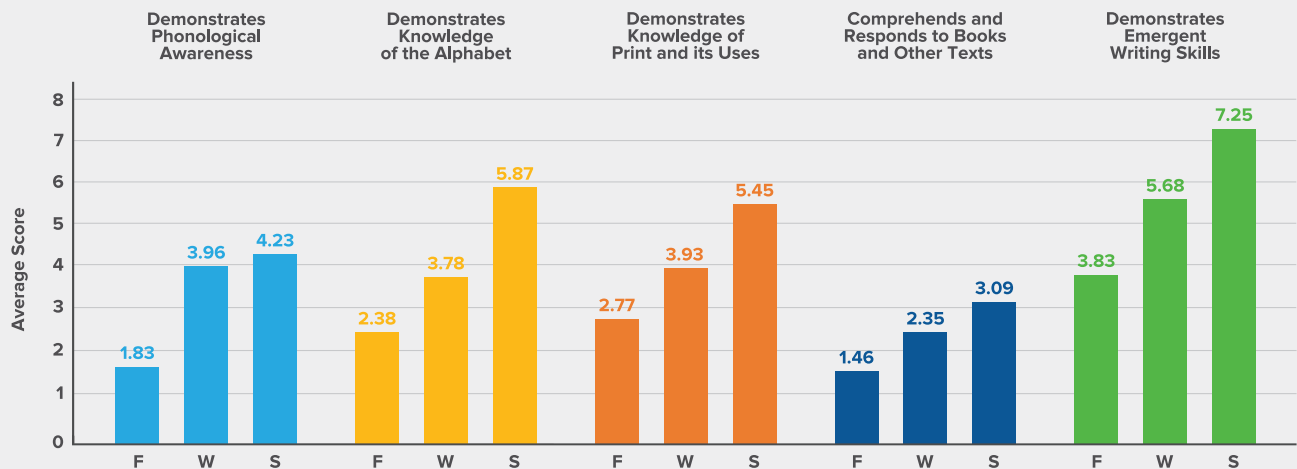


FIGURE 13

## Year 2 English Literacy Objectives in Fall, Winter, Spring; N=192

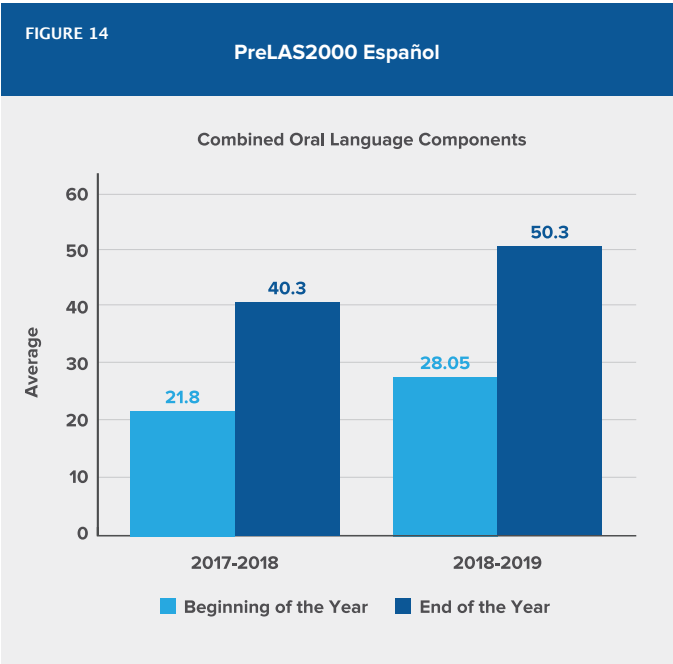


One limitation of GOLD, however, is that it is not designed for DLL. While it does provide domains in Spanish, those sections of the program, which are computer-based, unlock only if a teacher indicates that a child is an ELL. There were additional challenges with assessing in Spanish that were particular to our project.

**PreLAS 2000 ESPAÑOL**

Along with observations carried out by the research team, OCPS also collected data around the PreLAS 2000 Español or Pre-Language Assessment Scales. The PreLAS 2000 is a standardized language proficiency assessment and is used in the identification of ELL students. Using this tool, educators can compare a student’s language skills with fluent native speakers in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This assessment consists of two components – oral language and pre-literacy – and has been normed for early childhood students. Under OCPS’ Two-Way Dual Language programs it is used to monitor the stages of language acquisition in Spanish. The Aural/Oral component is used in the pre-K level and is administered two times per school year. OCPS’ multilingual staff administers the PreLAS 2000 one-on-one so instruction is not interrupted.

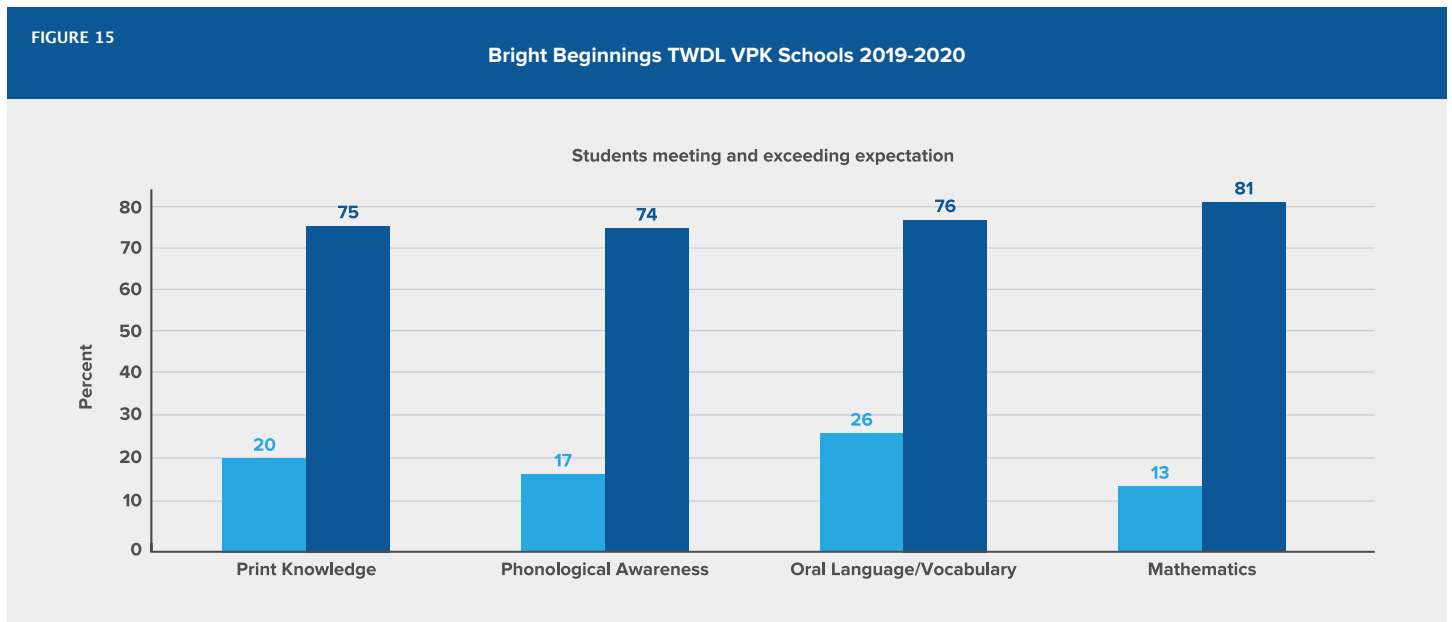
Figure 14 shows the growth in combined oral language components from 2017-2019.



## BRIGHT BEGINNINGS

Bright Beginnings is an English assessment developed by The Florida Center for Reading Research in collaboration with the Florida Department of Education. This assessment provides teachers with reliable information regarding their students' progress towards the Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for four-year-olds. Teachers use this feedback to design and differentiate their instruction. The areas assessed are: print knowledge, phonological awareness, mathematics, and oral language/vocabulary. Teachers administer this assessment three times per year.

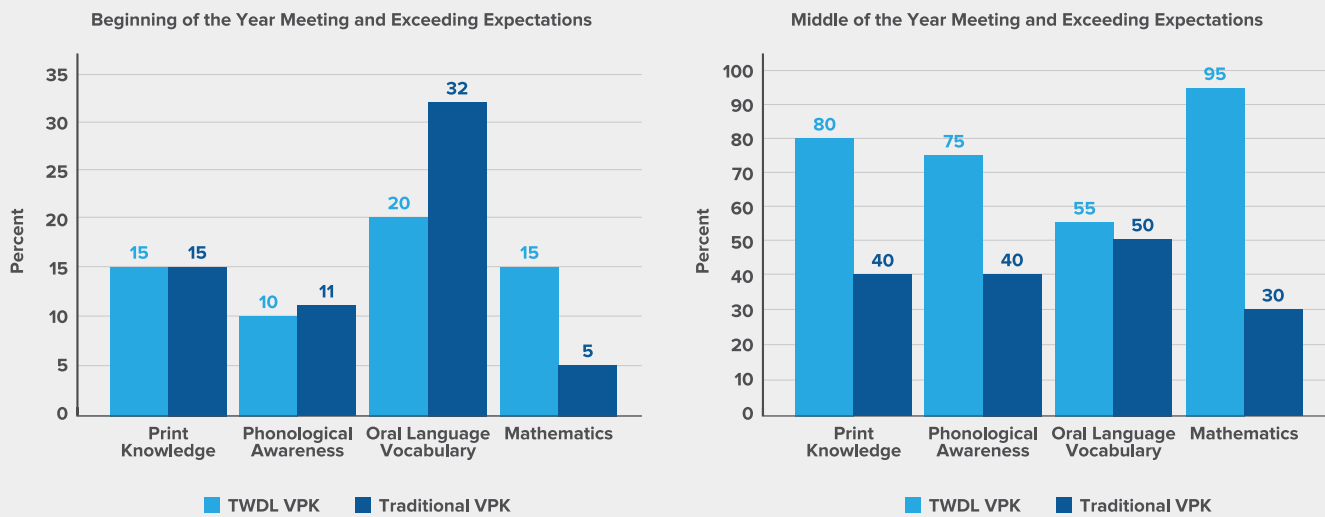
Figure 15 shows the progress of the students in the Two-Way Dual Language VPK program on the Bright Beginnings assessment. The light blue bar indicates students who met and/or exceeded expectations at the beginning of the year. The dark blue bar shows the students who met or exceeded expectations at the middle of the year. According to OCPS leadership, these results are not typically seen until the end of the year.



During the 2019–2020 school year OCPS had the opportunity to compare two VPK classrooms in the same school with similar demographics. One of the classrooms was Two-Way Dual Language while the other was a traditional VPK. Figure 16 shows how students performed on the assessment at the beginning and middle of the year. The light blue bars represent students in the TWDL program, while the dark blue bars show the traditional VPK students. These early observations suggest that students in the dual language program meet or exceed expectations at a faster rate than those in a traditional pre-school. While empirical, these observations align with research conducted by ASU using GOLD.

FIGURE 16

## Bright Beginnings 2019-2020 TWDL VPK vs. Traditional VPK



#### IV. SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

OCPS implemented this project with the fervent belief that providing instructional activities in a child's home language creates a more equitable learning setting. The district placed the value of families at the forefront of the project's design, both honoring and respecting the culture of their students and their families and recognizing that dual language learning brings about an economic advantage. Orange County is home to a large bilingual-multinational workforce, and being bilingual/biliterate in multiple languages provides a dramatic advantage in employment and community participation.

The program's success is not only due to the district's stalwart desire to provide students with diverse and equitable learning environments, but also can be attributed to the fact that it provided the necessary resources, in both human capital and dollars, to implement the program. OCPS did not provide mere "lip service" to creating the plan and piloting the program, but provided true leadership in their attention to budget, crafting of contingency plans should changes be needed midyear, and strategizing for each new year. In addition, the ways in which the district assigned multilingual staff and key educational administrators, enabled district personnel to provide ongoing and real-time professional development

in collaboration with teaching artists from ORT. The district also went to great lengths to inform the parents and the community about the project and the successes associated with it. Ultimately, this led to a cultural shift that enabled the growth of the Two-Way Dual Language Program.

Without a doubt, the real demonstration of the success of this project is depicted in student growth in language and literacy outcomes as seen in the GOLD, PreLAS 2000 Español, and Bright Beginnings figures above. OCPS did not approach this educational curriculum as a project, but as a valued shift in classroom instructional strategies. This mindset provided the opportunity for teachers, parents, and community leaders to become comfortable with the instructional approaches and to have the time to acquire the necessary professional development. Together, these strategies led the partners to witness first-hand the positive changes in student learning each year.

Program sustainability is dependent on a number of factors: personnel, leadership, community need, and state and local policies. Too often programs operate in isolation of each other therefore missing opportunities to coordinate common project goals and acknowledge the same desired outcomes. OCPS and ORT are uniquely positioned in Florida to coordinate with other Helios-funded projects such as the Florida Grade Level Reading Campaign, Early Learning Florida, and the Innovations in Early Childhood Technology grants. Within these programs are designated resources to support DLL. By connecting with such projects, OCPS and ORT staff will have immediate access to communities currently working to improve early language and literacy development. Each of these grants serves a valuable purpose, and, when intermingled, they collectively provide a web of support that contributes to the project sustainability.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the learnings from Arizona and Florida, Helios has identified a set of universal recommendations that can facilitate the development of a robust DLL program.

[Identify funds, both at the state and local levels, for dual language preschool programs and K–12 to increase opportunity and equity for all students.](#)

Few state and local education budgets include specific line items for the delivery of DLL content and the resources to support such a program. To increase the likelihood of success for all students and support diversity as an asset versus a deficit, leaders should create policies that identify and secure funding.

[Provide ELLs with activities in multiple languages during their early years so they can excel in language acquisition and emergent literacy opportunities for future school success.](#)

Data from the two research studies have shown that early intervention lowers the likelihood that students will be identified for structured or sheltered English immersion (SEI) programs. We recommend preschool programs offer DLL options to reduce the opportunity gap between English speakers and ELLs.

[Develop coursework and degrees at institutions of higher education that focus on bilingualism and bicultural activities for new teachers.](#)

Preschool programs and school districts implementing these DLL programs desperately need a pipeline of educators who not only are bilingual and biliterate but also have an in-depth understanding and respect for the culture of their students and the communities where they teach. Currently, many institutions of higher education are not offering these types of opportunities. To meet the growing need of bilingual communities, schools of education must further develop pedagogical practices

to strengthen the instruction within bilingual/biliterate classrooms. In addition, institutions of higher education need to create credentials or bilingual associate degrees for early childhood educators, including paraprofessionals. This would assist administrative personnel in identifying early childhood educators who are qualified to teach in a bilingual/biliterate classroom.

[Use culturally appropriate assessments.](#)

Early childhood educators and administrators need to select and administer culturally appropriate assessments for dual language and ELL students. Without these tools, teachers are limited in their effectiveness in implementing high-quality instructional strategies that will help build language and literacy skills. When teachers have these tools, they can better understand the connection between language, culture, and learning. Along with the assessments, districts need to align professional development opportunities to increase teachers' knowledge and skills to individualize instruction.

[Support paraprofessionals.](#)

Paraprofessionals, known also as teaching assistants or instructional aides, work alongside the teacher in preschool settings and elementary school classrooms. Their roles vary depending on the learning environment, but one key role in a dual language classroom is to directly translate or communicate information between the students and teacher. Employing bilingual paraprofessionals assist monolingual teachers with translation, but too often these paraprofessionals' career pathway is limited due to the challenges of becoming a lead teacher. The asset of being fluent in their native language can also be a barrier to enter a teaching program. Certificate and degree programs need to be more accessible to these individuals, and stipends should be provided for the additional role they assume in supporting the lead teacher in a dual language classroom.



### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TWO-WAY DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION

#### What is Dual Language Learning (DLL)?

In Dual Language Learning (DLL), students learn content through both their native language and the target language. Unlike monolingual or English-only approaches, which prioritize one language, the goal of DLL is bilingualism and bi-literacy for all students. Each language is given equal weight, time, and status in the classroom and is represented in classroom materials: books, music, posters, and written communication with parents.

#### What is Two-Way Dual-Language Immersion (TWI)?

TWI is one model of dual language education where children learn each language and culture not just from the teachers, but from one another and from parents who spend time in the classroom. TWI programs have three defining criteria:

- Student population should be close to half native English speakers and half native Spanish speakers
- Students stay in core content courses together
- Instructional time is split evenly between English and Spanish. This can vary. For example, one whole day in one language and then another whole day in the other. The instructional day could also be split. For example, English in the morning and Spanish in the afternoon or vice versa.

#### How can DLL/TWI be taught in the classroom?

One approach that promotes student achievement in both native and target languages is creative drama. When participating in a structured drama experience, students have a means of embodying and demonstrating knowledge kinesthetically before they can do so verbally, providing early opportunities for success in a second language. Through job-embedded professional development with teaching artists, early childhood educators can learn to design and implement drama-integrated literacy lessons that meet the diverse learning needs of their students, thereby improving instructional practice and student achievement. Teaching artists provide classroom teachers with the knowledge and skills to design and implement drama-integrated literacy lessons that meet the diverse learning needs of their students. Thereby improving instructional practice and student achievement.

One important aspect of child development is increasing the integration of and participation in family and community routines and practices in the early learning setting (Rogoff, 2003). When there is respect shown to families' viewpoints and contexts, practitioners support family cohesion, which is an essential aspect of social and emotional development in young children, especially children whose home culture might be very different from the typical US school culture (Isik-Ercan, 2012). The tools and methods each party uses for positive guidance might look quite different. This includes differentiating instruction to be sensitive to the various perspectives, values, and practices of each child.

## What should a school district know before considering DLL in its schools?

*Confirm there is district and staff commitment at all levels.* This work can only be successful when there is organizational support at every level, from the governing board, to the superintendent and support staff, to the classroom teachers and their direct supervisors, as well as parents. Success requires that everyone be on the same page about the beliefs and goals for dual language learning. In many cases, these are brand new programs with new curricula, new assessment systems (like Teaching Strategies Gold), and newly hired teachers, many without dual language experience.

*Create a strong implementation team.* School districts should consider creating a formal team of key staff who will be part of any implementation activities. By including individuals who bring unique skill sets, job responsibilities, and perspectives, the district will be able to address and resolve challenges quickly and provide cross training and knowledge sharing to account for staff turnover. The team should be collaborative, with an identified project manager who both can shepherd the work of the team and has implementation authority at the district. Every team member should understand each other's role in implementation to provide clarity and appropriate decision making. We recommend including the following roles:

- Director of Curriculum or more senior position, who can provide implementation oversight and project management
- Director of English Language or Multilingual Learning
- Bilingual Early Childhood or Preschool Coordinator
- Preschool Teacher
- Preschool Paraprofessional
- Bilingual Teacher Coach or Mentor

*Create a transition plan.* Develop an 18–24 month transition plan that includes but is not limited to:

- Development of bilingual curriculum and daily/weekly language schedule
- Staffing
- Ongoing professional development and support from bilingual mentors/coaches
- Anti-bias training for all participating staff
- Family outreach and engagement
- Integration of IDEA and other special needs classrooms
- Adoption of bilingual assessments
- Communication with external stakeholders, particularly external evaluators as applicable

*Hire appropriate teachers and paraprofessionals.*

Because TWI teaching is different from traditional teaching methods, we recommend selecting teachers with the following characteristics:

- Confidence teaching in Spanish and English, because teaching in a target language is different than demonstrating fluency in that language
- For programs where instruction is shared between English and Spanish teachers, teachers should be highly collaborative and comfortable with a co-teaching model
- Willingness and ability to mentor paraprofessionals who bring strong multilingual skills to the classroom but have limited instructional experience
- Philosophically aligned to the values and goals of TWI

*Provide sufficient teacher and paraprofessional support.*

As the district transitions to a DLL model some teachers may find they aren't comfortable with TWI instruction, so consider creating opt-out opportunities where they can move into similar jobs within the district. Change will require significant preparation, so plan for appropriate amounts of professional development and provide clear expectations for teachers' hours and time commitments. Consider a staggered implementation timeline to prevent teachers from feeling overwhelmed.

*Develop a pipeline of qualified teachers.* Consider building relationships with local postsecondary institutions who can both prepare students for DLL teaching and assist in student recruitment for open positions within the district.

For additional information please see:

Farrand, K. M., Troxel, M. N., Kilinc, S., & Kelley, M. (2019). "We're building frameworks": Administrator and educator perspectives on implementing a dual language pre-k program to include all students. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Children*, 19(1), 58–78. HYPERLINK "[https://doi.org/10.5555/2158-396X.19.1.58](https://us-east-2.protection.sophos.com?d=doi.org&u=aHR0cHM6Ly9kb2kub3JnLzEwLjU1NTUvMjE1OC0zOTZYLjE5LjEuNTg=&e=cHBlcn-JhdWx0QGhjbGlvcy5vcmc=&t=TVZ2RFNCWHZNvKx-PZGxwWWI3ejUreFQrZXRYUUdpWUxpWd0YmxwV1R-Rcz0=&h=9609dc80cc504a07b25dc230eb9a2a36)"

### How can teachers measure a child's learning progression in a DLL classroom?

Culturally appropriate practice requires integrating culturally sensitive attitudes, knowledge, and skills into the problem-solving framework of assessment and implementation of developmentally appropriate interventions — this includes the identification and use of assessment tools that broadly include opportunities for all students to have their individual needs met without restriction.

### How critical is communication when implementing a DLL program?

In addition to a thorough implementation plan and timeline, the school district should have a corresponding communications strategy for how it will initially promote the program, especially to parents and an ongoing play to convey activities to all stakeholders as they happen (i.e. every implementation action should have communications activity related to it). Remember, you can never over-communicate.

We suggest the first piece of communication highlight the overall value of dual language learning and provide an index of supporting research. This should be widely circulated among all possible stakeholders.

Communications with the implementation team:

- Ensure there is sufficient communication between all levels of the team either through standing check-in meetings or group email conversations

Communications with teachers:

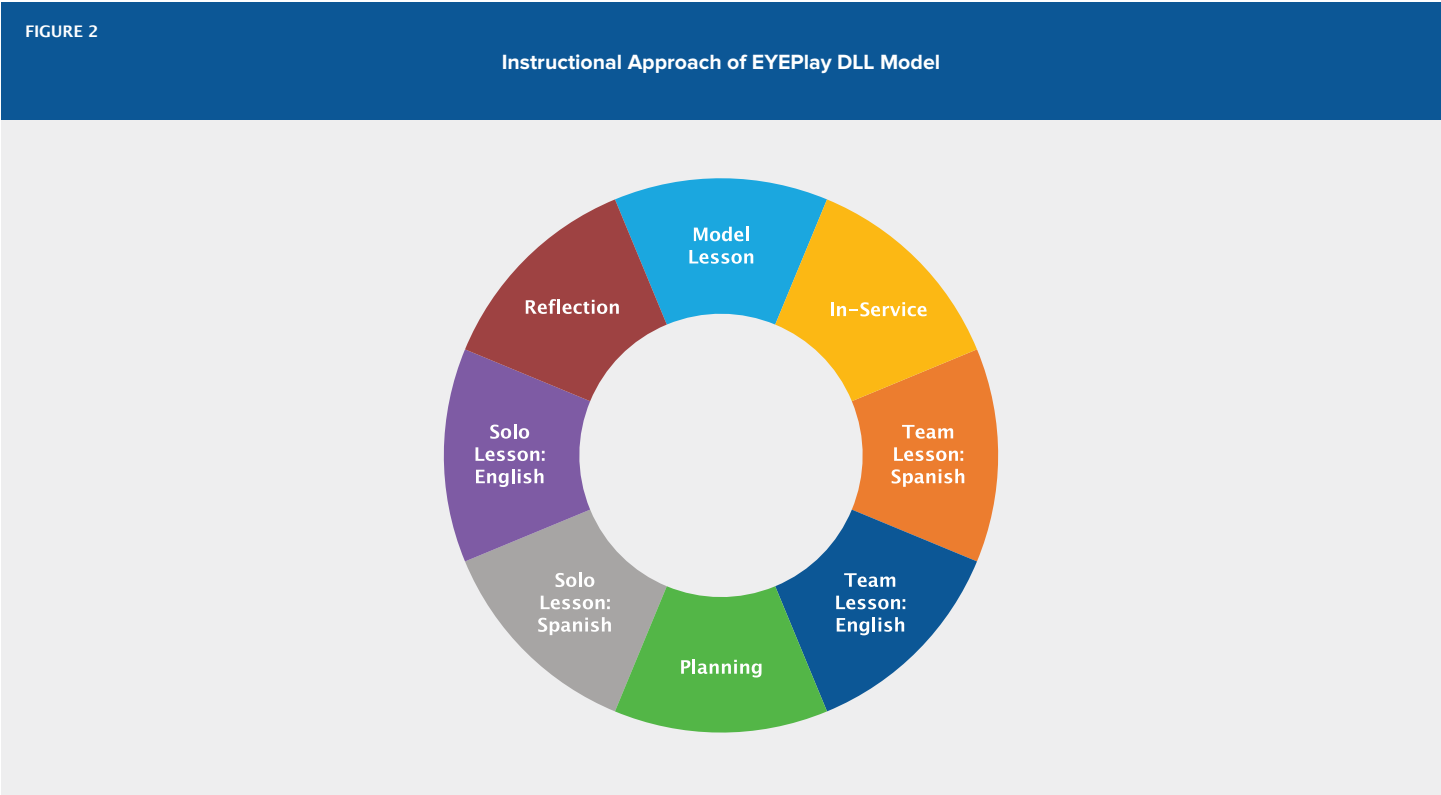
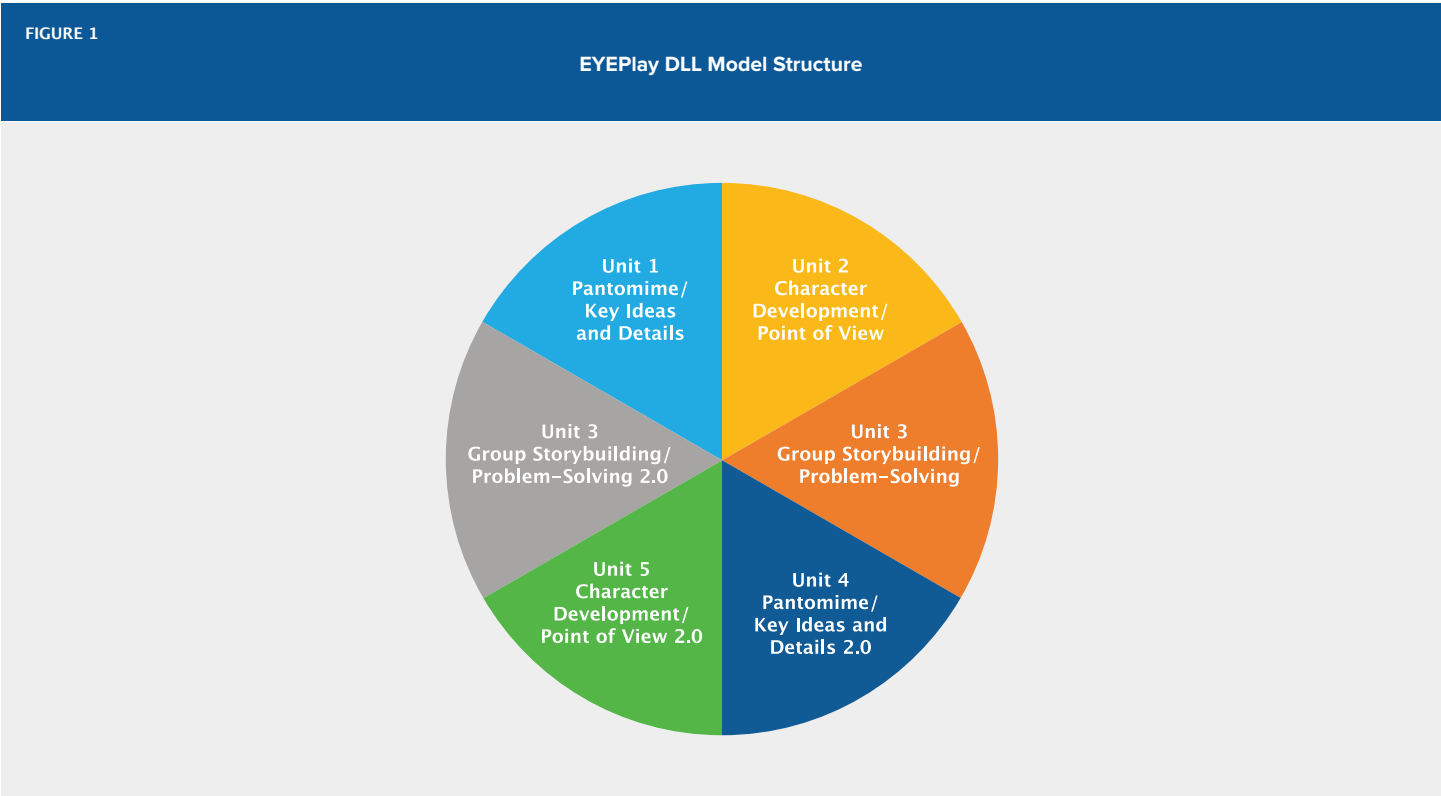
- Remember that any changes whether large or small, require extremely clear communications
- Create an open communication environment to allow for teacher questions and answers, understanding project goals, soliciting buy in and addressing challenges
- Implement clear on-boarding processes, so all teachers, whether in traditional, IDEA or developmentally delayed classrooms, get appropriate support and professional development

Communications with parents:

- Communication takes multiple forms and needs to be responsive to families' linguistic preferences
- Communication is both school and family initiated, timely and continuous
- Ask the family about their preferred mode of communication
- Options for communicating with families: face-to-face, written, online; photo sharing
- For those families whose home language is not English, ensure that staff and families can communicate effectively

### How can we plan to continue our DLL program in grades beyond preschool?

- Leverage and/or redirect existing and new funding streams
- Advocate for policy change such as including Pre-K in the school funding formula
- Explore other state models and review research studies related to funding of Pre-K DLL



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