

Dual Language Immersion Programs

Setting Goals to Build a Strong Foundation

State and local leaders must establish clear goals for dual language immersion (DLI) programs to align interest holders, guide curricula and teaching, and ensure accountability for sustainable improvement. Research identifies the following critical elements for DLI program goals: leadership and advocacy, strategic program development, inclusivity, and expectations.¹ Together, these elements form a robust foundation for DLI programs.

Leadership & Advocacy

Strong and consistent leadership is critical for DLI programs, in both advocating for resources and guiding long-term program success.²

Inclusivity & Expectations

Emphasizing inclusivity and setting high, consistent expectations for all students are key to the success and attractiveness of DLI programs, which ideally leads to better student outcomes and program effectiveness.³

Strategic Program Development

State and local administrators should prioritize deliberate design and grade-to-grade consistency in DLI programs to ensure a continuous learning experience that advances language skills and academics.

Establishing clear objectives focused on bilingualism, biliteracy, and multicultural understanding is key to developing students for a global society.

What was the analysis?

A research team from the Region 15 Comprehensive Center at WestEd conducted a literature scan that involved reviewing 27 of the most recent U.S. resources on dual language programs for grades K–12, including recent research studies, syntheses, and implementation guidebooks. The research team organized the information by themes and paid extra attention to those studies with experimental research designs. Four of the 27 research studies focused on the topic of goals for DLI programs—those four studies informed the content of this brief.

How can DLI programs benefit students?

As indicated above, DLI programs are most likely to be effective and sustainable when they are driven by goals focused on leadership and advocacy, strategic program development, inclusivity, and expectations. Ensuring the quality of DLI programs is important because these programs can benefit students in a variety of ways, including the following:⁴

- **Reading benefits:** Participating in DLI programs may benefit students' English reading skills.
- **Cultural competence:** Exposure to multiple languages and cultures can foster empathy, cross-cultural understanding, and an appreciation for diversity.
- **Future opportunities:** Bilingualism can provide students with additional opportunities in higher education and the workforce, as the demand for multilingual individuals grows.

What are the key takeaways for state and local leaders?

- **Leadership and advocacy:** It is important for leadership across different levels to work together in creating clear and strategic plans for DLI programs.
- **Strategic program development:** Leaders need to align program goals with educational standards and meet the diverse needs of students to ensure the programs' sustainability and success.
- **Inclusivity and expectations:** DLI programs should be designed to be accessible to all students. State and local leaders must actively work to eliminate barriers to participation and integrate students' cultural and linguistic assets into the educational experience, thereby fostering an environment that values and supports multilingualism.



© 2024 WestEd. All rights reserved.

The content of this brief was developed under a grant from the Department of Education through the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (PGSS) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) by the Region 15 Comprehensive Center at WestEd under Award #S283B190053. This contains resources that are provided for the reader's convenience. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, enterprise, curriculum, or program of instruction mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.



Endnotes

- 1 Howard, E. R., Lindholm-Leary, K. J., Rogers, D., Olague, N., Medina, J., Kennedy, B., Sugarman, J., & Christian, D. (2018). *Guiding principles for dual language education* (3rd ed.). Center for Applied Linguistics.
 - 2 What Works Clearinghouse. (2022, December). *Dual language programs: Systematic review protocol for English language arts interventions*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/InterventionReport/726>
 - 3 What Works Clearinghouse, 2022.
 - 4 Steele, J. L., Slater, R. O., Zamarro, G., Miller, T., Li, J., Burkhauser, S., & Bacon, M. (2017). Effects of dual-language immersion programs on student achievement: Evidence from lottery data. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1). <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216634463>; Porter, L., Vazquez Cano, M., & Umansky, I. (2023). *Bilingual education and America's future: Evidence and pathways*. The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA.
- 