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Dual Language Programming: A Model to Enhance School Climate and Academic Achievement in Diverse Schools

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This policy brief summarizes research and data on English learners (ELs) in Virginia and current dual language (DL) education policies and practices. It includes discussions of (1) the growth of ELs in Virginia and across the Richmond area; (2) both federal and state education policies on language use and DL programming; (3) critical factors related to outcomes and the instruction of ELs and native English speakers in an integrated setting; (4) case studies of school divisions in Virginia that have spearheaded DL programs in their region; and (5) responses to frequently asked questions around the implementation and new 2018 Virginia policies that support DL program development.

English Learner Growth and Diversity in Virginia

In Virginia, EL student enrollment trends show a steady increase over the past 15 years. The most recent data from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) for 2018-19 indicate ELs represent 13% of the total PreK-12 student population or 162,374 students.[1] In 2003-04, ELs represented 5% of the total PreK-12 student population or 60,295 students.[2] Table 1 shows the growth of the EL population in Virginia since 2003-04 and how this student group is currently 2.7 times larger than it was 15 years ago.
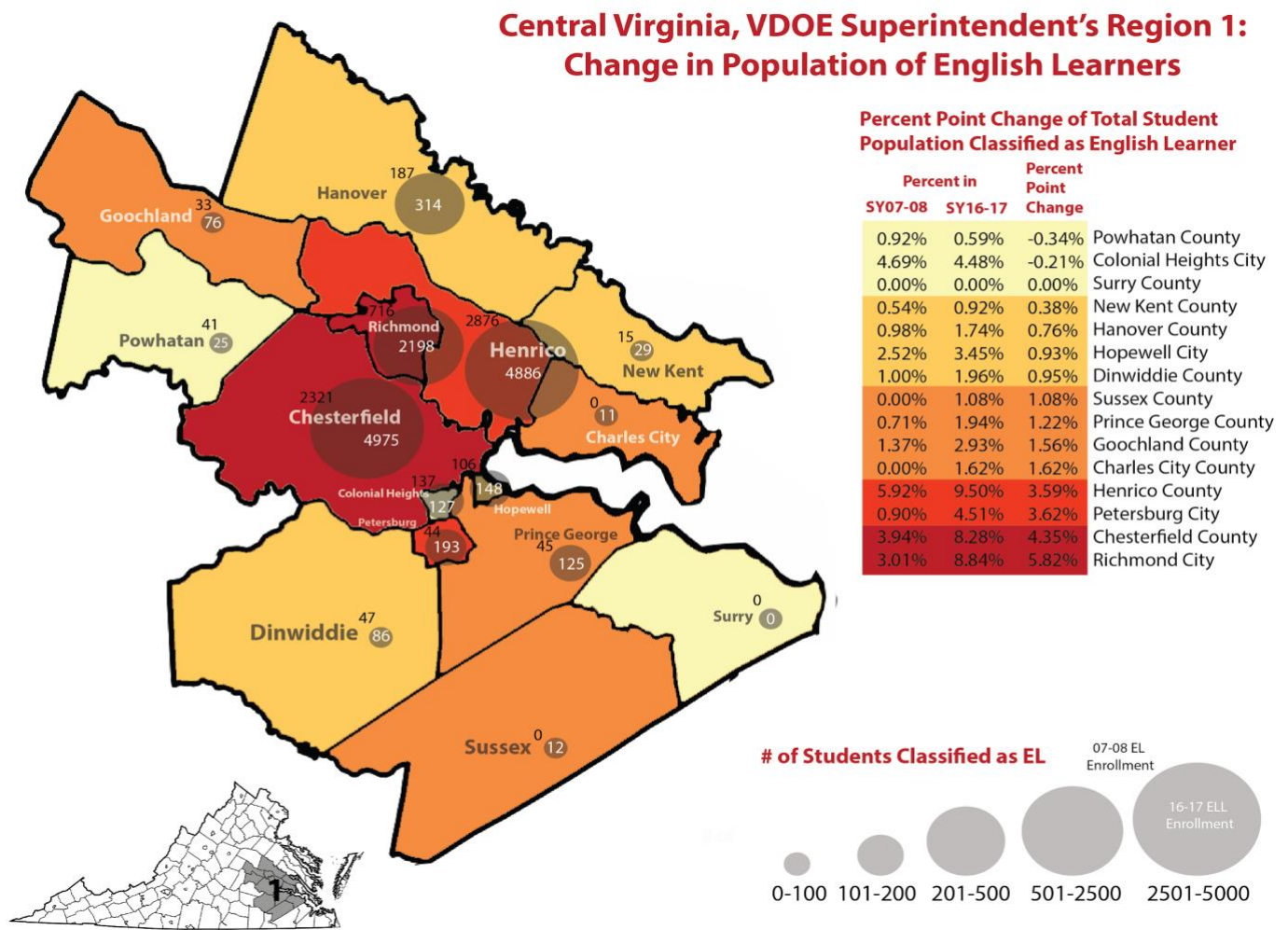
Table 1. EL Population Growth in Virginia from 2003-2018[3]

School Year	2003-04	2008-09	2013-14	2018-19
Number of ELs	60,295	99,839	125,859	162,374
Total Student Count	1,191,010	1,235,498	1,273,532	1,290,513
EL Percent of Total	**5%**	**8%**	**10%**	**13%**

Evidence also shows that not all ELs speak Spanish as their native language, and the proportion of speakers of other native languages is likely to increase in the coming years. While 51% of U.S. immigrants who have arrived since 1965 have been from Latin America, Asia is projected to surpass Latin America as the largest region of origin.[4] Also, the number of new immigrants from Africa rose by 41% between 2000 and 2013.[5] In 2013-14, two-thirds of Virginia's ELs spoke Spanish, followed by Arabic, Vietnamese, Urdu, and Korean as the top five languages.[6]

While there are long-standing immigrant communities in Northern Virginia that represent many parts of the world, there are newer communities in other regions of the state. Region 1 school divisions, for example, are serving an increasingly diverse student body. This change in student diversity is evident when looking at trends in student enrollment over the past 10 years. The majority of our school divisions are serving higher percentages of non-white racial and ethnic groups, higher percentages of economically disadvantaged students, and significantly more students whose first language (L1) is not English. The map in Figure 1 represents the increase in ELs across Region 1 in Virginia.

Figure 1. EL Population Growth across Region 1

Central Virginia, VDOE Superintendent's Region 1: Change in Population of English Learners

Percent Point Change of Total Student Population Classified as English Learner

Percent in SY07-08	Percent in SY16-17	Percent Point Change	
0.92%	0.59%	-0.34%	Powhatan County
4.69%	4.48%	-0.21%	Colonial Heights City
0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Surry County
0.54%	0.92%	0.38%	New Kent County
0.98%	1.74%	0.76%	Hanover County
2.52%	3.45%	0.93%	Hopewell City
1.00%	1.96%	0.95%	Dinwiddie County
0.00%	1.08%	1.08%	Sussex County
0.71%	1.94%	1.22%	Prince George County
1.37%	2.93%	1.56%	Goochland County
0.00%	1.62%	1.62%	Charles City County
5.92%	9.50%	3.59%	Henrico County
0.90%	4.51%	3.62%	Petersburg City
3.94%	8.28%	4.35%	Chesterfield County
3.01%	8.84%	5.82%	Richmond City

# of Students Classified as EL

07-08 EL Enrollment
16-17 ELL Enrollment

| 0-100 | 101-200 | 201-500 | 501-2500 | 2501-5000 |

EL Policies in the Current Context

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides states with significant autonomy in reforming educational policies for ELs; however, the regulations explicitly allow for the use of non-English forms of assessment if they are better equipped to accurately evaluate a student's mastery of content. *States must make every effort to make native language assessments available for all languages present 'to a significant extent' in a state.*[7]

In Virginia, two languages meet the federal criteria of being present "to a significant extent in a state": Spanish (68.72% of ELs) and Arabic (5.44% of ELs). Virginia's Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan states that there is currently no plan to develop assessments in languages other than English. Considering the state's increasingly linguistically diverse student population, DL programs offer a means to provide accessible instruction and comprehensible assessments.

Additionally, Virginia state policy provides for the *inclusion of 17 full-time instructional positions for every 1,000 students identified as having limited English proficiency, including dual language instructors*, who may provide instruction in both English and a second language,[8] facilitating the inclusion of DL instructional approaches for school divisions with significant EL student populations.

Virginia Policies Regarding Dual Language Instruction

There is a common misconception that Virginia is an English-only instruction state. Although English is the official language of Virginia (as stated in the Code of Virginia), no state or federal policies are prohibiting DL

instruction for ELs or native English speakers. On the contrary, in 2018 the Virginia General Assembly signed two laws that support DL programs:

- HB 507 Standards of quality; instructional programs and positions, dual language teachers (2018) allows school boards to use funds allocated for instructional programs for ELs (that have typically focused on English-only instruction) on DL programs instead.
- HB 1156 Teacher licensure; endorsement in dual language instruction pre-kindergarten through grade six (2018) requires the Board of Education to establish requirements for an endorsement in DL instruction from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade.

Critical Factors to Consider for English Learners

English Learner Student Performance

In Virginia in 2017, the five-year cohort on-time graduation rate for ELs was 74.6% compared to 91.1% overall. With a focus on the three school divisions with the highest percentages of ELs in Region 1, the 2017 Richmond City on-time EL graduation rate was 25.4% compared to an overall rate of 78.7%, a difference of more than 50%. Chesterfield's 2017 EL graduate rate was 69.2% compared to their overall rate of 90.8%, and Henrico's EL on-time graduation rate was 71.2% compared to an overall on-time graduation rate of 91.8%, differences of 20% each.[9]

In Virginia ELs also perform significantly lower on all SOL tests than their English-speaking peers. In 2017 64% of ELs compared to 80% of the total student population passed their reading SOLS, and 52% compared to an overall 79% passed their writing SOLs. Math SOL scores revealed similar gaps, with an EL pass rate of 68% compared to an overall 79% pass rate.[10] Research studies show when ELs underperform on standardized assessments, they are less likely to graduate from high school.[11] These outcomes mean lower graduation rates, fewer diploma and advanced course options (e.g., standard or advanced diploma, IB/AP college credits), and fewer post-secondary options to go to college and find employment.

> ***Virginia's English Learners are underperforming on standardized assessments and graduating at a lower rate than their peers. What can localities and schools do to support these students?***

Types of Students

ELs come with different educational backgrounds and experiences that can impact their academic development in English and the need for additional services. Table 2 provides some characteristics and needs to help identify four types of ELs.

Table 2. Four Types of English Learners

Type of Student	Characteristics	Needs
Long-term English learner	• Have attended U.S. schools for several years and may have been born in the U.S. • Have not passed the state English language proficiency assessments in five years • Master social language but lack academic language • Struggle academically	• School culture that values and taps into native language and culture • Academic instruction (reading and writing) or academic language supports in their native language • Grade-level content and quality English language instruction combined
English learner with a formal education	• Have had formal education in their native country with consistency	• Instruction where language and content objectives are targeted simultaneously to build

		English language skills and academic content
	• Have developed academic language and content knowledge in their native language • Have some social language in English • Succeed academically • Test out and exit ESOL programs quickly	• Challenged and provided opportunities for advancement in gifted and talented services, Honors/AP/IB classes, and specialized programs
Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)	• Arrive in the U.S. at an older age, typically with advanced work skills • Have had limited exposure to formal education in their native country • Possess limited academic knowledge in their native language • Have little or no social language in English • Typically come from countries with social and political turmoil	• School culture that values their abilities, skills, and life experiences • Specialized services and supports that address language development in their native language and English • Services for their social-emotional needs as they transition into an unfamiliar setting • Professionals trained to work with students who have endured trauma
English learner with a disability	• Are eligible for both special education and ESOL or bilingual services • Variability in the amount of time they have been in the U.S., their educational background, native language(s), English language proficiency level, and disability	• Appropriate disability identification processes and assessments • Targeted services and supports that meet their intersecting language and disability needs • School teams who are knowledgeable about the characteristics and needs in both areas

Research on English Language Acquisition

Although it might seem intuitive that minimizing instruction in L1 would provide more exposure to English and thus faster acquisition, research has not supported this approach. Research has conclusively found that instruction in the L1 not only enhances English acquisition, but also has important social, psychological, and emotional benefits for ELs. Students with proficiency in their L1 can transfer those linguistic understandings (e.g., phonemic awareness, decoding, word recognition strategies) to English or the second language.[12]

Dual Language Instruction

DL programming is a recognized model that promotes both language acquisition and academic content mastery for both students who are learning English and for those whose native language is English. Whether the program uses a 50:50 or 90:10 model (see Table 3), DL prepares students to develop language proficiency and literacy in English and a partner language by receiving content instruction in both languages. The benefits of two-way DL programs over English-medium language instruction programs are higher English language proficiency for ELs,[13] higher academic outcomes in general,[14] enhanced the potential for higher post-secondary outcomes with the achievement of Virginia's Seal of Biliteracy,[15] and greater cross-cultural competence and positive cultural identity, increasingly important in the global market.

Before presenting case studies of two DL programs in Virginia, Table 3 provides some important vocabulary.

Table 3. Key Vocabulary on Dual Language

Term	Definition
Dual Language	A type of bilingual education where students are taught literacy and content in two languages
One-Way Immersion	A type of DL program where target students are non-speakers of the partner language
Two-Way Immersion	A type of DL program where target students are a balance of both native English speakers and ELs who speak the partner language
Partner Language	The second or target language of instruction that accompanies English

50:50 Model	A model where 50% of instruction is in English and the remaining 50% is in the partner language
90:10 Model	A model where 90% of instruction in the partner language from grades K-1 and the remaining 10% is in English. These percentages change as students progress through elementary school (80:20 in 2nd grade, 70:30 in 3rd grade, 60:40 in 4th grade, and 50:50 in 5th/6th grades) until they reach 50:50
Strand Program	It dedicates a certain number of classrooms at each grade level. If the strand program is new, it might start with a kindergarten cohort the first year and anticipate needing both 1st grade classrooms for returning students and a kindergarten classroom for new students next year.
Whole-School Program	When an entire school and every grade within it is dedicated to providing instruction in two languages for all students

Case Studies

Given the multiple benefits to both students and communities, DL programs have grown throughout Virginia. Currently, there are ten school divisions in the state running a DL program in their region. They are Albemarle County, Alexandria City, Arlington County, Chesterfield County, Fairfax County, Harrisonburg City, Manassas City, Newport News, Virginia Beach City, and Winchester City. In this section, two case studies of DL programs provide context and information about their instructional model, which supports the language needs of ELs who speak the partner language and enhances outcomes for all students.

Harrisonburg City, a rural town in the Shenandoah Valley, has taken enormous strides in providing DL instruction to a community with one of the most active and effective refugee resettlement centers in the state, as well as a growing population of immigrant workers in the agricultural industry.[16] Developing from a recognized need for more effective services for a rapidly growing EL population, Harrisonburg's Dual Language Program started in 2010 at one school and is currently offered from kindergarten through eighth grade. At each school where the program is launched, it begins with a kindergarten cohort and grows with the oldest cohort, in addition to receiving new kindergarteners each year. In 2015, English learners made up 35.2% of Harrisonburg's student population and these ELs were predominantly Spanish speaking.[17] Harrisonburg City uses a two-way 50:50 Spanish/English DL model in strand programs at five of its six elementary schools, where student cohorts receive equal amounts of instructional time in each language. This DL approach was adopted as a means to transform school culture with an equity-driven model of instruction throughout the division. At the middle school level, and in the anticipated high school program, the percentage of the day taught in Spanish varies from 25 to 35%.

Arlington County is an urban division in Northern Virginia that has experienced rapidly changing demographics and periods of student population growth. Starting in the 1970s, Arlington County's Asian student population grew from 1.8% in 1970 to 15% by 1983, with students predominantly from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.[18] Students from Central America and Bolivia more than quadrupled from 1980 to 1990, resulting in an even greater need for resources and services for ELs.[19] During these significant student demographic changes, Arlington pioneered an English-Spanish two-way strand program at Key School in 1986 with a first-grade class and an additional grade as that cohort progressed, with kindergarten added in 1991. Currently, their programming consists of two whole-school programs from grades K-5 (Francis Scott Key Elementary School and Claremont Elementary) that use a two-way 50:50 Spanish/English DL model and strand programs in one middle school (Gunston Middle School) and one high school (Wakefield High School).

Frequently Asked Questions

Where will we find enough bilingual teachers to teach in the DL program? Teacher retention and recruitment is a challenge for most schools, but finding bilingual faculty and staff can be an even greater obstacle for school divisions. Based on conversations with school divisions that have DL programs in Virginia,[20] the tendency is to

recruit early and throughout the U.S., including in Puerto Rico. With the new state teacher licensure law (HB 1156) there will be opportunities for professionals to gain a DL teaching endorsement after completing coursework and assessments.

Do ELs in DL programs still receive the same number of hours of ESOL services as they would if they weren't in the program? Section 1703(f) of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act mandates local educational agencies provide English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) services that support language acquisition based on their English language proficiency level. If an EL is in a DL program, they will continue to receive ESOL services in addition to their DL programming. The number of ESOL service hours does not change because DL instruction does not count towards mandated ESOL hours. However, ELs who are in DL programs gain English language proficiency and typically exit the ESOL program at a faster rate than ELs who are in English-only programs.[21]

Do you have to have a population of 50/50 English speakers and native speakers of the target language to start a DL program? While a two-way immersion model isn't required, evidence shows a 50/50 population of ELs and native-English speakers is the ideal model for both student groups.

Do students need to start in DL programs in kindergarten? What does the model look like for middle and high schoolers using either a 50:50 or 90:10 model? Most dual language programs start with a kindergarten cohort of students who progress through elementary school. But not all students start in kindergarten. In a two-way immersion program, ELs who speak the partner language can typically start in a later grade because they have foundational language skills. Whereas, native English speakers, in the same program, would need to start in earlier grades to learn those beginning skills in the partner language. Once in secondary school, students are tested in the partner language to place into the DL program. At this level, most secondary programs use a 50:50 model and some elementary school programs start with 90:10 and slowly transition to 50:50.

What are the costs associated with starting a DL program? A 2018 New America study found that school resources were distributed evenly between DL and monolingual instructional programs.[22] The study reported additional costs at the central office level for specialized professional development, recruitment of qualified instructors, and curriculum development. In communications with staff from the Harrisonburg, Virginia school division, where there are DL programs in two primary schools and one middle school, additional expenses for books, resources, and recruitment were identified. No other additional costs were allocated for DL programs in the division.

Are science, social studies, and math taught in both languages, and if so is there enough time in the day to teach these lessons in both languages? Or are some content areas taught in English and some in the target language? And does this stay the same from year to year, or would students take math in Spanish, for example, in 2nd grade, and in English in 3rd grade? DL programming allows for flexibility in alternating the language of instruction for science, social studies, and math. The time devoted to science, social studies, and math instruction remains the same in DL and monolingual programs; the language of instruction is the differentiating program characteristic. In some models, science, for example, may be taught in the partner language one semester and in English during the second semester. Other models may alternate the language of instruction for a content area from one year to the next. What remains constant in most 50:50 DL models is that during the school day, equal time is devoted to instruction in the partner language and English.

For schools with a strand program, what is the process for selecting students for it? DL program coordinators in VA report that they select students using a lottery system for students in their zoned school. However, some school divisions allow students outside of their zoned school to also apply. If the program is using a two-way immersion model, there is an equal number of available slots for native English speakers and ELs who speak the partner language.

Endnotes

[1] Virginia Department of Education. (2018). *Virginia cohort reports*.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Percent calculated based on VDOE Fall Membership Data Reports for each corresponding school year

[4] Pew Research Center. (2015). *Modern immigration wave brings 59 million to U.S., driving population growth and change through 2065: Views of immigration's impact on U.S. society mixed*.

[5] Ibid.

[6] U.S. Department of Education. (2014). *Virginia's consolidated state performance report: Part I for State Formula Grant Programs and under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for reporting on school year 2013-14*.

[7] ESSA, Title I, Part A

[8] Code 22.1 - 253.13:2

[9] Virginia Department of Education. (2018). *SOL test pass rates & other results*.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Callahan, R. M. (2005). Tracking and high school English learners: Limiting opportunity to learn. *American Educational Research Journal, 42*(2), 305-328.; Gándara, P., Rumberger, R., Maxwell-Jolly, J., & Callahan, R. (2003). English learners in California schools: Unequal resources, Unequal outcomes. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11, 36.

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[14] Steele, J. L., Slater, R. O., Li, J., Zamarro, G., Miller, T., & Bacon, M. (2018). Dual-language immersion education at scale: An analysis of program costs, mechanisms, and moderators. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 40*(3), 420-445.

[15] This is an award affixed to their high school diploma and transcript.

[16] Garcia, A., & Carnock, J. T. (2016). *A critical mass: Creating comprehensive services for dual language learners in Harrisonburg*. New America.

[17] Office of Civil Rights. (2015). *Civil rights data collection English learner reports*.

[18] Arlington Public Schools. (2017). *The changing face of Arlington Public Schools over the past six decades*.

[19] Ibid.

[20] The following ten school divisions in Virginia provide DL programming: Albemarle County, Alexandria City, Arlington County, Chesterfield County, Fairfax County, Harrisonburg City, Manassas City, Newport News, Virginia Beach City, and Winchester City.

[21] Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2004). The astounding effectiveness of dual language education for all. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice, 2*(1), 1-20.; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Umansky, I. M., & Reardon, S. F. (2014). Reclassification patterns among Latino English learner students in bilingual, dual immersion, and English immersion classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal, 51*(5), 879-912.; Valentino, R. A., & Reardon, S. F. (2015). Effectiveness of four instructional programs designed to serve English language learners: Variation by ethnicity and initial English proficiency. Stanford University Graduate School of Education.

[22] Colon, I. (2018). *New study examines costs of dual language immersion programs*. New America.