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Policy and Practice Brief 3: Dual Language Programs Are Growing Across Virginia

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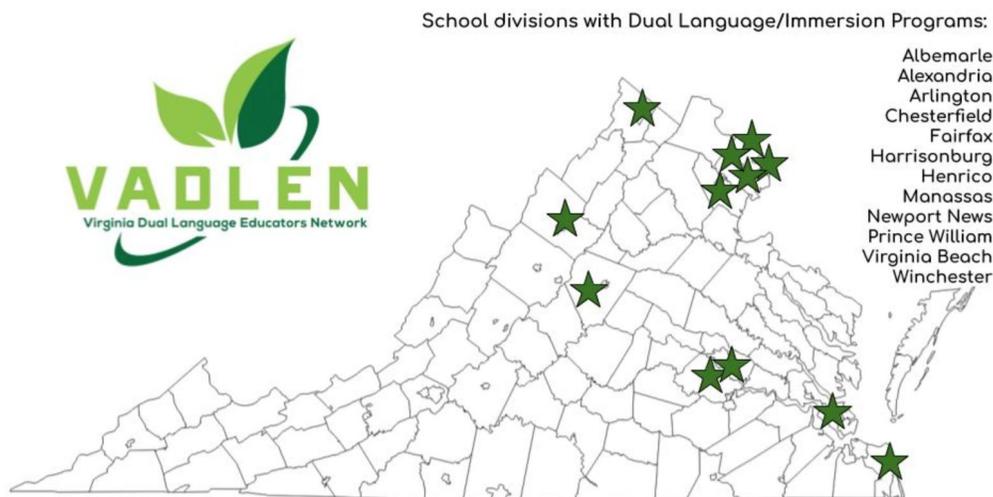
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The number of dual language (DL) programs has increased in response to a growing number of English learners (ELs) in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Virginia Dual Language Educators Network (VADLEN) is committed to supporting the growth of DL programs in the state. As of 2020, there are 12 school divisions that are implementing or in the planning process of beginning a DL program in Virginia as can be seen below.¹



DL programming is an instructional model that delivers academic content in English and a second, partner language with the learning goals of biliteracy, academic achievement, and intercultural competence.² DL programs typically follow one of two models: one-way or two-way immersion. One-way immersion programs enroll students who are non-speakers of the partner language, and two-way immersion programs aim to enroll students who are a balance of both native English speakers and ELs who are native speakers of the partner language.

At the elementary school level, students are instructed for half of the day in English and are instructed for the other half of the day in the partner language. Therefore, two-way immersion programs have been developed at elementary schools in school divisions that have a relatively high population of EL students consistently across grade levels who speak the same home language in order to meet the enrollment goal of this model.

¹ VADLEN Map of Virginia School Divisions with Dual Language/Immersion Programs

² https://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/foreign_language/resources/dual-language-immersion-2020.pdf

Virginia school divisions offering at least one two-way immersion program include Albemarle County Public Schools, Alexandria City Public Schools, Arlington Public Schools, Chesterfield County Public Schools, Fairfax County Public Schools, Harrisonburg City Public Schools, Manassas City Public Schools, Newport News Public Schools, Prince William County Public Schools, and Winchester Public Schools. School divisions offering at least one one-way immersion program include Chesterfield County Public Schools, Fairfax County Public Schools, and Virginia Beach City Public Schools. Henrico County Public Schools is planning for a start date of an elementary two-way immersion program in the fall of 2021.

Spanish is the most common partner language for the DL programs in Virginia. The majority of the school divisions with a DL program offer an English-Spanish model. Fairfax County Public Schools also supports DL programs in Japanese, Korean, French, and German, and Chesterfield County Public Schools provides DL programs in French, Mandarin, and American Sign Language.

The decision to begin a DL program typically coincides with the EL population trends in the school division. For example, in Arlington Public Schools, students from Central America and Bolivia more than quadrupled from 1980 to 1990, significantly changing student demographics.³ In response, Arlington pioneered an English-Spanish two-way immersion program with a first-grade class in 1986 that has developed into a DL program that now serves students from grades K-12.

In Fairfax County Public Schools, DL programs have been offered for three decades now due to a large number of ELs speaking the same home language enrolled in the division.⁴ Fairfax's immersion program started in 1989 with eight one-way immersion programs: one French, three Japanese, and four Spanish. Other language models were developed as the student population evolved and a need for them arose. In 2019, there were a total of 17 elementary immersion program sites and 13 middle school transition sites.

The DL program in Harrisonburg City Public Schools began in one elementary school at the kindergarten level in 2010 to address the needs of a growing EL population, with the support of a partnership with Eastern Mennonite University and James Madison University. Today, five of the six elementary schools in the division offer DL programming, and the division now serves students in the DL program from elementary to high school.

Chesterfield County Public Schools and Henrico County Public Schools are the only two MERC school divisions that offer DL programs. Chesterfield started its programs in the 2019-2020 school year and has three one-way immersion programs in French, American Sign Language, and Mandarin, and one two-way immersion program in Spanish. Henrico has offered a one-way Spanish language immersion program at one of its high schools since 1993. Students begin this program at the start of their freshman year and follow a course of study until graduation. A new elementary school is currently under construction with plans to open for the 2021-2022 academic year. This school will offer an English-Spanish two-way dual immersion program.

³ <https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Diversity-in-APS-Report-4page.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.fcps.edu/academics/world-languages-immersion-programs>