

Opportunities & Policies for Young Dual Language Learners

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Preschool Policy Facts

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There is a demographic trend of strong increases in dual language learners (DLL). Yet, Hispanics and Hispanic DLLs lag behind their white peers in access to preschool and achievement. Research has shown that high-quality preschool can reduce achievement gaps before children even enter kindergarten. This *policy facts* addresses the lack of information available on DLLs being served and the policies that support them in state-funded preschool.

What We Know:

- About 23 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds are dual language learners (DLLs)
- DLLs benefit strongly from participating in high-quality preschool
- Access to preschool is lower for Hispanic children, and more so for Hispanic DLL children, than for their white peers
- Hispanic DLLs show math and reading gaps twice as large as those of English-speaking Hispanic children at kindergarten entry
- Hispanic children who start kindergarten without speaking English rarely catch up with their English-speaking peers
- Bilingualism provides benefits for children in school and in life
- Most state preschool programs do not report providing comprehensive policies to support DLLs

Policy Recommendations:

- Increase access, outreach and participation in high-quality early childhood education for DLL children
- Identify the number of DLL children in state pre-K and use this for policy decisions such as teacher preparation, curriculum and location of programs
- Screen and assess all children in their home languages
- Communicate with parents in their home languages
- Develop best practice guidelines for supporting DLL children and families and require programs to plan for meeting DLLs' specific educational needs
- Incorporate best practices for preschool DLLs in pre-service and in-service teacher preparation
- Increase access to bilingual preschool for DLLs and English-only speakers
- Offer pay premiums for bilingual specialist teachers and assistant teachers based on qualifications
- Support partnerships with higher education institutions with specializations in DLL for P-3

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Access to Programs

One of the most significant recent trends in the U.S. education system is that white students are no longer the majority (NCES, 2015). This trend is mainly driven by growth in both the number and percentage of Hispanic children. The share of Hispanic students among kindergarten children increased from 19 percent in 1998 to 24 percent in 2010 (ECLS-K, Kindergarten Class of 1998–1999 & 2010–2011). Similarly, about 23 percent of state preschoolers are dual language learners (DLLs) (Friedman-Krauss, et. al, 2018). Research on preschool programs has found that young DLLs benefit strongly from participating in high-quality preschool programs, which makes both access to, and improving the quality of, preschool critical.

Analyses of national data allow us to examine opportunity gaps with respect to pre-K access and also program quality. About 2 in 3 children in the US access some type of center-based care at the age of 4 (Nores & Barnett, 2014). Access is slightly lower for Hispanic children, but starkly more so for DLL children

relative to their white peers (Figure 1).

Of those 4-year-olds enrolled in preschool, all groups have low levels of access to high-quality preschool (Figure 2). Only about a third of DLLs are enrolled in a high-quality program.

1. What can quality preschool do for DLLs?

Research is clear that knowing two or more languages is beneficial for school success, brain flexibility, and social-emotional development (Bialystok, 2015; Ribot, Hoff & Burrige, 2018), and low English proficiency at kindergarten entry is detrimental to children’s school

performance in later years (Galindo, 2009).

Kindergarten readiness gaps therefore have important implications for children’s long-term trajectories.

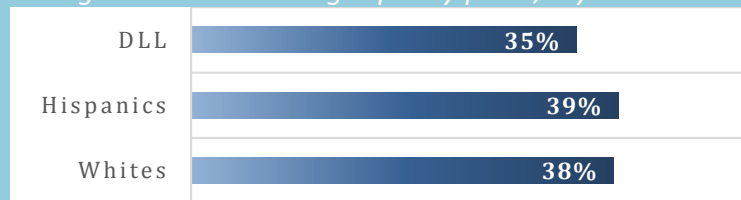
High-quality pre-K can reduce these gaps before children enter kindergarten. One study estimated that providing high-quality universal preschool could dramatically reduce the reading and math gaps between Hispanic and white children: the math gap could be reduced from the current 11 months to 2.4 months and the 12-month reading gap could be eliminated (Figure 3).

With about 4 in 5 Hispanic children living in homes where Spanish is the primary language, improving preschool access and quality is

Figure 1. Center-based care for Hispanics by language background in relation to white children, 4-year-olds



Figure 2. Access to high-quality pre-K, 4-year-olds



Source: Nores & Barnett (2014).

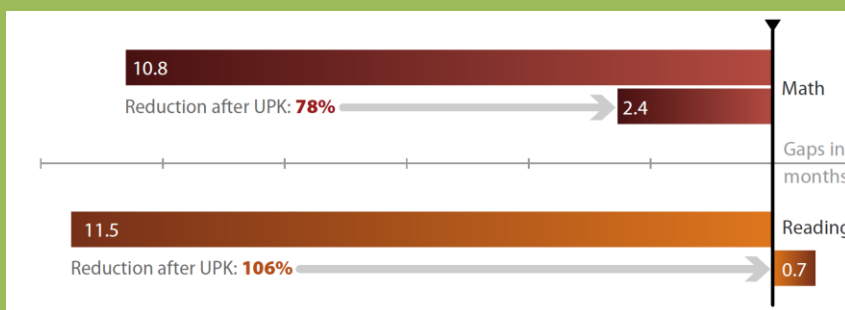
critical for Hispanic DLL children (Figuera-Daniel & Barnett, 2013), particularly since Hispanic DLLs show gaps twice those of English-speaking Hispanic children in relation to their white peers (Nores & García, 2014).

2. The State of Preschool for DLLs.

The State of Preschool 2017 (Friedman-Krauss, et al, 2018) reports how state policies support DLLs in state-funded preschool programs. The study revealed that only 23 state-funded preschool programs in 19 out of 50 states, plus D.C., collect information on child home language (seven states do not have a state preschool program and 24 states do not collect this information). In the states that do collect such information, an average 29 percent of children attending state-funded pre-K were DLLs—but enrollment varied widely from less than 10 percent to 50 percent (Figure 4) leaving many young DLLs behind. Access to high-quality pre-K is especially important to DLL children who are at high risk of poor developmental outcomes due to many factors such as poverty and living in a single-parent household. (García, 2015).

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Figure 3. Estimated reduction in K entry math and reading achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students, in months after universal high-quality pre-K



Source: Friedman-Krauss, Barnett & Nores (2016).

DLLs are more likely to be included in the 32 (out of 60) state preschool programs that target low-income children. In addition, 19 state preschool programs use non-English home language as an eligibility criterion.

Six states with a high proportion of DLLs in their population also have high DLL enrollment in state preschool: California, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Texas. However, several states with high populations of DLLs—including Arizona, Florida and New York—cannot report the home language of children enrolled in their state-funded preschool programs.

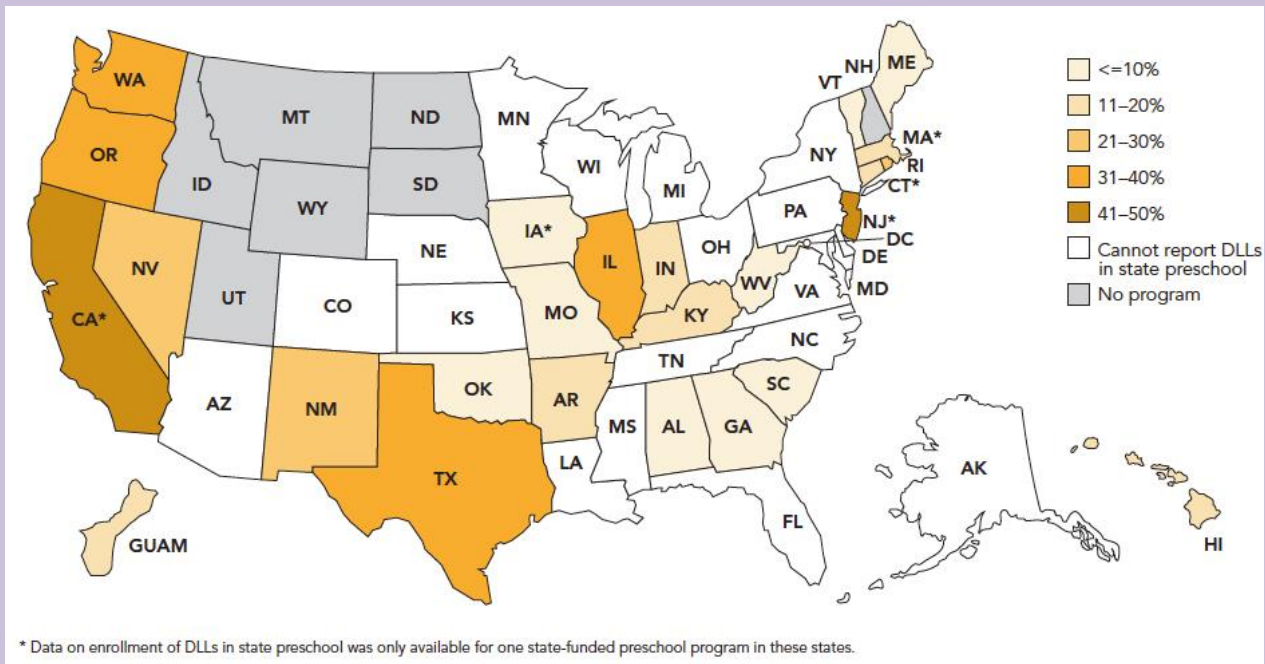
Out of the 60 separate preschool programs in 44 states plus DC, only 35 report having at least one of the specific policies for DLLs included in the survey.

Only four states expect programs to group DLLs together in classrooms which can provide an opportunity for targeting specialized supports and reduce children’s sense of isolation. However, this practice can also lead to language segregation if not combined with guidance

States and state preschool programs do not universally mandate collecting information on home language, a starting point for enacting policies to support DLLs.



Figure 4. Percent of state preschool enrollment that are DLLs



* Data on enrollment of DLLs in state preschool was only available for one state-funded preschool program in these states.

Source: Friedman, et. al (2018).

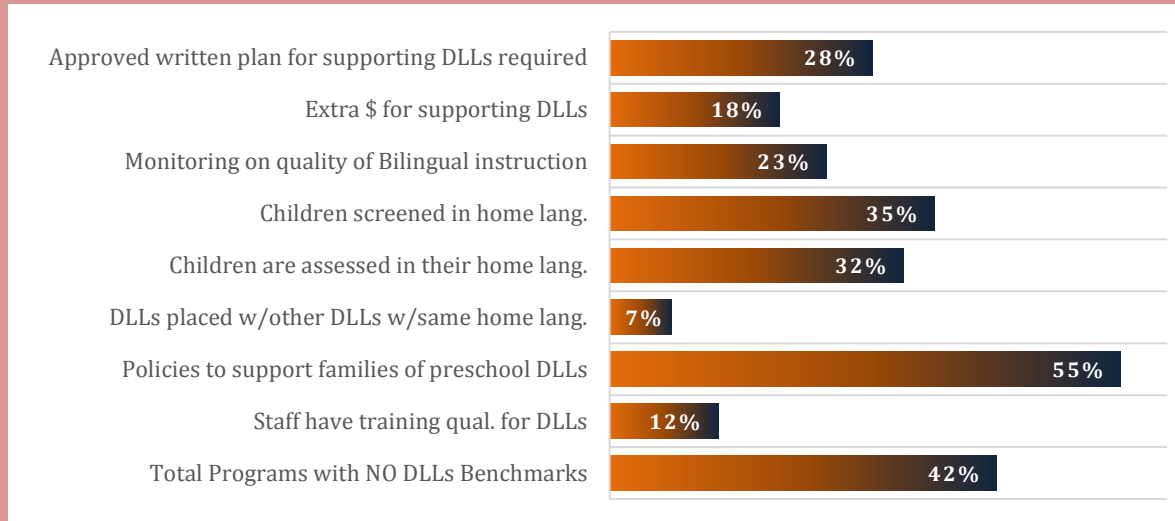
on ensuring mixed home languages in the classroom.

States that stand out for having at least seven of the nine DLL policies we highlight, include Kansas, Maine, Minnesota Head Start, Nevada, and Texas. Of these states, only Nevada and Texas have a high population of DLLs. However, other high DLL population states, have important policies in place. The California TK program, for example, requires written program plans for serving DLLs, provides extra funding for serving DLLs, monitors quality of DLL supports, and mandates specialized training for teachers working with DLLs.

Figure 5 shows that less than 20 percent of the programs provide additional funds to support DLL children. Only 28 percent of the programs require written plans for supporting DLLs and only 35 percent of the programs screen children in their home language.

Among the key components of a high-quality program is a qualified and well-supported staff. Only 12 percent of the programs have policies requiring specific training qualifications for working with DLLs.

Figure 5. Percentage of Programs that report various DLL support policy benchmarks, 2017



Source: Own calculations based on Friedman, et. al (2018).

Conclusions

The policies recommended in this policy facts require that state systems be designed to support programs in identifying and recruiting DLLs as well as meeting their instructional needs. State and local decisions regarding professional development, hiring, curriculum, assessment and pedagogy must be informed by knowledge about the specific needs of DLLs including how to support their English language acquisition effectively while enhancing home language development (Frede & Garcia, 2010). Policies should also support an understanding of the individual DLL children and their families including assessing what children know in both languages (Barrueco, et. al, 2012).

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