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A Blueprint for Developing Dual Language Learner Policies in Early Childhood Education Programs

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ABOUT NIEER

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For nearly two-and-a-half decades, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, has worked to improve pre-kindergarten education access and quality through objective research and collaboration with educators on the local, state, and national levels. This report focuses on the challenges of school districts' work with early childhood dual language learners and provides a blueprint—based on objective, collaborative, and nonpartisan research—for addressing these challenges.



Introduction

Despite strong research recommendations, state-level policies to support emergent bilingual or dual language learners' (DLLs) language and literacy development in early childhood settings have not kept pace with current needs. As a result, local policies often leave teachers and administrators to make decisions independently and without specialized guidance. This creates inconsistent experiences for children and families—a serious concern given the persistent gaps in reading outcomes for DLLs and the evidence showing that systematic implementation of effective strategies is critical to improving these outcomes.¹

This blueprint responds to that challenge. It provides a model for local leaders to develop policies that systematically support DLLs. The goal is to ensure that teachers within a district or program have clear expectations, strategies, and approaches that are research-based and readily translate into daily classroom practices. Acknowledging that policies must be contextualized and shaped by the communities they serve, this blueprint offers a structured approach for co-developing effective DLL practices with staff and stakeholders, ensuring a usable result with strong buy-in from inception.

The model was developed through a research–practice partnership^{2*} in a New Jersey school district. There, the Director of Early Childhood Education identified an urgent need for coherent local policies to guide district language and literacy practices, particularly for a linguistically diverse student population. Over time and through this effort, the partners documented the steps, activities, and resources used to design and implement a local policy that established clear instructional expectations and practices across the district.

This guide begins with a brief description of the state and local contexts for the work. It then presents concrete, sequential steps based on the process enacted in the district, specifically in support of DLLs' language and literacy development. Practical tips for success are included throughout to help leaders translate this blueprint into action. Our aim is to provide district and program leaders with a replicable framework for creating systemic practices that meet the needs of multilingual learners and their families, with particular attention to building more efficient early education systems focused on improving language and literacy outcomes.

***RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS ARE DEFINED AS SPECIFIC FORMS OF COLLABORATION WHERE RESEARCHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS FOCUS ON PROBLEMS OF PRACTICE IN AN ONGOING WAY. THE PARTNERSHIPS INVOLVE THE USE OF VARIOUS STRATEGIES, INCLUDING THE ANALYSIS OF DATA.**

Why is this Important?

- **The DLL Population is Growing:** Dual language learners account for one-third of the current population of children between the ages of 0-5 years.³ Of those, 59 percent live in households where Spanish is the home language. In five states (CA, NJ, NV, TX, and NM), this population accounts for an even bigger share of the population of children in this age range. While not all children of Latiné households may be considered DLLs, this population is projected to grow more by 2030 than any other ethnic groups, making both linguistic and cultural elements an area of priority for education systems nationally.⁴
- **Evidence-Based Strategies are Key:** Research has continually shown that supporting dual language learners requires a variety of intentional strategies and considerations to maximize their potential for gains on language acquisition and other cognitive and academic outcomes.⁵ In addition, research on DLL children's participation in preschool programs has shown that early academic skill growth is even more pronounced for them when compared to their monolingual peers.⁶
- **Policies are Lacking:** Policy has not been responsive to research; with few states providing strong examples of policy to guide programs at local levels, it is evident that school districts struggle to know how to best serve DLLs.⁷



State Context: New Jersey

[New Jersey's state-funded preschool program](#) has operated since a court ruling in 1998, establishing that all three- and four-year-old children be provided with free, high-quality full-day preschool for New Jersey's most low-income school districts⁸. Initially this created free, high-quality preschool in 31 school districts around the state (formerly referred to as Abbott districts based on the court ruling). School districts administer the program through a mixed-delivery system in which public schools, private providers, and Head Start programs that receive funds enroll and provide preschool instruction to all eligible children. Since the time of the court decision, additional school districts now receive state funds to administer the program, and currently 301 school districts participate.

District Context

District Demographics

This study's partnering district was one of the original 31 Abbott-designated programs, established in 1999. It is a large urban district currently enrolling about 75 percent of eligible children through mixed delivery which includes public schools, Head Start, and private providers. District demographics include a total of 94 percent Hispanic/Latino children districtwide, with 38 percent of children considered DLLs beginning in kindergarten and 98 percent of children in the preschool program considered Spanish-speaking multilingual learners. Of those, about 61 percent of children meet requirements via the WIDA ACCESS to be placed in ESL/bilingual classes for kindergarten, with about eight percent of those children exiting the program by third grade.

Implementation of the Preschool Program Classroom Numbers

In total, the preschool program includes 67 classrooms housed in public school buildings, 15 in Head Start, and nine in private childcare provider sites. The district utilizes the HighScope curriculum, one of five state-approved curricula.

In-district, the program provides for preschool instructional coaches (PICs) who primarily are tasked with "... visit[ing] classrooms and coach[ing] teachers using reflective practice to improve instruction" as outlined by the NJ Department of Early Childhood Services (p. 8; *New Jersey Preschool Implementation Guidelines*). While there are five PICs working throughout the district, their roles include a wide range of tasks beyond reflective coaching that in some ways infringe on their coaching time.

Dual Language Immersion (DLI) Implementation

While the district provides dual language immersion (DLI)* programs for children in kindergarten, at the time of the creation of the program of study there were no DLI programs in place for preschool. Among the seven public school buildings, a total of 16 kindergarten classrooms are designated as DLI. To enroll in these programs, families are required to complete the state-required Home Language Survey. The students whose families speak a language other than English at home complete the state-required English language proficiency test, WIDA Screener (Grades 1–12) or WIDA MODEL for kindergarten. Students scoring below the state-established cutoff (4.5 overall composite on WIDA ACCESS) are identified as multilingual learners. The DLI program serves as the district's official academic bilingual program of record for students in grades K–2, and in select schools through grade 5, across 10 elementary schools. Subsequently children move into typical English instructional (EI) classrooms. While the district also participates in the Seal of Biliteracy state award program, only 29 percent of high school seniors currently earn the award and of those, 80 percent are students who were classified as Els/DLLs at some point.

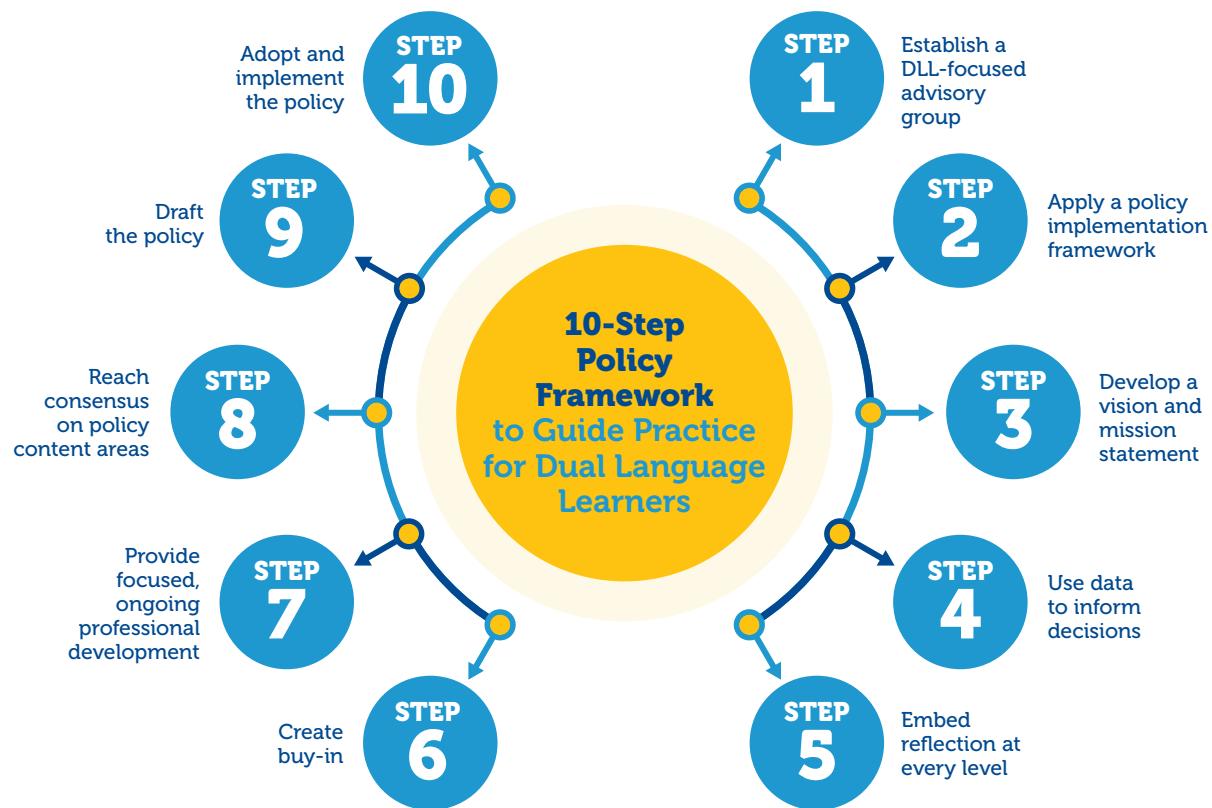
***DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS ARE THOSE THAT SEEK TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH WHILE MAINTAINING OR ADDING BILINGUALISM, BILITERACY, AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS. THIS MODEL IS SEEN BY RESEARCHERS AS THE GOLD STANDARD OF PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN LEARNING ENGLISH AS IT SUPPORTS ENGLISH LEARNING AS WELL AS SUPPORTS MONOLINGUAL/NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS TO ALSO BECOME BILINGUAL. VARIOUS STUDIES INVESTIGATING THE BENEFITS OF THIS MODEL WITH CHILDREN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SHOW PROMISING RESULTS AND INDICATE THAT CHILDREN LEARN ENGLISH AT THE SAME RATES AS PEERS WHO ARE OFFERED NO INSTRUCTION IN THE HOME LANGUAGE AND EXPERIENCE ADDITIONAL COGNITIVE AND ACADEMIC BENEFITS LATER ON.**

Addressing a Need: Developing a System for Supporting DLLs in Early Childhood

While the school district had a clear understanding of its student population, leaders identified a critical gap: the absence of policy to ensure consistent practices for supporting multilingual learner children and families from preschool onward. This issue came into sharper focus after the district leader participated in a research study with NIEER, which included data collection on how children were supported during daily instructional routines and settings. Coupled with the leader's involvement in a leadership academy designed to strengthen the pipeline of Latiné leaders in early childhood education, these experiences underscored that although state-level policies existed, there was little local guidance to shape how teachers approached everyday instruction. Moreover, teachers had not received recent professional development targeting this area. Together, these realizations sparked the current initiative, emphasizing the need to guarantee high-quality experiences for all children, regardless of teacher, building, or program.

To address this need, the district entered a research-practice partnership to collaboratively design, adopt, and implement policies that systematize appropriate supports for DLLs. Drawing on the research base, the expertise of advisory committee members, and input from a university-based researcher, the district engaged in an iterative process to align research, state policy, and local context. The result is a policy framework to guide practice for young DLLs as follows and discussed further below.

Figure 1. Policy Framework to Guide Practice for Young Dual Language Learners



Key Process Elements

As noted, the collaboration resulted in a final policy document, or as named by the district, a program of study. The goal of these key takeaways is to provide a guide for other local education agencies (LEAs) with similar contexts and needs.

STEP 1: Establish a DLL-Focused Advisory Group

Creating buy-in and spreading the vision for new policies or procedures requires the engagement of many individuals. Establishing a dedicated team to focus time and attention on policy development is essential. In this case, an internal group of key stakeholders was assembled to provide insight and background knowledge about the needs of teachers, children, and families. Building trust and ensuring buy-in required protected time for the group to meet consistently and engage in ongoing dialogue.

★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Form a core team** of up to seven individuals representing diverse perspectives and roles within the program.
- **Clarify the team's focus:** bring tasks to life efficiently and effectively.
- **Include key decision-makers who:**
 - Understand codes, rules, and regulations at both state and local levels.
 - Are familiar with guidance and policies from the state education agency or other oversight bodies.
- **Ensure diversity within leadership to:**
 - Vet decisions and ideas quickly.
 - Structure proposals appropriately for senior staff approval.
- **Gather insights from multiple perspectives to:**
 - Align goals and policies with existing governance structures.
 - Promote effective implementation that benefits both children and families.

Table 1. Possible Key Stakeholders to Include

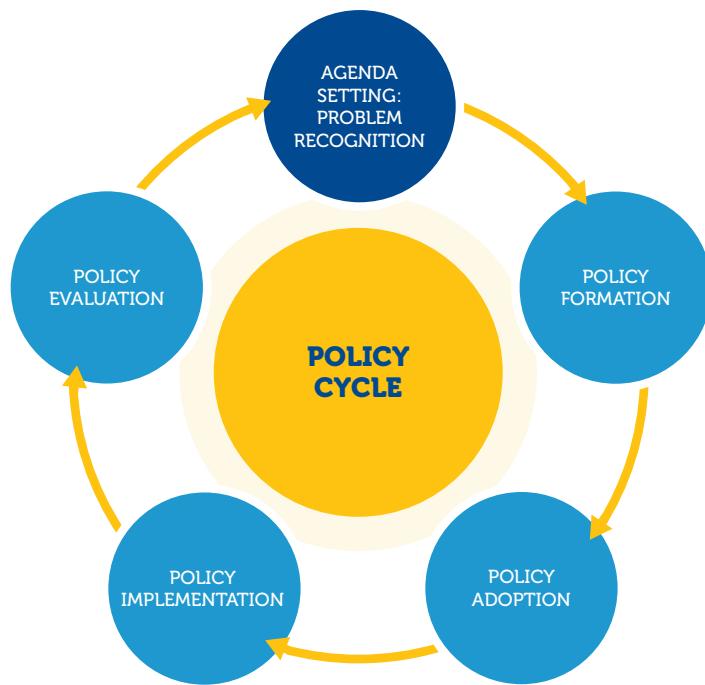
Role	Purpose
Director of Early Childhood	Lead the work and create the team to support carrying out the mission. To provide background code, guidelines, and other program-specific regulations needed to oversee the program (state policy, performance standards, etc.). To advocate for necessary budget considerations within central administration offices, seek data, and make requests of staff to provide needed inputs/ responses.
Content expert/researcher	Contribute knowledge of the current research and make recommendations able to support data collection and analysis.
Teachers	Provide insights about what is and isn't realistic for implementation given their experience and expertise.
Preschool Instructional Coaches	Share information about their perspectives on what teachers need by way of professional development, support, and resources.
Director of Bilingual Programs	Provide understanding of district-level policies for the K-12 space, which are more established, monitored, and based on requirements as established by code at the state level
Principals/Center Directors	Given that principals are ultimately the implementers of policy at the building/center level, their perspectives about how policies can be successfully implemented and monitored are key.
Superintendents	In their position as the ultimate decision makers, the participation of the superintendent is critical to supporting ideas at conception and in the final adoption and implementation phases.
Family Engagement Personnel (e.g., liaisons, social workers, etc.)	These positions have the most frequent contact with families and can provide important insights about how families interpret school district policies and activities in addition to reporting on expressed family concerns, needs, etc.

STEP 2: Apply a Policy Implementation Framework

To ensure clarity across all work, goals, and processes, we selected a policy formation framework from the literature to guide the project. This model outlines five phases: agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy evaluation (see Figure 2). Scholarship also emphasizes that policy implementation operates at both the macro level (e.g., policymakers) and the micro level (e.g., districts, administrators, and teachers).

In alignment with this perspective, the program of study aims to contextualize macro-level policy from the New Jersey Department of Education by incorporating what Matland (1995) refers to as “technology” to reduce potential ambiguity. At the district level, this theory informed the creation of a dual-level structure: the program of study functions as a macro-level policy, while principals and teachers represent the micro level. To further support implementation at the classroom level, we again drew on Matland’s theory by introducing the Self-Evaluation of Supports for Emergent Bilingual Acquisition (SESEBA) as a form of “technology.” SESEBA provides teachers with a practical tool for aligning daily instructional practices with broader policy goals, thereby bridging the gap between abstract policy and classroom realities.

Figure 2. Policy Cycle

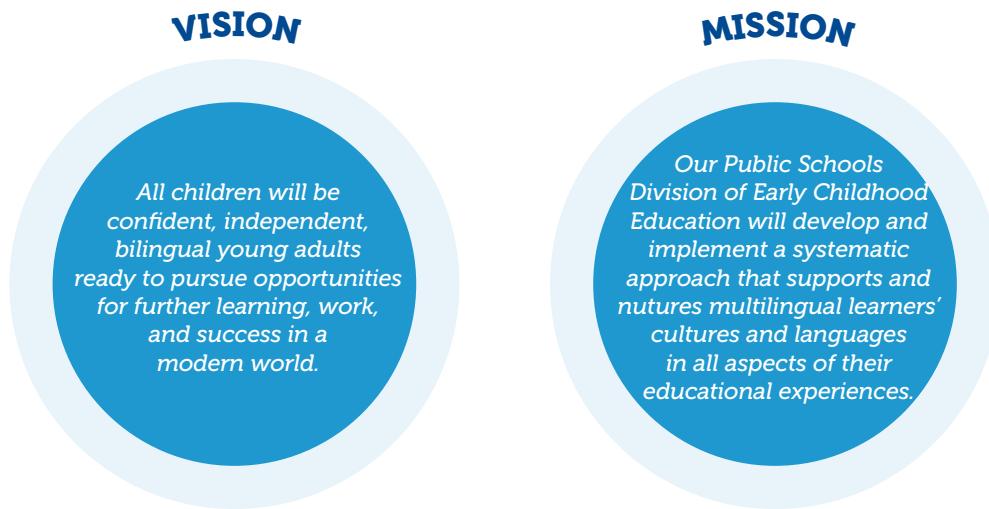


★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Leverage established policy models:** Use recognized frameworks for policy creation and implementation to establish clear direction and workflow.
- **Define the purpose:** Clarify that the goal of the policy document is to translate processes into daily practices that directly support children and families.
- **Establish shared understanding:** Agree on key terms and definitions to ensure clarity, consistency, and coherence across all aspects of the work.

STEP 3: Develop a Vision and Mission Statement

As with any policy development and implementation effort, it is essential to begin with shared ideals and values that can be communicated broadly across the program, beyond the advisory group. Assessing the needs and culture of the district was a critical step in establishing a vision and mission that were contextually appropriate and meaningful. Developing an initial draft, followed by opportunities for teachers and other stakeholders to provide feedback, further strengthened buy-in and fostered a sense of ownership. Through this collaborative process and extended discussion, the following vision and mission statements were established:



★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Articulate a clear vision and mission** to establish a shared understanding of teaching and learning with multilingual learners.
- **Reflect the value of language and culture** across districts and grade levels in both statements.
- **Ensure alignment with student experiences and outcomes**, so that goals are observable in practice.
- **Develop collaboratively** a vision and mission with input from an advisory group, then refine them through districtwide teacher feedback (e.g., surveys administered via Google Forms).
- **Disseminate broadly** by sharing the finalized vision and mission with all internal stakeholders and maintain their visibility through program websites, outreach materials, and pamphlets.

STEP 4: Use Data to Inform Decisions

As with any policy process, collecting data was essential for identifying needs and monitoring progress. Gathering information from multiple sources and in varied formats ensured that diverse voices were represented. Because work related to multilingualism is closely tied to attitudes and beliefs, school leaders identified this as a critical starting point. Understanding the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and families provided a necessary foundation for both planning and implementation.

In this case, an anonymous survey was administered to capture a broad view of stakeholder attitudes and beliefs about language learning. The survey provided insight into how different groups understood and valued issues such as language acquisition, English development, and the role of Spanish in instruction.

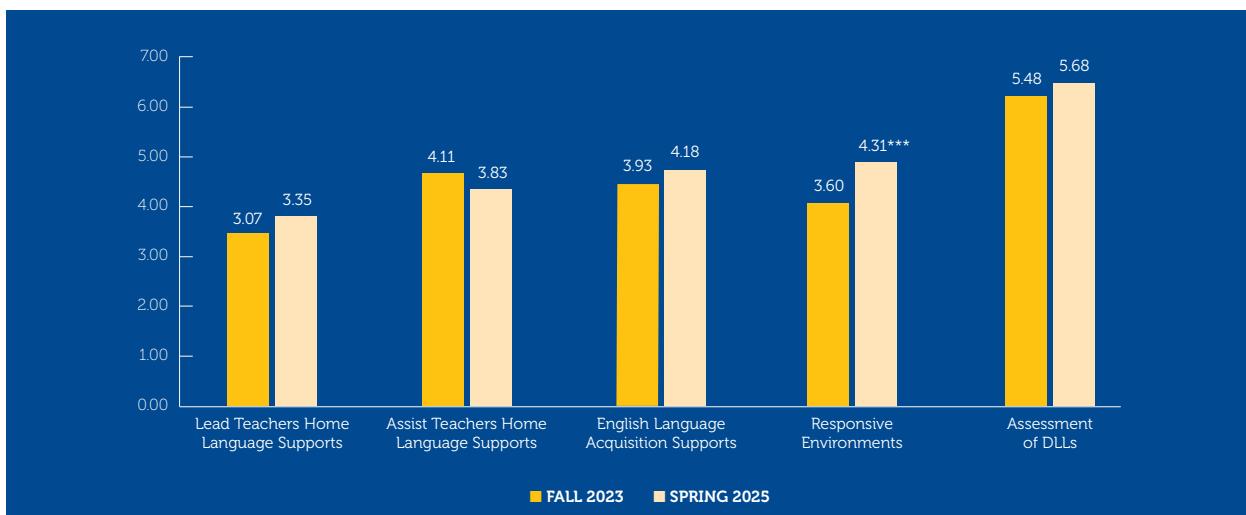
The next step involved collecting data on children's daily classroom experiences. To accomplish this, the district employed the *Classroom Assessment for Supports of Emergent Bilingual Acquisition* (CASEBA)* to evaluate the quality of language and literacy supports provided to multilingual learners. The findings identified areas in need of improvement, highlighted gaps in classroom resources, and surfaced exemplary teaching practices that could be incorporated into professional development materials, including demonstration videos.

Based on results from Year 1, the district placed a classroom supply order in Year 2 that included culturally relevant props and bilingual, bicultural books. These resources were intentionally selected to reflect students' home lives more accurately and to strengthen opportunities for language development. Additionally, the district team implemented a home language survey collected at the classroom level and for use by teachers. These surveys included questions about languages used at home by families, countries that families considered central to their identity, amount and sources of English exposure at home, in addition to other information about children's preferences and family goals. Use of this survey district-wide allowed for deeper insights at the classroom, program and district level for more intentional decision making.

Through use of the CASEBA again at the end of Year 2, the district was able to see where growth was most significant and where additional focus would be needed for a subsequent Year 3. As illustrated in Figure 3, most areas measured by the CASEBA grew, with only one subscale (assistant teachers' use of the home language) dropped.

* THE CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT OF SUPPORTS FOR EMERGENT BILINGUAL ACQUISITION (CASEBA) IS RATED ON A SEVEN-POINT LIKERT SCALE RANGING FROM 1 (POOR) TO 7 (EXCELLENT). INDIVIDUAL SUBSCALES OF THE CASEBA INCLUDE LEAD TEACHER HOME LANGUAGE SUPPORTS, ASSISTANT TEACHER HOME LANGUAGE SUPPORTS, ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORTS, RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND ASSESSMENT. THE CASEBA IS DESIGNED TO BE CONDUCTED VIA A THREE-HOUR OBSERVATION DURING THE MORNING OF A TYPICAL SCHOOL DAY.

Figure 3. CASEBA Growth Over Time



*p<0.10; **p<0.05; *** p<0.01, which denotes statistically significant differences between fall and spring scores.

Building on these lessons, we outline a set of potential data points for reflection, organized around diverse stakeholder perspectives. It is important to prioritize which data points are most relevant for each phase of policy development, as not all can be addressed at once. Equally critical is the creation of a clear timeline that specifies when and how data will be collected, who will oversee the process, how surveys will be piloted and administered, and how the resulting data will be analyzed to inform reflection and guide action.

Table 2. Stakeholders' Potential Data Points

Children	Teachers	Administrators	Families
Home language surveys	Attitude/Belief surveys	Attitude/Belief surveys	Attitude/Belief surveys
Formative assessment data	Self-efficacy surveys	Self-efficacy surveys	Family literacy practice surveys
Screeners to understand children's language proficiencies	Experience questionnaires (e.g. credentials/PD topics engaged in the past)	Experience questionnaires (e.g. credentials/PD topics engaged in the past)	Home language surveys
	Classroom observation measures	School building culture surveys	
	Self-reflection tools	Self-reflection tools	

★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Collecting data is essential** for identifying needs, measuring progress, and ensuring that all voices are represented.
- **Prioritize attitudes and beliefs** about multilingualism as an initial focus, given their strong influence on instructional practices; these can be captured effectively through surveys.
- **Use the CASEBA tool** to identify:
 - Areas in need of improvement
 - Gaps in materials and books
 - Exemplary teaching practices that can be highlighted for professional development and modeling



Photo credit: Daniel Huber

STEP 5: Embed Reflection at Every Level

Having data available for both teacher self-reflection and program- or district-level analyses serves different but complementary purposes, each aimed at uncovering opportunities for growth. At the program and district level, aggregated data can reveal patterns and highlight common challenges that require systemic responses. At the individual level, disaggregated data allows teachers to identify and address their own specific areas for improvement. Together, these perspectives create a more comprehensive understanding of needs and strategies for strengthening supports for multilingual learners.

★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Group reflection** on each data point is essential to drive informed discussion and planning.
- **Include diverse perspectives** to enhance interpretation, as each role provides unique insights into the data.
- **Collect data at multiple levels:** district-level data to identify broad patterns, and teacher-level self-assessments (via SESEBA*) to track progress in supporting DLLs.
- **Align coaching and professional learning** with SESEBA focus areas to maintain consistency and coherence during policy implementation.

* THE SESEBA SERVES AS AN IN-PRACTICE VERSION OF THE CASEBA FOR USE BY TEACHERS AND COACHES FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. THE UNDERLYING PREMISE OF BOTH THE CASEBA AND SESEBA IS THAT USE OF HIGH QUALITY AND MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS IN THE HOME LANGUAGE ALONG WITH INTENTIONAL AND WELL-PLANNED STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ARE THE BEST APPROACH TO TEACHING PRESCHOOL-AGED DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS. THE SESEBA CAN HELP PROGRAMS SEEKING TO SUPPORT TEACHER PRACTICE AROUND AREAS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT WHEN THE GOAL OF THE PROGRAM IS TO MAINTAIN AND BUILD UPON THE HOME LANGUAGE WHILE DEVELOPING ENGLISH FOR DLLS. THE USE OF SESEBA ALIGNS WITH CONSENSUS FOR GENERAL BEST PRACTICES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CALLING FOR INTENSE, SUSTAINED, AND CLASSROOM-BASED APPROACHES AS IT PRESENTS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR TEACHERS AND COACHES TO SELF-REFLECT, PLAN, IMPLEMENT, AND REPEAT.

STEP 6: Create Buy-In

A central element in any policy implementation process is buy-in. Educational researchers have defined buy-in in various ways, consistently noting that its absence can undermine or even derail new initiatives. In this case, the following process supported the collaborative creation of a vision and mission that served as an anchor for the work.

The vision and mission became central to communication efforts and guided conversations about the initiative. They also proved instrumental in securing support from the superintendent. With the draft vision, project description, and data overview in hand, the superintendent proposed that implementation of the policy become one of her own professional goals, formally tied to her performance evaluation with the county Office of Education. This step was pivotal: it signaled a strong commitment from district leadership and reinforced buy-in among building-level administrators who directly oversee preschool classrooms.

★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Develop an initial draft** of the vision and mission through the advisory group.
- **Engage teachers for feedback** by sharing the draft to gather ideas, edits, and additions from the broader teaching community.
- **Include a clear project overview** with the survey to explain the broader goals and purpose of the initiative.
- **Publicize the finalized vision and mission** widely and integrate it into all ongoing communication efforts.



STEP 7: Provide Focused, Ongoing Professional Development

Analysis of the data enabled district leaders to pinpoint priority areas for teacher professional development. Use of the CASEBA tool was especially valuable in identifying focus areas, guiding both in-person professional development sessions and the creation of discussion springboards for instructional coaches within professional learning communities. This process also allowed leaders to design sustained, cohesive PD opportunities, addressing teachers' concerns that prior offerings had often felt haphazard or disconnected.

For example, CASEBA scores revealed that while instruction was occurring in both English and Spanish, its use was inconsistent—some teachers incorporated Spanish frequently and intentionally, while others did so less systematically. To address this, the policy document explicitly included a section on language allocation models* and designations as part of the program of study. During the implementation phase, targeted professional development was introduced to explain the concept of language allocation models, and protocols for selecting and applying these models were implemented with all district teachers.

* LANGUAGE ALLOCATION MODELS DEFINE THE WAYS IN WHICH ENGLISH AND A HOME LANGUAGE (HL) ARE USED TO DELIVER INSTRUCTION IN INTENTIONAL WAYS. THOUGH THERE ARE VARIOUS MODELS, DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION MODELS ARE TYPICALLY THE ONLY ONES THAT SEEK TO DEVELOP A HOME LANGUAGE IN CONJUNCTION WITH ENGLISH TO ACHIEVE BILINGUALISM FOR ALL PARTICIPATING CHILDREN. OTHER MODELS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE PRESENCE OF AN HL FOR INSTRUCTION IS BENEFICIAL FOR CHILDREN, BUT THEY DO NOT HAVE AS CLEAR CUT DEMANDS ON USE OF THE HL FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PURPOSES. STILL, HAVING AN IDENTIFIED MODEL PROVIDES BOTH STRUCTURE AND INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT HOW AND WHEN THEY USE EACH LANGUAGE. THE USE OF ANY LANGUAGE ALLOCATION MODEL SHOULD DEPEND ON WHO THE CHILDREN ARE (IN TERMS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY), WHAT THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM ARE (TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH ONLY OR TO DEVELOP ENGLISH WHILE SUPPORTING HL MAINTENANCE TO ACHIEVE BILINGUALISM) AND WHO THE CLASSROOM STAFF ARE (ACCOUNTING FOR BILINGUALISM OF BOTH LEAD AND ASSISTANT TEACHERS).

★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Use data-driven insights** to guide district and program leaders in identifying priority areas for teacher professional development.
- **Leverage the CASEBA tool** (Classroom Assessment of Supports for Emergent Bilingual Acquisition) to:
 - Prioritize PD focus areas
 - Inform topics for in-person PD sessions
 - Support instructional coaches in facilitating professional learning communities (PLCs)
- **Develop a responsive policy document** that addresses system needs and ensures standardized, high-quality experiences for children and families.
- **Provide a targeted PD on language allocation models**, making explicit how language use is structured and supported across classrooms.

STEP 8: Reach Consensus on Policy Content Areas

To ensure maximum usability and achieve its central goal, the advisory group agreed that the policy document needed to strike a balance; that is, it should provide sufficient detail to promote systemic uniformity while avoiding overwhelming teachers and administrators. Guidance was informed by recent national research syntheses as well as state-level policy in New Jersey, which offered important guideposts for alignment.⁹ A central feature of the document was the inclusion of the state's definition of multilingual learners, as established through code, to anchor the work in a clear and consistent framework.

★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Balance clarity and usability:** Provide enough detail for consistency without overwhelming educators.
- **Anchor in evidence and policy:** Ground the document in national research and align with state definitions and guidance.
- **Prioritize shared understanding:** Use clear, consistent terminology to ensure all stakeholders are on the same page.

STEP 9: Draft the Policy

After reviewing and discussing various resources—including research used to unpack key terms and concepts—the leadership team concluded that the practices most in need of systematization could be organized into four primary categories.

Table 3. Four Categories of Systemization

Curriculum/ Instruction: Pedagogy	This section addresses key questions about approaches to language use in instruction. It provides teachers with guidance on understanding different language allocation models and formally designates all district classrooms as either following an English with Home Language Approach or a Dual Immersion model. In addition, the section outlines expectations for classroom environments, the use of the adopted curriculum to implement strategies for DLLs, and procedures for assessment.
Family Engagement	Within this section the policy outlines a specific framework to guide family engagement for the district (CRAF 4E) model. A districtwide home language survey
Professional Development	This section establishes the expected approach for professional development related to DLLs and highlights the use of SESEBA as a tool for guiding ongoing, research-based PD. It also provides details for onboarding new educators in alignment with the policy, along with guidance for instructional coaches and administrators to ensure consistent implementation.
Continuous Improvement	This section outlines a prescribed method for collecting data to inform decision-making on DLL supports at both the classroom and program levels.

Within each area, the school advisory team identified specific practices and resources to ensure that teachers could consistently create classroom environments offering uniform supports and structures for DLLs.

★TIPS FOR SUCCESS★

- **Systematize core practices** through use of existing and trusted resources, identifying key areas requiring consistent implementation across district systems and roles.
- **Develop aligned supports** for DLLs with specific expectations and concrete resources to accomplish tasks.
- **Ensure an accountability system** to monitor and support ongoing implementation.



STEP 10: Adopt and Implement the Policy

While implementation takes time, initial steps have included the key activities described above. Planned additional efforts for Year 3 include the following:

1. **Update the district website** to incorporate the mission, vision, and early childhood policy document.
2. **Provide ongoing professional development for teachers**, assistant teachers, and administrators.
3. **Purchase culturally relevant materials and bilingual books** for individual classrooms.
4. **Develop family-facing resources**, such as pamphlets and campaigns, to raise awareness of program goals, highlight the benefits of bilingualism, and support its maintenance in schools.
5. **Improve lesson planning templates** to promote greater intentionality in strategies and supports for DLLs.
6. **Implement a pilot dual language immersion model** in school buildings where there is opportunity for children to continue the model in kindergarten.

Reflections from District Partners

Through a series of individual interviews, district partners identified several critical factors in the development and implementation of the program of study. These reflections provide important insights and lessons learned, offering guidance for future efforts to operationalize the work in additional contexts.

One recurring theme was the importance of time—both the opportunity to focus on the topic over an extended period and the consistency of dedicated meetings. Partners emphasized that having monthly meetings scheduled through the research-practice partnership was pivotal in keeping the process on track. The structure of recurring meetings, coupled with shared accountability, ensured that the work remained a priority amid competing district demands. Partners also highlighted that the ability to sustain focus over two years allowed for deeper discussion, reflection, and the development of more nuanced understanding than had previously been possible.

The district personnel also believed that the implementation of the home language survey district wide created a systemic expectation for programs that allowed for better understanding of children and families. Based on the use of the survey, the team felt there was a tangible source of information to draw upon and that helped for teachers to have immediate learning about the children in their classrooms. This coupled with SESEBA training reenergized teachers with new ways to improve their practice.

Another important theme was the need to ensure that leaders overseeing teachers in individual program centers and buildings receive targeted professional development on both the essential elements and the underlying rationale of the policy. The team emphasized this as critical, since these leaders carry primary responsibility for ensuring that the policy is enacted with fidelity in day-to-day practice. While some training was included during the initial implementation phase, the group agreed that strengthening leadership capacity would become a central focus for the subsequent year—an investment viewed as essential for sustaining and deepening the policy's impact.

Overall, most partners agreed that while the will and belief in supporting DLLs had always been present, the structures and systems necessary to enact and sustain this vision were lacking. These reflections underscore the importance of not only developing policy and systems but also creating the “technology” (in Matland’s sense) that enables micro-level implementers—administrators and teachers—to translate policy into practice in ways that directly reach children and families.

Call to Action

In summary, ensuring the success of multilingual learners requires a clear understanding of which inputs matter most and how to embed them consistently within educational systems. Effective implementation provides frameworks that can guide leaders and teachers in shaping the everyday educational experiences of children through coherent policies. Yet little is currently understood about how local education agencies translate broad policies or recommendations into practice.

We argue that this gap in systemwide implementation—even when overarching policies exist—is driven by multiple factors, including the absence of a usable model or blueprint and limited leadership capacity to fully understand the rationale and urgency for change. The blueprint outlined above addresses these challenges by offering actionable steps that programs can adopt, adapt, or use as a starting point for conversations about how to move forward.

Endnotes

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