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## **Most State Pre-K Programs Fail to Support Dual Language Learners**

*New Brunswick, NJ* -- More than 20 percent of all preschool-aged children in the US speak a language other than English at home, yet most states have no policies in place to support young dual language learners (DLLs), according to a policy brief published today by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

One of the most significant recent trends in the U.S. education system is that white students are no longer the majority—a trend mainly driven by the growth in both the number and percentage of Hispanic children. Hispanic children who start kindergarten without speaking English rarely catch up with their English-speaking peers.

Research has shown high-quality preschool can reduce achievement gaps before children even enter kindergarten. However, only 12 percent of state-funded programs have policies requiring specific training qualifications for teachers of DLLs, only 35 percent assess children in their home languages and less than half of states collect information about a preschooler's home language.

“What we see across the US is a pretty weak response to a growing population,” said NIEER Co-Director for Research Milagros Nores, Ph.D. “Policymakers need to address the needs of DLL children.”

For K-12, children learning English are entitled by civil rights law to extra language services & federal policy requires states to determine which students qualify for such services. Early education policies for DLLs lag the K-12 system—each state sets its own policy. In pre-K, many have none.

This new policy paper, [\*Opportunities and Policies for Young Dual Language Learners / Oportunidades y Políticas para Niños de Lengaje Dual\*](#) outlines challenges facing non-English speaking families and calls on state pre-K programs to:

- Identify the number of DLL children in state pre-K and use the data to inform policies on teacher preparation, curriculum and classroom practice
- Screen and assess all children in their home languages
- Communicate with families in their home languages
- Better prepare and support teachers by offering pay premiums for bilingual specialist teachers and partnering with higher education institutions to offer specialization for teaching DLL children from preschool through Third Grade
- Increase participation in high-quality early childhood education for DLL children

Dr. Nores will be discussing NIEER's policy recommendations and our special report [\*Supporting Dual Language Learners in State-Funded Preschool\*](#) during the National Association of Hispanic Journalists National Conference held July 20-21 in Miami in partnership with the Education Writers Association.

“Research is clear that knowing two or more languages is beneficial for school success, brain flexibility, and social-emotional development,” Dr. Nores said. “By meeting the needs of DLL children, we also enhance learning for English-only children.”

(more)

Research has found young DLLs particularly benefit from high-quality pre-K, making access important. Knowing how many DLLs are enrolled in the state preschool is key to increasing access. But only 26 out of 60 state-funded pre-K programs collect that data.

Only nine state pre-K programs – out of 60 across 43 states, District of Columbia and Guam--have ANY policy relating to staff qualifications for teachers of DLLs. Six state pre-K programs require lead teachers to have specific training to work with DLLs. California’s TK, Illinois and Texas are the only programs that require pre-K teachers of DLLs to have bilingual certification.

Out of all states with public pre-K, the most common policy (35 states) allows bilingual instruction, while 33 states have policies supporting families of young DLLs—such as sharing information in the family’s home language.

#### **About NIEER**

The National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](#)) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, conducts independent, objective research to inform early childhood education policy promoting physical, cognitive and social development for all young children to succeed in school and later life.

The [State of Preschool 2017](#) annual report, based on 2016-17 academic year data, is the only national report on state-funded preschool programs. This year’s report includes a special section on policies affecting DLLs. Nationwide, more than 1.5 million children are enrolled in 60 state-funded preschool programs in a variety of settings. But instead of supporting quality early learning with adequate resources, most state programs invest too little to help children catch up with their more advantaged peers by kindergarten.