

Harnessing the Potential of Multiple Languages and Family Partnerships in Early Childhood Intervention and Special Education

Questions and Answers From a National Webinar Hosted by the National Center for Systemic Improvement and the Parent Technical Assistance Center Network

The National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) and the Parent Technical Assistance Center Network (PTACs) invited questions prior to, during, and after the webinar hosted on December 12, 2017. Here we synthesize the questions and some answers and provide additional resources to build capacity in understanding and effectively serving children from birth to age five who are learning more than one language (i.e., children who are dual language learners [DLLs]). We encourage you to (re)visit the webinar and associated resources (PowerPoint and PDF of slides, recording, transcript) on the NCSI [website](#).

Research on Dual Language Learners From Birth to Five Years Old

Sections 7:55–18:18 and 35:58–40:15 of the [webinar](#) present relevant information.

Question: What is typical language development among DLLs, and how does learning more than one language impact children’s development in language and other domains?

Answer: Learning more than one language early in life can benefit academic and social emotional development and school readiness. There is no research evidence indicating that exposure to more than one language early in life poses a risk to DLL children’s development. For more information, see the following:

[Center for Early Care and Education Research–Dual Language Learners \(CECER-DLL\), Research Reports and Briefs](#)

[Development of Infants and Toddlers Who Are Dual Language Learners \(CECER-DLL, Working Paper 2\)](#)

[Language and Literacy Development in Dual Language Learners: A Critical Review of the Research \(CECER-DLL, Research Brief 6\)](#)

[Social-Emotional Development in Dual Language Learners: A Critical Review of the Research \(CECER-DLL, Research Brief 7\)](#)

[The Cognitive Development of Young Dual Language Learners: A Critical Review of the Research \(CECER-DLL, Research Brief 11\)](#)

[Culture and Language](#) (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, formerly the Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness)

[National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning](#)

[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, Chapter 4)

Question: Is home language more important for children from 0–5, including those with disabilities?

Answer: Research shows that developing competency in both home and English languages is important for all young children in the United States, including those with delays or disabilities. Strong home language and literacy skills support English acquisition. It is important for families and their social networks to use their home languages with their children to provide native home language exposure that might not be available in early care and education programs and larger U.S. society. For more information, see the following:

[Dual Language Learners: Research Informing Policy](#) (Castro, García, & Markos, 2013)

[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, Chapter 10)

Question: How do you prepare professionals through preservice and in-service training to support DLL and their families in natural learning environments, such as home visits and inclusive child care and preschool settings?

Answer: Participate in or help create comprehensive systems of professional development for early childhood with aligned standards through coalitions with institutions of higher education, state and local education agencies, Head Start, child care, Early Intervention, health care, Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers (Parent Centers), other technical assistance centers and providers, and community-based organizations to braid funding streams and leverage expertise. For more information, see the following:

[Dual Language Learners: Teacher Interactions and Strategies](#) (California Department of Education)

[Early Childhood Personnel Center, Resources](#)

[Head Start, Professional Development Resources](#)

National Center for Parent Information and Resources: [Main Site](#) and [Find Your Parent Training and Information Center](#)

[National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning](#)

[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, Chapter 12)

[Resources on Personnel Development](#) (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center)

[Supporting Children Through Community-Based Coalitions](#) (Early Learning Challenge Technical Assistance)

Identification, Referral, and Enrollment of DLLs With Delays/Disabilities in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education Services in Natural Environments

Sections 19:34–31:30, 32:10–35:30, and 35:58–40:15 in the [webinar](#) present relevant information.

Question: When a language disorder or disability is suspected with a DLL, what is the best way to discern whether it is a true disorder or disability versus a feature of learning two languages?

Answer: DLLs with a language disorder or disability will exhibit impairments in both languages, and accurate identification requires professionals trained in DLL development and assessment in the home language as well as English. However, research on young DLLs with disabilities is limited by the small number of studies overall, by their specific disabilities, and by their descriptive (vs. predictive) nature. For more information, see the following:

[Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning](#) (2nd ed.; Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2011)

[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, Chapter 10)

Question: Are there guidelines on when to refer and how to determine if a DLL child is eligible for early intervention/early childhood special education?

Answer: In addition to the need for training in DLL development and assessment referenced earlier, programs and professionals should work together to track the development of DLL using the best assessment tools currently available, while being aware of their potential limitations, and gather multiple sources of information to determine need for referral and eligibility. For more information, see the following:

[Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, 2017)

[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, Chapters 10 and 11)

Bilingual/Multilingual Practices for Intervention, Classroom instruction, and Programming

Sections 7:55–18:18, 19:34–31:30, 32:10–35:30, and 35:58–40:15 of the [webinar](#) present relevant information.

Question: Where can I get information on evidence-based bilingual intervention practices, strategies, and/or models for children ages 0-3 years and for children with different levels of English exposure at home?

Answer: There is a small but growing evidence base for children under 5 years old, and much of the research to date has focused on children ages 3–5. It provides a starting place, with information that is potentially applicable to children ages 0–3. For more information, see the following:

[Dual Language Learners: A National Demographic and Policy Profile](#) (Park, O’Toole, & Katsiaficas, 2017)

[Dual Language Learners Toolkit](#) (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center)

[Evaluating Early Care and Education Practices for Dual Language Learners: A Critical Review of the Research](#) (CECER-DLL, Research Brief 4)

[Identifying Young Dual Language Learners: State Policies, Home Language Surveys, and Language Proficiency Assessments](#) (Preschool Development Grant Technical Assistance, 2017)

[Planned Language Approach for Language and Literacy](#) (Head Start Early Childhood and Knowledge Center)

[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, Chapter 8)

Question: Where can I get information on evidence-based bilingual intervention practices, strategies, and/or models for children 0–3 with delays or disabilities and for children 3–5 with delays or disabilities?

Answer: There is a larger evidence base for DLL children ages 3–5 than for children 0–3, including those with disabilities. For more information on evidence-based practices for DLL children 0–5 with delays or disabilities, see the following:

[Dual Language Learners With Disabilities: Supporting Young Children in the Classroom](#) (IRIS Center Module)

[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, Chapter 10)

Question: How can I ensure appropriate supports for families and DLL children who are also deaf or hard of hearing?

Answer: Children who are deaf or hard of hearing are DLLs. Just as the quantity and quality of language exposure influences the development of two oral languages, it also influences learning two or more visual and/or oral languages. For more information, see the following:

[Family Leadership in Language and Literacy](#) (Hands and Voices)

[Language, Literacy, and Social Development](#) (Hands and Voices)

[Literacy Strategies for Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing English Language Learners: Where Do We Begin?](#) (Cannon & Guardino, 2012)

[Position Statement on Early Cognitive and Language Development and Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children](#) (National Association of the Deaf)

Question: What strategies are available for programs without access to bilingual staff in a given language, and where can I get information on interpreters and children's books in different languages?

Answer: It is important for programs to prioritize the hiring of bilingual staff who are representative of the languages spoken in the communities they serve. An interim strategy presented in the webinar is to provide exposure to English and the home language by using a variety of resources, such as libraries (physical and online), Parent Centers, libraries, and other community-based organizations, that are representative of the cultures and languages of the children and families in your program to help you find interpreters and literature in other languages. For more information, see the following:

iColorín Colorado! [Main site](#) and [Books for Kids](#)

[Directory of Translators and Interpreters](#) (American Translators Association)

[International Children's Digital Library](#)

[Language Portal: A Translation and Interpretation Digital Library](#) (Migration Policy Institute)

[Many Languages, One Teacher: Supporting Language and Literacy Development for Dual Language Learners](#) (Magruder, Hayslip, & Espinosa, 2017)

[Practical and Proven Strategies for Teaching Young Dual Language Learners:](#) Chapter 4 in [Getting It RIGHT for Young Children From Diverse Backgrounds: Applying Research to Improve Practice With a Focus on Dual Language Learners](#) (2nd ed.; Espinosa & Magruder, 2015)

Parent Engagement, Partnership, Learning, and Leadership

Sections 19:34–31:30, 40:20–52:51, and 55:05–57:20 of the [webinar](#) present relevant information.

Question: How do you partner with and facilitate the participation of culturally and linguistically diverse families, particularly in the context of their job schedules, transportation challenges, limited literacy in home language, low educational attainment, and/or recent refugee status?

Answer: Start where families are by actively listening, focusing on strengths, and showing respect and cultural reciprocity. Identify their language preferences and goals and discuss potential supports to attain those goals. Communication should occur in their preferred language(s) using staff (internal or external) who understand early childhood terms (e.g., educational, health) and who are truly bilingual (understand and speak both English and the targeted language). Provide information across different media and platforms, such as informational handouts and webinars that are archived on websites and translated into multiple languages, as well as in person at family nights, parent trainings, and community events, particularly those in the cultural and linguistic communities of the families in your programs. Resources listed for professional development and monolingual staff/schools listed earlier are relevant here. For more information, see the following:

[Addressing Barriers to Successful Engagement of Immigrant and Refugee Parents of Young Children](#) (Migration Policy Institute)

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services: [Early Childhood](#) and [Family Strengthening](#)

[Building Partnerships: Guide to Developing Relationships With Families](#) (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center)

[Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices](#)

[Engaging Culturally Diverse Families](#) (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center)

[Limited English Proficiency Federal Interagency Website](#)

[National Association for the Education of Young Children, Family Engagement in Action](#)

[Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017, Chapter 7)

[Supporting Parent Engagement in Linguistically Diverse Families to Promote Young Children’s Learning: Implications for Early care and Education Policy](#) (Barrueco, Smith, & Stephens, 2015)

Question: Are there family-friendly brief(s) in different languages to help families understand DLL language development, identify developmental delays and disabilities, and learn the benefits of bilingualism of speaking their home language?

Answer: Contact your [Parent Technical Assistance Center](#) as a starting point. For more information, see the following:

Dual Language Learners: Five Tips for Parents in [English](#) and [Spanish](#); [The Benefits of Being Bilingual](#); Talking Is Teaching: Resources in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) (Too Small to Fail)

[Families Support Their Children Who Are Dual Language Learners](#) (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center)

[Hitos del Desarrollo y Crecimiento](#)

National Center for Parent Information and Resources: [Main Site](#), [Resources in Spanish for English Speakers](#), and [Tools That Empower Spanish-Speaking Parents](#)

Training & Support: [Supporting Learning & Behavior at Home](#) (Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education)

[Translated Tip Sheets](#) (communication, self-help/care, ear infections, pervasive developmental disorder diagnosis, attention span, transition to school, others; ConnectABILITY.ca)

About This Resource

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