

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

# Dual-Language Learning: 6 Key Insights for Schools



By [Corey Mitchell](#) — September 15, 2018 ⌚ 6 min read



Kindergartner Ava Josephine Mikel and teacher Priscilla Joseph dance to Haitian music during a game of “freeze dance” at Toussaint L’Ouverture Academy, a Haitian Creole dual-language program at Mattahunt Elementary School in Boston. More dual-language programs are cropping up in districts around the country. Gretchen Ertol for Education Week

For decades, two factors drove the demand for dual-language education: a desire to preserve native languages and recognition that dual-language learning can boost overall achievement for English-language learners. Now, a growing number of states also see bilingualism as key to accessing the global economy, as evidenced by the surging popularity of the “seal of biliteracy”—a special recognition for graduates who demonstrate fluency in two or more languages. The popularity of the seal is spurring even more demand for dual-language-education programs.

There is no definitive count of the number of schools that provide dual-language instruction, but new programs are cropping up each year in districts of all sizes. The

New York City schools alone have more than 100 dual-language programs, but schools in at least 40 states and the District of Columbia also operate programs. With more new programs undoubtedly in the works, *Education Week* talked with several regional and national dual-language education experts, who offered insights into what it takes to launch dual-language programs and strengthen existing ones. Here are some excerpts from those conversations, edited for clarity and length:

What resources do you need to start a dual-language program?

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**Two-Way Immersion:** Native English-speakers and native speakers of the target language are taught in the same classroom, with the goal of helping both sets of students become bilingual and biliterate by splitting instruction between the two languages.

**Total Immersion:** Native English-speakers are taught almost exclusively in the target language. Also known as one-way immersion.

**Partial Immersion:** Only a portion of academic subjects are taught in the target language.

**Developmental Bilingual:** English-learners are taught using both English and their first language.

“Once a program is well designed and implemented and it has all of its systems of support in place, the additional costs for a dual-language program is not much higher than any other monolingual English program. The issue, though, up front is going to be ... it’s a very different design, a very different approach to education. You have training costs, you have leadership-development costs, you have resource costs because, of course, now you need materials in the non-English language. That takes a while for districts to reach that capacity where now their budget is going to be able to ... ensure sufficient materials to support instruction in both languages. That takes some time. It depends on where you are in the country as to how much that startup cost will be. Here in New Mexico, we would say that the cost could be ... somewhere between \$30,000 and \$60,000 per school for the first three years of design and implementation. That would be a starting point.”

—*David Rogers*

*Executive director, Dual Language Education of New Mexico*

Spanish is the most dominant target, or non-English, language offered in dual programs, but districts now offer a broader array of languages to learn. What are some of the challenges districts may encounter with those lesser-taught languages?

“There is a level of investment that a district has to make to be able to provide the core materials in those languages, because you just can’t go to Vietnam and buy the standard

curriculum that's used in schools there, nor could you do that for [Chinese] or any other languages, because it has to be really aligned with [Common Core State Standards]. First of all for us is to figure out, what is our content allocation? What are we going to be teaching in the partner language, versus what are we going to be teaching in English? And then our goal is to try to provide those materials in an equivalent and rigorous way. Sometimes that involves buying materials that are out in the field and adapting those. Sometimes that means developing them ourselves. Sometimes that means translating the English material. Just like any good educational program, you have to invest in the curriculum, the professional development, to make it work well for kids.”

—*Michael Bacon*

*Director, department of dual language, Portland, Ore., schools*

How can schools with dual-language programs emphasize the importance of both languages?

“Sometimes what we see is that the [target] language is only represented in the classroom, and that doesn't give the appropriate idea about the dual-language program. When one decides to adopt a dual-language program, both languages should be integral throughout the school, should be present throughout the school. Both in the corridors but also in the meetings, in staff development, etc. Both languages should be present, and it should be obvious. Signs are in both languages, things are happening in both languages, because that also gives students the idea that both languages are valuable. Sometimes school districts don't. It's one of the things that is first noticeable. So, English is typically all over the place and the other language, well, it's within the classroom, but hardly anywhere else.”

—*David Nieto*

*Executive director, BUENO Center for Multicultural Education, University of Colorado, Boulder*



Kindergarten teacher Priscilla Joseph works with students beginning their second year enrolled in the Toussaint L'Ouverture Academy, a Haitian Creole dual-language program at Mattahunt Elementary School in Boston.

Gretchen Ertl for Education Week

When helping districts establish dual-language programs, is there a big misconception that you have to work to dispel early on?

“One of the big myths about implementing these programs has to do with the mindset that little children are just open to a second language, that it’s just easy for them. It’s schooling, and so schooling, after a certain point, gets difficult and so we have to have people understand that this is not just an enrichment program or a foreign-language option. This is a complete shift of the child’s core program, and it’s developed so that kids really do become literate in both languages. So it’s not business as usual with this little overlay called a second language. It has to be redefined so that everyone understands that we’re going to teach language arts in English, but we also are going to teach language arts in Spanish. So it’s not 45 minutes a week, it’s a minimum of half a day, every single day.”

—*Rosa Molina*

*Executive director, the Association for Two-Way & Dual Language Education, based in Santa Cruz County, Calif.*

How can educators, even those working outside of classrooms, support dual-language education?

“My push right now, big time, is principals, making sure that our principals, our assistant principals, central-office leaders, all are aware of what dual language is because everybody plays a role in the rollout of dual language. Budget, curriculum, evaluation, policy. You need a leader that understands the whole background on dual language, not just learning in Spanish. Not just learning to read in Spanish. No, everything that it encompasses, what dual language encompasses, which is bilingualism, biliteracy, cultural competence, high academic achievement, through, not in, but through both languages. So you need the leadership. They need to know what to look for when they go into a classroom and do an observation in a room that is dual, which is very rich. What should they be looking at, what should they be paying attention to? How should they be guiding their teachers?”

—*Elena Izquierdo*

*Associate professor, University of Texas, El Paso*

What are some growing pains that schools can expect to encounter after launching dual-language programs?

“The number of [language] immersion programs continues to grow across the country, and so the demand [for] having a quality teacher workforce is growing, too. That’s been one of our biggest challenges, to find a pipeline of teachers, qualified teachers. We’ve been finding an alternate way to help certify teachers that we need.”

—Gregory Fulkerson

*Director of language-acquisition workgroup, world languages, and dual-language immersion, Delaware Department of Education*