

Dual Language Learner Pilot Study Overview

Introduction

The Dual Language Learner (DLL) Pilot Study work began in 2014 guided by First 5 California's (F5CA) 2014–2019 Strategic Plan Objective 1.2.2 to “Support and pilot culturally and linguistically effective strategies to engage Dual Language Learners in the classroom.” In October 2015, F5CA created a F5CA DLL Pilot Project Input Group comprised of First 5 county commissions, DLL advocates, and subject matter experts to inform the Project.

In 2017, American Institutes for Research (AIR) was selected through a competitive bidding process to carry out the Pilot Study (approximately \$7.5 million). As part of its sampling design, AIR identified 16 counties to participate in the DLL Pilot Study using a sampling process to ensure a demographically representative total sample of the DLL child population in California. Participating counties include Butte, Calaveras, Contra Costa, Fresno, Los Angeles, Monterey, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Sonoma, Stanislaus, and Yolo.

The DLL Pilot Study is implemented in three phases: background study (phase 1), in-depth study (phase 2), and expansion study (phase 3), which are described below. During the background study, F5CA surveyed First 5 county commissions in counties selected for the DLL Pilot Study about how to engage and support participation in the in-depth study. Counties felt local involvement and incentives would help AIR increase participation. Therefore, F5CA entered into contracts with a lead agency in each of the 16 counties to support the in-depth study by appointing an in-county liaison to communicate with and assist early learning settings, educators, and parents identified by AIR to participate in the DLL Pilot Study and provide incentives to study participants. The total of this investment in county agencies was approximately \$1.5 million. Therefore, of the \$20 million approved by the F5CA Commission in July 2016, approximately \$9 million of the approved funding was dedicated to phases one and two (for evaluation and county support), and the remaining \$11 million for phase three expansion activities and evaluation.

Study Phase 1 – Background Phase

- a. **Purpose:** Identify current supports for DLLs across the state in participating counties and understand county priorities, policies, and infrastructure to support learning outcomes for DLLs and challenges in carrying out efforts to implementing priorities and supporting DLLs.
- b. **Research Questions:**
 - What policies and practices are in place to support DLLs across California? What challenges exist?

- What are county-level contexts and supports provided to early learning and care (ELC) sites serving DLLs?

c. **Design:** Interviews with county leaders to understand local contexts and supports available to ELC settings and the selection of approximately 800 ELC settings to complete a survey about their programs.

A report released February 6, 2020, at a legislative briefing at the State Capitol described the range of local and state supports for DLLs and their families, and early educators who serve young DLLs. This [*The Early Learning and Care Context for Dual Language Learners in California*](#) is available at californiadllstudy.org/reports.

Study Phase 2 – In-depth Phase

a. **Purpose:** Describe the range and distribution of learning experiences for DLLs in California and understand how these experiences are linked to positive child and family outcomes.

b. **Research Questions:**

- What instructional, family engagement, and professional development strategies are associated with positive child and family outcomes?
- How do outcomes vary by group (ages 0 to 2 years and 3 to 5 years), setting type (licensed family childcare homes and centers, and unlicensed community based settings), and context?

c. **Original Design:** Program, provider/educator, family, and child-level data collection in licensed center- and home-based early learning settings, including classroom observations, direct and indirect child assessments, and parent and providers surveys in a subsample (approximately 360) of ELC settings from phase one. Prioritizes diverse common languages spoken in California (including Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Vietnamese), as well as both infants/toddlers and preschoolers.

Modified Design since March 2020 (COVID-19): Additional surveys of families about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic with related research briefs and policy products.

The first set of findings from the in-depth study was released in early October 2020 in a document titled, [*Quick Facts: Early Learning and Care Programs Serving Dual Language Learners in California*](#), and can be found californiadllstudy.org/reports.

Study Phase 3 – Expansion Phase

a. **Purpose:** Provide information about how effective strategies can be sustained, scaled, and expanded to other contexts.

b. Research Questions (modified to address COVID-19):

- To what extent are sites able to implement targeted strategies in the COVID-19 context?
- What are the successes, barriers, and challenges to implementing strategies, and what additional supports are needed?
- What resources are needed to scale and sustain effective strategies?

c. Design: Provide funding to the 16 counties to expand effective strategies to support DLLs in the context of COVID-19 and help identify policy recommendations for overcoming barriers to scaling these strategies. The three overarching goals include:

- Strengthen teacher knowledge and use of instructional strategies that are effective in supporting DLL children's learning and development during COVID-19 and recovery from the pandemic, including English and home language support
- Strengthen family engagement strategies that support DLLs and their families through this public health emergency, prevent DLLs from falling further behind, and emphasize the importance of home language and how to support children's home language development
- Strengthen a systemwide commitment to DLLs and cross-agency plan for supporting DLLs' learning and development as the early learning and care systems rebuilds from the COVID-19 crisis

In addition, the expansion study funding requires counties to:

1. Addresses the needs of DLL families in poverty to help DLL families recover from the effects of COVID-19
2. Distribute age- and language-appropriate books to families