



**October 22, 2020**

**INFORMATION ITEM**

**SUBJECT: DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNER PILOT UPDATE**

**Strategic Plan Priority Area II: Child Development.**

**Goal:** All children birth through age 5 have high-quality, nurturing environments that ensure their learning readiness.

**SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE**

Commissioners will hear an update on the DLL Pilot Study, plans for the expansion phase activities, and how the evaluation is designed to influence policy.

In July 2016, the First 5 California (F5CA) Commission approved \$20 million for the Dual Language Learner (DLL) Pilot Study, to evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of existing early learning, professional development (PD), and family engagement strategies for DLLs in early learning and care (ELC) settings. In 2017, American Institutes for Research (AIR) was selected through a competitive bidding process to serve as the evaluator, and their contract is executed through June 2021 to carry out portions of the study.

COVID-19 caused disruptions in study implementation and required AIR to modify its data collection to accommodate school closures. In July 2020, Commissioners approved a six-month extension of the third study phase (expansion phase) to allow ample time for counties to expand effective strategies for supporting young DLLs and their families and for F5CA to assess their scalability.

Over the past year, the DLL Pilot Study has garnered attention of policymakers and advocates as the State strives to ensure the needs of young DLLs are met through the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and as it plans for how best to provide early learning services through the pandemic and recovery.

## **BACKGROUND OF KEY ISSUES**

Nearly 60 percent of California's children ages 5 and under live in households where a language other than English is spoken (compared to the 22 percent nationwide). Further, nearly 72 percent of the DLLs in California also are members of low-income families, living with income less than 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Research shows bilingualism has cognitive, social, cultural, and academic benefits for today's children and that birth to age 5 is a prime time period for developing bilingualism. Despite the evidence that competence in two languages can be a significant asset, many of California's young DLLs are not adequately supported in early learning and care programs to realize that potential.

The DLL Pilot Study builds upon F5CA's past and current program investments and integrates recent research to support F5CA's vision, "California's children receive the best possible start in life and thrive." Additionally, the Pilot builds state and national research, policy, and policy recommendations emphasizing the importance of effective instructional practices, family engagement, and professional development (PD) for educators, with the goal for California's young DLLs to thrive, develop bilingual ability, be ready for kindergarten, and succeed in school and beyond. Furthermore, it incorporates and builds upon the California Department of Education's investment in [DLL professional development](https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/dllprofdev.asp) (see <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/dllprofdev.asp>).

The goals of the DLL Pilot Study are to:

- Understand strategies used to support children's home language and promote dual language acquisition in a range of early learning setting types, including centers, family child care homes, and unlicensed community-based settings
- Identify the instructional, family engagement, and PD strategies used in early learning and care programs that are associated with positive outcomes for DLL children and their families
- Understand the conditions under which these strategies are most effective and scalable

### **Three Study Phases**

The DLL Pilot Study is implemented in three phases: phase 1 – background phase; phase 2 – in-depth phase; and phase 3 – expansion phase. (See Attachment A, DLL Pilot Study Overview.) Each phase of the study builds on the other. Findings from the background phase informed the framing of the in-depth phase, and information gleaned during the first two phases led to the development of the expansion phase.

The background phase was completed in late 2019 and provided information about county priorities, policies, and infrastructure to support learning outcomes for DLLs and challenges in implementing those priorities to support DLLs. A report summarizing the findings was released on February 6, 2020, with a Legislative Briefing at the State

Capitol, and a copy of the report titled [The Early Learning and Care Context for Dual Language Learners in California](https://californiadllstudy.org/reports) ([californiadllstudy.org/reports](https://californiadllstudy.org/reports)) was emailed to Commissioners in February.

The in-depth phase is currently nearing completion and was designed to identify the range and distribution of learning experiences for DLLs in California and understand how these experiences are linked to positive child and family outcomes. The final expansion phase is designed to explore the scalability of effective PD, family engagement, and infrastructure-building strategies to support DLLs across the early learning and care system.

### **COVID-19 Impact on Study Design**

Amid the implementation of the in-depth phase, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic reached a critical turning point for California. In March 2020, The Governor's stay-at-home orders went into effect. Place-based child and family support services were closed or severely impacted into the foreseeable future. Conditions around the pandemic required AIR to shift the study's focus to ensure the funding met the changing context. AIR updated the study methodology to exclude further site-based data collection and use data already collected and surveys able to be collected electronically to answer the research questions. AIR recently released a research brief summarizing key facts learned from the study's original site director survey about the early learning and care environments DLLs participate in. Following a press release in early October, the brief ([Quick Facts: Early Learning and Care Programs Serving Dual Language Learners in California](#)) was sent to Commissioners. This brief highlighted that pre-COVID-19, most licensed centers and family child care homes served DLLs, but the workforce may not be prepared to meet their needs effectively.

In addition, with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation and in partnership with Early Edge California, AIR also conducted a survey of providers across the state to understand their needs and the needs of families of DLLs during the pandemic. The brief is titled [A System in Jeopardy: California's Early Learning System and its Dual Language Learners During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). The report highlighted the disproportionate effect of school closures and enrollment reductions on DLLs and the significant barriers programs face to reopening. At the time of the survey, 81% of DLLs compared to 72% of non-DLLs were no longer attending the program in which they were enrolled prior to COVID-19 and DLLs were less likely to secure new spots as programs reopened.

### **Expansion Study Focus**

The DLL expansion phase was designed expressly to address the changing landscape and the disparities for DLLs illuminated by COVID-19's impact on the early learning system. The funding is designed to provide counties with flexibility to support instructional, PD, family engagement and infrastructure strategies to meet local needs. Appendix B, Summary of DLL Expansion Phase Projects, highlights how the 16 counties implementing DLL expansion activities are supporting local needs within their

counties and in surrounding counties, and focusing on the most vulnerable DLL children and families.

### **Urgency for Data to Drive Policy**

Policy leaders and state agency partners are tracking the DLL Pilot Study and have expressed interest in the results from the in-depth and expansion phases. The goals of the expansion phase align with many recommendations in the policy platforms authored by Advancement Project California and Early Edge California. (See [\*The Dual Language Learner Policy Platform: Informing California's Early Learning and Care Policies and Investments in 2020–21 and Beyond\*](#) released February 2020 and an addendum titled, [\*COVID-19 Rapid Response: Urgent Needs of Dual Language Learner Children and Families\*](#) released in September. F5CA is working with Early Edge California to ensure the expansion phase evaluation, to the extent possible, provides data to inform the topics addressed in the Policy Platforms so they can further advocate for comprehensive policies to support DLLs.

### **SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND ACTION**

At the July 2016 Commission meeting, Commissioners approved up to \$20 million for the DLL Pilot Study (Fiscal Years 2016–17 to 2020–21). At the July 2019 Commission Meeting, F5CA staff and AIR presented an update on the progress of the DLL Pilot Study, including presentation of preliminary qualitative findings. In April 2020, Commissioners approved a six month time-only extension of the DLL Pilot Study funding to compensate for the delay in carrying out the study due to the COVID-19 restrictions and implement the expansion phase, authorizing implementation through December 2021.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Dual Language Learner Pilot Study Overview
- B. Summary of Dual Language Learner Pilot Expansion Phase Projects
- C. AIR Presentation: DLL Pilot Study Progress Update and New Findings