

# Handbook for Families



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## Dual Language Handbook for Families

This handbook provides general information about the NNPS Dual Language Immersion program. Program implementation may vary slightly from school to school. If you have additional questions about the program or about dual language immersion in general, please contact Helen Small, Instructional Supervisor for World Languages, at [helen.small@nn.k12.va.us](mailto:helen.small@nn.k12.va.us) or 757-283-7850 ext. 10253.

Dual language immersion is currently available at the following schools:

### **Saunders Elementary School**

853 Harpersville Road  
Newport News, VA 23601  
757-591-4781  
Principal: Shannon Pipkin

### **Watkins Early Childhood Center**

21 Burns Drive  
Newport News, VA 23601  
757-591-4815  
Principal: Sue Waxman

Students zoned for Palmer Elementary are also eligible to apply to the program and receive transportation.

### **Acknowledgements:**

Some of the information in this handbook is from Alexandria County Public Schools' *Dual Language Parent Handbook* (2016), which is available online at <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/dual-language/resources.php>.

## What is Dual Language Immersion?

Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs are designed for families who would like their children to learn another language while receiving the same high quality academic curriculum as students throughout the school division.

DLI programs are a form of enrichment education based on over forty years of research showing the advantages of learning a second language through academic content instruction. Programs may be two-way, in which half of the students are from homes where the target language is spoken, or one-way, in which all students come from the same language background (usually English) and are learning the same second language. Dual language programs typically begin in kindergarten or first grade and continue through at least the end of elementary school.

A typical elementary two-way immersion form of DLI is characterized as follows:

- Approximately half of students are from Spanish-speaking homes and half from homes in which English (or another language) is spoken.
- Instruction integrates literacy and academic content knowledge in both languages.
- Curriculum focuses on challenging, age-appropriate academic skills and knowledge aligned to high standards for all students.

DLI, sometimes referred to as Two-Way Immersion (TWI), is a blend of two successful programs: traditional foreign language partial immersion and Developmental Bilingual Education (DBE). In each of these models, students spend at least 50% of the school day learning academic content in a language other than English, from kindergarten or first grade through at least fifth grade, and preferably through twelfth grade.

- In partial immersion programs, students are immersed for at least half of the school day in a second language beginning in the early grades. Partial and full immersion programs have always existed world-wide, and immersion is widely considered to be the most effective model for language learning.
- Developmental Bilingual Education is intended for English learners (ELs) who speak the same minority language, often Spanish (Hamayan, Genesee, & Cloud, 2013, p. 17). Like partial immersion programs, students spend at least 50% of the school day learning in their native language, and the remaining time learning in English. Unlike other programs for ELs, DBE is *additive* in that it continues support in the students' native language, leading to full bilingualism and biliteracy.

### Dual Language “Non-Negotiables”

To meet the definition of a Dual Language or Two-Way Immersion program, the following minimum requirements must be met (Thomas & Collier, 2012, p. 32):

#### *Non-Negotiable Components of Dual Language Education*

- At least 50% of the instructional time must be taught in the non-English (partner) language
- Separation of the two languages for instruction (by content, time, and/or space)
- PK/K-12 commitment (minimum K-5)

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### What are the goals of the program?

All DLI programs share certain goals (Hamayan, Genesee, Cloud, 2013, p. 62):

- High levels of academic achievement
- High levels of literacy and academic proficiency in both languages
- Positive cross-cultural attitudes

### Academic Achievement

All students, regardless of their language background, are expected to meet Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) outcomes for each grade level. Research by Thomas & Collier (2012), among others, has shown that DL students often outperform their peers on end-of-grade tests of reading and math by the end of elementary school. Whether students are learning in English or Spanish, our DL teachers use the NNPS curriculum and Virginia SOL to plan lessons. English- and Spanish-speaking partner teachers work together to ensure that students have the necessary academic vocabulary to succeed in both languages.

### Biliteracy

In most DLI programs, literacy is taught in both Spanish and English beginning in kindergarten. Reading is taught in each language according to how it is taught to native speakers of that language. For example, in English we focus on initial letter sounds of words, whereas in Spanish we emphasize vowel sounds and syllables as the building blocks of words.

NNPS supports simultaneous literacy development, as recommended by research (Escamilla et al, 2014). This approach allows students to learn together and support one another, with each language group serving as a model for the other. Research by Thomas & Collier (2012), among others, has shown that students in similar DLI programs perform up to a grade level higher than their peers on standardized tests of reading by the end of middle school. However, it is important to note that students may appear to lag behind English-only peers in the early grades, as they navigate two different language systems. DL students typically catch up and begin to surpass their same-gap-group peers by the end of third or fourth grade.



### Biculturalism

By blending roughly equal numbers of English and Spanish speakers in each classroom, both languages and cultures are given equal status within the program and the school. Students interact daily with one another, and authentic Spanish-language literature and resources are used as much as possible to reflect Spanish-speaking cultures. Schools are encouraged to highlight Hispanic cultures throughout the building and school year, such as by labeling all areas of the school in Spanish, providing signs and information in both languages, and taking advantage of annual events such as Hispanic Heritage Month (mid-September to mid-October) or National Foreign Language Week (first full week of March).

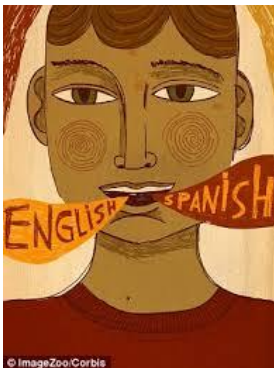
### What are the benefits for students?

The main benefit of DLI is that students exit the program fully bilingual, which carries its own advantages. By starting in kindergarten or earlier, students reach sufficient proficiency in their second language to profit from the cognitive boost that bilingualism affords, which in turn positively

affects their academic progress. According to the National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (Office of Head Start, n.d.), bilingualism leads to measurable benefits in the following domains:

- Cognitive
  - understanding math concepts and solving word problems more easily
  - stronger thinking skills and improved use of logic
  - focusing, remembering, and making decisions more easily
  - improved ability to think about language (metalinguistics)
  - learning other languages more easily
  - delayed onset of dementia
- Social-emotional
  - stronger family and community ties for heritage or native speakers
  - ability to make friends in the second language
  - better self-control (a key indicator of school success)
- Academic
  - more flexible approaches to thinking and problem solving
  - higher levels of abstract thought
  - the ability to ignore irrelevant information
  - less biased thinking and decision-making
- Global
  - increased access to information
  - expanded participation in a global society
  - increased job opportunities and higher salaries (average of \$7,000 more annually)

### How does DLI help English learners?



In addition to the general benefits above of being bilingual and biliterate, ELs in dual language immersion programs progress in English at a faster rate than in traditional ESL programs. Research has shown a connection between development of first language skills, which takes until about 12 years old, and other types of cognitive development (Thomas & Collier, 2012). ELs learning in their first language are able to progress academically at a faster rate, and can transfer literacy skills and academic concepts to their new language. DLI is the only program that has been shown to close the achievement gap in reading for ELs (Thomas & Collier, 2012), which is critical for academic success.

### Are dual language programs effective?

DLI was chosen as an innovative educational program for NNPS because of a large body of research that shows its effectiveness for both ELs and native English-speaking students. Two-way dual language is the only program that has shown full achievement gap closure for English learners (ELs). ELs who participate in dual language programs become fully proficient in a second language without sacrificing their English development (Baker, 2011; Lindholm-Leary, 2009). Spanish-speaking students have the opportunity to become literate in their native language, thus enabling them to transfer skills and concepts to English (Baker, 2011; Genesee, 2004). On state assessments as well as norm-referenced tests given in English, English learners in dual language typically score significantly higher than their peers in traditional ESL programs (Thomas & Collier, 2012).

The Thomas & Collier (2012) research also shows that students from traditionally low-performing gap

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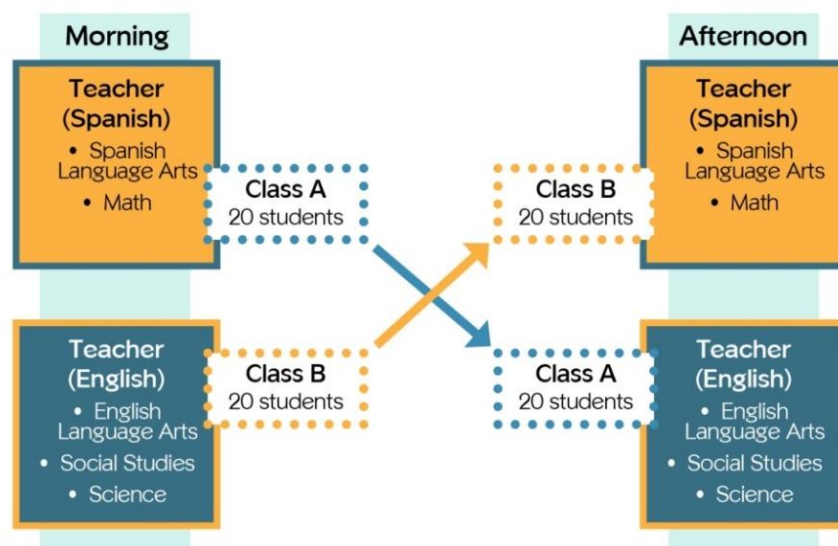
groups such as minority, low SES, and special needs students score higher than their peers in traditional programs, with the greatest gains made by African American children. A 2015 study by the RAND Corporation on behalf of the American Councils for International Education corroborated these findings; by the end of middle school, students in Portland, Oregon, who were randomly assigned to DL classes, tested a grade level above average in reading.

### What is the NNPS program model?

NNPS has chosen a 50-50 two-way model of DLI. This means that students spend at least 50% of the school day learning in Spanish and come from two language backgrounds. This model is used by hundreds of successful program in Utah, Delaware, North Carolina, Georgia, and many other states.

The 50-50 model allows for one Spanish-speaking teacher to meet the needs of twice as many students by partnering with an English-speaking teacher. As seen in Figure 1, students begin the school day with one teacher and switch classrooms and languages at the midpoint of the day. In DL programs, it is important that students learn collaboratively and that teachers carefully support language learners, such as by posting useful phrases, sentence starters, anchor charts, etc., in both language classrooms. At NNPS, math has been taught in Spanish, although the choice of content taught in Spanish may vary from year to year or from grade to grade.

Figure 1. NNPS typical day (elementary)



At Watkins Early Childhood Center, DLI classes are self-contained. The same teacher provides instruction in both languages and may use each language for multiple, shorter blocks of time during the day or may alternate days in Spanish and English. Only students zoned for Palmer or Saunders elementary schools are provided transportation by NNPS if they continue in the program at Saunders.

### How did the program develop in Newport News?

Newport News Public Schools piloted the first dual language kindergarten classes during the school year of 2014-15. Palmer and Saunders Elementary Schools each began with two kindergarten classes, expanding to first grade the following year. In the fall of 2016, Watkins Early Childhood Center added dual language pre-school for students zoned for Palmer and Saunders. These schools were chosen because they have high numbers of Spanish-speakers within their zones. In 2017-18, the elementary



programs were merged and will be housed at Saunders only, but students from both Palmer and Saunders school zones are eligible to apply and receive transportation. The program currently includes grades PreK through three and will continue to expand by one grade level per year through high school.

At the secondary level, DL students will be funneled into one middle school and one high school, where they will take two courses taught in Spanish each year. In addition to a higher level Spanish language class, students will take at least one core subject in Spanish. We anticipate that DL students can take Advanced Placement Spanish Language in ninth grade and will graduate with language proficiency equivalent to at least a minor in Spanish.

### **How are students placed in the program?**

#### **Is this program appropriate for all students?**

Research has consistently shown that all students may benefit from dual language education (Thomas and Collier, 2012, p. 4; Hamayan, Genesee, & Cloud, 2013; Genesee, 1987, pp. 78-99). Any student capable of learning his or her first language is capable of learning a second language. We recommend that students be screened for general kindergarten or school readiness, and that DL Spanish teachers be included in the placement process.

#### **My child has a disability. Is this program appropriate for them?**

In most cases, yes! However, students with disabilities directly related to language processing may experience frustration. Every case is unique, and you should consult with teachers to decide if this program is right for your child. Accommodations are provided as with any other program.

#### **We speak a language other than English or Spanish in the home. Can my child participate?**

Yes! A dual language program is good for students of all language backgrounds, because the teachers are trained in using strategies to support language learning. However, if your child does not already speak one of the languages of instruction, it will be challenging to learn two new languages at the same time.

#### **I already have a child in the program. Can my younger children also participate?**

Yes! We give preference to younger siblings and encourage children to help each other and use their new language at home as much as possible.

#### **When may my child enter the program?**

At NNPS, like most DL programs, English-speaking students may enter the program only during preK or kindergarten, unless they are transferring from another DLI program. After that point it is extremely difficult for a child to reach the necessary language abilities to handle increasingly challenging academic content in Spanish. Exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis.

Spanish-speaking students may enter at any time; however, Spanish-speakers who are cannot read and write in Spanish will experience difficulty if entering during the upper grades. They still benefit from learning in their first language as they develop English-language skills.

#### **How long should my child stay in the program?**

In order to reap the benefits of an immersion program, students must stay in the program for at least five to six years. This is especially important for English-speaking students in the program. If you know that you will be moving out of the area, then this program may not be appropriate.

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Students who stay in the program through high school can expect to reach high levels of language proficiency and literacy in both languages. Students may graduate with the equivalent of at least a minor in Spanish.

### How can my child participate?

If your child is entering preK or kindergarten, and you are zoned for Palmer or Saunders Elementary School, please fill in and submit an application to the school. Applications are available at each school as well as online at <http://www.nnschools.org/worldlanguage/>. Students are selected based on a lottery and are screened for school readiness. Every effort is made to maintain a 50-50 balance of native English and Spanish speakers.


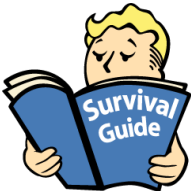

### How long does it take to become proficient in another language?

Children learn social language quickly, but it can take five to seven years to acquire the academic language needed to become fully bilingual and biliterate. This is why it is important to remain in the program at least through elementary school and preferably through high school. The longer your child stays in the program, the greater the benefits.

### What learning stages will my child experience?

Your child will go through the same stages he or she went through to learn the first language, beginning with a silent period that may last up to six months. Most students can understand more than they can produce, and they may be reluctant to speak during the early stages or “on demand” in their second language outside of school. They will move slowly from being able to use simple words and memorized phrases to creating their own sentences and expressing themselves in longer conversations with confidence.

You can expect to see your child go through the stages on the next page as he or she acquires a second language. These language proficiency levels are based on descriptions set by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

	The <b>Novice</b> level is characterized by the use of words, lists, or memorized phrases, but not original sentences or questions. Novices are like parrots – they can respond with things they have learned, but can’t create with language. Novice High speakers are able to do Intermediate tasks, but cannot sustain that level.
	<b>Intermediate</b> language users can express their own ideas in a limited way. They are sometimes called language “survivors,” because they can express themselves just well enough to meet their basic needs. This is the level at which learners become more independent with the language and can engage in conversations about familiar topics. Intermediate High speakers can perform some Advanced tasks, but not consistently.
	<b>Advanced</b> speakers can converse with ease about a variety of topics and are able to narrate past, present, and future events. ACTFL recognizes two additional levels: Superior and Distinguished. However, most adults operate in their native language within the Advanced range for day-to-day personal and professional needs.

### How will the teacher help my child to learn?

Language is learned best when children have a real reason to understand and use it. Immersion programs provide this context by teaching academic content through another language. Students aren't just learning Spanish or English; they are learning math or another subject that is taught in that language. Teachers make sure that the students can understand the meaning of what they are saying by using linguistic and non-linguistic strategies such as:

- Linguistic strategies:
  - Slower speech
  - Clear articulation
  - Controlled vocabulary and sentence length
  - Paraphrasing and repetition
  - Synonyms, antonyms, and cognates
- Non-linguistic strategies
  - Concrete referents (visuals, manipulatives, and concrete objects)
  - Multiple representations (showing a concept in more than one way, such as using more than one visual or adding a gesture/action)
  - Concept organizers that graphically depict information
  - Physical classroom space that supports language learners (charts, posters, displays, bulletin boards, anchor charts, etc.)
  - Kinesics (gestures, facial expressions, body language, and pantomime; demonstrations, acting out the meaning, and modeling; manipulatives and hands-on activities)

### Will the teacher translate into my child's first language, if he or she doesn't understand?

No! Translating, or switching between languages, is not helpful because students will simply wait to hear it in their own language. The English and Spanish speaking teachers plan together and extend the learning into the other language on a regular basis, allowing them to fill in any gaps in understanding. They do not reteach the same material, but a concept taught in one language may be applied in the other class to ensure transfer of learning. Both classrooms typically display similar anchor charts and posters in their respective languages to support learning concepts.

### What is expected of children in a dual language program?

Students are expected to learn the same academic content as any other child at NNPS. In addition, we expect them to:

- Participate actively in learning their two languages;
- Show effort through participation in class activities, including group and independent work;
- Use the language of instruction during class to the greatest extent possible;
- Revisit their work when standards or expectations are not achieved; and
- Show respect for the teacher and classmates, including respect for others' cultures.

### What language outcomes are expected?

The chart on the next page includes our target proficiencies for 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades (adapted from Alexandria County Public Schools, 2016) for learning a second language. Note that the 12<sup>th</sup> grade target is the same as the minimum level required for language teachers to become certified in Virginia.

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STAGE		GENERAL BEHAVIORS OF STUDENTS
Novice	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May go through a silent period</li> <li>• Can point to objects, act, nod, or use gestures to respond</li> <li>• Can say yes or no</li> </ul>
	Mid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can produce isolated words and short, memorized phrases</li> <li>• Relies on context clues to understand</li> <li>• May speak hesitantly</li> </ul>
	High (by end of 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can engage in basic conversation about familiar topics</li> <li>• Uses memorized phrases to ask and answer simple questions</li> <li>• Pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are heavily influenced by the first language</li> </ul>
Intermediate	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can engage in short conversations about familiar topics</li> <li>• Can respond using simple sentences</li> <li>• Makes frequent grammatical errors that often interfere with meaning</li> </ul>
	Mid (by end of 5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can engage in simple conversations about concrete topics</li> <li>• Can respond to direct questions and requests for information</li> <li>• May pause frequently while searching for vocabulary and appropriate grammatical structures</li> </ul>
	High (by end of 8 <sup>th</sup> grade)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engages with confidence in simple interactions about familiar topics</li> <li>• Begins to produce longer responses, but may switch languages when struggling for words</li> <li>• Can state opinions and original thoughts</li> <li>• Makes frequent grammatical errors that sometimes interfere with meaning</li> </ul>
Advanced	Low (by end of 12 <sup>th</sup> grade)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can converse fluently about a variety of social and academic topics</li> <li>• Understands grade-level classroom instruction</li> <li>• Vocabulary is less extensive than a native speaker's</li> <li>• Continues to make non-native grammatical errors that do not interfere with meaning</li> </ul>



### How will my child be assessed?

Dual language students take the same state and district assessments as other students, including Virginia Standards of Learning tests, PALS reading assessments, and others. Students also take classroom-based assessments in the language of instruction.

In addition, DLI students are given the PALS Español or a similar assessment to track progress in learning to read in Spanish, although English speakers are not expected to perform at the same level as on the English PALS. Teachers also monitor student growth in Spanish through writing samples and other means. Students will take a nationally normed assessment of Spanish proficiency at the

end of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

### What if my child is struggling in the dual language program?

Remember that it takes five to seven years to become biliterate, and that students may appear to lag behind peers until third or fourth grade. Learning a second language while learning content is challenging, but worth it. Well-implemented programs show remarkable gains by the end of elementary or middle school. Families are encouraged to commit to the program through at least fifth grade.

If your child begins to struggle, it is likely due to the increased academic rigor at each new grade level rather than the language of instruction. Second grade is often when students begin to confront more challenging expectations for homework and academic content, whether they are in a dual language class or not. This is normal and does not necessarily mean that the dual language program isn't working for your child. Discuss concerns with your child's teacher and follow the teacher's suggestions to support your child academically at home.

If you continue to have a concern about learning difficulties beyond the expected challenges related to learning a second language, we suggest the following steps:

- Meet with teacher(s) to discuss concerns and plan interventions. Your child may be invited to attend.
- After interventions have been implemented, you may meet with the building principal and/or teacher(s) to discuss progress and next steps.
- If the interventions are unsuccessful and you feel that your child cannot benefit from the program, then you may choose to withdraw the child from dual language. We recommend that this take place at the end of the school year.
  - Parents will be asked to submit a DLI withdrawal form (available at the school)
  - Students who withdraw may not re-enter the program.
  - DLI students not zoned for Saunders will return to their zoned school.

### What is expected of families in a dual language program?

Families are expected to:

- be full partners in their child's education;
- communicate regularly with both teachers;
- uphold the program's standards and expectations;
- ensure that students attend school regularly and arrive on time;
- read with students in the home language (usually English or Spanish); and
- commit long-term to this program (at least through elementary school).



### How can I support my child?

Families are valuable partners and can support their children's learning in many ways. Both English- and Spanish-speaking families are encouraged to read with their children in their native language, and books may be sent home to support continued development of the home language. This is especially important for Spanish, because it is a minority language in an English-dominant society.

You can help your child by:

- Encouraging friendships with students who speak the other language.
- Understanding that it takes time to learn a second language. Be patient and encourage your child to persist.
- Asking your child to explain what he or she is learning and doing. Your child should do this in the home language.
- Developing a working relationship with your child's teacher.



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- Providing a quiet work space for your child so that he or she can work without outside interruptions. It is difficult to complete work in one language when hearing or listening to a different language.
- Reading and speaking to your child frequently in your home language.
- You may be interested in learning the second language. This is great, and shows your child that you value language learning. However, you are not expected to model the other language if you are not yet proficient in it. Children will benefit more when you talk to them in your stronger language. This will develop a strong foundation in the home language, thereby preparing them to acquire their second language.

### What about homework?

- It is the responsibility of teachers to ensure that students understand the homework assignments so that they can be completed *independently* at home.
- Students are responsible for completing the assignment *independently*, in the language of instruction.
- Ask your child to explain his or her assignments to you and tell you about what he or she is learning. Students should be able to do this in the home language.
- To ensure students continue to develop each of their languages, you are discouraged from translating homework. When a student is experiencing difficulty with homework assignments, he or she should attempt to complete the assignment to the best of his or her ability.
- You should communicate difficulties directly to the teacher(s).



### What else can I do to support my child at home?

- Make a good-faith commitment to continue in the dual language program at least through the end of grade 5.
- Ask questions and monitor your child's learning in Spanish and all subject areas, including overseeing out-of-class work, on-task behavior, and the student's demonstration of understanding.
- Check your child's backpack daily for messages from your child's teacher(s).
- When issues or questions emerge concerning your child's progress and how to assist your child, please the teacher(s) first.
- Take an active role in your child's learning experience.
- Watch the school calendar for open houses, family forums, and school events related to dual language.
- Consider volunteering in the classroom or joining the Dual Language Parent Advisory Committee. Submit an application (in this handbook) to Helen Small at [helen.small@nn.k12.va.us](mailto:helen.small@nn.k12.va.us) or mail to  
Helen Small, World Languages  
Newport News Public Schools  
12465 Warwick Blvd.  
Newport News, VA 23606

### What other resources about dual language are available for families?

Additional resources for families include:

- Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) Parent Questions about Two-Way Immersion at [http://www.cal.org/twi/toolkit/PI/P\\_QA/parent\\_qs.htm](http://www.cal.org/twi/toolkit/PI/P_QA/parent_qs.htm)
- CAL TWI website at <http://www.cal.org/twi/> for TWI Toolkit and other information
- ¡Colorín colorado! bilingual website for educators and families of English language learners at <http://www.colorincolorado.org/>
- Multilingual Parenting website at <http://multilingualparenting.com/>
- Multilingual Children website at <http://www.multilingualchildren.org/index.html>
- NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements at <https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements> for a deeper understanding of language proficiency levels
- Research supporting dual language immersion:
  - <http://empowercharter.org/what-does-the-research-say-about-dual-language-immersion/>
  - <https://www.americancouncils.org/news/why-dual-language-immersion-approach-will-change-achievement-american-public-schools>
  - [http://www.berkeleyschools.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/TWIAstounding\\_Effectiveness\\_Dual\\_Language\\_Ed.pdf?864d7e](http://www.berkeleyschools.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/TWIAstounding_Effectiveness_Dual_Language_Ed.pdf?864d7e)
  - <http://www.thomasandcollier.com/assets/jncl-nclis-white-paper-on-dual-language-education.pdf>

For more information about the NNPS Dual Language Immersion Program, please contact Helen Small, Instructional supervisor for world languages, at [helen.small@nn.k12.va.us](mailto:helen.small@nn.k12.va.us) or 757-283-7850 ext. 10253, or visit <http://www.nnschools.org/worldlanguage>.

Applications and informational flyers are available from each school, from the School Board Office at 12465 Warwick Boulevard, or from the NNPS website at <http://www.nnschools.org/worldlanguage>.





### What are some myths about language learning?

The following myths and facts are quoted from and fully cited in Hamayan, Genesee, & Cloud (2013).

**MYTH:** *Young children are linguistic sponges – they can acquire a second language easily and quickly with little formal instruction.*

**FACT:** Second language learning is a challenging and lengthy process for children. Studies indicate that it can take children a minimum of two and up to five or seven years to achieve advanced proficiency in academic English. Even mastery of basic grammar and phonology can take ELs living in monolingual English communities more than two years.

**MYTH:** *More time in English in school results in higher levels of achievement in English.*

**FACT:** Contrary to popular belief, beginning instruction in English earlier in elementary school and providing more instruction in English during the elementary grades do not result in better outcomes in English for either native speakers of English or ELs.

**MYTH:** *Language minority parents don't support dual language education. They want English only.*

**FACT:** Some language minority parents may feel that way, but most families welcome the opportunity to maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage once they are assured that their children will develop the highest level of English proficiency possible.

**MYTH:** *A few years in a DL program will bring advantages for a lifetime, so any amount of time in a DL program is worthwhile.*

**FACT:** It can take up to six years of extended exposure to academic language to become fully proficient in that language. If we do not give students that amount of time, they may not attain full academic language proficiency and their mastery of academic material taught through that language may become a challenge.

**MYTH:** *Young children are such good second language learners that simply exposing them to the new language is sufficient for them to acquire full native-like competence in that language.*

**FACT:** That might be true when it comes to learning a second language for day-to-day social communication. However, when it comes to learning academic language, there is growing research evidence that school-age second language learners benefit from systematic and explicit instruction of difficult-to-acquire aspects of language. In other words, when teachers explicitly and systematically focus L2 students' attention on aspects of the L2 that they have not yet mastered and create opportunities for self-correction, students show improvements in acquisition.

**MYTH:** *People often think that bilingual code-mixing (the use of words or grammatical patterns from two languages in the same sentence or utterance) is a sign that the child is confused, is not acquiring language properly, and may even have a language impairment.*

**FACT:** There has been extensive scientific research on bilingual code-switching in children acquiring different language combinations. There is absolutely no evidence from this research that code-mixing indicates language delay or problems. To the contrary, this research shows that children mix their two languages systematically so that they avoid breaking the grammatical rules of either language; three-year-old bilingual children have this ability. Children code-mix for a number of reasons: They do not know a word in the language they are currently using but know it in their other language ("lexical gap filling"), there is no appropriate word in the

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language they are currently using but there is in their other language, or it is an expression of their bilingual identity.

**MYTH:** *People think that parents of minority language children (children who speak a language other than English at home) should use English in the home to prepare them for schooling in English.*

**FACT:** It is not recommended that minority language parents who do not speak English well use English to raise their children. There are several reasons for this. First, if parents do not speak English well, they will not be able to provide good models of English to their children and, thus, their children's acquisition of English will be of little benefit in school. Second, when minority language parents try to raise their children in a language they have not mastered, they are unable to communicate effectively with them and, thus, are unable to fulfill the critical socializing role that all parents must play in their children's development. Third, research shows that minority language parents are able to support their children's transition to schooling in English if they use the home language, especially in ways that are related to academic language and literacy development, because these kinds of skills transfer from the home language to English.

**MYTH:** *If you can hold a conversation fluently, you are proficient in that language.*

**FACT:** Being proficient in a language in school entails much more than being able to hold a conversation in that language. Students need to be able to understand how to use academic language to discuss and learn about different subjects in the curriculum, and they need to be able to communicate in different settings and with different audiences.

**MYTH:** *Treating each language of a dual language program the same is the best way to respect the equality of both languages.*

**FACT:** Because of the tremendous power of English, it is often necessary to raise the status of the non-English language above that of English to balance the value of the two languages.

**MYTH:** *You have to wait until students have a solid base in oral language before beginning formal instruction in literacy.*

**FACT:** You can start to teach reading and writing explicitly to children by the time they reach first grade and, in fact, literacy instruction can begin from the very beginning—as soon as children are exposed to their new language—if it is done in developmentally appropriate and meaningful way. However, since students can more easily read what they can talk or think about, our lesson framework always begins with a concrete activity that becomes the source for meaningful oral language use which is, in turn, linked to reading and writing instruction.

**MYTH:** *Translated books are best because they are familiar stories and easy to find.*

**FACT:** Translated books may not depict the language in a truly authentic cultural fashion. While high-quality translated bilingual books can lend themselves to the exploration of many cross-linguistic and cross-cultural activities, it is important for students to have firsthand experiences understanding both languages and cultures in literature written by bona fide members of those linguistic communities.

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Dual Language Parent Volunteer Interest Form

Submit to Helen Small at [helen.small@nn.k12.va.us](mailto:helen.small@nn.k12.va.us) or mail to:

Helen Small, World Languages  
Newport News Public Schools  
12465 Warwick Blvd.  
Newport News, VA 23606

Name(s) of Parent/Guardian(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Language: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) and grade(s) of each current Dual Language student:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

**I am interested in the following:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Joining the Dual Language Parent Advisory Committee

\_\_\_\_\_ Volunteering in the classroom (reading with students, sharing cultural information, chaperoning field trips, assisting the teacher in other ways)

\_\_\_\_\_ In English

\_\_\_\_\_ In Spanish

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_





