

**Materials Prepared for ACPS School Board Public Hearing
January 23, 2020**

- I. Continued Strengthening of Dual Language (DL) Programming in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), January 2020 (JAES/MVCS Joint DL PTA Leadership)
- II. ACPS Dual Language Program- Look How Far We've Come! (2015-2108)
- III. ACPS Dual Language Five Year Program Goals Summary (2015-2020)
- IV. Dual Language In Alexandria City Public Schools (Excerpt DL Parent Handbook, 2016)
- V. Strengthening Dual Language (DL) Programming in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), April 2018 (JAES/MVCS Joint DL PTA Leadership)

Continued Strengthening of Dual Language (DL) Programming in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), January 2020

In spring 2018, the leadership of DL Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Committees at Mount Vernon Community School (MVCS) and John Adams Elementary School (JAES) joined together to outline top concerns and recommendations related to DL programming in ACPS (see 2018 DL Advocacy Platform--Attachment 1). Our concerns were rooted in key action items that had yet to be fully implemented that were outlined in the ACPS DL Strategic Plan of 2015-2020. MVCS and JAES parents subsequently briefed the concerns and sought the input of key ACPS leaders, including Superintendent Hutchins, Interim Superintendent Berlin, Chief Academic Officer Mozingo, and Director of English Learners, Dr. Nickerson in a series of meetings that also included a fall 2018 DL open house with most ACPS School Board candidates.

ACPS not only listened to parents but also acted on many of the concerns. Of particular note, ACPS is on the cusp of a significant expansion of DL learning in the city; two new programs will launch this fall at Francis C. Hammond Middle School (FCHMS) and George Washington Middle School (GWMS), and ACPS also alerted PTA leadership to its intent to expand DL learning at John Adams to more students. These noteworthy expansionary efforts build upon significant improvements in the quality and reach of the programs at MVCS and JAES since 2015.

Let us be clear, this is a good news story. The DL program in Alexandria is stronger today than it was in 2018, and the program in 2018 was stronger than it was in 2015. ACPS, in alignment with its vision to work with the community to make ACPS the best it has ever been, both listened to and acted on parent input.

However, continued DL progress in Alexandria is needed now more than ever in light of the planned expansionary efforts. For example, ACPS is now in the final year of its five year strategic plan, and key goals and action steps to support teachers and improve student bilingual and biliteracy outcomes have not been achieved. Meanwhile, the DL Leadership Committee that authored the plan in 2015--comprised of parents, teachers, and school and district administrators--has not been reconstituted since it was disbanded in May 2018, leaving no city-wide forum for systematically reviewing progress or developing a new Strategic Plan that covers 2020-2025. Nor does it provide a forum for parents to continue to understand the direction or to share recommendations or concerns.

With two new programs launching this fall, and an expansion at John Adams on the horizon, the MVCS and JAES DL PTA Committees have once again joined forces to outline our top concerns and recommendations related to the DL program in the city. We again speak as one voice representing current and future DL families in the City of Alexandria. We respectfully ask that you take action on the following priorities:

1. **Improve Accountability Through Robust Data Sharing and Follow-up on Data Results.** ACPS on November 22, 2019 shared with the School Board a data overview that compared students in DL with non-DL students division-wide based

on Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) and Virginia Standards of Learning academic achievement data. The report, which per ACPS leadership will be published annually, reflects significant progress in the city, as this was the first report published in the program's 25+ year history in Alexandria on how children in the program are progressing relative to their peers who are not in a DL program. The data report concludes that the Division needs to re-visit practices in the dual language program to optimally enhance student achievement and reestablish a city-wide leadership committee. The memo to the school board also acknowledged that no English language development progress information for ELs or Spanish language or literacy assessment information was included.

Action Items:

- *Communicate to the community easy-to-understand takeaways and related action items to both learn about the program and to enhance achievement. Frame the data in the context of national results on student progress, i.e. students in DL programs are expected to initially fall behind their non-DL peers and then accelerate in the later years, research states that it takes 5-7 years to learn a second language, etc.*
 - *Update report to include WIDA progress data for English language learners, as well as aggregated performance data for this year's 5th graders to help parents assess whether their kids are well positioned to excel in a MS Social Studies class in Spanish.*
 - *Detail progress against benchmark scores. It is one thing to understand how kids did on the SOLs and PALs at a point in time, but an entirely different level of understanding comes from learning how kids progressed based on where they started, some of whom started with no English background.*
 - *Identify the drivers behind the performance differences between the two elementary schools, examining why JAES appears to be outperforming MVCS. These two schools employ different models, as JAES students receive more Spanish instruction in grades K-2 via its 70/30 model. If this is a driver behind the achievement differences, consider adopting the 70/30 model Division wide.*
2. **Strengthen Spanish Language and Literacy Component in Grades 3-5.** The 2015-2020 DL Strategic Plan called for an evidence-based curriculum for Spanish Language Arts to be put in place for Grades 3-5 by August 2017. ACPS has not implemented a Spanish Language arts curriculum to date, a deficiency that undoubtedly will limit student preparation for middle school DL. Teachers are expected to integrate Spanish language arts into Science. Parents of grades 3-5 students also do not consistently receive clear information about Spanish language and literacy progress and there is no formal progress report from ACPS provided for Spanish language and literacy progress as was outlined in the strategic plan for any of the grades.

Action Items:

- *As set forth in the Strategic Plan, implement a Grades 3-5 evidence-based curriculum for Spanish language arts that incorporates best practice in DL instruction, is aligned to standards, and is vertically articulated.*
- *Adopt existing qualitative and quantitative measures of Spanish language and literacy to demonstrate progress, and share existing measures with families. Incorporate these metrics into the ACPS report card process and parent-teacher conferences.*
- *Support the principals at both schools in changes they will need to make in the master schedule to include a Spanish Language arts block in grades 3-5. Unless the school day is made longer, adjustments to other classes/encore will need to be made to accommodate the addition.*

3. **Position Our Kids for Success in a DL Middle School (MS) Program.** ACPS is pursuing expansion starting in SY 2020-2021 of the DL program model to the middle school level to achieve the program goals bilingualism, biliteracy, and cross-cultural understanding for students, and to promote the cognitive benefits and high levels of academic achievement associated with bilingualism and dual language education. The MS program will consist of two courses in Spanish: Spanish language arts and one content area, social studies. We applaud ACPS for responding to requests from parents of current dual language students, a majority of whom have indicated in annual parent surveys that they would pursue this option if offered.

We are aware that ACPS is rapidly developing a MS curriculum and developing a communication rollout plan, with initial school-based sessions with counselors scheduled in the coming weeks. We are particularly concerned, however, that due to the aforementioned lack of explicit Spanish language and literacy instruction in grades 3-5 and the absence of quantitative and qualitative measures to assess student Spanish language progress, rising MS students will have a difficult transition to a MS program. We also are concerned about ensuring the the two schools have equitable programs and are fearful that a program at Hammond may be too small to thrive. Lastly, given the little information that has been shared with parents there is a concern that there may not be the uptake in the program that ACPS anticipates.

Action Items:

- *Communication. We highly recommend that joint MVCS and JAES “town hall” sessions with parents on the MS DL programs be scheduled ASAP as parents are already actively thinking about middle school options.*
- *MS Transition. We believe a bridge program in the summer, between 5th and 6th grades, will be critical to ensuring a smooth transition to MS, particularly given the fact that our students have never learned Social Studies in Spanish,*

but rather Math and Science, and they have widely different levels of Spanish language capabilities. A bridge program would be an asset to the students and their MS teachers and set the kids up for success before they hit the ground running in a MS environment, get overwhelmed, and drop the program.

- *Equity. As expressed to ACPS leadership during our advocacy for a single MS program in Alexandria, we are concerned that the program at Hammond will be too small to thrive due to the small size of the current 5th grade class, resulting in a lack of student equity between the two MS DL programs. We expect the issue of program equity and class size to be addressed explicitly in the rollout briefings to parents, with specifics provided on how DL students at FCHMS can take advantage of DL opportunities afforded to the significantly larger program at GWMS.*
- *Differentiated Learning. The November 2019 data overview and our experiences with our children point to the need for the MS DL program to offer robust differentiated learning and extra assistance for students to ensure success in a DL Social Studies course. Students at both MS programs who require extra help with Social Studies in Spanish should be able to access bilingual tutors during after school tutoring hours or the Saturday Academy.*
- *Ensure Proper Staff Resourcing. Robust staffing will need to be in place to ensure proper strategic and tactical scaffolding between elementary, middle, and potentially a high school program, as well as between courses at the elementary and middle school levels. The city cannot afford from an achievement perspective to staff an expanded DL program on a shoestring, and it should consider adding another DL-focused coordinator within the Central Office to take on the middle school mandate and work closely with the existing elementary-level coordinator. This would also afford ACPS the opportunity to incorporate the work of the DL program into the ACPS strategic plan that is under development, addressing equity and the large numbers of EL students in ACPS.*

4. Work Toward a Spanish DL Program Available to Families Across the City.

The city's current model does not provide for equal access opportunities to DL education for all students, including the growing population of EL students in the city who would benefit greatly from the program (research shows that DL programs bring EL students up to English proficiency faster than non-DL programs). Expanding JAES to a whole-school DL program available by lottery to city communities would expand the opportunity of becoming biliterate in reading/writing and bilingual in speaking/listening to several hundred more children across ACPS.

Action Items

- *As part of the plan to expand the DL program at JAES, consider making it a DL hub in the linguistically diverse and densely populated West End and available by lottery to more city residents.*
- *Consider making JAES--with its DL, Sympatico music, and CETA programs--a school for “language and the arts” that complements the STEM-focused Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School. Ferdinand Day also could provide a nearby alternative for JAES in-boundary residents who do not want to attend or cannot commit to six years in a DL program.*

5. Implement Innovative Strategies to Recruit and Retain DL Staff. With the city’s DL expansion and the increasing popularity and success of DL programs in the region and throughout the U.S., the demand for qualified DL teachers, bilingual long-term substitutes, and knowledgeable administrators continues to grow.

Action Item:

- *We recommend increased support from Human Resources at the ACPS Central Office to think creatively and actively recruit and retain qualified bilingual DL teachers and staff for both schools. We would also like to see if there are additional partnerships that can be developed with higher education teacher preparation programs as a pipeline for DL teachers, reciprocity agreements, bonuses and incentive pay, along with pursuing flexibilities or waivers from the state when appropriate.*

We respectfully ask that you give your full consideration to our joint MVCS-JAES recommendations to strengthen a DL program. We also recommend that the School Board dedicate a portion of a work session exclusively to DL learning in Alexandria, as a strong DL program is key to ACPS’s vision to grow its students into fully-rounded global citizens who will be the next leaders of their generation. Our Committees will happily clarify any of these issues if you would like to meet with us.



DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM

LOOK HOW FAR WE'VE COME!

BEFORE 2015

- Limited infrastructure to support the program.
- Literacy was taught only in English; instruction did not support program goals of biliteracy and bilingualism.
- Expectations were not yet established for student progress in Spanish.
- Accountability for implementing the program as it was intended, adhering to dual language principles, or for meeting dual language program goals, was not evident.
- Little systematic professional development to support the goals of dual language.
- Families had limited information about expectations for their children and how the program works.

NOW (2018)

- Committed leadership, program handbook, biliteracy curriculum, professional development and coaching in place to guide program implementation using best practices for dual language.
- Students learn to read, write, listen and speak in both languages from Kindergarten to Grade 2.
- In Grades 3-5 students continue to develop biliteracy and bilingualism within the context of science.
- Grade-level expectations for Grades K-5 and Spanish Language Arts progress report Grades K-2.
- System in place for monitoring program implementation, demographics, and student outcomes over time.
- The first cohort of students who received a "full" dual language experience is now in 3rd grade and their performance can be analyzed and compared with non-dual language students.
- Teachers receive ongoing professional development, modeling and coaching in strategies to support biliteracy and learning academic subjects through a second language.
- Written communication includes family handbook, web page, info packets, and newsletters. In addition, we hold regular events including DL open house, back to school night, DL Family Night, multicultural nights, principal coffees and more.

ACPS DL Five-Year Program Goals (2015 - 2020)

1. Program Structure	<p>1.1. <i>Align the program structure with best practices and non-negotiables in Dual Language education (ACPS 2020 1.1).</i></p> <p>1.2. <i>By the end of SY 2015-16, develop a plan for a Dual Language Pre-K at John Adams (ACPS 2020 1.3).</i></p> <p>1.3. <i>By SY 2018-19, expand the Dual Language program to the secondary level (ACPS 2020 1.1).</i></p>
2. Curriculum	<p>2.1 <i>By the end of April 2016, ensure teachers have access to Spanish and English multicultural online and print materials to support reading in the content areas for the range of literacy levels of their students (ACPS 2020 1.5, 1.9).</i></p> <p>2.2. <i>By August 2017 have a K – 2 evidence-based holistic biliteracy curriculum in place that incorporates best practices in Dual Language instruction. The curriculum will be aligned to standards, coordinated across English and Spanish language arts, integrated with academic content, vertically articulated, and follow an authentic phonics sequence for each language. (ACPS 2020 1.1, 1.3, 1.9).</i></p> <p>2.3 <i>By August 2017, have a Grades 3-5 evidence-based curriculum for Science/Spanish language arts in place that incorporates best practices in Dual Language instruction. The curriculum will be aligned to standards, and vertically articulated (ACPS 2020 1.1, 1.3, 1.9).</i></p> <p>2.4 <i>By August 2020, have a Grades 6 - 8 evidence-based middle school dual language curriculum in place for Spanish language arts and one subject area to be taught in Spanish(ACPS 2020 1.1, 1.3, 1.9).</i></p>
3. Assessment and Accountability	<p>3.1 <i>By December 2015, have an Assessment and Accountability Action Plan ready to implement (ACPS 2020 1.2, 6.2).</i></p> <p>3.2 <i>By December 2015, leverage the current ACPS student information system to track student demographic and outcome data and to monitor student growth over time toward program goals (ACPS 2020 6.2).</i></p> <p>3.3 <i>By August 2016, have a student progress report in place for Spanish language arts (ACPS 2020 6.2).</i></p>
4. Staff Quality & Professional Learning	<p>4.1 <i>Hire the most qualified Dual Language staff possible and create an environment that motivates and retains them (ACPS 2020 3.1).</i></p> <p>4.2 <i>Foster a culture in which professionals collaborate closely to share knowledge, skills and best practices aimed at improving student academic achievement, language and literacy in Spanish and English (ACPS 2020 3.2).</i></p> <p>4.3 <i>Expand professional learning opportunities that address assessed needs of staff and that provide teachers and other staff members with multiple opportunities for improving their individual effectiveness in supporting the program goals and philosophy (ACPS 2020 3.3).</i></p>
5. Family and Community	<p>5.1 <i>Establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect to ensure effective communication in the Dual Language program, enhanced engagement with families, and culturally responsive relationships (ACPS 2020 2.2).</i></p> <p>5.2 <i>Collaborate with families and community members in the ongoing development of the Dual Language program (ACPS 2020 2.1, 2.3)</i></p> <p>5.3 <i>Implement an advocacy plan to ensure ongoing support from the community, School Board, and State (ACPS 2020 2.5).</i></p>

Dual Language Non-Negotiables

- **Minimum 50%** and up to 90% of instruction is provided in the target language.
- The two languages are **strictly separated** for instruction, with the exception of deliberately planned **opportunities for cross-linguistic transfer**.
- The program is offered for a minimum duration of **six years** (at least K-5 and preferably PK-12).

Dual Language in Alexandria City Public Schools

The Spanish-English two-way immersion program in Alexandria City Public Schools is designed for families who would like their children to learn another language while receiving the same high quality academic curriculum as students throughout the division. Alexandria City Public Schools offers K-5 Spanish-English two-way dual language programs at two schools. The first program was established at John Adams Elementary School over 20 years ago. A second program was begun at Mount Vernon Community School in the 2000-01 school year. The program at John Adams consists of a single strand within a school. Mount Vernon is in the process of becoming a whole school dual language program.

What are the vision and goals of the Dual Language program?

In keeping with the vision of Alexandria City Public Schools, the Dual Language program aims to become an international model of excellence in two-way immersion education. The mission of the Dual Language program is to provide an enriched bilingual, biliterate, and culturally competent educational experience for students.

The goals of the program are for students to...

- listen, speak, read and write in two (or more) languages
- attain high levels of academic and social-emotional competence
- become lifelong cross-cultural learners and critical thinkers.

What is a dual language program?

Dual language 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. The Spanish-English two-way immersion form of dual language 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.

Are dual language programs effective?

Research has shown that both native English speakers and native Spanish speakers in well-implemented dual language programs tend to excel academically, out-performing their peers in traditional educational settings. Students in dual language programs demonstrate significantly higher academic achievement than their peers not in dual language (Thomas & Collier, 2012).

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). Schools that offer dual language programs can expect one-fifth to one-sixth of the achievement gap for English learners to close each year (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Strengthening Dual Language (DL) Programming in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), April 2018

Since drafting the DL Strategic Plan in 2015, Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) has made significant improvements in the quality and reach of its two DL programs at Mount Vernon Community School (MVCS) and John Adams Elementary School (JAES). Please see the attached highlights for more information on the tremendous work that has gone into strengthening the city's DL program.

- The five-year DL strategic plan was authored by the DL Leadership Committee with representation from parents, teachers, and school and district administrators.
- It laid out ambitious goals and concrete action steps to support teachers and improve student bilingual and biliteracy outcomes at MVCS and JAES.

The DL Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Committees at MVCS and JAES are highly concerned that key action items outlined in the DL Strategic Plan are not being fully implemented. With the recent shift in central office ACPS coordination of the DL program there is an added concern about lack of momentum and gaps in oversight and support at this critical time. Meanwhile, ACPS is educating more students than ever—13.5% of the K-5 population—under the two-way Spanish-English immersion model who most certainly would benefit from the Strategic Plan action items.

- MVCS has moved to a school-wide DL program that covers 827 students (92%) of the total K-5 population.
- The JAES DL program has 267 students in DL, which will soon represent approximately 50% of JAES elementary classrooms due to the ACPS redistricting initiative.

The MVCS and JAES DL PTA Committees have joined forces to outline our top concerns and recommendations related to the DL program in the city. We speak as one voice representing current and future DL families in the City of Alexandria. We respectfully ask that you take action on the following priorities:

1. **Improve Accountability Through Progress Reporting and Robust Data Sharing.** Parents of K-5 students do not consistently receive clear information about English and Spanish language and literacy progress. Amid this progress reporting vacuum, DL parents also have not received data on how children in the program are progressing relative to their peers who are not in a DL program. While many parents registered their children for DL based on ACPS talking points that research indicates students who participate in well-implemented DL programs typically perform as well or better than their peers who are not in DL programs a certain number of years into the program, we need ACPS to back these talking points with data specific to ACPS.

Action Items:

- *Adopt existing qualitative and quantitative measures of Spanish language and literacy to demonstrate progress, and share existing measures of English language development with both Spanish and English dominant families. Incorporate these metrics into the ACPS report card process.*

- *Make data available to parents and community stakeholders and continue to do so on a yearly basis. The cohort of MVCS and JAES DL students, starting with this year's 3rd grade, have been identified within the ACPS system. Their information can now be used to study differences and track/understand progress between DL and traditional classrooms. While Standards of Learning (SOLs) test results for 3rd grade are not available until the end of the year, other demographic and progress data can and should be shared (PALS, Fontes and Pinelle, WIDA, SRI, SMI, etc).*

2. **Establish a DL Middle School Program.** An important focus of the DL Strategic plan is the expansion of the program to the secondary level by August 2020. The identified timeline for this action in the plan have not been met. We urge you to put in place a middle school program to avoid devaluing the significant investment the city has made in all DL students and to ensure their development into biliterate, bilingual, and culturally competent Alexandria citizens.

Action Item: *As set forth in the Strategic Plan, grant approval to move forward with establishing a middle school DL program by August 2020. The original plan called for this year's 3rd graders—over 150 students at MVCS and JAES—to begin middle school in a content-based DL program where Spanish is taught through academic classes.*

3. **Implement Innovative Strategies to Recruit and Retain DL Staff.** Vacancies are impacting the learning and successful implementation of the DL model. With the increasing popularity and success of DL programs in the region and throughout the U.S., the demand for qualified DL teachers, bilingual long-term substitutes, and knowledgeable administrators continues to grow.

Action Item: *We recommend increased support from Human Resources at the ACPS Central Office to think creatively and actively recruit qualified bilingual DL teachers and staff for both schools. We would also like to see if there are additional partnerships that can be developed with teacher preparation programs as a pipeline for DL teachers, reciprocity agreements, along with pursuing flexibilities or waivers from the state when appropriate.*

4. **Work Towards a City-Wide DL Offering by Expanding JAES Program.** The city's current model does not provide for equal access opportunities to DL education for all students, including the growing population of EL students in the City who would benefit greatly from the program. Expanding JAES to a whole-school DL program available by lottery to all city communities would expand the opportunity of becoming biliterate in reading/writing and bilingual in speaking/listening to several hundred more children across ACPS.

Action Item: *Consider expanding the DL program at JAES via a gradual, phased-in approach following Mt. Vernon's model. A DL hub in the linguistically diverse and densely populated West End would complement the new Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School that is being promoted as a STEM school. Ferdinand T. Day also could provide an alternative only a half a block away for JAES in-boundary residents who do not want to attend or cannot commit to six years in a DL program.*

We respectfully ask that you give your full consideration to our joint MVCS-JAES recommendations. Our Committees will happily clarify any of these issues if you would like to meet with us.