

## ACPS Dual Language Program Proposal: Pilot Pre-K Program

### Introduction

An extensive body of research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of well-implemented early childhood education programs on the academic success of emergent bilingual students (The Brookings Institution, 2017). As dual language programs continue to grow in US schools, more and more districts across the region and nation are expanding their programs to include our youngest learners. Research in both fields highlights a firm foundation of high-quality, shared best practices that, when combined, can significantly improve outcomes for multilingual learners.

### *Shared Best Practices and Research*

Early childhood and dual language education share several key best practices that promote the success of multilingual learners, including:

- Thematic instruction focused on teaching “big ideas” that integrate concept development, knowledge, and skills;
- Fostering oral language and vocabulary development;
- Teaching within the zone of proximal development;
- Beginning with concrete instructional strategies (i.e., use of manipulatives, realia) and moving to more abstract instruction; and
- The use of ongoing, formative assessment to inform instruction (Howard et al., 2018; Robles & Pryor, 2014).

Furthermore, decades of research in the field of language acquisition has demonstrated the critical role of continued home language development in early childhood, as well as its positive effect on achievement in the language of schooling (Howard et al., 2018). In the early years of life, children are naturally primed for language acquisition, and are also developing the fundamental early literacy skills (i.e., oral language skills, phonemic awareness, vocabulary) that will impact their language and literacy development as they move through elementary school and beyond. Students who develop and maintain strong bilingual skills throughout their schooling reap myriad benefits, including:

- Healthy social-emotional and identity development;
- Stronger metalinguistic skills and the ability to transfer literacy skills between their languages;
- Greater cognitive flexibility, stronger attention and abstract thinking skills;
- More developed executive functioning and problem-solving skills; and
- Higher levels of tolerance and interest in learning from other peoples and cultures (WIDA, 2014).

### Proposal

The Dual Language and Early Childhood Programs jointly propose the conversion of one existing pre-K classroom to dual language for SY23-24. This class will be housed at the Early Childhood Center (ECC), located in the facility shared with John Adams Elementary School (JAES). The pilot will be open to families registering for VPI (Virginia Preschool Initiative) who have an interest in dual language education, with priority given to families zoned to attend JAES for grades K-5. The class will aim to maintain a ratio of approximately 60% native Spanish-speakers and 40%

speakers of English or another language. The Pre-K Dual Language Program will follow a 90:10 immersion model in which 90% of daily instruction is provided in Spanish (core content) and 10% is provided in English (encore subjects). As students continue in the Dual Language Program at JAES, they will move to a 70:30 model in kindergarten, which reduces to a 50:50 language allocation plan in second through fifth grade. The graphic below provides a summary of these details:

<b>ACPS Dual Language Pilot Pre-K Program Proposal for SY23-24</b>				
<b>Location</b>	<b>Grades</b>	<b>Number of Classrooms</b>	<b>Model</b>	<b>Student Ratio</b>
Early Childhood Center	Pre-K	1	90:10	At least 60% native Spanish-speakers
John Adams Elementary School	K-5	2 at each grade level	70:30 (reduces to 50:50 in grades 2-5)	Goal of 50% native Spanish-speakers

#### *Why 90:10?*

After a comprehensive research review, site visit to a 90:10 preschool in DC Public Schools, and virtual visit with a 50:50 preschool in Newport News Public Schools, the team recommends following a 90:10 model for pre-K in ACPS. While research has yet to determine an ideal ratio of English versus partner language instruction, to the extent feasible, and given the resources available within the community (i.e., teacher language proficiency, materials), providing more instruction in the partner language early on in students' school careers generally leads to higher levels of bilingualism and biliteracy for all learners served within the program, and has no negative impact on literacy development for non-native Spanish speaking students (Howard et al., 2018). To this end, studies have consistently shown that outcomes for students served in bilingual classrooms in terms of English language development- including levels of English language proficiency, reclassification of students from EL to fully English proficient, and English reading achievement- are generally consistent for students spending less time in English (i.e., 90:10 model) versus more (i.e., 50:50 model). In contrast, though, when examining students' proficiency in the partner language, studies have shown that students who participate in dual language programs with more time in the partner language develop greater levels of proficiency in that language, as well as higher levels of reading achievement as measured in the partner language (August, McCardle, & Shanahan, 2014; Lindholm-Leary, 2016). Finally, these findings hold true for both native English-speaking students and native speakers of the partner language. Studies have consistently demonstrated that teaching literacy through the partner language does not disadvantage native-English speaking students, and that by third or fourth grade, these students score at least as high as their counterparts from monolingual classrooms on standardized reading assessments (Howard et al., 2018).

#### **Planning and Budgetary Considerations**

##### *Student Enrollment*

At this time, student enrollment in the Pre-K Dual Language Pilot Program will be open to families who qualify to participate in VPI, with priority given to those students who will attend JAES for

grades K-5. There are a total of 16 seats available; if interest exceeds available seats, a lottery will be used to select participating families. With the programmatic and community goal of expanding dual language at JAES, planning considerations must begin in SY23-24 for the kindergarten class of SY24-25, and the need to potentially convert one additional kindergarten class to dual language at JAES. This will enable the program to accept additional JAES students into the Dual Language Program, as well as students enrolled in the pre-K program who are zoned for other West end elementary schools, and otherwise would not have had the opportunity to enroll in the JAES Dual Language Program.

Although the pilot will occur at the ECC, assuming the success of this model, discussions must also begin in SY23-24 for the potential expansion of the Pre-K Dual Language Program to eligible students on the East end of the city. Currently, ACPS does not offer VPI classrooms in the neighborhoods of Mount Vernon, Cora Kelly, Charles Barrett, George Mason, or Naomi Brooks, where there is a need for such support. Expanding the Dual Language Pre-K Program to this area would allow ACPS to provide critical early childhood education access and resources for these families. In addition, many of the eligible students are from Spanish-speaking households, and would benefit greatly from a bilingual pre-K experience.

#### *Staffing and Support*

The ECC currently employs one bilingual teacher who has previously taught in the ACPS Dual Language Program. This staff member will be assigned to teach the pilot dual language pre-K class, and has the training (i.e., GLAD Foundations), skills, and knowledge to be successful in this role. Depending upon family interest and the success of the SY23-24 pilot, more dual language pre-K sections may be added at the ECC, with the intention of hiring additional bilingual teachers as made possible through staff attrition. In terms of teacher support, JAES currently has a dual language coach assigned to support 12 teachers; this individual will also be assigned to support the pre-K dual language staff at the ECC.

#### *Curriculum and Materials*

*The Creative Curriculum* currently used in all pre-K classrooms in ACPS is available in both English and Spanish, and can be purchased using budgeted funds. Supplemental materials, such as bilingual classroom libraries and other Spanish language resources, can be purchased using dual language programmatic funds. Once the proposal is approved, an inventory of additional necessary and desired materials will be completed to facilitate procurement of these resources.

#### **Summary**

The ability to expand access to the ACPS Dual Language Program to our youngest learners represents a tremendous opportunity to improve long-term academic, linguistic, and social-emotional outcomes for our emergent bilingual students. With staffing, curriculum, and instructional support readily available, planning considerations for the pilot are significantly reduced, and will focus on student enrollment and the purchase of supplementary materials. Through participation in dual language as early as pre-K, ACPS students will have even greater opportunities to maintain and build upon the rich linguistic and cultural resources they bring from home, while they continue to add another language to their linguistic repertoire.

## References

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