

**ACPS Dual Language Program:  
Elementary Program Model and Language Allocation Plan Proposal**

**Introduction and History**

In the 2014-2015 school year, after undergoing an extensive program evaluation, the ACPS Dual Language Program (DLP) implemented a significantly refined model, grounded in bilingual education research and theory, and better aligned to the *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (2nd edition, 2007). Under this model, the program currently serves over 1,270 students in four schools: John Adams Elementary School (JAES), Mount Vernon Community School (MVCS), Francis C. Hammond Middle School (FCHMS), and George Washington Middle School (GWMS). The program model, language allocation plans, and course sequences for the elementary and middle school programs are outlined in the table below:

<b>Grades K-5 Dual Language Program</b>			
<b>Elementary School</b>	<b>Program Model</b>	<b>Spanish Core Content</b>	<b>English Core Content</b>
John Adams Elementary School	70:30  Program strand	<u>Grades K-1:</u> Spanish Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies  <u>Grades 2-5:</u> Spanish Language Arts, Math, Science	<u>Grades K-1:</u> English Language Arts  <u>Grades 2-5:</u> English Language Arts, Social Studies
Mount Vernon Community School	50:50  Full school	Spanish Language Arts, Math, Science	English Language Arts, Social Studies
<b>Grades 6-8 Dual Language Program (Program Strands at Francis C. Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools)</b>			
<b>6th Grade</b>	<b>7th Grade</b>	<b>8th Grade</b>	
Dual Language Spanish Language Arts I + Dual Language US History I	Dual Language Spanish Language Arts II + Dual Language US History II	Dual Language Spanish Language Arts III + Dual Language Civics and Economics	

Over the last eight years, the field of dual language education has continued to evolve and expand in its application of more recent language education research to bilingual school contexts, including the release of an updated *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (Howard et al., 2018). With the synthesis of current research, both new and revised recommendations and guidelines for the implementation of effective dual language programs have been shared. In addition, during the 2019-2020 school year, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) conducted an evaluation of the K-2 ACPS Dual Language Curriculum, and subsequently shared several recommendations to improve alignment of the curriculum and instructional practices to the *Guiding Principles*, the implementation of which has been delayed due to two years of pandemic-related closures and disruptions.

As shared in the *Guiding Principles*, for dual language programs to be successful, strong planning processes must be in place that allow for continuous reflection upon student data and progress towards programmatic goals, current research, and evolving best practices in the field. At the same time, to best serve their students, dual language programs must maintain flexibility to adapt the program model to the unique and changing needs of the community (Howard et al., 2018). This document addresses recent research in the field of dual language education; considers the unique needs and profile of our dual language community; and proposes key action steps that will continue to build and improve upon the Dual Language Program in Alexandria City Public Schools.

**Proposal 1: Adopt a 70:30 model in both elementary schools.**

Since the 14-15 school year, John Adams Elementary School (JAES) has served dual language students through a 70:30 model, while Mount Vernon Community School (MVCS) has maintained a 50:50 model. Beginning in school year 23-24, it is proposed that MVCS will implement a 70:30 model in kindergarten, rolling up to 70:30 in first grade the following year, and maintaining a 50:50 model for grades 2-5. The goals and rationale for making this change are the following:

*Goals*

1. Improve long-term literacy outcomes for EL students participating in the dual language program. Despite measurable growth in students’ performance on standardized reading assessments administered in late elementary school into middle school, persistent achievement gaps remain between native English-speaking and native Spanish-speaking students in the Dual Language Program.
2. Improve Spanish language proficiency outcomes among all program learners, particularly in the areas of speaking and writing, which were identified as programmatic areas of need following the 2022 administration of the STAMP (standardized measure of Spanish language proficiency):

2022 STAMP Administration Average Scores <i>Proficiency Goal: Intermediate Low (Score of 4) to Intermediate Mid (Score of 5)</i>						
School	Test-takers	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Composite
JAES	32 5th graders	5.06	3.63	4.22	2.94	3.96
MVCS	130 5th graders	5.0	2.8	4.16	2.94	3.79

*Rationale*

Several decades of research have consistently demonstrated that students participating in well-implemented dual language programs reap significant academic, linguistic, cognitive, economic, and sociocultural benefits. 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 (Howard et al., 2018):

- Overall, 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, 2016a).

- 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).
- Finally, students who have participated in dual language programs with more instructional time in the partner language have reported holding a much greater affinity for reading in the partner language, which in turn has been demonstrated to lead to higher rates of biliteracy, as measured by reading achievement tests in both languages (Lindholm-Leary 2016b).

**Proposal 2: Adjust the language allocation plan to alternate the instruction of science and social studies in Spanish and English in grades 2-5.**

Since the 14-15 school year, the elementary school language allocation plan has remained static, with math and science being exclusively instructed in Spanish, and social studies primarily being instructed in English, with the exception of kindergarten and 1st grade at JAES (see chart on p. 1). Beginning in school year 23-24, it is proposed that the language allocation plan be revised first in 5th grade, rolling down to 3rd grade the following school year. The revised language allocation plan, in combination with a programmatic shift to a 70:30 model in elementary school, would be implemented as follows:

Proposed DL Elementary Language Allocation Plan		
Grade Level	Spanish Core Content	English Core Content
Kindergarten (MVCS beginning SY23-24)	Spanish Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies	English Language Arts
1st Grade (MVCS beginning SY24-25)	Spanish Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies	English Language Arts
2nd Grade	Spanish Language Arts, Math, Science	English Language Arts, Social Studies
3rd Grade (Beginning SY24-25)	Spanish Language Arts, Math, Social Studies	English Language Arts, Science
4th Grade	Spanish Language Arts, Math, Science	English Language Arts, Social Studies
5th Grade (Beginning SY23-24)	Spanish Language Arts, Math, Social Studies	English Language Arts, Science

The goals and rationale for making this change are the following:

### *Goals*

1. Improve alignment between the elementary and middle school language allocation plans. Currently, social studies is instructed in Spanish at both middle schools. Rising 6th grade students attending GWMS will have never studied social studies in Spanish prior to entering 6th grade, and rising 6th grade students attending FCHMS will have not studied social studies in Spanish since the 1st grade. Students, families, and staff have voiced a need for a more purposeful articulation of the content and language curriculum to promote the development of strong biliteracy skills, as well as to support students' long-term success in the Dual Language Program across content areas.
2. Align the language of instruction with the language of high-stakes, standardized assessments required by the Virginia Department of Education, according to grade-level testing requirements.

### *Rationale*

- Decades of research confirm the crucial role of effective biliteracy instruction in dual language programs to ensure positive student outcomes (Howard et al., 2018). Similarly, myriad studies have confirmed the importance of explicit literacy instruction across the content areas, including the importance of being able to read and understand a variety of informational and nonfiction texts, as well as to write for a variety of purposes and audiences, including in math, science, and social studies (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). As the ACPS DLP aims to develop bilingual, biliterate learners who can think critically and effectively communicate across cultures, the program must provide biliteracy instruction across content areas and program languages (Howard et al., 2018).
- It is widely accepted that effective schools use assessments that are aligned with the schools' vision, goals, and curriculum/standards. Furthermore, a growing body of language researchers advocate for the holistic bilingual assessment of multilingual learners, which may lead to more valid and reliable assessment outcomes (Howard et al., 2018). Currently, the Virginia Standards of Learning tests are only available to be administered in English, with social studies assessed in 4th grade and 8th grade, and science assessed in 5th grade and 8th grade. The proposed change in the program's language allocation plan will better align the language of instruction to the language of assessment in the elementary grades for these content vocabulary- and literacy-dependent exams. This is particularly important during the elementary years, when all dual language students are still working towards the development of higher levels of language proficiency in both program languages. Furthermore, as referenced above, the practice of alternating content areas taught in either program language will better support biliteracy development for all learners in the DLP.

### **Conclusion**

After operating under the current ACPS Dual Language Program model and language allocation plan for the past eight years, several factors have influenced the proposal to modify the current program structure. Programmatic achievement and language proficiency data, coupled with a review of updated, research-based guiding principles and stakeholder feedback, have informed the recommendations outlined above. Through a model grounded in ongoing reflection, planning, and improvement, the ACPS Dual Language Program will continue to provide an enriched educational experience in which all students attain high levels of academic achievement, bilingualism and biliteracy, and sociocultural competence.

## References

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