Taking Stock of Dual Language Learner Identification and Strengthening Procedures and Policies

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Executive Summary

Across the United States, a growing number of young children have at least one parent who speaks a language other than English in the home. These Dual Language Learners (DLLs) also make up a significant share of young children in most states. Extensive research has shown that high-quality early childhood services are particularly beneficial for DLLs in supporting their future academic success and well-being. Appropriate support can also help these children build on their exposure to a language other than English to develop as multilingual and/or multiliterate. Yet DLLs, overall, are less likely than their peers to access early childhood services, and a lack of robust and reliable information about this population across federal, state, and local levels means that much remains unknown about their experiences and service needs in their formative early years.

Accurately identifying DLLs in their early childhood years (ages 0 to 5) in a way that informs early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems and programs of their language experiences, environments, and learning needs is a critical step toward ensuring that these young children and their families receive equitable and relevant early childhood services. Such services can promote children's home language and English language development and connect families to services that provide additional forms of support. However, many states do not collect any information on the home languages of the children they serve in state preschool programs, and the absence of a common definition of who is a DLL across the patchwork of public and private, formal and informal programs that make up the early childhood sector render these young children invisible in many contexts.

Accurately identifying DLLs ... is a critical step toward ensuring that these young children and their families receive equitable and relevant early childhood services.

Age-appropriate and linguistically and culturally relevant tools and authentic assessment[1] processes are necessary in order to accurately evaluate DLLs' language backgrounds and experiences. Research points to the effectiveness of assessments that are observational in nature and draw from multiple sources of information, engaging families in ways that go beyond a simple survey questionnaire and approach them as true partners. However, the availability of these types of evidence-informed, holistic, culturally appropriate assessments remains highly limited, and where such tools do exist, they are rarely used in a systematic way.

A scan of federal, state, and local programs and policies shows considerable variation in approaches to collecting information about the linguistic characteristics of young children and their families. It also points to some promising practices that can be built upon to identify DLLs in a more systematic, meaningful way.

A.   *How Do Federal Programs Approach DLL Identification?*

A review of federal efforts to identify DLLs reveals relatively little guidance, though recommendations in a 2016 joint statement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of

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1   Authentic assessments are those that measure a child's language use and proficiency in a natural context, rather than with a standardized test.

Education encourage states to compile data on DLLs and establish home language survey policies. Among disparate national programs and policies, standards and messaging around DLL identification vary:

► The federal Head Start program, which has long been a leader in providing programmatic resources and supports for DLLs, requires programs to develop procedures to identify and meet the needs of limited English proficient children and families. Head Start programs must also provide information on the linguistic backgrounds of the children and families they serve as part of their annual reporting.

► The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program requires the initiatives it funds to collect and report the primary home language spoken by participants; however, the data collected are limited to the options of English, Spanish, another language, or unknown.

► The Child Care and Development Fund requires states to report on the primary home language of families served through grant funds, starting in fiscal year 2018.

► The *Every Student Succeeds Act* includes a definition of English Learners (ELs) that includes children as young as age 3 who are entering an elementary school and need additional support learning English. However, no explicit guidance is given as to how states should approach the process of identifying ELs. Moreover, in the context of K-12 public schools, EL identification primarily serves the purpose of determining which students may need English language learning support, whereas the goals and targets of DLL identification are broader, including, for instance, children who are fully proficient in English but could benefit from home language support.

B.   *State and Local Efforts to Identify DLLs*

Looking to state and local efforts, a majority of states currently lack policies to standardize or promote DLL identification in state preschool programs and other early childhood programs. Existing procedures, moreover, are highly variable across—and at times within—states. Some states utilize a home language survey in their state preschool programs, while others do not. And for those states that do use such a survey, it is unclear whether these tools are specifically designed for use with children younger than kindergarten age.

Several states and localities are exploring innovative strategies and taking steps to improve DLL identification procedures in their early childhood programs, including:

► **Illinois,** for example, is unique in requiring all school districts to identify ELs ages 3 to 5 by their first day attending a preschool program. These young ELs are identified using a home language survey that has been translated into 39 languages. Programs that serve 20 or more ELs who speak the same home language, moreover, are required to provide programming that supports their English language development as well as home language development, in some instances.

► In **New York**, the New York State Education Department requires districts and community-based organizations that operate state-funded preschool programs to report whether they have a process for identifying DLLs. In 2017, the department also developed the Emergent Multilingual Learners Language Profile Protocol, a procedure that collects more comprehensive information about young

learners' language experiences and environments, though use of this protocol has not been made mandatory.

▶ **Pennsylvania** is another one of the few states that requires school districts to give a home language survey to children enrolling in pre-K. The Pennsylvania Department of Education also encourages a family interview, which gathers more detailed information about children's language exposure. This information is intended to be used to determine what additional supports or services each child may need.

▶ **Minnesota's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Program,** one of several state-funded early childhood services offered by the state, is required to meet all of the same standards that pertain to ELs in the state's K-12 schools due to the program's formal inclusion in the K-12 system. Children who are identified as ELs in the VPK program, moreover, must be provided with support through English language specialists in their districts.

▶ **The Fresno Language Project,** a local-level initiative in California, takes a more comprehensive approach to identifying DLLs across early childhood services. The Fresno Unified School District coordinates this initiative, which has included the development of a Family Language and Interest Interview tool to facilitate a conversation between educators and families to learn more about their language use and aspirations for their children's language learning.

While many of these practices focus more heavily on the identification of young children with limited English than on those with significant exposure to other languages, they represent important steps toward a better understanding of the language characteristics of young children in ECEC programs.

C.   *Policy Implications and Opportunities to Strengthen DLL Identification*

Ultimately, this review of research and practices finds that identification of DLLs in early childhood programs would ideally incorporate the following steps: (1) initial determination of whether young children have significant exposure to a language other than English in their home environment; (2) collection of accurate, comprehensive data about DLLs' linguistic environment and experiences; and (3) determination of DLLs' evolving language and literacy skills in English and in their home languages, as well as language use. An accompanying issue brief, *Ending the Invisibility of Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Systems*, proposes a framework for DLL identification that includes these elements as well as foundational system capacities—such as comprehensive state data systems and professional development support—that must be in place in order to implement such a process in a robust way that supports the improvement of ECEC programming for DLLs.

Incremental steps can be taken at the federal, state, and local levels to advance the development of a comprehensive, aligned DLL identification system. At the federal level, further guidance, support, and resources to implement recommendations that have already been made could help states and localities make these principles a reality.

The state level holds a wide range of opportunities, as public preschool programs, guidelines, and standards are primarily developed at this level. As more states develop kindergarten entry assessments, it will be important to incorporate DLL-specific information into these tools and ensure that information collected about young children's linguistic profiles in ECEC programs transfers into the K-12 realm, including when developing early childhood integrated data systems. State preschool programs can also take a leading role by anchoring DLL identification processes within a state and guiding other programs to follow their lead. Additionally, bringing DLL-specific indicators into the design of quality rating and improvement systems can help ensure that programs are held accountable for and provided resources to effectively support DLLs once they are identified.

Finally, at the local level, school districts, cities, and counties can collaborate across the disparate siloes that make up the early childhood sector, as stakeholders in Fresno have done, to share and scale up promising practices, new tools, and valuable lessons learned.

Despite calls from federal agencies, early childhood experts, and community leaders for more robust, systematic DLL identification processes, much work remains to be done at the federal, state, and local levels to develop and implement such systems—and to ensure that the information collected is available to teachers, administrators, and policymakers who can use it to improve ECEC programs and policies for DLLs. Such policies are long overdue, and the need for them will only become more pressing as the DLL population grows. More accurately and comprehensively identifying these young children is an important and foundational step toward providing equitable services for DLLs and supporting their long-term educational success.

1   Introduction

Dual Language Learners (DLLs)—young children with at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home—represented one-third (33 percent) of all children ages 5 and under across the United States and numbered more than 7.4 million in 2015–19, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.[2] Given the necessary support, DLLs have the potential to develop as multilingual and multiliterate individuals. But despite their growing numbers and unique linguistic assets and learning support needs, data on the number and characteristics of DLLs in early childhood programs are hard to come by due to a lack of standardized policies and procedures for identifying them.

Better information about this young child population is urgently needed to ensure that early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs and systems are responsive to their experiences and needs. Research consistently shows that DLLs, along with economically disadvantaged children, are particularly likely to benefit from participating in high-quality preschool and early

Given the necessary support, DLLs have the potential to develop as multilingual and multiliterate individuals.

learning opportunities.[3] However, the available data indicate that they enroll in preschool programs (and center-based care) at lower rates than their peers.[4] In reality, however, DLL participation rates are difficult to determine with confidence because of the lack of reliable data identifying this population across state ECEC systems.

The purpose of identifying DLLs in their early years differs from the objectives of identifying English Learners (ELs) in the K-12 system. While ELs are identified as part of a legal process and for placement in mandated services to support them in acquiring English, DLL identification is a way of tracking children's language development in both their home language and language of instruction, while also providing information for appropriate language support and understanding which children continue to lack proficiency in the language of instruction. Determining which young children may later be identified as ELs not only benefits individual DLLs by highlighting their particular language needs, but it also supports ECEC systems in planning teacher development and curriculum design. Unlike ELs, however, DLLs are not necessarily limited in their English proficiency. Identifying all DLLs, not just those who need second language support, is a crucial step toward helping children who have ongoing exposure to a language other than English in their home develop as multilingual and/or multiliterate. Leveraging this potential during the early years, a particularly sensitive period for brain development, is important.

The purpose of identifying DLLs in their early years differs from the objectives of identifying English Learners in the K-12 system.

In its 2017 consensus report, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommended that federal and state agencies overseeing early childhood programs offer research-based guidance for programs regarding ways to effectively serve DLLs. The report also called for a clear process for identifying DLLs and determining their developmental trajectory in their home language and English.[5] Without common and evidence-informed procedures and policies to identify DLLs, and especially those whose English proficiency is not on track to allow them to benefit fully from instruction without targeted second language support, ECEC providers and policymakers lack the information necessary to effectively serve these children and their families. Proper identification of DLLs can help inform the types of supports ECEC providers offer each child so they reap the full benefits of early childhood opportunities.[6] Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic background of young children should guide decisions regarding funding and resource allocation, recruitment efforts, staffing, programmatic design, and policy improvements.

This report examines the extent to which federal agencies, states, and localities have procedures or guidance in place to identify DLLs in early childhood programs. It begins by providing an overview of the significance of accurately identifying DLLs, as well as the substantial costs of failing to do so. Because similar

3   Julia Gelatt, Gina Adams, and Sandra Huerta, *Supporting Immigrant Families' Access to Prekindergarten* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2014).

4   Maki Park, Anna O'Toole, and Caitlin Katsiaficas, *Dual Language Learners: A National Demographic and Policy Profile* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2017).

5   The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017), 472.

6   Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017).

issues have long plagued the K-12 education sector with respect to ELs, this analysis taps into the literature on EL identification and classification for potential lessons that may prove relevant for efforts to improve DLL identification. After reviewing federal, state, and local efforts to identify DLLs, the report concludes with a discussion of opportunities to advance more comprehensive DLL identification policies and practices.

2   The Importance of Accurately Identifying DLLs in Early Childhood Programs

The benefits of high-quality ECEC are well known.[7] Research shows that DLLs disproportionately benefit from participating in these programs,[8] which can support children's language development in English and their home language; connect families to wraparound services that support child and family well-being; and assist families with navigating the transition to kindergarten and the U.S. school system. These benefits can help young children build a solid foundation for school readiness and future success.

But despite the benefits that early childhood opportunities offer the growing population of DLLs,[9] states, preschool programs, and other ECEC providers and administrators know surprisingly little about them. For example, a 2016–17 national survey of state-funded preschool programs found that more than half of states did not collect information on a child's home language.[10] The challenge of accurately identifying DLLs is compounded by the fragmented nature of the ECEC system, which is characterized by a disconnected network of public and private providers that lack a single or shared understanding of what characteristics define a DLL. As a result, a DLL who is identified in one ECEC program may go unidentified in another, perhaps even within the same city. Indeed, the lack of a shared definition of who is a DLL underpins many of the challenges related to effectively identifying and serving these young children.

The challenge of accurately identifying DLLs is compounded by the fragmented nature of the ECEC system.

States and early childhood programs also face other significant challenges that contribute to the inaccurate or incomplete picture of DLLs. Many screening and assessment instruments that are currently available are not validated for use with DLLs, limiting their value and utility. The instruments and protocols that are available in non-English languages are most often in Spanish, and therefore are inappropriate for use with speakers of other languages.[11] Many ECEC educators also lack experience and training in language development, cultural competency, and screening and assessment of DLLs. Finally, there is considerable variation among DLLs in terms of their home languages, degree of exposure to English, and experiences in ECEC settings, all of which can shape language development and a child's degree of multilingualism. For

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7   See, for example, OECD, *Starting Strong 2017*.
8   OECD, *Starting Strong 2017;* Gelatt, Adams, and Huerta, *Supporting Immigrant Families' Access to Prekindergarten.*
9   Park, O'Toole, and Katsiaficas, *Dual Language Learners.*
10   Allison H. Friedman-Krauss et al., *Special Report: Supporting Dual Language Learners in State-Funded Preschool* (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2018); Janie Tankard Carnock, "Tracking the Enrollment of Dual Language Learners in Early Ed," New America, April 2, 2018.
11   Danielle Guzman-Orth, Alexis A. Lopez, and Florencia Tolentino, *A Framework for the Dual Language Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2017); Caitlin Katsiaficas and Maki Park, *Minnesota's Superdiverse and Growing Dual Language Learner Child Population* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018).

example, two children with similar levels of exposure to their home language may nonetheless have very different trajectories in their process of English language acquisition depending on whether or not they had access to early learning programs that effectively supported their home language development. As a result, they would also benefit from different kinds of support and early learning interventions.

Without proper identification, states and ECEC providers are missing a critical opportunity to effectively support DLLs. For example, a provider's approach to important programmatic elements should reflect the children in their care. The language of instruction, nature of the ECEC environment, instructional and assessment practices, qualifications and linguistic competence of the teachers and caretakers, and family engagement practices are all elements that, with better data about the number and characteristics of DLLs, could be improved to be inclusive of and relevant for these children.[12] If DLLs are not offered these supports, gaps between them and their peers can open early and persist over time.[13] Similarly, on a policy level, DLL data should inform funding and resource allocation, requirements for educator training and professional development, and efforts to improve the quality of ECEC programs. They should also be used to ensure that DLLs have equitable access to these early learning opportunities.

3   Assessments and Implications for Identification Procedures

Accurately evaluating a DLL's linguistic background is critical for tailoring and providing high-quality instruction that can serve as a foundation for future school success.[14] It can also help address the current challenge of under-referrals of DLLs for early interventions and special education.[15] Central to an effective assessment process are tools that are linguistically and culturally relevant as well as appropriate for a DLL's age.[16] Any efforts related to assessment, moreover, must begin with an understanding of children's language use, gained through a home language interview, survey, or other process that meaningfully engages families and caretakers. Furthermore, assessments—and their interpretation—must take into account research on language development in DLLs (see Box 1).

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12   NASEM, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English,* 190.

13   A study of Mexican American children and their White peers, for instance, found a disparity in reading and language skills upon kindergarten entry. See Dan Princiotta, Kristin Denton Flanagan, and Elvira Germino Hausken, *Findings from the Fifth-Grade Follow-Up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K)* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

14   Linda Espinosa, *Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs Development & Learning, Prek-Third Grade* (Minneapolis: McKnight Foundation, 2014), 1.

15   NASEM, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English,* 369–371.

16   Espinosa, *Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs Development & Learning,* 1.

BOX 1
Understanding DLLs' Language Development

Most literature concerning the language development of DLLs compares their trajectories to those of their monolingual peers. In its 2017 consensus study, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that, while the first and second language trajectories of DLLs in the United States can differ dramatically, DLLs (and all children) have the capacity to learn two languages without endangering the development of either. In fact, children are as able to learn two (or more) languages as they are one—and, given the appropriate supports, can become fully proficient in both. There is also extensive research pointing to the cognitive benefits of multilingualism.

However, the language development process of DLLs and monolinguals presents differently to untrained observers who may only examine their English language development and discount their home language skills. In reality, while young DLLs may appear to have a more limited vocabulary in English, this deficit is often eliminated once vocabulary in the home language is taken into account. DLLs also may not possess the same skills in both languages. For instance, it may take more time for them to learn some of the characteristics of one of their languages as compared to their monolingual peers, as they are dealing with more complexities. Additionally, several scholars have found that DLLs have two different language systems, which can interact with and affect each other. DLLs frequently use pieces from both of these language systems, engaging in code mixing or code switching (using both languages when articulating something). While these processes are normal for DLLs, it is critical that early childhood educators understand the developmental trajectory of DLLs so that they can effectively support it and properly identify delays.

Notably, there is considerable variation among DLLs, whose different experiences at home and in ECEC settings can shape their language development and degree of multilingualism. While all children have the capacity to learn multiple languages, there are several factors that can influence whether a child becomes fully competent in their first and second languages. These include:

▶ when DLLs begin learning their second language;

▶ how often DLLs are exposed to their first and second languages and the quality of these inputs;

▶ DLLs' development of their first language and how this influences their second language; and

▶ sociocultural factors, including family characteristics (such as language skills, income, parental education, and length of time in the United States) and community characteristics (such as neighborhood resources, attitudes, and possible stigmas regarding the value of a DLL's home language).

Overall, research has found that earlier exposure to their second language from proficient speakers and continued development of their first language supports DLLs' proficiency in both languages, in addition to contributing to positive cultural and identity development.

Sources: The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017); Danielle Guzman-Orth, Alexis A. Lopez, and Florencia Tolentino, *A Framework for the Dual Language Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2017).

Researchers have found that assessing DLLs in just one language can give the impression that they have a smaller vocabulary than monolingual children, even when controlling for socioeconomic status. However, when DLLs are assessed in both languages, they have the same or higher scores than monolinguals.[17] Assessing DLLs in both languages is thus essential for understanding their true vocabulary knowledge. More broadly, educators should work to understand DLLs' capability in both languages as well as how their knowledge is spread across both. DLLs will usually be dominant in one of their languages, and knowing this information is key for assessing a child and tailoring services.[18] However, because no assessments have been developed to identify language dominance, researchers have suggested that educators ask DLLs' families about their language exposure and use.[19] For children to be assessed effectively, the teacher assessing a DLL should speak the child's home language or work with another adult who does.[20]

Language assessments may be conducted in several ways, ideally through "authentic assessments" that measure a child's language use and proficiency in a natural context (as compared with a standardized test).[21] Components of effective authentic assessments include:

► observing how children use language in the classroom,

► including information from other staff members who speak a DLL's home language,

► gathering information from a child's family via an interview or questionnaire, and

► speaking with children directly and giving them a prompt to answer.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, leading professional associations in the early childhood field, recommend that ECEC programs use observational assessment strategies, drawing information from multiple sources including families and collecting data over time.[22] Meanwhile, they state that any standardized assessments used should be culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate, with results interpreted cautiously and on a continuous basis.

However, the availability of effective, culturally appropriate assessments for DLLs remains extremely limited. In a review of 34 language assessments focused on DLLs learning English and Spanish, Educational Testing Service researchers found that the approaches to administration, format, and skill measurement all varied. The review also found that the DLL assessments examined look at both languages separately, as two sets of skills, and may penalize children if they use their home language during an English assessment and vice versa. Therefore, such assessments may not capture the full picture of a DLL's skills.[23] Additionally, the Spanish assessments were largely translations of their English counterparts, which is problematic because these are often not normed for DLL populations, meaning that they are designed with assumptions based

17   NASEM, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English,* 115.
18   Espinosa, *Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs Development & Learning,* 7.
19   Espinosa, *Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs Development & Learning,* 7.
20   Espinosa, *Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs Development & Learning,* 9.
21   Espinosa, *Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs Development & Learning,* 8–9.
22   Espinosa, *Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs Development & Learning,* 8.
23   Guzman-Orth, Lopez, and Tolentino, *A Framework for the Dual Language Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners,* 7.

on children who develop monolingually and hold dominant cultural values.[24] While this review focused on DLLs learning English and Spanish, assessment tools are even less common in other languages, pointing to the critical need for resources that reflect a DLL population with increasingly diverse linguistic and cultural characteristics.[25] Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs), for example, are the fastest growing racial group in the United States, and AAPI DLLs comprised 16 percent of DLLs overall in 2015–19; they are a group with a high degree of linguistic diversity, with many parents speaking low-incidence minority languages.[26] Black DLLs, a group with a similarly diverse linguistic profile, made up 7 percent of DLLs.

Overall, the existing research points to the importance of assessing DLLs in ways that are developmentally appropriate and using assessment tools that are valid as well as culturally and linguistically appropriate for each child. The availability of such instruments is a key challenge to implementing more widespread, standardized DLL identification. This is particularly the case in superdiverse contexts where children in a given program may speak a range of different languages.[27] These findings also underscore the need for a workforce that has the linguistic and cultural competency to effectively administer assessments and interpret the data, in addition to knowledge of second language acquisition, multilingualism, and child development.[28] While outside of the scope of this report, it should be noted that the recruitment and retention of a workforce well equipped to serve DLLs has been a consistent challenge for the field. As such, it is a key consideration for policymakers and programs working to strengthen DLL assessment and ECEC services for this population more generally.

> *The existing research points to the importance of assessing DLLs in ways that are developmentally appropriate and using assessment tools that are valid as well as culturally and linguistically appropriate for each child.*

4 Efforts to Identify DLLs in Federal Programs

There is relatively little federal guidance regarding DLL identification, with resources and guidelines for federal early childhood programs largely focusing on how to serve DLLs once they are identified as such. This section reviews federal agency guidelines and policies to examine how states and other federally funded entities are encouraged or required to identify DLLs. It documents whether program requirements or guidelines specifically advise states on identification procedures, collecting information on a child's home language, and DLL assessments. This review found considerable variation and that guidance often centers on program reporting requirements.

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24   Guzman-Orth, Lopez, and Tolentino, *A Framework for the Dual Language Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners,* 7.
25   Katsiaficas and Park, *Minnesota's Superdiverse and Growing Dual Language Learner Child Population.*
26   MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's ACS, pooled for 2015–19. For a discussion of diversity within these groups, see: Maki Park, Jie Zong, and Jeanne Batalova, *Growing Superdiversity among Young U.S. Dual Language Learners and Its Implications* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018).
27   Park, Zong, and Batalova, *Growing Superdiversity among Young U.S. Dual Language Learners and Its Implications.*
28   Guzman-Orth, Lopez, and Tolentino, *A Framework for the Dual Language Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners,* 11.

A.   Federal DLL Policy Statement

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Education (ED) issued a joint policy statement on DLLs in which they outline a vision for providing high-quality supports for these children in early childhood programs. The statement offers important recommendations for states related to DLL identification. According to the document, states should:

► **Compile up-to-date data on the number of DLLs.** The joint statement encourages state agencies to collect data on the number of DLLs in their state, including the number of DLLs participating in ECEC programs and those who are eligible but not currently enrolled. ED and HHS suggest the use of Census data in combination with state-collected administrative data and data compiled by research partners.[29]

► **Establish home language survey (HLS) policies and modify current surveys in use.** The statement encourages states and school districts to build off of HLSs they are already using and to require or encourage all ECEC programs to identify a child's home language upon enrollment. The joint statement notes that a common survey across ECEC programs can increase the accuracy of states' DLL estimates.[30]

► **Use data to inform resource allocation and other decision-making.** The policy statement recommends that states use data on the DLL population to inform culturally and linguistically tailored outreach and recruitment efforts to families of DLLs, resource allocation, professional development, technical assistance, and the creation of valid screening and assessment tools.[31]

► **Incorporate DLL-specific indicators into state quality rating and improvement systems for child-care, preschool, and other ECEC programs.** The statement outlines several examples of DLL-relevant indicators that states should consider incorporating into their systems and processes to evaluate and improve such programs. One indicator the statement proposes is having a systematic way to identify DLLs upon enrollment in a program.[32]

► **Accurately identify DLLs with disabilities and provide them with the services they need.** The statement outlines requirements around determining whether children should be referred to early intervention or special education services. These include a requirement that school districts take a child's English proficiency into account in these deliberations to ensure that limited English proficiency is not conflated with disability.[33]

The HHS–ED joint policy statement marked an important step toward strengthening ECEC services for DLLs. It called attention to the increased diversity of the young child population in the United States and offered a marker for programs striving to provide responsive services for DLLs. However, while issued by two federal agencies, this guidance has not been formally incorporated into federal program guidelines, which would

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29   U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Department of Education (ED), *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs* (Washington, DC: HHS and ED, 2016), 15.

30   HHS and ED, *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children,* 15.

31   HHS and ED, *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children,* 15

32   HHS and ED, *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children,* 16.

33   HHS and ED, *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children,* 19.

help translate these recommendations into practice. In the meantime, the current support provided across federal ECEC programs regarding DLL identification and assessment varies significantly.

B.   *Early Head Start and Head Start*

Overseen by HHS' Office of Head Start (OHS), Early Head Start and Head Start programs provide services to support the school readiness of children in low-income families. The *Head Start Act* requires programs to develop procedures for identifying and meeting the needs of the limited English proficient children and families they serve.[34] Programs must conduct a needs assessment with every participating family, a process that includes a consultation with caregivers in a language they understand.[35] Head Start program standards stipulate that "a program must ensure staff and program consultants or contractors are familiar with the ethnic backgrounds and heritages of families in the program" and mandate that a qualified, bilingual adult assess the skills of each DLL in both languages and in other domains.[36]

Additionally, Head Start provides a range of resources for programs serving DLLs, including those focused on screening and assessment, such as:

▶   Suggestions for practitioners regarding the collection of information on DLLs, including different elements of a child's language background, why they matter, and questions that can be asked of families to obtain this information.[37]

▶   Information about selecting screeners and assessments to support programs in meeting the Head Start requirement that children are screened and assessed using tools that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. This includes DLL-specific considerations such as the validity of different instruments for this population.[38]

▶   The Dual Language Learners Program Assessment, a self-assessment geared toward Head Start, child-care, and preschool programs, is meant to promote the successful engagement of DLLs and their families in programming. The assessment recommends that programs identify a family's preferred language and offers guidance regarding the assessment of DLLs in it and in English.[39]

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34   *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*, Public Law 110–134, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 121 (December 12, 2007): 1383; HHS and ED, *Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children,* 4.

35   *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*, 1383.

36   HHS, Office of Head Start (OHS), *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (Washington, DC: OHS), 53, 30.

37   OHS, "Gathering and Using Language Information that Families Share" (fact sheet, OHS, Washington, DC, n.d.).

38   Tamara Halle et al., *Understanding and Choosing Assessments and Developmental Screeners for Young Children Ages 3-5: Profiles of Selected Measures* (Washington, DC: HHS, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, 2011); National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, *Screening Dual Language Learners in Early Head Start and Head Start: A Guide for Program Leaders* (Washington, DC: HHS, OHS and Office of Child Care, n.d.); OHS, "Special Considerations: Developmental Screening of Children Ages Birth to 5 Who Are Dual Language Learners (DLLs)," updated April 29, 2019.

39   "Subpart J—Program Management and Quality Improvement," 45 *Code of Federal Regulations* § 1302 of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) calls for a coordinated approach; Head Start encourages programs to use the Dual Language Learners Program Assessment as part of their continuous improvement activities. See Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, "Dual Language Learners Program Assessment (DLLPA): What Is Its Purpose?," updated August 27, 2018.

Early Head Start and Head Start programs must also report on the linguistic backgrounds of the children and families they serve in their annual program information report. The 2020–21 report (due August 31, 2021) incorporates significant revisions, including changes regarding the collection of language-related data. Specifically, programs will need to report the number of children who are DLLs and the primary language spoken at home for all children.

Head Start has long been a leader in promoting awareness of DLLs' specific needs in the early childhood field.

Head Start has long been a leader in promoting awareness of DLLs' specific needs in the early childhood field. With the requirement that programs identify and assess all DLLs alongside guidance and tools on how to do so effectively, Head Start provides the most comprehensive supports for ECEC programs and practitioners among the federal programs reviewed. The guidance that Head Start provides serves as a helpful model and reference for other ECEC programs seeking to strengthen their services for DLLs. However, with Head Start programs only serving 36 percent of eligible preschool-aged children overall in 2018–19,[40] the benefits of these programmatic standards and requirements are not reaching the majority of DLLs across the United States.

C. *The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program*

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, operated by HHS, supports home visiting for at-risk parents with or expecting young children.[41] MIECHV-approved[42] home visiting models vary in the degree to which they explicitly focus on or otherwise serve DLL, refugee, and other immigrant families. For example, the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program is one of very few models that specifically includes immigrant families facing language barriers as one of the target characteristics for their client population. This is also the only model with an explicit focus on immigrant and DLL populations that MIECHV has categorized as evidence based thus far.

MIECHV-funded home visiting programs are required to collect and report the primary language spoken in the home of participants, or "the language used in the home the majority of the time."[43] However, the reporting process limits programs to reporting whether the primary language is English, Spanish, another language, or unknown. As a result, it will be challenging for stakeholders to determine the full range of languages spoken by families served unless programs and states opt to collect and report more detailed information.[44]

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40   National Head Start Association, "National Head Start Fact Sheets," accessed May 5, 2021.
41   In a few states (e.g., Florida), nonprofits, rather than state agencies, are the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) awardees.
42   States receive grants from the $400 million program to serve target populations, as determined through a state needs assessment. States have some flexibility in the models they select to deliver home visiting services, but they must use at least 75 percent of funding to implement evidence-based models that meet the criteria aligned with HHS' Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE) initiative. HomVEE currently relies on studies that do not specifically address program models' efficacy for DLL or immigrant families (or other minority populations), making it unclear as to the extent to which these models are successfully reaching or supporting these populations. See NASEM, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English,* 180.
43   The MIECHV Program, "Form 1: Demographic, Service Utilization, and Select Clinical Indicators," updated July 24, 2018, 15.
44   The MIECHV Program, "Form 1," 15.

Although reporting data on English and Spanish—the two languages most commonly spoken nationally—may be useful for comparison at the federal level, it does not provide granular information that is useful for state and local programs. It is unclear whether programs and states are collecting more disaggregated home language data that would assist them in tailoring services, hiring staff, and understanding and driving broader program improvement and equity efforts. This is especially problematic as the young child population is becoming more linguistically diverse.[45]

D.   *The Child Care and Development Fund*

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), administered by HHS' Office of Child Care (OCC), supports child-care subsidies for low-income families. Since 2016, states must report quarterly on the primary home language of families served with CCDF grant funds.[46] Preliminary OCC figures for fiscal year 2018 are the first to report data on home language. However, at this stage this information is solely meant to indicate a state's progress in addressing this new requirement, and not all states have reported these data.[47] Here, again, home language data publicly reported by HHS only specify English, Spanish, or another language.

This new requirement that states report home language could provide critical information allowing policymakers to better identify potential barriers and equity issues in child-care subsidy access. Recent research has shown, for example, that many minority populations access CCDF funds at significantly lower rates, pointing to possible challenges including language barriers.[48] However, as with MIECHV, it is unclear whether states are collecting more granular information on home languages beyond English and Spanish and, if so, whether or how this is informing program activities.

E.   *The Every Student Succeeds Act*

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA)—reauthorized most recently in 2015 with the passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA)—includes a definition of "English Learners" that encompasses children as young as 3 years old who are entering an elementary school.[49] ESEA has required states to identify students who need language instruction services for decades, but there is no explicit guidance regarding how states should undertake this process.[50] At the preschool level, most states and school districts lack a standardized process to identify and track DLLs at all, in spite of rising preschool attendance across many states, as will be discussed in Section 5. At the K-12 level, identification of ELs is typically a two-step

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45   Park, Zong, and Batalova, *Growing Superdiversity among Young U.S. Dual Language Learners and Its Implications.*

46   HHS, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), *CCDF Reauthorization Regulatory Changes* (Washington, DC: HHS, 2016), 56–57. This administrative, case-level data is reported monthly or quarterly following monthly collection for the ACF-801 report, with an annual ACF-800 report of aggregated data due by the end of the calendar year. See HHS, ACF, Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System, "ACF-800 & 801 Child Care Data Reporting," accessed April 15, 2021.

47   OCC, "FY 2018 Preliminary Data Table 20 - Average Monthly Percentages of Primary Language Spoken at Home (NEW)," updated December 4, 2019.

48   Rebecca Ulrich, Stephanie Schmit, and Ruth Cosse, *Inequitable Access to Child Care Subsidies* (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2019).

49   *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended through Public Law 115–224, enacted July 31, 2018, Section 8101(20).

50   According to ED's non-regulatory guidance, "Title VI's implementing regulations have been interpreted by case law to require that [local education agencies] have in place procedures that accurately identify in a timely manner all students who may be ELs and determine if they are ELs through a valid and reliable assessment that includes all four domains of language (i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing)." See ED, *Addendum to September 23, 2016 Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* (Washington, DC: ED, 2016), 1.

process that first starts with identifying the entire universe of potential ELs, followed by an English language proficiency (ELP) screener. While this process has different objectives to DLL identification, as noted in Section 1, understanding how states and districts approach this can offer useful lessons.

Home Language Surveys and Tests of English Language Proficiency

Although not legally required, states and districts often use HLSs to identify potential ELs. States' use of HLSs to identify language minority children first gained popularity in the wake of the 1974 U.S. Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* as states developed strategies to ensure such students could effectively participate in the classroom.[51]

Despite a recommendation made by the Council of Chief State School Officers for states to require the use of a uniform HLS across their school districts in the early 1990s,[52] a comprehensive review of states' policies and procedures for administering HLSs nearly two decades later found little consistency. That 2011 study found that slightly less than half of states (23 states and the District of Columbia) required school districts to use a state-developed HLS or state-developed questions to which districts could add.[53] In addition, the content and wording of the survey questions varied substantially across states. Finally, some researchers have raised concerns about the validity of HLSs, noting that parental responses might be influenced by fears related to citizenship status or concerns about how EL classification might affect their child's educational opportunities.[54]

Under ESSA, states must implement standardized statewide procedures for identifying ELs within 30 days of enrollment.[55] Federal guidance to states suggests that these procedures might include "the process for identification of ELs, the timeline for implementing that process, the home language survey the [local education agencies (LEAs)] use, the specific English language proficiency screener the LEAs administer, and the scores on the ELP screener that will result in the identification of a student as an EL."[56]

In an effort to ensure that states and districts are accurately identifying ELs, ED's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) identified three questions for districts and states in their compliance work under Title VI and the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974* that should be addressed in the EL identification process:[57]

1   What is the primary language used in the home, regardless of the language spoken by the student?

2   What is the language most often spoken by the student?

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51   Alison L. Bailey and Kimberly R. Kelly, "Home Language Survey Practices in the Initial Identification of English Learners in the United States," Educational Policy 27, no. 5 (2011): 770–804, 776; National Research Council, *Allocating Federal Funds for State Programs for English Language Learners* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2011), 80.

52   Bailey and Kelly, "Home Language Survey Practices," 776–777.

53   Bailey and Kelly, "Home Language Survey Practices," 778.

54   Jamal Abedi, "Classification Systems for English Language Learners: Issues and Recommendations," *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice* 27, no. 3 (2008): 17–31.

55   *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended through Public Law 115–224, enacted July 31, 2018, Title III, Sec. 3113 (b)(2).

56   ED, *Addendum to September 23, 2016 Non-Regulatory Guidance,* 1–2.

57   ED, "Chapter 1: Tools and Resources for Identifying All English Learners," in *English Learner Toolkit* (Washington, DC: ED, 2016), 4.

3   What is the language that the student first acquired?

OCR and DOJ consider school districts and states minimally compliant under the law if they assess English proficiency for students whose parents or guardians answer one or more of these questions with a language other than English.[58]

Like HLSs, English proficiency assessments, often called screeners, vary across states. While all states are required to use screeners of some kind, the design and use of these screeners is far from uniform. Some states, for example, use different screeners depending on age band, while others do not.[59] Eight states choose to use their own state-developed screeners, and Oregon utilizes five distinct state-approved screeners, unrelated to specific age bands.[60]

Due to the variability in state policies and practices for identifying ELs, students who are identified as ELs in one state could plausibly go unidentified in another state. Moreover, in states in which districts have a great deal of control over HLSs and ELP screeners, a student might be classified as an EL in one district but not another even within the same state.

The manner in which K-12 schools have historically identified ELs has important implications for identification procedures for DLLs in ECEC programs. Many of the policy challenges experienced at the K-12 level are also present in the ECEC sector. And because many—though not all—state-funded preschool programs operate in elementary schools or are managed by school districts, ESSA guidance and regulations may have some impact on enrollment and HLS procedures for a substantial segment of DLLs attending public preschool programs.

5   State and Local Efforts to Identify DLLs in Preschool and Other Early Childhood Programs

While some states have taken steps toward a systematic process for identifying DLLs in their state preschool programs and beyond, the vast majority have no existing policies to standardize or promote this practice. Putting in place effective procedures to recognize and track DLLs in state and other public preschool programs is important, however, as U.S. children are increasingly attending some form of public preschool. As of 2019–20, 34 percent of four-year-olds and 6 percent of three-year-olds attended state-funded preschool,[61] indicating the importance of state policy in shaping preschoolers' learning outcomes.

There is considerable diversity in the degree to which and ways states are identifying DLLs in various early childhood programs. As noted in Section 2, a 2016–17 national survey of state preschool programs found that roughly half of states do not gather information on a child's home language.[62] However, some states, such as Massachusetts and Ohio, encourage or require school districts to administer an HLS

58   ED, "Chapter 1: Tools and Resources for Identifying All English Learners," 4.
59   Leslie Villegas and Delia Pompa, *The Patchy Landscape of State English Learner Policies under ESSA* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2020).
60   Villegas and Pompa, *The Patchy Landscape of State English Learner Policies under ESSA.*
61   National Institute for Early Education Research, *2020 State of Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2021).
62   Friedman-Krauss et al., *Special Report: Supporting Dual Language Learners in State-Funded Preschool.*

upon enrollment in preschool.[63] It is possible that school districts in these states are using HLS tools and procedures that have been designed for children entering kindergarten or higher grades. This warrants further investigation to determine if these tools and procedures are appropriate for use with preschool-aged children. Meanwhile, the majority of states with public preschool programs provide little to no guidance to districts regarding DLL identification procedures in these programs. This, too, is problematic and indicates that these states are missing an important opportunity to identify DLL children and understand how best to support them in preschool.

Putting in place effective procedures to recognize and track DLLs in state and other public preschool programs is important … as U.S. children are increasingly attending some form of public preschool.

Several states are in the process of exploring strategies and taking steps to improve DLL identification procedures in their early childhood programs. WIDA, an organization housed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Wisconsin Center for Education Research, is currently working in partnership with several interested state agencies to provide resources and professional development related to improving early learning opportunities for DLLs through its Early Years program. As part of this effort, and with support from partner states, WIDA has developed and is piloting a toolkit that includes tools for authentic assessment to support identification, family engagement, instructional planning, and children's transition to kindergarten.[64]

The subsections that follow take a closer look at four states that are currently more advanced in their policies and guidance around DLL identification and data collection in their preschool programs, as well as an example of a county-level initiative in California. In most cases, the DLL identification processes described below focus more heavily on identification of young children with limited English than on those with significant exposure to other languages. Nevertheless, these states have taken important steps toward gaining a better understanding of the language characteristics of the young children they serve.

A.   *Illinois' Bilingual Pre-K Instruction*

Illinois is unique in requiring school districts (and programs with which they contract) to identify ELs ages 3 to 5 no later than their first day attending a preschool program, as mandated by 23 *Illinois Administrative Code* Part 228: Transitional Bilingual Education. While EL identification differs from DLL identification in its scope and objectives, Illinois does gather valuable baseline information about home language use and exposure. Illinois defines preschool ELs as children who (1) live in a household in which at least one member speaks a non-English language and (2) when screened, are not found to have proficiency in English.[65] ELs are identified through an HLS, which at a minimum must include the questions of whether a child has a non-

63   Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Guidance on the Initial Identification of English Learners* (Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019); Ohio Department of Education, *Identifying English Learners in Ohio* (Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Education, 2018).

64   Author interview with Lorena Mancilla, Director of WIDA Early Years, May 13, 2020.

65   Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Division of English Language Learning, *Serving English Language Learners in Preschool Programs in Illinois Public School Districts 23 Ill. Adm. Code Part 228: Frequently Asked Questions* (Chicago: Illinois State Board of Education, 2014).

English home language and, if so, what that language is, and whether the child speaks a non-English language and, if so, which language.[66] The HLS has been translated into 39 languages.[67] Districts are also required to adopt screening procedures that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and incorporate family involvement in order to gauge a child's level of English proficiency.[68]

By providing for systematic identification and screening, as well as detailing specific supports districts must provide DLLs, Illinois has relatively robust requirements.

In addition to establishing a standardized way to identify and screen DLLs, the *Illinois Administrative Code* mandates that centers with 20 or more ELs enrolled in preschool and speaking the same home language must offer a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program in English and that other language. Centers with fewer than 20 ELs speaking the same home language must provide either a TBE or Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI) program. The latter offers English as a second language (ESL) instruction and may also include home language instruction or supports. While school districts have some flexibility in the models they use, these must meet the requirements of the TBE or TPI programs.[69] Upon transition to kindergarten, children are screened again using the WIDA MODEL instrument to determine if they should be designated an EL and placed in a TBE or TPI program.[70]

By providing for systematic identification and screening, as well as detailing specific supports districts must provide DLLs, Illinois has relatively robust requirements that could be a helpful model for stakeholders elsewhere who are seeking to improve services for DLLs.

B.   *New York State's Emerging Multilingual Protocol*

As in most states, New York's laws and regulations do not require school districts to provide language support services to DLLs entering preschool. School districts and community-based organizations operating state-funded preschool programs, however, must report to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) whether they have a process for identifying DLLs. More than 80 percent of districts stated they had such a process in place in 2016–17 and reported serving more than 30,000 DLLs.[71]

In an effort to increase the quality of supports for DLLs in preschool programs, NYSED developed the Emergent Multilingual Learners Language Profile Protocol (EMLLPP) in 2017. The tool is intended as a means of collecting more comprehensive information about young learners' language experiences and environments.

The EMLLPP procedures, described in Box 2, could serve as a model for other states seeking to incorporate evidence-based practices into the identification of DLLs through a holistic approach. However, it is

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66   "Transitional Bilingual Education," 23 *Illinois Administrative Code* 228 (A)(f)(23)(A)(I)(f)(228), updated July 23, 2015; ISBE, Division of English Language Learning, *Serving English Language Learners in Preschool Programs.*

67   ISBE, "Multilingual Identification and Screening," accessed March 4, 2020.

68   ISBE, Division of English Language Learning, *Serving English Language Learners in Preschool Programs.*

69   ISBE, Division of English Language Learning, *Serving English Language Learners in Preschool Programs.*

70   ISBE, Division of English Language Learning, *Serving English Language Learners in Preschool Programs.*

71   Zoila Morell, *Emergent Multilingual Learners in Prekindergarten: A Protocol for Identification, Instructional Planning, and Programming* (New York: New York State Education Department, 2017), 1.

important to emphasize that while New York preschool providers must have a process for identifying DLLs, and the EMLLPP has been recommended by the state, it is not required. It is unclear how widely preschool providers are using the protocol.

BOX 2
New York's Emergent Multilingual Learners Language Profile Protocol

The Emergent Multilingual Learners Language Profile Protocol (EMLLPP) is designed to identify children entering prekindergarten with limited or no English skills. Notably, the protocol does not determine a child's proficiency in English (or the home language) as is typical of processes for identifying K-12 ELs. The EMLLPP is unique in that educators use the protocol to develop a full "linguistic profile" that will enable them to support the child's development.

The EMLLPP encompasses five steps:

1. **Completion of the Emergent Multilingual Learners Language Profile for Prekindergarten Students.** Completed by parents when they register a child for a preschool program, the profile explores the languages spoken in the home, exposure to English outside the home, the parents' language goals for the child, and the child's early literacy experiences.

2. **Family interview.** This step is an opportunity for educators to engage parents and caregivers in a conversation about the child's early development and linguistic experiences. Educators also use this time to underscore the value of the child's home language.

3. **Child interview.** Educators engage the child in an informal conversation with the purpose of observing how the child communicates. The interview is ideally conducted in English and in the home language to evaluate the child's receptive and expressive language skills in both languages. The interview should take place at the time of registration, if done in person, or shortly after the child is enrolled.

4. **Review developmental screenings.** Many programs conduct initial screenings to get a baseline of the child's cognitive development, social and emotional skills, and language development. These screenings should be conducted in the child's home language.

5. **Plan for instruction.** Educators use the collected information to integrate the child's home language into instruction to promote learning.

In the transition to kindergarten, the preschool program is meant to ensure that the records and information collected through the EMLLPP follow children and become part of their school records. Children who are identified in preschool as DLLs may or may not be later identified as ELs when they enter kindergarten.

Sources: Zoila Morell, *Emergent Multilingual Learners in Prekindergarten: A Protocol for Identification, Instructional Planning, and Programming* (New York: New York State Education Department, 2017), 1; New York State Education Department, "Emergent Multilingual Learners Language Profile for Prekindergarten Students," updated January 7, 2021; New York City Department of Education, "Guidance for Implementing the Emergent Multilingual Learners Language Profile for Prekindergarten Students," updated August 2020.

C.   Pennsylvania's DLL Identification Procedure

Pennsylvania is one of the few states that explicitly requires school districts to give an HLS to children enrolling in pre-K.[72] The state-issued HLS asks about the language(s) spoken in the home and by the child and identifies the child's first language.[73] The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) goes a step further in also calling for a family interview, which asks for more detailed information about a child's language exposure, as part of its process to determine whether a child is a DLL. According to PDE procedures, this interview is required unless all responses to questions on the HLS are non-English languages, in which case the child is automatically identified as a DLL.[74] State guidelines suggest that the interviews should then be reviewed by ESL professionals, who establish whether the child's exposure to a non-English language is "superficial" or "significant." If it is determined that another language may have had an impact on the child's English language development, the school is required to screen the child using an appropriate instrument, if possible; otherwise, a determination on whether to identify the child as a DLL will be based on the HLS and interview.[75]

DLLs are to be offered appropriate language supports, depending on their proficiency in English. Many of these supports are also woven into Keystone STARS, the state's quality rating and improvement system, promoting accountability. These supports include:[76]

► tailored English-language instruction,

► native language support,

► supplementary language enrichment,

► use of tailored visuals, and

► pairing with peers who speak English and/or the DLL's native language.

In those preschool programs that are led by school districts, information about each DLL is uploaded into the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS), PDE's statewide longitudinal data system (where DLLs are categorized as EIs because there is not a separate DLL category). Information about DLLs' English proficiency is also shared with all of the teachers with whom they interact.[77] This data collection that feeds into the state's K-12 system, however, is limited to preschool programs that are administratively connected to school districts, leaving out a large number of programs in Pennsylvania's mixed delivery system, including those based in child-care centers.

Implementation of these robust procedures throughout the system, furthermore, remains limited across the state, given constraints on resources and an ongoing need for training and professional development for

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72   While the home language survey distributed to pre-K students is the same as the one given to K-12 students, there are separate identification procedures for the two groups.

73   See the home language survey available for download at Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), "Screening, Identification, and Placement," accessed May 5, 2021.

74   PDE, *Dual Language Learner Identification Procedure – Pre-K* (Harrisburg, PA: PDE, n.d.).

75   PDE, *Dual Language Learner Identification Procedure – Pre-K.*

76   PDE, *Dual Language Learner Identification Procedure – Pre-K.*

77   PDE, *Dual Language Learner Identification Procedure – Pre-K.*

early childhood staff to expand capacity to enact these measures in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways.

D.   Minnesota's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Program

In recent years, Minnesota has made great progress in advancing DLL-focused policies and efforts, including passage of the *Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success Act* (LEAPS Act) in 2014. While the LEAPS Act pertains primarily to K-12 services, provisions from the legislation have been embedded into many of the state's early childhood programs as well.

Minnesota, like many other states, has an array of state-funded early childhood services. Among these, the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program, which is open to all four-year-olds, has the most robust formal requirements and processes in place to identify and track the DLLs it serves, processes that are integrated into the state's K-12 system.[78] Because of its formal inclusion in this system, the VPK program is required to meet all of the same standards that apply to ELs in K-12 schools, including identification practices. According to program guidelines, VPK programs are required to both identify and evaluate ELs in the same way that they would be in kindergarten and beyond.[79] Similarly, young children who are identified as ELs are required to be provided with support through English language specialists in their districts.[80] Because VPK is only one of several available public pre-K programs in Minnesota, however, the state is still unable to report the number and characteristics of all DLLs enrolled in pre-K.

E.   The Fresno Language Project in California

At the local level, the Fresno Language Project takes a comprehensive approach in identifying DLLs in early learning settings, including but not limited to preschool programs. The initiative, which is coordinated by Fresno United School District and supported by philanthropic funds, was created in response to gaps in student outcomes data that pointed to a need to better support DLLs in early learning. It brings together participants from across multiple agencies and ECEC settings[81] to provide professional development and coaching to support teachers, teaching assistants, and in-home providers to help them more effectively serve DLLs. As part of its work around engaging families to support DLL outcomes, the Fresno Language Project, with early childhood expert Dr. Linda Espinosa, developed a Family Language and Interest Interview tool, which enables educators to learn from families about their language use and aspirations.[82] The interview explores:

► who lives in the household and which language(s) they use with the child,

► who the primary caregiver is and which language they use most frequently,

► in what language the child first spoke, and

78   Katsiaficas and Park, *Minnesota's Superdiverse and Growing Dual Language Learner Child Population.*

79   Minnesota Department of Education, *Minnesota Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten and School Readiness Plus Program Implementation Manual* (Roseville, MN: Minnesota Department of Education, 2018).

80   Minnesota Department of Education, *Minnesota Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten.*

81   Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, "Fresno Language Project" (fact sheet, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Fresno, CA, n.d.).

82   Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, "Fresno Language Project."

► how important families believe it is for the child to continue learning and speaking their home language.

Beyond the creation of the survey itself, trainings, focus groups, and other conversations organized through this initiative have underscored the need for the project to train educators on how to administer interviews and the purpose and spirit of the DLL designation. Leaders of the project have also found that any survey protocol should be administered multiple times during the early childhood period to capture the fluid dynamics of language use. Providing this tool and the professional development to support its effective implementation has helped educators better understand the DLLs they serve and build meaningful relationships with parents.[83]

6   Implications for Policy and Practice

While the commendable state and local practices described in the prior section demonstrate a move in the right direction toward identifying DLLs in ECEC programs for the purposes of improving service provision, no states have yet come near to developing a system that identifies and tracks DLLs effectively across an aligned birth-to-age-five system. This is due not only to a lack of guidance on identifying DLLs specifically, but also to the piecemeal nature of most ECEC data systems, which prevents effective knowledge transfer and alignment between the many disparate public and private, formal and informal programs in which young children participate prior to kindergarten entry. Identifying and tracking DLLs in state pre-K programs is an important step—and one of the most achievable, given many programs' integration into existing K-12 systems. However, as the majority of young children do not participate in these programs, there is a clear need for a more comprehensive approach.

Efforts to develop comprehensive solutions to DLL identification must recognize the many challenges inherent in the limited and disjointed nature of ECEC systems in most states and localities. At the same time, forward-looking steps can and should be taken across the federal, state, and local levels to provide important information about DLLs in an effort to continue to improve services and outcomes for this growing population of children.

In contrast to K-12 settings, where schools often conduct a home language survey upon a child's enrollment, early childhood scholars recommend that the first step of identifying DLLs in early childhood programs take the form of a protocol, similar to what is being promoted in New York through the EMLLPP. This would replace or go beyond parents providing answers on an enrollment questionnaire, and instead involve a family interview designed to determine how different languages are used by the child and family along with other information pertinent to the child's learning trajectory. New York's protocol includes the development of a linguistic profile that could serve as a model for other states and providers. It explores the languages spoken in the home, exposure to English outside the home, the parents' language goals for the child, and the child's early literacy experiences. Additionally, while not requiring a particular procedure, Head Start has provided a range of resources that other federal and state ECEC programs could look to in seeking to bolster their capacity to collect information on a DLL's background. This is an emerging area of

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83   Diana Chun and Chris Sciarrino, "Q&A: Fresno Early Learning Leaders on Supporting Language and Culture," The Early Learning Lab, June 2018.

research but one that holds promise for improving both policy and practice. It would provide program staff with information critical to informing their strategies for supporting children's language development. In addition, it would provide policymakers and ECEC administrators with information critical to guiding system design and capacity development.

Identification of DLLs should also include some form of assessment of the child's knowledge of English and the home language, as well as language use. But compared to language surveys and protocols, the role of assessments is less well understood in this context. If used, assessment instruments and procedures would need to be validated for linguistic, cultural, and age subgroups within the DLL population and go beyond translations of English-language versions of these tools. Conducting such assessments and using their results to inform practice also requires qualified staff who are trained in linguistic acquisition and second language development in DLLs.

Ultimately, this review of research and state and local practices indicates that identification of DLLs in early childhood programs would ideally incorporate the following steps: (1) initial determination of whether young children have significant exposure to a language other than English in their home environment; (2) collection of accurate data about DLLs' linguistic environment and experiences; and (3) determination of DLLs' evolving language and literacy skills in English and in the home language, as well as language dominance. These steps are largely in line with recommendations that have already been put forth through documents such as the joint policy statement on DLLs released by HHS and ED in 2016. An additional step to ensuring that the data collected during the DLL identification process can be effectively leveraged to improve programming and learning supports for these children would be to make sure the data are accessible to ECEC policymakers and programs. Together, these four elements of a DLL identification framework are discussed in a companion piece to this report, *Ending the Invisibility of Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Systems: A Framework for DLL Identification*.[84]

A.   *Policy Levers to Promote DLL Identification*

There are potential levers at the federal, state, and local levels that can be explored to advance the development of a comprehensive, aligned DLL identification system.[85] At the federal level, further guidance, support, and resources to implement the recommendations discussed above could help states and localities move closer to making these principles a reality. Accountability measures—such as those integrated into program reporting requirements—are also needed to ensure that states can accurately report information about DLL characteristics and needs, and that this information is being made available to policymakers and program administrators to inform their work to promote equity and program quality.

At the state level, early learning standards and guidelines that inform everything from assessment practices to quality rating and improvement systems are a critical lever to advance DLL identification. As more states develop kindergarten entry assessments, incorporating DLL-specific information into those assessments as well as considering how best to transfer information about young children's linguistic profiles from

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84   Maki Park and Delia Pompa, *Ending the Invisibility of Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Systems: A Framework for DLL Identification* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2021).

85   For a more in-depth discussion of these opportunities to advance DLL identification, see Park and Pompa, *Ending the Invisibility of Dual Language Learners.*

early learning programs into the K-12 realm are also important avenues to promote a more robust DLL identification process and increase the impact of the information gathered.

State preschool programs, which often follow Head Start guidelines, can also take a vanguard role in anchoring DLL identification processes and guiding other programs to follow their lead, as states such as Illinois and Minnesota have done. Additionally, state early childhood agencies can design instruments used in quality rating and improvement systems to promote accountability measures, ensuring that programs are able to effectively provide relevant supports for DLLs once they are appropriately identified.

States also have an important opportunity to incorporate critical information about young children's language use as they move toward the development of comprehensive early childhood integrated data systems. Such systems align information across early childhood programs as well as vertically into a state's K-12 data systems. While the realization of such a system remains a distant goal for many states, including information relevant to DLLs in these systems' design from the outset is critical to ensure that these young children's needs will be understood and met in early childhood services.

Finally, at the local level, school districts, cities, and counties can take steps to collaborate across disparate sectors and siloes as early childhood stakeholders in Fresno have done, sharing promising practices, new tools, and valuable lessons learned that may be taken to scale as the field moves forward. Rooted in a particular local context, these efforts can be more responsive to community needs, taking into consideration specific equity gaps and concerns as well as varying language distributions. Perhaps most importantly, such initiatives can concretely show the many benefits and improved outcomes to be gained from identifying DLLs and understanding their language profiles through a comprehensive, strengths-based approach that recognizes and values home language skills as an asset rather than a liability.

B.   Concluding Thoughts

Federal agencies, researchers, and national education organizations have all called for more systemic processes for identifying DLLs as an important step toward improving services and outcomes for this population. However, a great deal of work remains at the federal, state, and local levels to develop and implement systems that can collect the relevant information and make it available to teachers, administrators, and policymakers who can, in turn, utilize it to improve programs and policies for DLLs. Strategies to implement standardized identification procedures not only within individual early childhood funding streams but also across ECEC settings in an aligned manner remain particularly elusive, representing a significant long-term challenge that remains to be addressed. As public interest in building

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more robust and accessible early childhood systems grows, and as the young child population continues to become more linguistically and culturally diverse, investments in better identifying and understanding DLLs' characteristics and early learning needs are clearly overdue—and critical to these children's future educational success.

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