



Incorporating Instructional Strategies, Initiatives, and Goals for Biliteracy Initiatives and Dual Language Education Into State Literacy Plans

Overview

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA) defines an English learner (EL), in part, as an individual “whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards; the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or the opportunity to participate fully in society.” A large and well-established body of research demonstrates that biliteracy education (BE) initiatives—which focus on the ability to read and write in two languages and are commonly referred to as dual language education (DLE) initiatives—not only help to improve student outcomes but also strengthen and support literacy development in both English and students’ native languages. However, few ELs have access to long-term DLE programs—those providing consistent DLE from elementary school to middle school (Goldenberg, 2024). State educational agency (SEA) literacy teams, EL program leaders, and other educators and stakeholders can take steps to improve academic achievement for ELs by implementing or improving DLE efforts.

This document provides supporting information for biliteracy initiatives and DLE programs in schools and suggests ways to embed DLE strategies, initiatives, and goals within State literacy plans (SLPs) to improve both literacy outcomes and overall academic achievement for ELs across grade levels. This information can inform the planning, development, or revision of SLPs, as well as the creation of or updates to materials and curricula for classroom instruction, assessment, and professional learning. Readers can use this information to:

- Review current strengths and gaps in State biliteracy initiatives and DLE programs;
- Identify sections or topic areas in SLPs that can emphasize and integrate BE efforts; and
- Develop or revise an SLP that integrates DLE implementation or improvement, assigns responsibilities and next steps, and sets measurable goals for assessing biliteracy and DLE efforts.





Rationale for Incorporating Biliteracy Initiatives and DLE Into SLPs

An increasing number of State literacy teams (SLTs) have added or expanded strategies and objectives related to biliteracy into SLPs. Often, these SLP goals involve teaching ELs to read and write in their primary or home languages while also teaching them to speak, read, and write in English.

The list below enumerates some of the pedagogical, statutory, and policy-related reasons to consider incorporating biliteracy initiatives and DLE into an SLP.

- **Reading literacy stems from spoken language skills.** Interdisciplinary research has established that spoken language constitutes the foundation of literacy for all learners. To become literate in written English, ELs must also receive instruction in speaking English to help develop vocabulary and to establish the necessary foundation in phonics, word recognition, and other foundational reading processes (Dehaene, 2013; Goldenberg, 2024).
- **Reading skills in one language can transfer and support learning to read a second language.** Studies demonstrate DLE's synergistic effects in how reading skills obtained from literacy instruction in the primary language transfer to the second language. Research on ELs shows that learning to read in one's home language can promote reading achievement in English (Goldenberg et al., 2023; Goldenberg, 2024). Elementary-through-middle-school DLE programs for ELs showed promising results compared with early-elementary DLE alone (Goldenberg et al., 2023; Goldenberg, 2024). Other research has identified a biliterate reading trajectory in which literacy learning in the second language closely follows that in the primary language (Escamilla et al., 2013).
- **Cognitive science supports DLE.** Research with medical imaging technologies demonstrates that similar networks in the brain are activated when learning to read a first language and when learning to read in an additional language (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Literacy in one's primary language and other languages depends on acquiring foundational cognitive literacy skills involving phonics (Goldenberg, 2024). However, ELs need additional support in English literacy learning because of their unfamiliarity with English's phonology, semantics, and vocabulary (e.g., clarification of words with nonverbal cues, regular vocabulary-building instruction, and guided practice with spoken English; Ehri et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2024; Vaughn et al., 2006).

Suggested Resources

You can find useful information on DLE in the list of resources below, as well as in the works cited in the References section.

- These are two blog posts written by education expert Claude Goldenberg:
 - [Oral Language and Written Language Are Not the Same Things: Why the Distinction Really Matters When Teaching Literacy to English Learners](#)
 - [Phonics Instruction Is Not Enough for English Learners, or Anyone. But It's Still Foundational for All.](#)
- [Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School](#)
- [Advancing Ohio's English Learners](#)
- [How to Develop a Lesson Plan That Includes ELs](#)
- [The Colorado Department of Education's Biliteracy Professional Development Series](#)

- **Practical classroom studies support DLE.** Effective English literacy instruction for ELs is crucial in the early grades. Studies demonstrate that ELs not proficient in reading English by Grade 3 are less likely to read at or above grade level in subsequent grades and have a greater likelihood of dropping out of school (Armstrong, 2019). Classroom intervention studies support the conclusion that foundational skills for learning to read in both a first language and a secondary language are similar and mutually reinforcing. These classroom studies also indicate that language learners benefit from additional instructional support (Goldenberg, 2024).
- DLE is compatible with evidence-based educational support frameworks. Educators can integrate DLE programs with new or established frameworks for response to intervention (RTI) and multitiered systems of support (MTSS).

Integrating biliteracy initiatives and DLE in SLPs

SLPs afford educators, literacy experts, policymakers, and others the opportunity to plan, assign responsibility for, and set evaluation criteria for statewide DLE programs. An SLT drafting or revising an SLP can consider the following guiding questions:

- How can our SLP (or how does our current SLP) address literacy in both students' home languages and English?
- Which goals or strategies in our current SLP or other ongoing literacy initiatives promote biliteracy?
- What resources or supports exist for educators to instruct students in achieving literacy in more than one language?
- How can funding sources, including State and local sources, support DLE programs and supplemental services across our State?
- Which key partners can contribute to statewide biliteracy and DLE efforts—EL specialists, bilingual program leaders, literacy specialists, or others?





An SLT can incorporate strategies, plans, data, instructional guidance, objectives, continuous improvement processes, and resources pertaining to DLE within the SLP. Table 1 lists the nine common components of an SLP (see the [SLP Starter Kit](#) for more details) and describes opportunities for incorporating biliteracy under each component.

Table 1. Suggestions for Integrating BE Into the Nine Common SLP Components

SLP Component	BE-Related Content
1. Cover Page and Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the introduction to describe statewide biliteracy priorities and initiatives.
2. Infrastructure, Legislation, and Related Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List and describe the components of infrastructure related to educating ELs (e.g., personnel, organizations, institutions, and resources). List and describe State laws and policies related to ELs
3. Alignment of SLP With Other State Literacy Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List and describe State literacy initiatives for ELs and biliteracy initiatives. Explain how the SLP aligns with these initiatives.
4. Needs of All Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present and analyze data disaggregated by EL status and language proficiency. Present and analyze data to identify target DLE populations.
5. Effective Evidence-Based Framework for Literacy Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and highlight research-based pedagogical practices that promote dual language instruction, biliteracy, and DLE programs across grade levels.
6. Goals and Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List one or more measurable goals based on disaggregated data on student achievement and other data. Describe biliteracy and DLE activities aligned with the goals (e.g., programs, curricula, interventions, professional development opportunities, and RTI/MTSS).
7. Implementation and Continuous Improvement at the Local Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how biliteracy and DLE activities will be implemented and evaluated at the local level. Identify and describe what strategies will be used to ensure continuous improvement at the local level. Describe timelines for implementation and evaluation.
8. Continuous Improvement at the State Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how success will be evaluated at the State level. Identify and describe what strategies will be used to ensure continuous improvement at the State level. Describe timelines for evaluation.
9. Resources and Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify tools, resources, and supports the State educational agency can provide to local educational agencies. List plans and timelines for developing professional learning opportunities, curricula, and other resources to support biliteracy efforts.



References

- Dehaene, S. (2013). Inside the letterbox: How literacy transforms the human brain. *Cerebrum*, 7. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3704307>
- Escamilla, K., Butvilofsky, S., Escamilla, M., Hopewell, S., Ruiz-Figueroa, O., Soltero-González, L., & Sparrow, W. (2013). *Biliteracy from the start: Literacy squared in action*. Caslon Publishing.
- Goldenberg, C. (2024, December 3). *Research must guide how we teach English learners to read*. CLSD Topical & Project Directors Meeting. Alexandria, VA, United States.
- Goldenberg, C., & Cárdenas Hagan, E. (2023). Literacy research on English learners: Past, present, and future. *The Reading League Journal*, 12–21. <https://www.thereadingleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TRL-C-ELEB-Goldenberg-Cardenas-Hagan-2023.pdf>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *English learners in public schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf>

