Supporting Children Who Are DLLs and Their Families Through the Transition to Kindergarten

Transitioning from a Head Start program to kindergarten means many changes for the child and their family. When children who are dual language learners (DLLs) transition from early learning settings to elementary school, they need the same support that all children require, along with additional support related to language learning and cultural experiences. Families of children who are DLLs may be unfamiliar with U.S. school systems, either because this is their first child to transition to elementary school or because their prior experience occurred in a different country or school system.

Definition of Dual Language Learner

Dual language learner (DLL) describes a child who is acquiring two or more languages at the same time or a child who is learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. The term "dual language learner" may encompass or overlap substantially with other terms frequently used, such as bilingual, English language learner (ELL), Limited English Proficient (LEP), English learner, and children who speak a Language Other Than English (LOTE). Terms, 45 CFR&1305.2

Preparing children, families, and schools for this specialized transition requires participation from the early care and education community. *The Dual Language Learners Program Assessment (DLLPA)* outlines this overall coordinated approach that ensures effective participation of children who are DLLs and their families. The DLLPA describes the systems and services that work together to support children who are DLLs while they are enrolled in Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS). These systems and services help staff coordinate an approach to supporting transitions from Head Start to elementary school for children who are DLLs and their families. These supports can help children and their families meet short term learning goals and honor the long term benefits of growing up with two or more languages. Bi- and multi-lingualism and bi-literacy are important assets for long term success. The DLLPA *section 10 on Transition Services* includes questions programs can ask themselves to examine the extent to which they support transitions for children who are DLLs and their families. Consider your program's efforts to:

- **Share information** on the developmental progress of children who are DLLs with staff in the new educational settings or within our own program.

- **Offer ongoing support** groups and training for our families on transition topics specific to children who are DLLs.

Consider your program's efforts to:

- **Develop individual plans** with families that include language and cultural considerations for their child's transition to new learning settings.

- **Connect with destination programs** and arrange visits for our children who are DLLs and their families?

- **Use the home language**, when possible, to facilitate the transitions of children who are DLLs and their families during their arrivals and departures.

- **Help families understand** that the transition to academic English may take up to five years and even though their child has learned some English, the child might still be placed in a bilingual or ESL kindergarten.

- **Develop Memorandums of Understanding** (MOUs) with partners, such as Local Education Agencies (LEAs), child care, and other early childhood programs, to ensure that our transition plans include strategies to support children who are DLLs.

- **Talk to families of children who are DLLs** about school readiness and discuss specific strategies our families can use to support their children's readiness for school.

Supporting Children Who are DLLs and Their Families Through the Elementary School Enrollment and Placement Process

In most states, school district staff will ask families to submit a home language survey as recommended by guidance from the Every Student Succeeds Act. If the survey reveals a home language other than English, the child will be identified for language screening to determine if a placement is needed in some form of English language development services. Families typically receive a letter outlining the placement decision and are asked to approve the decision. Preschool programs, including Head Start, have multiple roles to play in this process. They can support families as they share information with the state and school district about their child's home language and English proficiency. Head Start and other preschool programs can also support parents as they receive information from the school district about screening, including the results of the assessment. They might also help families advocate for their child's language learning needs in preparation for the transition to kindergarten.

To effectively support families and children through this process, education staff members need to understand and be able to articulate the research findings that support maintaining the child's home language (use *The Importance of Home Language series*). As outlined in this excerpt, the Head Start Program Performance Standards accurately reflect this research by emphasizing the need for home language supports. The fact remains, that many kindergarten entry assessments (KEA) administered by elementary schools may be available only in English. Children and families need support to prepare for this and Head Start program staff can work with the receiving schools and programs to make sure they have information about each child's learning that an English-only assessment may not capture. One question that comes up frequently is, "how can elementary schools make placement decisions about children who are DLLs?"

"The teacher called a few days before school started and talked to us in Spanish. That really made Carlos and me feel comfortable!"

Parent

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) often make these decisions using a combination of factors such as the home language survey, the Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) and additional screenings, along with considerations based on the languages spoken, the availability of spaces in the various levels of service, and the locations of appropriate classroom models. Early childhood educators may work diligently to support children's English language development, but later learn that the children's English language skills did not meet the minimum threshold on the KEA or other screening tool for language proficiency, thereby prompting a recommendation for placement in bilingual kindergarten or English as a Second Language (ESL) services . Early childhood educators or families may consider this a step backward for the child or a rebuke of the educator's efforts. Research by James Cummins and others suggests that it takes five to seven years to become academically fluent in a new language. So a child will likely make significant progress learning English during preschool, while not yet testing as fully proficient in English for the elementary school. There is also a significant body of research that shows continuing to learn the home language can support English language learning. To read more about this research, see *The Benefits of Being Bilingual*.

> ## "Communicating with the preschool teacher helped me understand so much more about the home language and English development and experiences of each of the children coming to my class."
>
> **– Kindergarten Teacher**

English Language Family Toolkit

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition has prepared a vital resource to help families navigate these transitions and inform them about their rights and responsibilities. It's titled *English Learner Family Toolkit*.

This resource gives families tips, resources, and useful questions they can ask. Head Start program staff can use this document to make sure they have the information needed to develop their own transition processes and supports.

Successful transitions for all children includes supports via child-school, family-school, program-school, and community-school connections.

Here are adaptations you may wish to consider for children who are DLLs:

Child-School Connection

for All Children	Adaptation for Children Who are DLLs
Make a video for children about kindergarten.	› Include voiceovers in children's home languages. Make the video available to families so they can explain in more detail, using their home language with their child.
Set up the dramatic play area to resemble a kindergarten classroom so children and teachers can "practice" what kindergarten will be like.	› Provide information to classroom volunteers and staff about this area's purpose so bilingual adults can support children who are DLLs and record notes to document that the children who are DLLs demonstrated understanding of their coming transition.
Take a field trip to a kindergarten classroom (so they can practice going to the cafeteria, riding the bus, etc.).	› Prepare children who are DLLs before this field trip so they can understand their experiences during the trip. Language differences may make it hard for them to understand explanations during the trip. Preparation could include: • Creating a story about the field trip, and having it translated into children's home languages, and reading it several times. • Sending an explanation home so families can discuss the features of the trip with children. • Asking bilingual staff to help explain the trip to the children, or including bilingual staff to participate.
Read books about kindergarten.	› Choose books that accurately depict what the children can expect. Some books seem cute, but their funny events may be hard for some children to understand. Look for books in the languages of the children in the class and have home language readers share the books and have conversations with children who are DLLs.

"There is a lot of paperwork to enroll my child in kindergarten. I appreciate the help from Head Start staff to figure it out."
- Parent

Family–School Connection

Recommendation for All Children	Adaptation for Children Who are DLLs
Send home learning activities to prepare for kindergarten.	› Make these messages and materials available in the home languages.
Co-plan and coordinate a kindergarten open house for families.	› Offer additional options to be sure every family has a chance to learn about the kindergarten experience. Many families are intimidated by large group activities, or they may work shifts that prevent their attendance at a single open house. Smaller group options also make it easier to communicate in the family's home language and answer their questions. Ensure materials are provided in the home languages of the families, or ensure interpreters are available during the event.
Partner with receiving schools to create opportunities for families to discuss their child's strengths and challenges with receiving teachers.	› For families of DLLs, include opportunities to understand the receiving school's English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual education policies, and the rights and responsibilities of families in advocating for their child.
Send home transition information to families.	› Written information, even when translated, can be misunderstood. When sending home this important information, make staff, volunteers, or bilingual families available to talk with each family and answer any questions.
Find ways to use individual family information (with written permission) to support each family's transition process.	› Examples might include the child's siblings, pets, family traditions, or talents. This information helps the new school greet the child and family and build personal connections accross language differences.
Discuss how you can coordinate opportunities for families to connect with other families in the receiving school.	› Match families with the same home language when possible.
Encourage families to become involved in advocacy and leadership opportunities in the receiving school.	› Families may need more information about school involvement if they have no experience with U.S. schools and the roles of family members as advocates for their children.

Program–School Connection

Recommendation for All Children	Adaptation for Children Who are DLLs
Make it possible for educators (kindergarten and early childhood) or administrators (Head Start site leaders and elementary principals) to talk to one another about aligning curricula between settings.	› For children who are DLLs, additional information should be shared so the early childhood educator understands how to prepare children for the receiving school's English Language Development services and the receiving school needs to learn about the language policies and practices of the early learning setting.
Facilitate communication between educators (kindergarten and early childhood) or administrators (Head Start site leaders and elementary principals) about assessments that will help inform teaching practices.	› Support communications about Kindergarten Entry Assessments (see research listed below under Resources), developmental screenings, Home Language Survey, and Language Proficiency Screening.
Establish and share policies for program and school personnel (e.g.,site leaders, managers, principals) communicating about individual children.	› Include program and school personnel who make decisions about children who are DLLs in these communications.
Collaborate with program and school personnel to host a kindergarten registration event.	› Translate documents, hire interpreters, and offer alternative meetings for families who may not feel comfortable with large group events.
Work with program and school personnel (e.g., teachers, education managers, disability coordinators, principals, special ed coordinators) and families to develop a transition plan for children with disabilities or other special needs.	› Be sure each child's home language and language learning needs are also addressed appropriately.
Confer with program and school personnel (e.g., educators, education managers, disability coordinators, principals, special ed coordinators) to ensure children with disabilities have a current IEP in place when the year begins.	› Make sure the IEP specifically addresses functional goals related to home language learning as well as cultural and linguistic supports. See the guidance in the *DEC Position Statement on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness*.
Plan for early childhood education staff to spend time at the receiving school so children see a familiar face during the first week of school (and so early childhood educators can better understand the kindergarten learning setting and expectations).	› Identify bilingual early childhood education staff who can visit and interact with children in their home language.
Partner with local education agencies to participate in professional development with the goal of building a common foundation of knowledge.	› In addition to building a common foundation of knowledge, partner with local education agencies to build a common understanding of effective teaching practices for young children who are DLLs. This approach is recommended in the Non-regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the ESEA, as Amended by the *Every Student Succeeds Act*.
Invite personnel from the receiving school to join program activities and visit classrooms throughout the school year.	› When you have children who are DLLs, invite members of the school's ESL or bilingual education team.

Community–School Connection

Recommendation for All Children	Adaptation for Children Who are DLLs
Inform the community about the amazing assets of children who are growing up with two languages and the benefits of bilingualism to foster respect for children who are DLLs and their families. Some examples might be posting a blog or press release highlighting all of the languages spoken in your program or sharing a recording of the children singing songs in different languages.	› Invite members of the community to volunteer or provide other kinds of resources and support to smooth the transition from early learning settings to kindergarten for children who are DLLs and their families. Community volunteers who are bilingual might be available to answer families' questions about getting ready for kindergarten or they might help to translate information from the school.

Resources

Dual Language Learners Program Assessment
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/guide-dual-language-learners-program-assessment-dllpa/dual-language-learners

Supporting Transitions: Using Child Development as our Guide
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/supporting-transitions-brief-one.pdf

U.S. Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition English Learner Family Toolkit and English Learner Toolkit
https://ncela.ed.gov/family-toolkit

U. S. Department of Education Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the ESEA, as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act
https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essatitleiiiguidenglishlearners92016.pdf

English Learners in Select States: Demographics, Outcomes, and State Accountability Policies
https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/english-learners-demographics-outcomes-state-accountability-policies

TESOL Position Paper on Language and Literacy Development for Young English Learners (ages 3-8)
http://www.tesol.org/docs/pdf/371.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Assessing the Kindergarten Readiness of Dual Language Learners
https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/dll-data-gaps-4

Unlocking ESSA's Potential to Support Early Learning by New America
https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/unlocking-essas-potential-support-early-learning/

Building Bridges: Transitions that Support Children
https://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/psguide/transition.pdf

The Office of English Language Acquisition's NCELA newsletter
https://ncela.ed.gov/ncela-nexus

DEC Position Statement on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness
hhttps://www.utoledo.edu/education/grants/partnerproject/focus/docs/DEC%20summary%20Diversity.pdf

IDEA for English Learners with Disabilities
https://sites.ed.gov/idea/topic-areas/#English-Learners-with-Disabilities

Supporting ELL Transitions in Early Education
http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolc/issues/2014-09-01/3.html

Partnering with Families of Children who are Dual Language Learners
https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/partnering-families-dll.pdf

Colorin Colorado: Your Rights as the Parent of a Public School Student
http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/your-rights-parent-public-school-studen

> **" Making time to sit down with everyone at the table has made all the difference for our kids. They are coming to school ready to learn ..."**
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> **-Kindergarten Educator**

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