Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Leading by Exemplar:
Meeting the Needs of DLLs

This brief focuses on the practices of five exemplary Head Start programs from the Leading by Exemplar research project. Below you'll find details on the strategies used by each program to best meet the needs of their dual language learners. Each of these programs does something different, but have proven impacts on the children they serve.

Acelero uses its innovation cycle to support its large proportion of dual language learners

Every Acelero classroom uses a sheltered English instructional model. This model provides intentional additional support to dual language learners so they can effectively learn in the classroom while also developing proficiency in English. Through their innovation cycle, Acelero has piloted and implemented several new practices, including a training process to teach aids or volunteers how to administer screenings in a child’s home language and integrate children’s culture and language into the classroom.

CAP Tulsa prioritizes hiring bilingual or multilingual staff

To support the many children enrolled in the program who speak languages other than English, CAP Tulsa uses a model known as “English with home language support.” Teachers provide primary content in English, while also creating opportunities for children to be exposed to their home language frequently. CAP Tulsa prioritizes recruiting Spanish-proficient staff by offering a salary bump to those who are bilingual or multilingual. They also extend the impact of their bilingual staff by having them “float” between classrooms and activities to ensure children receive home language support even when their primary teachers do not speak their home language.

Educare Miami-Dade’s “One Teacher, One Language” model

Since nearly 80 percent of children enrolled are dual language learners, Educare Miami-Dade implements a fully bilingual Spanish-English program that uses a “one teacher, one language” model. In this model, each of the two teachers in the classroom is assigned a primary language and speaks only this language throughout the school day. The teachers’ alternate lesson plans so that every other week children receive instruction in one of the two languages. Because mastering both languages is important to economic and civic life in Miami, Educare Miami-Dade also engages parents and crucial partners in supporting their children’s home language development.

Source: Head Start Program Information Report, 2017-2018
Fairfax County’s “English-only with home language acquisition” model

To support the high percentage of children who are dual language learners in their Head Start program, FCPS works to promote growth in both English and the child’s home language by using a model known as “English-only with home language acquisition.” In this model, teachers deliver instruction and monitor children’s progress in English, while engaging parents as an essential partner in supporting children’s home language development. To do this, teachers and family engagement staff work closely with parents during monthly parent meetings where they share strategies and techniques for nurturing their child’s language development at home. One strategy that has been successful in building proficiency in English and the child’s home language is using children’s books to compare and explore words and phrases in multiple languages, whether or not the parent can read in that language.

UCA includes all dual language learners in a classroom with staff skilled in their home language

Utah Community Action also uses the “English with home language support” model to support language acquisition for dual language learners. UCA requires at least one staff member in each classroom speaks one of the home languages represented in UCA’s population of dual language learners. Because UCA has a large portion of students who speak home languages other than English and Spanish, it can be a challenge to hire qualified teachers and staff who speak certain languages, like Arabic, Vietnamese, Sudanese, and Chinese. In these cases, UCA engages parents, grandparents, and volunteers who speak the children’s home languages to come into the classroom and provide support for home language development.

Key takeaway

Each of these programs provides structured and intentional support for dual language learners with slight variations to meet the individual needs of the children they serve. English is the primary language used to provide instruction in each program. However, each model engages unique strategies to ensure dual language learners are exposed to their home languages and cultures. Each program also engages parents as partners to support their child’s language development at home.