

Ready At Five Prepares to Support the Needs of Maryland's Earliest Dual Language Learners

National and Local Data on Dual Language Learners¹

Children who routinely hear more than two languages - Dual Language Learners (DLLs) - are an increasing demographic in more than 40 states. In 2014 in Maryland, there were 122,000 DLLs ages 0-5, approximately 28% of children, representing a 149% increase since 1990. Maryland has the 14th largest number of DLLs in the country. Only 57% of DLLs in Maryland are Spanish-speaking; the other languages DLLs speak are Chinese, French, Vietnamese, and Ethiopian.

Only 7% of DLLs are proficient in reading by the time they are in fourth grade. DLLs face a variety of risk factors that can impact their abilities to achieve academic language proficiency, including growing up in poverty, not being identified as a DLL early in the academic process, and having parents with lower educational and language proficiency backgrounds: 20% of parents of DLLs in Maryland do not have a high school education.



Implications for Dual Language Learners

The impact of DLLs is felt first in the early childhood arena, which creates an opportunity for the early childhood field to develop systems to identify of DLLs, high-quality instruction for children who are developing multiple language pathways, and ongoing assessment

of children's growth. The increase of DLLs is also felt in the early childhood education workforce. Over 25% of the early childhood workforce in Maryland is foreign-born, and about half of those workers are limited English proficient. Stakeholders need to identify better models for providing training and building the competencies and proficiencies of the early childhood education workforce. Additionally, family engagement in support of DLLs is crucial. Parents and families need to feel welcomed and empowered as their child's first teacher, and as partners in their child's educational process.

Dual Language Learners as Assets²

Early childhood educational programs should welcome children and families who represent their community's cultural and linguistic diversity. By focusing on DLLs and their families as assets to an early childhood program rather than a "problem to be solved," educators can support DLLs' language development by building on their inherent resources and looking at the specific ways in which each child approaches and experiences language development in all content areas.

WIDA's Early Years "can-do" philosophy embraces inclusion and equity and the acknowledgement that all children are developing language throughout their educational lives. Its philosophy supports the research-based understanding that there are cognitive benefits to being bilingual/multilingual, and that DLLs should be exposed to both languages so that they can continue to maintain and build multiple language pathways concurrently. Maintenance of the home language is critical to the child's ability to access family support. WIDA's belief embraces encouraging practitioners to when thinking about and working with dual language learners to think about the child and what they are doing through the lens of language. What does the DLL need to have/know/express in order to 1) participate and 2) demonstrate knowledge in a particular activity?

¹ Margie McHugh, Director, Migration Policy Institute of the National Center of Immigrant Integration Policy. "Dual Language Learners and Their Families: National and Maryland Perspectives." December 10, 2015.

² Erin Arango-Escalante, Director, Early Years and Tricia Blanco, Early Years Program Manager for WIDA, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "Collaborating to Support Young DLLs: The WIDA Early Language Development Standards Framework." December 10, 2015.

Maryland's Exceptional Programs Support DLLs

Many programs in Maryland are already working to support DLLs and their families. Home-visiting programs, parent resources and education, bilingual early childhood education programs and assessment, high-quality professional development for practitioners, and community involvement and engagement programs are ensuring that all family members play a role in their children's education and are an asset to children, other parents, early educators and schools.

What Can You Do to Support DLLs and Their Families?

According to Dr. Jack R. Smith, Ph.D., Maryland's Interim State Superintendent of Schools, our collective goal should be that "all of Maryland's 1445 schools are welcoming and supportive of DLLs and their families." You can help Maryland achieve this goal by actively working to identify the specific needs of DLLs and their families in communities, developing a system of early identification for DLLs, encouraging all families to play an active role in their child's education and by leveraging community diversity.



Ready At Five Is doing its Part

Ready At Five has a number of resources to support the needs of DLLs. **VIOLETS** (Vocabulary

Improvement and Oral Language Enrichment through Stories) is an early childhood language program that promotes the development of pre-reading skills, oral language proficiency, and background and conceptual knowledge for 3 1/2 to 5 year old children. Developed by Ready At Five and Diane August, a national expert in the education of English language learners, VIOLETS is addressing the language & literacy skills gap and improving school readiness of children learning the English language. Based on the success of VIOLETS and the need to support children's development earlier, **PETALS** (Promoting Enrichment to Advance Language Skills), a Read Aloud language and vocabulary program for children ages 2-3 is currently in development.

Parents and family members play a crucial role in their child's readiness for school; they help their children grow, learn, and develop the academic, social, physical, and emotional skills needed for life-long success. Built on the idea that learning can be fun, **Learning Parties** are interactive, hands-on, parent/child experiences that promote the development of young children's school readiness skills. Ready At Five's four-part Learning Party curricula are available in Seven Domains of Learning.

The Cultural and Linguistic Competence: A Curriculum for Early Care and Education was developed by Ready At Five and Wendy Jones and Kathy S. Hepburn from Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (GUCCHD), Center for Cultural Competence. The curriculum is a unique, two-day professional development experience for early educators, elementary school staff and administrators, and community service providers, who work with and teach young English language learners.

Now is the time for Maryland's early childhood education community to identify and meet the needs of all of our earliest learners and their families.

Ready At Five is a dynamic, statewide organization that elevates the discussion, practice, and quality of early childhood in Maryland so that all children will be ready for kindergarten. Our vision is that all children will have the foundational skills needed for success in school, career, and life.

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