

# DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING:

## BENEFITS OF A MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION



Language is an important part of early development. It allows people to communicate, understand each other and develop social skills. Kids can't do this alone, so having dual language learning in schools and at home provides the support they need.

## THE MULTILINGUAL DIFFERENCE



A total of 27 percent of children younger than 6 are dual language learners, according to a 2021 study by the *International Journal of Educational Research*.

Learning more than one language can offer many benefits.

### IMPROVED COGNITIVE ABILITIES

- Bilingual children are more interested in processing new information and understanding their environment.
- Bilingual children develop skills differentiating between languages at an early age, including the following:
  - » Improved pattern recognition skills
  - » Improved general attention skills and executive functioning

### BROADER VOCABULARY

- In 2021, 56.2 percent of multilingual children aged 11 to 16 said they enjoyed reading in all the languages they knew because they learned new words.
- Learning more than one language at once allows children to understand sentence structure and make connections between languages, making them faster learners.

### MORE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FUTURE

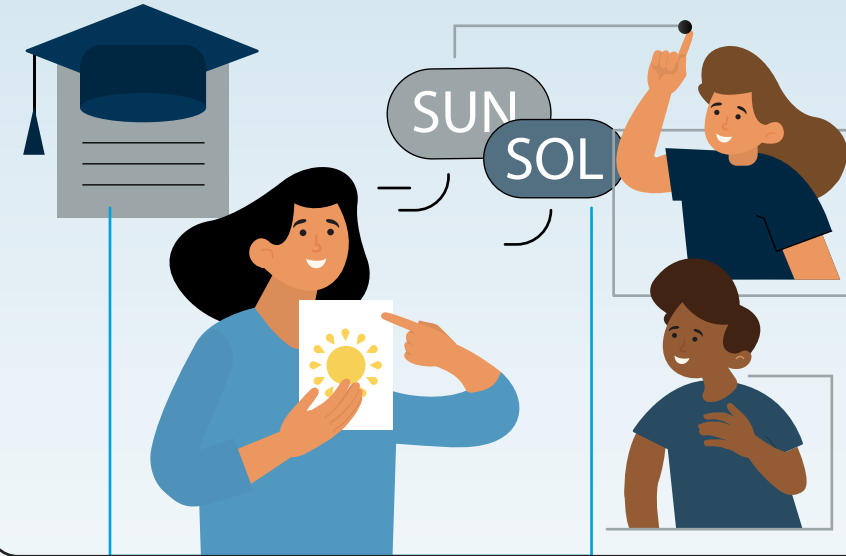
- Multilingual children use all their languages at once to become creative problem-solvers.
  - » This is called "code-mixing."
- Knowing multiple languages can help with future employment, with travel and in building diverse communities.
- Learning languages becomes harder with age, so learning multiple languages in childhood gives them an advantage over others during adulthood.

### STRONGER CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

- In 2021, 73.6 percent of children aged 11 to 16 believed that their non-English language was an important part of their identity.
- Learning both majority and home languages helps children understand the cultural practices of their communities.
  - » They learn about their heritage and history directly from non-English-speaking family members.

## LANGUAGES AND THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The U.S. had more than 3,600 dual-language immersion (DLI) programs in 2021, according to the American Councils for International Education: **80 percent Spanish, 8.6 percent Chinese and 5.0 percent French.**



### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**Children learn better in their native language.**

- Providing resources for non-English speakers helps them:
  - » Stay interested in learning
  - » Grow confident in their academic skills
  - » Learn another language faster



Elementary schools with successful dual language programs have:

- Effective bilingual teachers
- Active parent participation
- Knowledgeable leadership

It takes a minimum of four years for a student to reach grade-level performance in a second language, so starting early gives them the best chance for success.

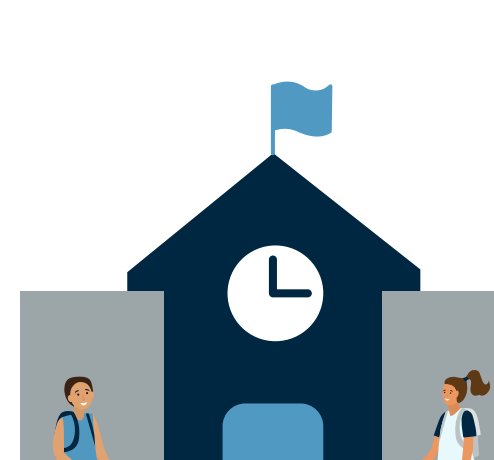
### MIDDLE SCHOOL

Many high schools require language courses, so taking dual language classes in middle school can help students get ahead.

By middle school, many programs adopt either a **90/10** immersion method or a **50/50** immersion method.

**90/10**  
» 90 percent second language  
» 10 percent English

**50/50**  
» 50 percent second language  
» 50 percent English



### HIGH SCHOOL

Most states have minimum requirements for high school graduation.

Many colleges and universities require applicants to have completed three to four years of a foreign language.

### EXTRACURRICULAR EDUCATION

Extracurricular language education may include the following:

- Transfer programs**: Students live with host families in a foreign country who help them learn about the local language and culture.
- Language clubs**: Many schools have clubs dedicated to specific languages in which students practice speaking and learn about the country of origin.
- Volunteering**: Students can earn community service hours and practice a language at the same time by volunteering in their community.

## PROVIDING SUPPORT EARLY

Children learn from their surroundings and the adults in their life, so having a support system boosts their education.

### FAMILY SUPPORT

Most children who are dual language learners have close family members who speak a language other than English.

Parents can support their children by communicating with their teachers and getting involved at school.

Don't let language be a barrier.

- » Ask for an interpreter at the school.
- » Help with homework.
- » Enroll children in extracurricular programs.

### ADAPTIVE CLASSROOMS

An adaptive classroom highlights a child's strengths and skills.

- » Different cultures learn differently, so adapting learning plans to students' needs helps succeed in school.

The U.S. Department of Education recommends a "research-based, assets-oriented framework."

**This means:**

- Integrating books and materials from students' cultures
- Inviting family into the classroom for culturally relevant lessons
- Exploring students' home cultures through arts and crafts
- Encouraging students to use their home languages in learning tasks

### ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT

Assessing a child's language skill doesn't just happen once.

- » A young learner may be placed in an English (ESL) program in first grade, then moved to native English classes in eighth grade.

When assessing a child's language proficiency, it's important to consider the following:

- How long has the child been speaking/listening to their home language?
- How long has the child been speaking/listening to English?
- How do the child's language proficiencies change over time?
- What are the child's learning environments?
- Does the child have any difficulties with language generally?

## CONCLUSION

While language learning is a lifelong endeavor, individuals who begin dual language learning at a young age benefit from it. They may have higher executive functioning skills, more social understanding and awareness, and a long-lasting connection to their families and cultures.