



**Tri-State  
Consortium**

## **Princeton Public Schools**

**TRI-STATE CONSULTANCY 2022**

**Dual Language Immersion Program K-12**

**November 30 – December 2, 2022**

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## Tri-State Consortium

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## **Executive Summary**

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### **The Tri-State Consortium**

The Tri-State Consortium, a professional network of **fifty-seven** public school districts in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, advances student performance through a continuous improvement process. Based on a framework of [eight quality indicators](#), the process involves a self-study by member districts and a triennial cycle of review by teams of fellow educators whose districts also belong to the Consortium. Serving as critical friends, these teams provide Tri-State districts with external feedback about current strengths and promising next steps.

### **The Princeton Tri-State Consultancy 2022: Dual Language Immersion Program K-12**

The Princeton Public School District is, by every measure, a high-performing district and highly regarded as such both locally and nationally. As a long-time member of the Tri-State Consortium, the District has welcomed the Consortium to review multiple programs and initiatives over the years. The Consortium values its relationship with the Princeton Public Schools and appreciates the opportunity to engage with the District to learn more about the Dual Language Immersion (DLI) program and to bring forward a visiting team with a wide range of experiences with DLI, English as a Second Language (ESL), World Language, and instructional expertise.

The Princeton Public School District is located in central New Jersey, one of 13 districts in Mercer County. While the PK-8 students come from Princeton Township, high school students include Cranbury Township students from neighboring Middlesex County. District enrollment has been growing and is currently above 3,400 students in grades PK-12. The student population is diverse, with 26.1% Asian, 11.7% Hispanic/Latino, 6.5% African- American, 14% Multiracial, 0.01% Native American or Pacific Islander, and 52.4% Caucasian students. About 16.7% of students receive Special Education services, 7% receive ESL or Bilingual support, and 12% are eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program.

The Princeton Public Schools invited the visiting team to evaluate the district’s Dual Language Immersion Program (DLI) at Community Park Elementary School and Princeton Middle School. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Kim Tew, Supervisor of World Languages and ESL/Bilingual and DLI Programs, Priscilla Russell, Community Park Elementary School Principal, Dineen Gruchacz, Middle School Principal, Jason Burr, Micki Crisafulli, Director of Student Services, and Sarah Moore, Supervisor of Elementary Education, welcomed the team and asked the visiting team to consider three essential questions to guide the evaluation. The District indicated that it selected DLI as the focal point of the Tri-State review because of the belief that all students in the program benefit from enhanced cognitive skills, improved academic performance, higher second language proficiency, and enhanced global citizenship.

During the introductory meeting, District representatives reviewed the essential questions and the overarching goal for the visit, including a desire to receive feedback regarding the DLI program, which had begun to gain momentum right before the pandemic. The District believes that the program needs a “reset” involving a more comprehensive, District-wide shared vision for the DLI program. The District is hoping that the Tri-State team can help provide support and clarity related to the initiative's original intention and consider the program's current state.

There is an awareness in the District and in the greater Princeton community that the program, originally designed to reduce the achievement gap and help underachieving students to be more successful in school, may not be reaching all of the students and families it was originally intended to serve. Instead, there is a perception that it has become a more “boutique” type program mostly for families of native English-speaking children seeking a bilingual immersion experience for their children. Although this experience is extremely positive for the children and families enrolled in the program, the District faces imminent increasing enrollment, issues with space, and challenges involving parents and children of English learners who are not choosing to access the DLI program. Instead, some of these families choose to attend another District elementary

school where they perceive that their children will receive better support via a more traditional ESL model.

The team spent three days in the district, November 30 - December 2, 2022, examining district documents and a variety of evidence of student work, and interviewing administrators, teachers, students, and parents and members of the Board of Education. On the second day, the Tri-State team facilitated a consultancy conversation between team members and district representatives, attended by teachers and staff from both schools and the District Office. The visit concluded with a debriefing meeting between the entire visiting team and the District Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. The Superintendent has been with the District for 18 months, and the Assistant Superintendent started in June 2022. This is worthy of note because both lead administrators are relatively new to the District and, although supportive of the program's goals and intentions, were not part of any original planning or launching of the DLI program in Princeton.

## **Response to Essential Questions**

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### **Essential Question #1:**

***To what extent is there a shared vision for the Princeton Public Schools DLI program across the district (Central Office, Community Park, and Princeton Middle School)?***

The visiting team was quickly aware through early discussions across the schools and with District administrative staff that there is currently no **shared** vision for the Dual Language Immersion program across the District. Community Park Elementary School administrators and teachers have a robust and steady commitment to the program but, in many ways, are operating on an island. Since the program's inception, Community Park Elementary School remains the only

school in the District to have a DLI program and holds fast to the possibility of becoming a fully DLI school by the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

In the 2020-2021 school year, the first cohort of Grade 6 students from Community Park arrived at the middle school, and the 2023-2024 school year will witness this original cohort, currently in the eighth grade, moving to the high school. Without a well thought out trajectory for DLI students, the future academic experience of students in DLI at the high school is hard to determine. Scheduling of DLI cohorts has presented some significant scheduling challenges for the middle school, limiting the amount of DLI instruction that students receive once they leave the elementary school. Since students coming from elementary schools other than Community Park also land in the middle school, the DLI students represent a relatively small cohort of Grade 6 students each year, comprising about 10% of the total middle school population. This “cohort within a school” model has proven tricky for the middle school to accommodate well and, lacking a shared District-Wide vision for DLI, will more than likely result in a similar challenge at the high school.

A serious concern about the program - that it is not serving the ELL children and families in Princeton that it was designed to support and serve - was mentioned by many who participated in the visit, including members of the Board of Education, administrators, and teachers. The program is beloved by the students, teachers, parents, and support staff participating in the DLI experience; however, there are complicated questions and dynamics in play as to why many ELL families are not choosing the DLI program for their children. The team heard more than once that the program had become more of an elite program for families who want a bilingual education for their native English-speaking children because they see the tremendous value of their children being bilingually proficient. Although this outcome is an important point for the District to consider, it does not address the issue of the program not being embraced as an effective strategy to address the needs of native Spanish speaking students, and underperforming students, many of whom also struggle with issues related to economic disadvantages as well as lower academic achievement.



This type of unintended outcome is not surprising without a clearly determined and articulated district-wide vision for DLI in Princeton. The lack of vision is also apparent in the fact that there is little to no mention of the DLI program on the District website, no inclusion of the program in the district's strategic plan and profile of a graduate, no clearly defined, targeted and effective recruitment of native Spanish speaking families to the program, little to no District communication about DLI for all members of the school and larger community, and therefore many questions across the schools about the level of District commitment to the program. This confusion especially leaves the Community Park administration, staff, parents, and students feeling unsupported and confused about their future.

The District is currently involved in a strategic planning process that involves the exploration of the "profile of a Princeton School District graduate," where perhaps a discussion of the vision for DLI can be a part of the District's vision-setting deliberations.

### **Commendations**

- The District is commended for offering a DLI program to students and families. Research supports the positive impact of such programs.
- The District is commended for opening the program up for review by the Tri-State Consortium.
- Community Park Elementary School offers a strong program.
- The District is commended for expanding the program into the middle school, and planning to move it into the high school in 2023-24.
- The teachers, K-8, are open to feedback and seek professional growth opportunities.
- The Community Park School principal is tenacious, committed, and visionary in embracing the opportunity to run the program in her school.
- Parents and students feel a sense of belonging to the program.

- The District recognizes the linguistic richness of the Princeton community and seeks to partner with families and community-based organizations to foster multilingualism and multiculturalism (connection to strategic plan).
- Students we spoke with are proud of their emerging bilingualism and seek to strengthen their reading and writing capabilities.

## **Recommendations**

- Consider clarifying the intent of the program - to serve mostly native English speakers or to be a true 50/50 model?
- Consider ways to develop an inclusive district-wide vision. Currently, there is no district-wide vision: there is a two-school vision.
- Once a vision is established, consider developing an action plan to move the vision forward and a communication strategy for disseminating the vision to all community stakeholders needs to be developed. Narration about the program's importance from the district office would be helpful in this process.
- Engage administrators, teachers, and students in resetting the vision and determining the professional learning experiences needed.
- Establish criteria for bringing in curriculum resources, such as linking to Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CRS-E) tenets.
- Engage the high school administration and staff in the creation of a K-12 vision for DLI.
- Consider ways to link the vision for DLI with pillars of the district strategic plan and profile of a graduate.
- Think about the "end game" - what is the desired outcome for DLI in Princeton – and what is the process and time line for getting there?
- Provide professional development and curriculum planning/mapping time for DLI teachers, especially by bringing teachers from Community Park and the middle school together periodically.

- Promote the program among the Spanish-speaking community (in Spanish!) and with existing Latino community resources such as churches and community centers serving the Latino community in Princeton.
  - Hold meetings and a variety of times in the day so that ALL parents can attend and receive information.
  - Include students, parents, and faculty that are already part of the program as speakers who can attest to the impact of the program.
  - Leverage personal connections, family-by-family targeted, flexible outreach.
  - Establish a point person for intake/registration that is knowledgeable and will **promote** the program with families.
  - Establish guidelines for intake/registration.
  - Encourage the principals of the other elementary schools to recommend that native Spanish speaking families explore the possibility of enrolling their children in the program.
- Consider increasing the number of “on-ramps” for the program. For example, are there ways that non-native Spanish speaking children can enter the program after Grade One, such as tutoring followed by a proficiency test, or with other types of support?

**Essential Question #2:**

***To what extent does the DLI program reflect the following:***

- ***Appropriate admissions criteria***
- ***Staffing***
- ***Research-based curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment?***

At the outset of the visit, the District has been clear that enrollment and admissions to the DLI program are challenging, which may be partially due to changes in the enrollment policy over the years. When the DLI program opened in 2015, only “in-boundary” families were eligible for enrollment, leaving some native Spanish-speaking families in the District out of the opportunity.

The enrollment policy was eventually changed, and any family in the District was eligible to enroll their children. Currently, students may enroll in the program up until January of Grade 1, after which only students who are either native Spanish speakers or students previously enrolled in a DLI program in another district may enter above the grade 1 January cut-off date.

District administration and teachers shared with the visiting team that finding additional ways to “on-board” students to the program who do not meet the current criteria would be a desirable outcome. Still, it is not clear how this would be approached. Outside tutoring with a grade-level entrance assessment might be possible, albeit not necessarily financially practical for many families. The enrollment policy/admissions criteria currently allow for increased participation; however, with marketing for the DLI program non-existent, it is hard to gauge the real level of interest among Princeton families since there is a strong belief that the program is not well-known in the community. Outreach into the Latino community is crucial and efforts must be carefully constructed to include not only presentations and materials that are available in Spanish but also an understanding that when engaging in this kind of outreach, partnering with trusted Latino community members such as clergy and other social services agencies is critical for success.

Engaging with Latino parents in a less formal and more conversational manner can alleviate concerns that are often unique to this program. In addition, ANY representatives from the District explaining and engaging with potential parents must provide a strong, positive message about the benefits of the program for children who are already Spanish speaking. There is a widespread belief and concern that not only is this NOT happening but that the opposite dynamic is in play resulting in eligible families choosing to attend school outside of the Community Park Elementary School based on a belief that students will receive better support at a different location. This messaging needs to be addressed immediately along with a well-thought-out communications plan designed to increase understanding about the program and its benefits to both Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking children.

In speaking with the administration, there is a belief that the program is well-staffed and that a concerted effort is in place to recruit Spanish-speaking teachers and support staff whenever possible. This effort has been a commendable success, and the DLI program is fortunate to have many Spanish-speaking staff members who effectively support students.

In terms of assessment, the visiting team encourages the District to determine and share multiple ways of demonstrating student academic achievement based on the goals and objectives of the DLI program. There is a current emphasis on standardized test scores, especially in math; however, there is additional clear evidence of student success such as the ability to engage in sustained discussions with the visiting team exclusively in the target language and a high level of awareness of cultural and global perspectives among the students interviewed for the visit. It is hard to gauge the success of an innovative program by traditional metrics. Identifying and capturing other measures of success will be critical in helping parents understand the full impact of their children's participation.

**Commendations:**

- Finding bilingual/Spanish-speaking staff (aides, liaisons, Special Education teacher, MS Social Studies teacher).
- Opening the program to any students within the district (District-wide program).
- Providing transportation for students to attend the DLI program.
- Investing in research-based materials such as Benchmark.
- Fidelity to the target language in classrooms and interviews.
- Students demonstrate proficiency in Spanish (they can maintain a conversation).
- Excellent internal resources that may be able to showcase and encourage provide best practices for teaching and learning (DLI teachers in the program).
- Staff offer creativity and flexibility in the materials they provide to students and families.

## **Recommendations:**

- Consider innovative benchmarks and measures of success/proficiency in the program.
  - Identify multiple measures (in both English and Spanish that align with measures used across the elementary schools).
  - AAPPL assessment.
- Consider bridging/transference of knowledge.
- Consider a wide array of recruitment strategies to attract Spanish-speaking families to the program.
- Consider multiple on-ramps with supports.
- Include more information about the program on the district website (provide this information in Spanish as well).
- Provide training for all staff on the use of Benchmark.
- Tap into peer coaching, classroom visitations, and looking from within for best practices.
- Complete a District-wide audit of the ENL students at other schools to determine exactly how many students are not accessing the DLI program ... and why.
- Ensure that the DLI program (instruction) is able to fully support these students in their academic skills and growth.
- Enlist the support of the other principals in encouraging parents of native Spanish speaking students to explore the benefits of enrolling in the DLI program.

## **Essential Question #3:**

***To what extent does the DLI program meet the academic and social-emotional needs of all learners (e.g., native Spanish speakers, native English speakers, students with disabilities, and students who require tiered academic support)?***

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has played an outsized role in all students' academic progress and social/emotional needs, with economically disadvantaged students particularly hard hit across the state and the nation. Challenges with a lack of connectivity and adequate technology (student

devices) despite an extensive district distribution of computers during the pandemic impeded access to learning for low-income students during the pandemic. Given the DLI program's relatively short lifespan, post-pandemic student proficiency data will likely reflect this access gap.

Currently available data bear out the fact that whatever the early aspirations for the program might have been, the DLI program and Community Park School are not serving the anticipated large numbers of economically disadvantaged students and are not serving many students who come to school speaking Spanish in the home, making the assessment of the DLI program on ALL learners challenging to gauge. This, in turn, makes it challenging to measure the many benefits for English learners who attend dual language programs. As cited in the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) report commissioned by the District in 2022:

- Research shows that ELLs benefit from continuing to learn in their native language. (Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2010)
- Oral proficiency and literacy in a student's first language facilitated English literacy development. (August & Shanahan, 2006)
- ELLs are less likely to fall behind in core subject areas if they are able to continue learning grade-level content in their home language while acquiring proficiency in English. (Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2010)

Specifically, for Spanish-speaking English learners (Relyea & Addendum, 2019):

- Stronger early Spanish reading in Kindergarten was related to greater English reading growth by Grade 4.
- Students in stronger Spanish reading groups but with lower English oral proficiency initially began behind their counterparts in reading but caught up with and surpassed them later.
- Initial, well-developed Spanish reading competence plays a greater role in English reading development than English oral proficiency.

There are numerous social/emotional learning supports available for all students in Community Park School, including a designated Social Emotional Learning classroom used by the school counselor to conduct weekly lessons for children in Kindergarten and First Grade as well as biweekly lessons for students in grades 2-5. The school counselor, school psychologist, and social worker regularly partner with classroom teachers, special area teachers, and other school staff to support the social/emotional development of all students and reinforce the goals of Responsive Classroom. The visiting team saw evidence of school-wide initiatives and classroom and grade-level programs in place to support students. The school also uses the Second Step program, a researched-based approach to meeting students' social and emotional needs. In the future, a school-wide survey designed to measure students' social and emotional learning might help quantify some of these efforts. Administrators, teachers, and staff are highly invested in meeting the needs of children and families, and students express that they like their teachers and believe their teachers care about them. The team also reviewed evidence of collaboration between the counseling services support staff and classroom teachers to develop lessons designed to facilitate social/emotional learning goals, such as creating "worry stones" in the art classes and the self-portrait collaboration, as examples.

**Commendations:**

- Students are supported by a bilingual special education and Academic Intervention Services provider.
- Teachers appear to know students well.
- Students are eager for higher-level learning.
- Students are overall happy with the program, understanding the benefits.
- Parents are supportive and find the program valuable.
- Students express a desire to be challenged.



## Recommendations:

- Consider the criteria to measure the success of the program: do they fully reflect the goals of the program?
- Establish/identify the outcomes for the DLI students.
- Share and promote the results of the APPL test.
- Collect, study, annotate, and celebrate exemplars of student work.
- Attend to the master schedule at the MS level so that it maintains and supports the ability of students to participate in the DLI program, with daily instruction.
- Establish grade-level benchmarks in content areas and proficiency.
- Incorporate academic vocabulary into lessons.
- Consider exploring options for obtaining the New Jersey Seal of Biliteracy so that students have an “exit goal” for the program.

## Conclusion

During our three-day visit to the District, our team was consistently impressed by the admirable level of energy and professionalism that the teaching and administrative staff bring to the district. It is abundantly clear that the administrators and staff at Community Park School are heavily invested in the success of the DLI program and that the Middle School continues to work toward strengthening the DLI cohorts despite challenges with the schedule.

We understand that the Board of Education and Superintendent must make some difficult decisions regarding the long-term trajectory of the DLI program weighed against the specter of increasing enrollment and lack of space to accommodate the expected number of new families that will eventually be part of the Princeton community. With enrollment at Community Park falling out of sync with the other District elementary schools, either increasing the number of families accessing the DLI program or keeping non-DLI cohorts in the school needs to be decided. Indeed, engaging in a serious communication strategy to inform the greater parent community

about the benefits of DLI is critical to any efforts to increase participation. Determining additional “on-ramps” may also be essential to increase access and participation.

We also understand that there are questions about the cost of a program serving a relatively small percentage of students. We suggest that abandoning the program and offering native Spanish speaking students ENL services instead may equate to a similar cost.

Regardless of the original intent of the program, the current reality is that although a popular program with a certain segment of the parent community who want and understand that bilingual children will be uniquely better positioned for success in college and beyond, the program is lacking in “cache” with Spanish-speaking families. Community outreach must be a high priority to address the less-than-supportive “messaging” currently dragging on the program.

The visiting team is extremely grateful for the district's warm welcome and attention to detail during the visit. All thanks to the district office staff for the warmth and hospitality we experienced throughout the three days. Thanks, in particular, to the gracious Giovanna Byzewski, Assistant to Kimberly Tew, who ensured that our accommodations at The Nassau Inn were scheduled and that we were very well-fed!

We hope our feedback is helpful and that the Princeton Public Schools DLI program can reach the goals and objectives designed to provide all interested students and families with this unique and innovative approach to learning and success in school.