

Supporting Dually Identified Students in Dual Language Immersion

May 2026

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WestEd 



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The Council of the Great City Schools convened a working group comprising English learner, dual language, and special education expert practitioners from member districts. This group played a key role in shaping the playbook and provided valuable feedback throughout the process.

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Executive Summary

This companion playbook was developed to address a persistent gap in dual language immersion (DLI) programming—the lack of explicit guidance for serving dually identified students—English learners (ELs) who also have disabilities. Building on the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) DLI playbooks, the document provides research, rationale, and practical guidance to help districts design and sustain inclusive DLI programs that simultaneously support biliteracy, grade-level content learning, and access to disability-related services. Its purpose is to help district and school leaders align policy, staffing, instruction, family engagement, and continuous improvement around the needs of this growing student population.

Components

The playbook begins by explaining why dually identified students require focused attention. It defines the population, outlines the intersecting legal obligations that govern their education, and examines the persistent challenges of disproportionality, misidentification, and underperformance. It also highlights how difficulties associated with second language acquisition can be confused with disability-related needs, underscoring the importance of valid, linguistically responsive identification and support systems.

Part I: Research synthesizes the research base on bilingualism, biliteracy, and multilingual learners with disabilities. It explains how the development of the dominant home language supports English acquisition through cross-linguistic transfer, and it examines the cognitive and affective factors that shape language learning for dually identified students. This section provides the conceptual foundation for inclusive DLI design by clarifying how bilingualism, literacy development, and learning differences intersect.

Part II: Systemic Challenges identifies the major barriers districts and schools face in serving dually identified students. These include leadership knowledge gaps, siloed systems between multilingual education and special education, staffing shortages, fragmented service delivery, insufficient assessment and identification practices, deficit-based assumptions, and weak family engagement structures. This section frames the systems-level problems that the playbook is intended to address.

Part III: Dual Language Immersion as a Model presents DLI as a promising framework for serving dually identified students. It explains how inclusive DLI programs can support home language development, English proficiency, academic achievement, and access to special education services in more coherent and asset-oriented ways. It also identifies core features of effective inclusive DLI programs, including asset-based design, integrated supports, holistic staffing, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, and meaningful family engagement.

Part IV: A Playbook for Implementing Inclusive DLI Programs translates the research and model into action. Organized into three stages—*Visioning and Planning*, *Support and Implementation*, and *Continuous Improvement*—this section provides district- and school-level actions for building inclusive DLI systems. It aligns this guidance with the OELA DLI playbooks and outlines strategies for policy and structural planning, instructional design, service delivery, staffing, professional learning, family and community engagement, monitoring, and program evaluation.

The final section, **Additional Considerations**, highlights complex issues that warrant further district attention, including assessment validity, screening and identification protocols, progress monitoring, classroom observation, staffing roles, instructional coaching, and the content of professional learning. This section provides tools and considerations to support sustained implementation and continuous refinement of inclusive DLI programs for dually identified students.

A Note on the Scope of This Playbook

This playbook focuses on how dual language immersion programs can support dually identified students through sustained access to English and dominant home language development. Such access can strengthen cross-linguistic transfer, preserve communication and relationships within families, and help prevent erosion of the language of home and community.

The playbook recognizes, however, that staffing capacity and program availability may limit districts' ability to provide instruction in a student's dominant home language. In English-medium settings, carefully designed instruction grounded in language learning research can also be effective. The Council's *Framework for Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction for English Learners* (Council of the Great City Schools, 2023) offers a comprehensive and connected approach that develops language-based skills, including oral language, comprehension and meaning-making, and word knowledge, alongside code-based skills, including phonological and phonemic awareness, print knowledge, decoding and phonics, and early writing, while drawing on students' existing linguistic knowledge and linguistic repertoires to support literacy development.

Regardless of program model, students' home languages and broader linguistic repertoires remain important assets that contribute to literacy development and learning. The knowledge, experiences, and ways of meaning-making students develop through their home languages can support engagement with new content and language learning. Maintaining these linguistic resources also helps sustain connections to family, community, and culture, particularly given evidence that home language erosion may reduce opportunities for intergenerational communication and families' capacity to guide and support their children.

Project Origin and Purpose

This companion playbook was developed to address a critical and persistent gap in dual language immersion (DLI) programming—the lack of targeted guidance for supporting dually identified students—English learners (ELs) with disabilities. The strategies and best practices delineated in the original DLI playbooks created by WestEd for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA)¹ for implementing high-quality DLI programs are also foundational for programs that serve dually identified students. However, the original playbooks did not explicitly include the additional steps required to address the needs of dually identified students. Many districts face challenges in providing access to dominant home language instruction in DLI settings, particularly for dually identified students who may benefit most from it.

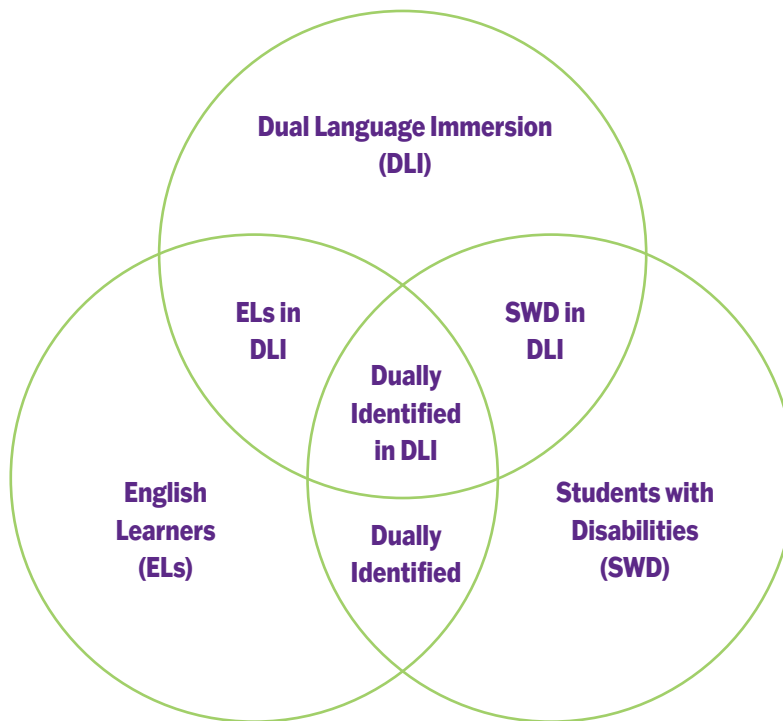
Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) Dual Language Immersion Playbooks

In December 2024, the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) of the U.S. Department of Education published a series of playbooks to support the implementation of high-quality DLI programs. The playbooks outline evidence-based state and district policies, processes, and initiatives necessary to design and sustain quality DLI programs, and highlight examples of successful planning, collaboration, and strategies for effective implementation, funding, staffing, and community involvement.

Council-member districts have consistently called for more inclusive, evidence-based resources to support the design and implementation of DLI programs that serve all learners. This playbook responds directly to that call, providing systems-level strategies and practical guidance to help districts embed support for dually identified students into their instructional frameworks, policies, and professional learning structures. As shown in Figure 1, dually identified students face distinct challenges that cannot be fully addressed by general DLI, EL, or special education supports alone. Their success requires integrated, responsive strategies that acknowledge the complexity of their needs.

1 U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2024). *Dual language immersion playbooks*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/oela-resources/playbooks/dual-language-immersion-playbook>

Figure 1. Intersection of Needs and Supports for Dually Identified Students



The development of this resource was guided by three core objectives:

- To provide actionable, research-informed strategies that improve access and outcomes for dually identified students in DLI settings;
- To engage district leaders in shaping inclusive practices through structured collaboration and shared expertise; and
- To equip districts with tools that can be immediately integrated into planning and professional learning efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Why Focus on Dually Identified Students

Dually identified students are identified as both English learners (ELs) and students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They are entitled to services under multiple federal laws, including IDEA, Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA), which collectively ensure access to both language assistance and disability-related educational services. Their educational needs are multifaceted, requiring support for both language development and learning differences.

Table 1 outlines the distinct and intersecting obligations for English learners, students with disabilities, and dually identified students. Organized by key domains—including legal obligations, instructional practices, identification and assessment, program access, family and community engagement, staffing and professional learning, and monitoring and evaluation—the crosswalk draws directly from statutory and regulatory language in IDEA, Title III of the ESEA, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and the EEOA. It is intended to clarify the responsibilities of educational agencies and practitioners in meeting the needs of these student populations. States and local education agencies retain substantial discretion in deciding how to comply with legal obligations.

Table 1. Obligations for English Learners, Students with Disabilities, and Dually Identified Students

Program Area/ Domain	English Learners Only	Students with Disabilities Only	English Learners and Students with Disabilities (Dually Identified Students)
Legal Obligations	Title VI and EEOA require affirmative steps to ensure ELs can participate meaningfully; Title III mandates language instruction programs and meaningful access to education.	IDEA and Section 504 mandate free appropriate public education (FAPE) and nondiscrimination; evaluations and services must be timely and appropriate.	IDEA and Section 504 require FAPE; ELs with disabilities must receive both language assistance and disability-related services.
Instructional Practices	Provision of a language instruction educational program as required under Title III of the ESEA.	Special education services tailored to individual needs in the least restrictive environment; use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive practices.	Integrated instruction with accommodations; dual services must be provided without delay in the least restrictive environment.

Table 1. Obligations for English Learners, Students with Disabilities, and Dually Identified Students, continued

Program Area/ Domain	English Learners Only	Students with Disabilities Only	English Learners and Students with Disabilities (Dually Identified Students)
Identification and Assessment	Home language surveys and valid English language proficiency (ELP) assessments for screening.	Comprehensive evaluations using multiple sources; assessments must be valid and culturally responsive.	Evaluations must distinguish between language proficiency and disability; assessments in the dominant home language when appropriate.
Program Access	Access to core curriculum, specialized programs (e.g., Advanced Placement, Gifted and Talented), and extracurricular activities; avoid unnecessary segregation.	Access to general education curriculum and extracurriculars; placements in the least restrictive environment.	Equal access to EL and special education programs; avoid exclusion due to scheduling or perceived limitations.
Family and Community Engagement	Translation of notices and interpretation services for parents with limited English proficiency; proactive outreach and advocacy support.	Family engagement in IEP development, accessible communication, advocacy, and leadership opportunities.	Interpretation at IEP meetings; culturally responsive engagement; informed parental consent for services.
Staffing and Professional Learning	Qualified ESL/ESOL/ELD teachers; ongoing training in sheltering techniques and second language acquisition.	Qualified special education staff; professional learning in inclusive practices and learning difference awareness.	Staff trained in both EL and special education strategies; joint special education and EL teams recommended.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Annual ELP assessments; longitudinal data analysis; exit criteria based on valid and reliable measures.	Data-driven evaluations of IEP and 504 plans; continuous improvement and compliance monitoring.	Monitor academic and language progress; monitor IEP-specific goals; ensure valid exit criteria and meaningful participation post-exit.

Source. Adapted from U.S. Department of Education documents, including the *Dual Language Immersion Playbooks* (2024),² *Inclusive Educational Practices Guidance* (2025),³ and the *Dear Colleague Letter on English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents* (2015).⁴

2 U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2024). *Dual language immersion playbooks*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/oela-resources/playbooks/dual-language-immersion-playbook>

3 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, & Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2025). *Building and sustaining inclusive educational practices aligned with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/inclusive-practices-guidance-109436.pdf>

4 Lhamon, C. E., & Gupta, V. (2015). *Dear colleague letter: English learner students and limited English proficient parents*. Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education; Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice.

According to U.S. Department of Education data from SY 2020–21, the two most prevalent Individualized Education Program (IEP) disability categories among dually identified students are:

- **Specific learning disability (SLD).** SLD is the most common classification, accounting for 44.7 percent of ELs with disabilities. SLD includes conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia, which can affect reading, mathematical calculation, and writing, respectively. ELs are more likely to be identified with SLD than all school-aged students served under IDEA, Part B, of whom 34.6 percent are identified with SLD. This represents a 10.1 percentage-point higher identification rate for ELs compared to all school-aged students (OSEP, 2022).
- **Speech or language impairment (SLI).** SLI is the second most common category, accounting for 18.9 percent of ELs with disabilities. This includes difficulties in articulation, fluency, voice, or language processing. ELs are also more likely to be identified with SLI than all school-aged students served under IDEA, Part B, of whom 17.6 percent are identified with SLI. This reflects a 1.3 percentage-point higher identification rate for ELs than for all school-aged students (OSEP, 2022).

Disproportionality in the Identification of English Learners Requiring Special Education

Disproportionate or inappropriate identification of students for special education is problematic because it increases the likelihood that students receive unneeded labels and services, thereby failing to meet their specific needs and undermining their academic success. The appropriate and valid identification of linguistic and ethnic minorities requiring special education is complex yet critically important to mitigate disproportionality. Moreover, it has been the subject of litigation and has been explicitly addressed in federal statute.

Diana v. State Board of Education (1970) challenged the use of IQ tests when given to students in a language they do not understand. The class action lawsuit was filed in federal district court on behalf of Diana and eight other Mexican American students who were placed in what was labeled “Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR)” classes based on results from an IQ test administered in English, although the children did not speak the language. The stipulated settlement required nondiscriminatory assessment practices because assessments administered in a language students did not understand could not accurately measure their abilities.

Subsequent requirements influenced by *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970) help ensure that evaluations of English learners for special education are valid and nondiscriminatory. Specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) stipulates that school districts must ensure assessments and other evaluation materials are selected and administered—



in a manner that is not discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis.



in a language and form that is most likely to provide accurate information about what the child knows and can do.



by trained and knowledgeable personnel.

IDEA further specifies that a child must not be found eligible for special education services under IDEA if the determining factor is limited English proficiency (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2004; Karger, 2013).

Relationship to English Language Proficiency and Dominant Home Language Support

Despite the legal parameters in place, the disproportionate placement of English learners in special education is an ongoing challenge. Research has examined these patterns of disproportionality in the identification of English learners as well as other underserved groups, including African American and Latino students. Analyses of state- and district-level data reveal the following factors related to English language proficiency and access to dominant home language support:

- **Language proficiency is a risk factor for special education identification.** Sullivan (2011) found that English learners with limited proficiency in both their dominant home language and their newly developing English were more likely than other groups to be placed in special education.
 - Overrepresentation of ELs was higher in secondary grades than in elementary grades.
 - ELs with limited proficiency in both their dominant and newly developing languages (English) were overrepresented in learning disability (LD) and language and speech impairment classes.
 - ELs were overrepresented in high-incidence categories of specific learning disabilities (SLD), mild intellectual disability (MID),⁵ and speech or language impairment (SLI).
- **Native language programs and supports help to mitigate special education identification risk.** Research on participation in specific language instructional program models indicates that English learners in English immersion programs with the least dominant home language support were more likely to be placed in special education. Overrepresentation was less prevalent in programs that provide support and/or instruction in the dominant home language, such as bilingual education (Artiles et al., 2005).

5 In 2010, Congress enacted legislation to change references in Federal law from *mental retardation* to *intellectual disability* (Public Law 111-256, 111th Congress, “Rosa’s Law”). Accordingly, ESEA, IDEA, and other Federal laws were amended to reflect the newly adopted term, including the category *mild intellectual disability*.

Other Contributing Factors to Disproportionate Special Education Identification among English Learners

Disproportionality is largely shaped by general education factors rather than by special education alone (Artiles et al., 2005; National Research Council, 2002). Addressing overidentification of English learners requires careful examination of the multifaceted factors that may contribute to academic struggles. The National Research Council (2002) identifies the following contributors to disproportionality:

- Structural forces (e.g., funding, class size, personnel quality);
- Individual factors (e.g., the fit between student cognitive and social skills and the school setting);
- Interactional processes (e.g., biased teacher perceptions, student resistance); and
- Historical legacies (e.g., discrimination, racism).

Structural and individual forces meet in social contexts—in classrooms and schools—interacting to influence student achievement and behavior. Understanding and preventing disproportionality, therefore, requires examining structural forces, learning conditions such as dominant home language instruction and language instructional models, and learner characteristics. Additional factors that affect identification and placement patterns include:

- Income level and the community’s relative percentage of minority students;
- Language background;
- Large-scale reforms (e.g., discipline policies, high-stakes testing); and
- School culture (i.e., values, teacher and staff attitudes, and capacity of administrators and staff) (Sullivan, 2011).

Finally, because high-incidence disabilities—described as “judgmental” categories—lack clear biological causation, their diagnosis relies heavily on professional clinical decisions. Specifically, disability definitions and diagnostic processes, including eligibility criteria and the use of available assessments and measures, can be fraught with ambiguity, uncertainty, and bias. The identification decision-making process can have high stakes for certain student groups, as special education eligibility may result in segregated placements. Furthermore, social stigma may accompany these labels in some cultural communities (Artiles et al., 2010).

Understanding the Connections between Language Acquisition and High-Incidence Disability Categories

Dually identified students are more frequently identified in disability categories that involve language-based or cognitive processing learning differences, which may overlap with typical processes and trajectories of second language acquisition. However, second language learning difficulties and neurodevelopmental disorders are distinct. Second language learning difficulties are typically related to limited exposure or proficiency, whereas specific learning disabilities (SLD) and speech or language impairment (SLI) are neurodevelopmental and persist across languages (Kormos, 2017; Paradis, 2010).

Specific Learning Disability

Specific learning disability (SLD) is defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as a disorder affecting one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. Such difficulties may manifest in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or mathematical calculation. The definition includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. However, SLD does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; intellectual disabilities; emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1401(30), 2004).

Closely aligned with the IDEA's SLD definition, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) uses the term *Specific Learning Disorder* to describe a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting the ability to develop academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. In its latest revision, the DSM-5 consolidated three previously separate diagnoses—reading disorder, mathematics disorder, and disorder of written expression—into a single overarching category, with two subcategories particularly relevant to multilingual children (reading disorder and disorder of written expression). The DSM-5 highlights SLD's underlying weaknesses in working memory, executive functioning (planning, organizing, strategizing, and paying attention), processing speed, and phonological processing (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Kormos, 2017).

Speech or Language Impairment

Children with *speech or language impairment* (SLI) exhibit language learning difficulties that occur in the absence of hearing impairment, intellectual disability, autism, motor speech disorders, or acquired neurological damage. In addition to difficulties with specific morphological skills, children with SLI may struggle to understand how language use varies according to social situations or specific purposes, which requires students to understand meaning beyond the words themselves (Scarcella, 2003).⁶ Research, however, suggests that dually identified students, particularly those with speech or language impairment (SLI), can learn multiple languages and that supporting both languages is critical for optimal development (Drysedale et al., 2015; Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016).

Distinguishing Language Acquisition from Neurodevelopmental Disorders

Multilingual learners and students with SLD or SLI may share similar language learning difficulties, though the origins of these difficulties differ. For example, a student learning English as an additional language may initially show word-level decoding difficulties similar to those observed in students with dyslexia. However, the English learner may not have dyslexia. These shared surface-level characteristics can complicate accurate identification and may contribute to both over- and under-identification of disabilities among multilingual learners (Silva & Tankard Carnock, 2019). Table 2 outlines some of these similarities and distinctions.

6 Sociolinguistics is also referred to as “discourse pragmatics” by linguists and researchers.

Table 2. Comparison of Second Language Learning Difficulty, Speech or Language Impairment, and Specific Learning Disability

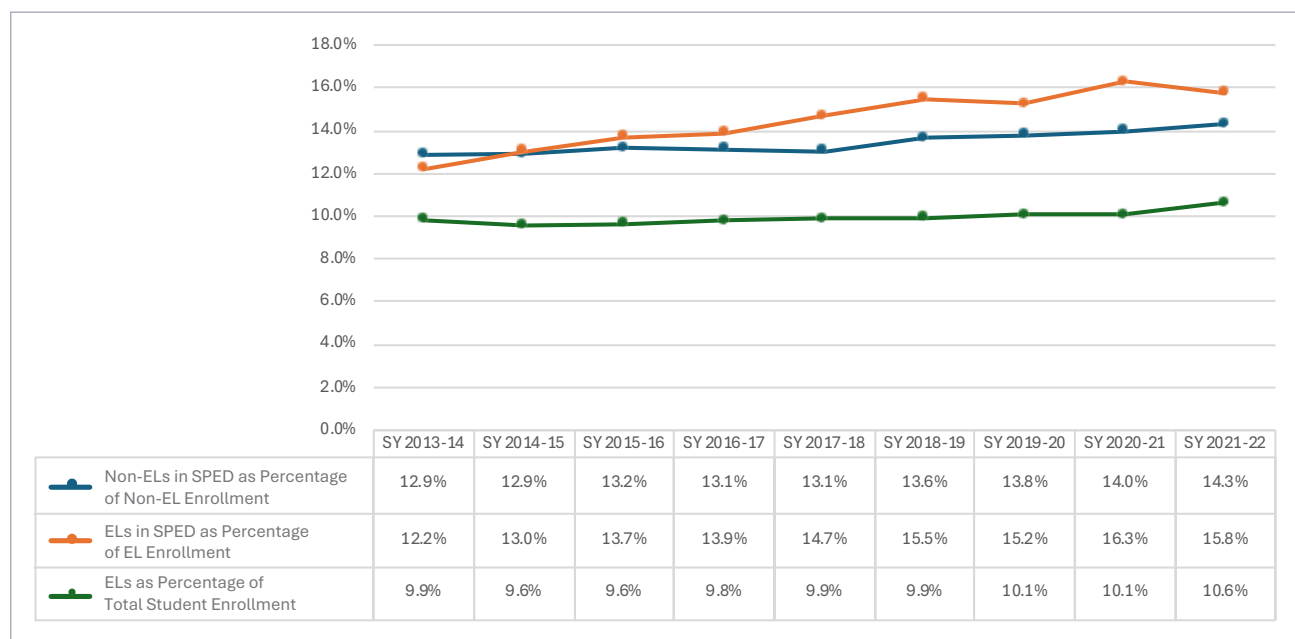
Feature	Second Language Learning Difficulty	Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)	Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
Cause	Typically due to limited exposure, instructional access, or proficiency in the second language.	A neurodevelopmental disorder that causes difficulties with learning language, but not as a consequence of another disorder.	Neurodevelopmental origin; affects cognitive processing regardless of language.
Persistence	Often improves with increased exposure and targeted instruction in the second language.	Delays or difficulties in reaching language-production milestones and acquiring particular grammatical forms and other grammatical and syntactic knowledge; the condition is largely biologically determined.	Persistent across time and languages; does not resolve with language exposure alone.
Language Context	Difficulties are typically limited to the second language and may not appear in the first language. Early exposure to two languages (“early bilinguals”) is associated with greater language mastery than late bilingual exposure.	Young bilingual children exposed to two languages from birth generally achieve major linguistic milestones in each language, with development proceeding according to timetables similar to those observed in monolingual children.	Difficulties are present in both the dominant home language (L1) and other languages.
Manifestation	May include slow vocabulary acquisition, grammatical errors, or pronunciation issues due to the second language learning stage.	Delayed in their onset of first-word and first-word-combinations. Lexical, morphosyntactic, and language-use abilities are below those of same-age peers without SLI. Difficulty in acquiring finite verb morphology—the set of morphemes that signal tense and verb agreement.	May include phonological processing deficits, working memory limitations, and difficulties with decoding, spelling, or syntax.
Assessment and Identification	Requires evaluation of language proficiency, instructional history, and exposure.	Requires consideration of children’s exposure patterns to both languages, whether children learned both languages simultaneously or sequentially, and how early the child was exposed to both languages.	Requires a comprehensive cognitive and linguistic assessment across languages, ideally in both the dominant home language and English.

Source. Author-created based on prior research (Alderson et al., 2015; Erdos et al., 2014; Geva & Massey-Garrison, 2013; Geva & Wiener, 2014; Geva & Yaghoub Zadeh, 2006; Kormos, 2017, 2020; Kovelman et al., 2008; Paradis, 2010; Paradis et al., 2003).

Dually Identified Students Are a Growing Student Population

Dually identified students are an increasingly visible segment of the U.S. public school population. From SY 2013–14 to SY 2021–22, the proportion of ELs receiving special education (SPED) services increased from 12.2 percent to 15.8 percent, indicating that a growing share of ELs are being dually identified. (See Figure 2.) During the same period, the number of ELs receiving special education services grew by 38.2 percent, rising from 601,155 to 831,044 students. The percentage of non-ELs in special education rose more gradually, from 12.9 percent to 14.3 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023, 2024).

Figure 2. EL and Non-EL Participation in Special Education, PK-Grade 12, SY 2013–14 to SY 2021–22



Note. Data include all 50 states and the District of Columbia. English learner data reflect students ages 3–21. Enrollment data cover grades Pre-K through 12.

Source. Author-created using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2023, 2024).

Academic Outcomes Lag for Dually Identified Students

Outcomes for dually identified students aged 14–21 reveal disparities in educational attainment compared with their non-EL peers with disabilities. Dually identified students are more likely to drop out or receive a certificate rather than graduate with a regular diploma (OSEP, 2022). According to data from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) for SY 2019–20:

- **Graduation with a regular high school diploma.** Only 71.2 percent of dually identified students graduated with a standard diploma, compared to 76.6 percent of all students with disabilities.
- **Dropouts.** Dually identified students were more likely to drop out of school (14.6 percent) than the broader population of students with disabilities (12.7 percent).
- **Certificates of completion.** A higher percentage of dually identified students (13.1 percent) received a certificate of completion rather than a diploma, compared to 10.0 percent of all students with disabilities (OSEP, 2022).

Long-Term ELs. Research shows a strong link between special education identification and long-term English learner (L-TEL) status, meaning that a student has not exited EL status or been reclassified as English proficient within the expected time frame (Umansky & Avelar, 2023).⁷ In other words, L-TELEs remain in EL programs for six years or more, and possibly for the entirety of their K-12 education. L-TELEs typically struggle with academic literacy, particularly in reading and writing, and require sustained, targeted support (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition [OELA], 2024; Umansky & Avelar, 2023), underscoring the need for integrated service models that provide both English language development and special education supports, rather than forcing students into an “either/or” framework (Kangas, 2017; Umansky & Avelar, 2023).

Dually Identified Students and English Learner Reclassification Criteria

Dually identified students may encounter unique challenges related to exiting EL status (Schissel & Kangas, 2018). In some states, ELs are required to meet specific criteria to exit EL classification, such as achieving a designated score on standardized English Language Arts (ELA) assessments. For dually identified students, particularly those with disabilities that affect language processing or test performance, meeting these criteria can be more complex. Thus, some students may remain classified as ELs even after they meet the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) threshold for reclassification. In certain states, ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities face additional barriers due to the absence of alternate English language proficiency assessments tailored to their needs.

The Role of Identification and Support

- Proper identification helps ensure that students are accurately classified based on their current needs.
- Ongoing academic support is essential to address both language development and learning difference needs.
- Collaboration among educators—including EL specialists and special education professionals—can help provide more comprehensive and responsive instruction.
- Understanding how classification systems and exit criteria interact is key to supporting the academic success of dually identified students.

⁷ Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states set their own timelines for ELs to achieve English language proficiency, generally between five and eight years. Office of English Language Acquisition. (2024, November 4). *Long-term English learners* [Infographic]. OELA. <https://ncela.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2024-11/longtermels-508.pdf>

PART I—RESEARCH

Bilingualism and the Intersectionality of Language Development and Disabilities in Multilingual Learners

Part I synthesizes research on bilingualism and the intersection of language development and learning differences in multilingual learners, with particular attention to students who are dually identified as English learners and students with disabilities. This section examines how bilingual language systems function, the relationship between bilingualism and literacy development, and the critical role the dominant home language plays in supporting English language acquisition. It also explores cognitive and affective factors that shape language learning for students with learning disabilities, clarifies distinctions between second language acquisition and neurodevelopmental disorders, and highlights evidence-based instructional implications.

Bilingualism

In bilingual brains, distinct language systems coexist and are often simultaneously active. Because multiple systems are active at once, bilingual individuals must direct their attention to the language relevant for a given task while suppressing competing, irrelevant languages. This requires continuous monitoring of context, which frequently shifts as the linguistic environment changes (Bialystok, 2007). Linguistic representation itself involves syntactic structure, semantic intent, phonological realization (sound production), and aspects of use, as well as nonlinguistic features such as tone, pitch, speed, body language, visuals, and cultural context. Managing these interacting components across two active language systems places consistent demands on attentional control. As a result, executive processes—attention, inhibition, monitoring, and switching—are routinely engaged in bilingual language management. These processes, all core components of executive function, appear to strengthen with repeated use. Research indicates that bilingual children develop the ability to regulate attention and ignore misleading information earlier than monolingual children, likely because they frequently engage these control mechanisms while navigating multiple active language systems (Bialystok, 2007).

Bilingualism and Literacy

Ongoing research in second language acquisition and reading has led to important shifts in how these processes are conceptualized. Earlier conceptualizations about second language acquisition suggested that the dominant home language would interfere with reading development in the newly acquired language (L2). Current conceptualizations, however, recognize that cognitively demanding tasks related to language development, such as literacy and academic learning, are shared across languages. In reading, the conceptualization shifted from viewing reading as an indivisible whole to a constellation of closely related yet separable mental operations, each entailing a unique set of subskills (Dóczy & Kormos, 2015; Koda & Reddy, 2008). The conceptualization of reading as a constellation of subskills enables a more nuanced examination of the cross-linguistic relations among the discrete reading subskills. For example, research has found that cross-linguistic transfer is particularly effective when the languages share syntactic structures, as seen in Spanish-English bilinguals (Paradis, 2010; Soltero-González et al.,

2016; Verhoeven & Perfetti, 2022). Not only does subskill analysis provide a better understanding of reading development, but it also yields nuanced findings about literacy development in multilingual brains. For instance, reading principles across languages are facilitated when the two languages are written in the same alphabetic system (Bialystok et al., 2005).

Role of the Dominant Home Language in English Language Development

Through mechanisms such as cross-linguistic transfer, dominant home language proficiency plays a foundational role in supporting English language acquisition and is particularly important for students with language impairments. (See Table 3.) Students' level of dominant home language proficiency positively influences the rate and quality of English language development. For example, students' phonemic knowledge of their dominant home language may overlap with English sounds, and they may be familiar with narrative structures through oral storytelling in their dominant home language (Ndlovu & Geva, 2008). English learners who are provided with opportunities to develop their dominant home language demonstrate greater growth in English proficiency compared to peers educated in monolingual English-only environments (Gutiérrez-Clellen et al., 2012). Moreover, children with underdeveloped dominant home language skills often experience slower English language acquisition, highlighting the need to nurture the home language. Cross-linguistic transfer facilitates English development in several key domains:

Dually identified students with limited exposure to their dominant home language tend to make more morphosyntactic errors in English, underscoring the importance of maintaining the dominant home language for syntactic development.

- **Typological similarity.** The degree of structural similarity between the dominant home language and English—encompassing lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic features—can significantly impact English acquisition. For instance, children whose dominant home language is typologically similar to English (e.g., Spanish) show stronger performance in English tense marking, suggesting positive morphological transfer (Blom & Paradis, 2013; Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016).
- **Morphosyntax.** Sustained exposure to the dominant home language supports morphosyntactic development in English. Dually identified students with speech or language impairment (SLI) who receive consistent dominant home language input from birth perform comparably to or better than monolingual peers with SLI on expressive and receptive morphosyntactic tasks in both languages. In contrast, dually identified students with limited exposure to their dominant home language tend to make more morphosyntactic errors in English, underscoring the importance of maintaining the dominant home language for syntactic development (Gutiérrez-Clellen et al., 2012; Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Paradis, 2010; Paradis et al., 2003; Simon-Cerejido & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2014).
- **Vocabulary acquisition.** Bilingual interventions that incorporate dominant home language use have been shown to enhance vocabulary growth in both the dominant home language and English (Tsybina & Eriks-Brophy, 2010). Children exposed to bilingual instruction demonstrate gains in receptive and expressive vocabulary comparable to monolingual peers (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Kovelman et al., 2008). Systematic reviews further support the effectiveness of strategies such as dialogic reading, cognate-based instruction, and multimodal supports in promoting vocabulary development among Spanish–English bilinguals with developmental language disorders (Towson et al., 2024).

Table 3. How Dominant Home Language Development Supports Cross-Linguistic Transfer in Dually Identified Students Learning English

Language Domain	
Morphosyntax: <i>Syntactic awareness and grammatical structures in the dominant home language</i>	
Cross-Linguistic Transfer Considerations 	Students with sustained exposure to their dominant home language often show stronger English morphosyntactic outcomes. Dually identified students who receive consistent dominant home language input may perform similarly to, or better than, monolingual peers with SLI (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016).
Instructional Implications 	Provide explicit instruction in English grammar and use comparisons to the dominant home language to make patterns more visible. Many learners benefit from clear, direct explanations of syntax and morphology (Kormos, 2020). Use contrastive analysis to highlight structural similarities and differences across languages (Kormos, 2020). Supporting Learning Differences. Use visual sentence frames, color-coded grammar cues, and guided discovery routines to manage cognitive load and support accuracy (Kormos, 2020).
Vocabulary Acquisition: <i>Lexical knowledge and semantic networks in the dominant home language</i>	
Cross-Linguistic Transfer Considerations 	Depth of dominant home language vocabulary supports English word learning. Children receiving bilingual instruction can show receptive and expressive vocabulary growth comparable to monolingual peers (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016).
Instructional Implications 	Use cognate-focused instruction and bilingual glossaries to leverage shared meanings and forms. Preview essential vocabulary and teach memorization strategies to strengthen retention and retrieval (Kormos, 2020). Incorporate dialogic reading in both languages to build word knowledge through structured talk and text discussion (Towson et al., 2024). Supporting Learning Differences. Provide repeated exposure with visual supports, multisensory vocabulary mapping, and spaced retrieval to improve long-term retention (Kormos, 2020).
Phonological Awareness: <i>Syllable segmentation, rhyme, and phoneme manipulation in the dominant home language</i>	
Cross-Linguistic Transfer Considerations 	Phonological skills can transfer across languages, particularly when the dominant home language and English share an alphabetic writing system. Phonological decoding is widely recognized as a strong predictor of reading development (Bialystok et al., 2005; Kormos, 2020; Perfetti et al., 1992).
Instructional Implications 	Strengthen phonological awareness in both the dominant home language and English through explicit instruction and practice with sound and syllable manipulation. Use the dominant home language strategically to reinforce decoding routines that students apply in English (Kormos, 2020). Supporting Learning Differences. Use multisensory structured learning approaches that engage multiple sensory pathways and include ample practice and review cycles (Kormos, 2020).

Table 3. How Dominant Home Language Development Supports Cross-Linguistic Transfer in Dually Identified Students Learning English, continued

Language Domain	
Reading Comprehension: <i>Narrative structure and inferencing skills in the dominant home language</i>	
Cross-Linguistic Transfer Considerations 	Comprehension strategies developed in the dominant home language can support English reading comprehension. Working memory contributes to maintaining information during reading and supporting inference-making using background knowledge (Kormos, 2017).
Instructional Implications 	Use bilingual texts and structured reading guides with comprehension prompts to support meaning-making and monitoring. Encourage story retells in the dominant home language to strengthen narrative structure and provide scaffolds students can transfer to English (Kormos, 2020). Supporting Learning Differences. Provide chunked texts, graphic organizers, and oral retelling options to reduce working memory demands and strengthen comprehension (Kormos, 2020).
Spelling and Writing: <i>Orthographic knowledge and morphological awareness in the dominant home language</i>	
Cross-Linguistic Transfer Considerations 	Dominant home language spelling patterns and morphological knowledge can support English writing, especially when the languages share typological features (Bialystok et al., 2005; Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Ndlovu & Geva, 2008).
Instructional Implications 	Use multisensory structured learning approaches that integrate multiple modalities and include frequent practice and review. Allow students to brainstorm and plan in the dominant home language before drafting in English to support idea generation and organization (Kormos, 2020). Supporting Learning Differences. Permit alternative output formats (e.g., oral responses), provide speech-to-text tools, and allow extended time to reduce barriers while maintaining rigor (Kormos, 2020).
Listening and Oral Comprehension: <i>Auditory memory and syntactic parsing in the dominant home language</i>	
Cross-Linguistic Transfer Considerations 	Strong listening skills in the dominant home language can support English oral comprehension, particularly when general language comprehension skills are well developed (Kormos, 2020).
Instructional Implications 	Provide and encourage oral language opportunities in both the dominant home language and English. Use visuals, gestures, and other multimodal supports to strengthen comprehension by distributing information across channels (Kormos, 2020). Supporting Learning Differences. Use captioned videos, repeat-and-respond routines, and reduced auditory distractions to support attention and processing (Kormos, 2020).

Cognitive and Affective Factors in Multilingual Learning with Disabilities

Dually identified students navigate a uniquely complex educational landscape shaped by both cognitive and affective dimensions. These factors influence how they acquire and use multiple languages and how they respond to instruction. Cognitive processes such as memory, attention, and processing speed are foundational to language acquisition and learning in general. Similarly, affective elements play a critical role in shaping students' engagement and resilience.

Cognitive and Affective Factors Influencing Language Learning in Dually Identified Students

Learning a second language involves a complex interplay of cognitive and affective factors that may function differently in dually identified students. As shown in Table 4, dually identified students often experience learning differences in areas like working memory, phonological processing, and executive functioning, all of which are critical for language development (Kormos, 2017; Kovelman et al., 2008). Equally important are affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-esteem. These factors influence how students engage with language learning and how they respond to setbacks. Research shows that students with learning disabilities are more vulnerable to fluctuations in these factors, especially in environments that do not affirm their linguistic and cultural identities (Kormos, 2020; Rhinehart et al., 2024).

Table 4. Cognitive and Affective Factors for Language Learning Impacted by Learning Disabilities

Factor	Function in Language Learning	Impact of Learning Disability
Cognitive Factors		
Phonological Short-Term Memory	Temporarily stores speech sounds; essential for vocabulary learning, sentence processing, and oral comprehension.	Reduced capacity limits the ability to retain and recall English vocabulary and grammar rules.
Working Memory	Enables simultaneous storage and processing of language input; supports reading, writing, and grammar learning.	Limited working memory hinders comprehension, grammar acquisition, and writing fluency.
Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN)	Measures speed of naming familiar items; linked to reading fluency and lexical access.	Slower RAN is a strong predictor of reading difficulties, especially in students with dyslexia.
Executive Functioning	Regulates attention, planning, inhibition, and task-switching; supports comprehension and production.	Weaknesses impair focus, increase distractibility, and reduce the ability to manage complex language tasks.
Processing Speed	Affects how quickly learners can decode, comprehend, and respond to language input.	Slower speed increases cognitive load and reduces fluency in both oral and written tasks.

Table 4. Cognitive and Affective Factors for Language Learning Impacted by Learning Disabilities, continued

Factor	Function in Language Learning	Impact of Learning Disability
Affective Factors		
Motivation	Drives persistence and engagement in language learning.	Often decreases due to repeated failure; influenced by peers' and teachers' attitudes and internal goals.
Language Learning Anxiety	Emotional response to perceived difficulty; can hinder performance and participation.	Increases when persistently experiencing challenges; may lead to avoidance of language tasks, especially if instruction is rigid and scaffolds are scant.
Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem	Affects willingness to take risks and engage in learning.	Often negatively impacted by ongoing struggles and lack of success; sensitive to classroom dynamics.

Source. Author-created based on prior research (Kormos, 2017, 2020; Kovelman et al., 2008; Paradis, 2010; Rhinehart et al., 2024; Rissanen et al., 2019).

Instructional Considerations to Address Affective Factors of Dually Identified Students

In addition to the cognitive demands associated with learning in two languages while also navigating learning differences, dually identified students often experience affective factors that shape how they engage with instruction and respond to challenges. Motivation, language learning anxiety, and self-confidence can significantly influence students' willingness to participate, persist, and take risks in language-rich academic tasks. As a result, instructional planning should not only address access to content and language development, but also intentionally foster classroom environments that affirm students' identities and support a positive sense of themselves as capable learners.

Motivation. Inclusive environments that value neurodiversity and provide differentiated support help sustain student effort and persistence. Growth-mindset pedagogical practices include supporting students' individual learning processes, emphasizing learning over performance, encouraging persistence, and promoting process-focused thinking. For dually identified students, motivation is strengthened when instruction makes success attainable through appropriate scaffolds, recognizes effort and progress, and affirms bilingualism and learning differences as assets rather than deficits. When students experience classrooms as places where their strengths are noticed and their learning is supported, they are more likely to remain engaged and persevere through difficulty.

Language Learning Anxiety. Anxiety is exacerbated by rigid instruction and a lack of scaffolding. Teachers who use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and offer multiple means of engagement can reduce anxiety and increase the likelihood that students persevere with the language task. This is especially important for dually identified students, who may experience heightened stress when asked to process unfamiliar language, manage academic demands, and navigate learning differences at the same time. Instruction that provides flexibility, multiple entry points for participation, and clear supports for meaning-making can reduce performance pressure and create conditions in which students feel safe attempting, revising, and continuing to learn.

Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem. Teachers with an asset-oriented mindset and related pedagogy provide positive reinforcement for students' strengths and foster safe, inclusive classroom dynamics. For dually identified students, self-confidence is also strengthened when educators maintain high expectations while providing the supports needed for students to meet them. Flexible grouping, supportive peer interactions, and opportunities to demonstrate understanding in varied ways can help students experience a sense of competence and belonging. Over time, these conditions can reinforce a stronger sense of identity as successful multilingual learners who are capable of growth and academic achievement.

Role of Dominant Home Language Development in English Language Learning of Dually Identified Students

While dually identified students may face challenges in language learning and development, particularly in a new language, developing their dominant home language may be particularly beneficial in mitigating these challenges. Research has found a positive correlation between reading competence and bilingual language proficiency, including aspects of semantic, morphological, and syntactic production in English and Spanish (Kovelman et al., 2008). Dually identified students benefit from this bilingual advantage if they are provided opportunities to continue developing their bilingual proficiency.

- **Cognitive benefits.** From a cognitive perspective, bilingualism supports executive functioning, working memory, and attention control, areas that are often challenging for students with SLDs (Koda, 2008; Kormos, 2017). These cognitive factors are essential for managing complex language tasks, and strengthening them through development in the dominant home language can enhance a student's ability to process and produce language in both the dominant home language and English. Additionally, bilingualism fosters metalinguistic awareness, helping students better understand how language works, thereby supporting grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Koda, 2008; Kormos, 2017).
- **Affective benefits.** When students are encouraged to use and grow in their dominant home language, they experience greater self-esteem, stronger motivation, and a more positive cultural identity, all of which are critical for sustained engagement and academic persistence (Rhinehart et al., 2024). Supporting the dominant home language not only affirms students' identities but also creates a more inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environment. Establishing strong home-to-school connections—such as involving families in programming and providing resources in their dominant home language—can support development in both the home language and English, while also helping families navigate the complexities of special education (Drysedale et al., 2015; Kangas, 2017). These connections also foster trust and collaboration between educators and families. In contrast, English-only environments can inadvertently increase language learning anxiety and reduce confidence, especially when students struggle to keep up with peers (Kormos, 2017).

Tables 5 and 6 outline how dominant home language development contributes to English language acquisition by enhancing cognitive processing and emotional well-being. They identify specific language learning domains based on the *Council's Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction for English Learners* framework⁸ and describe the cognitive and affective benefits of bilingualism. Furthermore, the tables provide general instructional implications. Pedagogical practices that are responsive to affective factors related to both language-based (Table 5) and code-based (Table 6) literacy skills are those that embody a growth mindset, recognize effort and progress, and affirm bilingualism and learning differences as assets rather than deficits. DLI programs, by design, address many of the general instructional implications.

Table 5. How Dominant Home Language Development Supports Cognitive and Affective Factors in Developing Language-based Skills

Language-based Skills	Benefits of Home Language Development	
	Cognitive	Affective
Oral Language Encompasses both receptive (listening) and productive (speaking) skills. Includes understanding and producing narratives, learning pronunciation, vocabulary, and discourse norms.	Dominant home language oral proficiency supports working memory and narrative structure, which are essential for English oral fluency and comprehension (Kormos, 2017). General Instructional Implications. Use structured oral tasks in both the dominant home language and English to reduce memory load and scaffold narrative development (Kormos, 2020).	Using the dominant home language as a supportive tool can lessen language learning anxiety and bolster self-confidence, increasing willingness to participate in L2 oral tasks (Kormos, 2020). General Instructional Implications. Encourage storytelling and discussion in the dominant home language to build confidence and reduce performance pressure (Kormos, 2020).
Impact of Learning Differences Cognitive. Working memory limitations may reduce fluency (Kormos, 2017). Affective. Anxiety can inhibit participation (Kormos, 2017).		
Comprehension and Meaning-Making Involves activating background knowledge and using strategies to extract meaning from spoken and written language.	Dominant home language metacognitive strategies (e.g., inference-making, summarizing) transfer to English comprehension (Alderson et al., 2015). General Instructional Implications. Teach comprehension strategies first in the dominant home language, then bridge to English using bilingual texts and reciprocal teaching (Kormos, 2020).	Comprehension success in the dominant home language builds self-efficacy and reduces frustration in English learning (Kormos & Csizér, 2010). General Instructional Implications. Use the dominant home language to preview and discuss texts, helping students feel prepared and capable before engaging in English tasks (Kormos, 2020).
Impact of Learning Differences Cognitive. Limited working memory and executive functioning hinder inference-making and integration (Kormos, 2017). Affective. Low confidence may reduce engagement (Kormos, 2017).		

8 Council of the Great City Schools. (2023). *A framework for foundational literacy skills instruction for English learners: Instructional practice and materials considerations*. Council of the Great City Schools. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED629876.pdf>

Table 5. How Dominant Home Language Development Supports Cognitive and Affective Factors in Developing Language-based Skills, continued

Language-based Skills	Benefits of Home Language Development	
	Cognitive	Affective
Word Knowledge Entails understanding word meanings, usage, and pronunciation in both oral and written forms. Includes morphological awareness and word generation.	Dominant home language vocabulary depth supports English word learning through cross-linguistic semantic mapping and cognates (Geva & Ryan, 1993; Perfetti et al., 1992). General Instructional Implications. Use bilingual glossaries, cognate instruction, and dominant home language semantic webs to support English vocabulary acquisition (Kormos, 2020).	Presenting and rehearsing key English vocabulary with support from the dominant home language (e.g., pre-teaching key words and providing glossaries) can make word learning more accessible and help sustain learners' motivation (Kormos, 2020). General Instructional Implications. Incorporate dominant home language vocabulary games and visuals to make learning engaging and affirm linguistic assets (Kormos, 2020).
Impact of Learning Differences Cognitive. Reduced phonological short-term memory and morphological awareness impair retention (Kormos, 2017). Affective. Repeated difficulty may lower motivation (Kormos, 2017).		

Table 6. How Dominant Home Language Development Supports Cognitive and Affective Factors in Developing Code-based Skills

Code-based Skills	Benefits of Home Language Development	
	Cognitive	Affective
Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Recognizing syllables and rhymes; manipulating phonemes to form and alter words. Foundational for mapping sounds to print.	Dominant home language phonological skills (e.g., syllable segmentation, rhyming) support English decoding and spelling (ErDOS et al., 2014). General Instructional Implications. Implement phonological awareness activities in both the dominant home language and English (e.g., blending, segmentation) (Kormos, 2020).	Success in dominant home language phonological tasks builds confidence in early literacy and reduces avoidance (Kormos, 2017). General Instructional Implications. Use rhythm, songs, and phonological games in the dominant home language to create a low-stress, high-engagement environment (Kormos, 2020).
Impact of Learning Differences Cognitive. Deficits in phonological processing and rapid automatized naming (RAN) are common among students with dyslexia (Kormos, 2017).		

Table 6. How Dominant Home Language Development Supports Cognitive and Affective Factors in Developing Code-based Skills, continued

Code-based Skills	Benefits of Home Language Development	
	Cognitive	Affective
Print Knowledge Understanding that print conveys meaning and follows conventions (e.g., directionality, letter recognition).	Dominant home language literacy experiences (e.g., directionality, letter-sound correspondence) transfer to English print decoding (Geva & Ryan, 1993).	Familiarity with dominant home language print conventions reduces anxiety and supports early reading confidence (Kormos, 2020).
Impact of Learning Differences Cognitive. Weaknesses in visual-spatial processing and letter-sound mapping (Kormos, 2017). Affective. Frustration with print-heavy tasks may reduce persistence (Rhinehart et al., 2024).	General Instructional Implications. Use dual-language books and print materials in the dominant home language to reinforce decoding and orthographic awareness (Kormos, 2020).	General Instructional Implications. Allow students to annotate or highlight in their dominant home language to support comprehension and reduce stress in English reading tasks (Kormos, 2020).
Decoding and Phonics Establishing grapheme-phoneme correspondence to decode unfamiliar words and develop fluency.	Dominant home language decoding skills strengthen grapheme-phoneme mapping and English fluency (Perfetti et al., 1992).	Familiar decoding strategies in the dominant home language reduce frustration and support persistence in English reading (Kormos, 2017).
Impact of Learning Differences Cognitive. Phonological deficits, slow processing speed, and limited working memory impair decoding (Kormos, 2017).	General Instructional Implications. Use explicit phonics instruction in both the dominant home language and English, emphasizing transferable decoding patterns (Kormos, 2020).	General Instructional Implications. Celebrate decoding milestones in both languages to build motivation and reinforce progress (Kormos, 2020).
Early Writing Expressing meaning through written symbols, from scribbles to structured sentences. Supports encoding, spelling, and composition.	Dominant home language writing strategies (e.g., planning, syntax awareness) support English composition and coherence (Ndlovu & Geva, 2008).	Writing in the dominant home language affirms identity and reduces anxiety around English writing tasks (Kormos & Csizér, 2010).
Impact of Learning Differences Cognitive. Writing demands strain working memory, executive functioning, and spelling accuracy (Kormos, 2017; Ndlovu & Geva, 2008). Affective. Low self-esteem may inhibit risk-taking (Ndlovu & Geva, 2008).	General Instructional Implications. Use dominant home language brainstorming and outlining to scaffold English writing. Provide sentence frames and graphic organizers (Kormos, 2020).	General Instructional Implications. Allow students to draft or reflect in their dominant home language before composing in English to reduce pressure and support expression (Kormos, 2020).

PART II—SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

Serving Dually Identified Students

The intersection of English language development and learning disabilities creates complexities that districts must carefully navigate to meet the needs of English learners who have learning disabilities (i.e., dually identified students). This section describes some of the most prevalent challenges districts and schools face in designing, delivering, and monitoring services for dually identified students.

District Leadership Understanding of Dually Identified Student Needs and Legal Requirements

District leadership's limited understanding of the legal and instructional obligations for dually identified students remains a foundational barrier to service delivery. Although federal law requires that both language development and special education services be provided concurrently, many districts lack a coherent strategy or accountability structure to ensure this dual entitlement is met. As a result, students are often placed in programs that prioritize one service over the other or are required to forgo language development support to access special education services. Examples from Council reviews of English learner and special education programs⁹ include the following:

- **Limited awareness of legal obligations.** Several districts demonstrated gaps in understanding the legal requirements under IDEA and Title III. In some cases, IEPs lacked language development goals, and EL services were not integrated into special education planning. In one district, students were exited from EL programs before reaching proficiency due to scheduling conflicts, reflecting a misunderstanding that these services are mutually exclusive.
- **Departmental silos and lack of coordination.** Organizational structures often reinforce separation between departments, particularly between EL and special education services. Reviews found that while multilingual departments may be proactive, their efforts are frequently disconnected from other central office teams, such as curriculum, literacy, or special education. Similarly, special education departments may be proactive in meeting the needs of dually identified students but fail to connect with their districts' multilingual education departments. This lack of coordination between departments results in inconsistent practices, unproductive duplication, and missed opportunities for integrated support.
- **Deficit-based assumptions.** Educator or administrator decisions are sometimes influenced by deficit-based assumptions about the capabilities of students with disabilities. In several districts, students with IEPs were discouraged from participating in dual language immersion programs due to concerns about academic performance or data outcomes. These practices reflect a broader failure to adopt asset-based approaches that recognize the potential of dually identified students to thrive in bilingual environments.

9 See the appendix, "Council of the Great City Schools Strategic Support Teams."

- **Insufficient investment in professional learning and capacity building.** Most reviews revealed a systemwide lack of clear expectations that special education teachers be prepared to serve dually identified students. Professional learning is often compliance-focused and lacks depth in instructional strategies for serving dually identified students. Reviews noted that many educators lacked certification in *English as a Second Language (ESL)/English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)* or bilingual education, and that special education staff lacked training to distinguish between language acquisition and disability. According to Council survey data from SY 2022–23 ($n=38$ districts), 58 percent of responding districts reported that their state had no requirement for either a license/certification or an endorsement/credential for special education teachers serving English learners. Only 13 percent of districts required an EL-specific license/certification, and none required an endorsement alone. While some districts have implemented professional learning or supplemental coursework, these efforts are inconsistent and often voluntary, with staff reporting no access to cross-departmental training.
- **Inadequate use of data for decision-making.** Many districts do not monitor or share data related to the identification and progress of dually identified students with instructional leaders and staff. Risk ratios and performance metrics are often unavailable or are not communicated to school-level staff, limiting the ability to identify disparities or evaluate program effectiveness. Reviews and discussions with district administrators revealed that the risk ratios for dually identified students are not widely known across the district or relevant departments.

Disproportionality and Misidentification in Special Education

Disproportionality and misidentification of English learners in special education are symptoms of broader systemic challenges. Fragmented service delivery (e.g., inadequate EL support in general education, siloed special education services), limited cross-departmental collaboration, and persistent cultural and linguistic biases create conditions where ELs are either over- or under-identified for special education. These structural issues are compounded by inadequate evaluator training and flawed assessment tools. In secondary settings, ELs are often placed in remedial or special education tracks based on perceived low academic skills rather than accurate assessments of their needs (Umansky & Avelar, 2023). Key contributing factors include:

- **Inadequate and English-only assessments.** Many assessments are not designed to distinguish between second language acquisition (SLA) and learning disabilities, conflating language learning with a disability (Abedi, 2009; Artiles et al., 2005; Paradis, 2010; Schissel & Kangas, 2018). Best practice calls for evaluating students in their dominant home language (Kangas, 2017, 2024), yet few states have adopted assessments in native languages, and the federal government has not invested in them, despite federal statutes that call for valid assessments (Cuba & Tefera, 2024). The lack of valid assessments for bilingual students results in evaluations that fail to capture students' full linguistic and cognitive profiles, leading to misidentification and inappropriate placement.
- **Evaluator training and expertise gaps.** Oftentimes, special education staff lack training to differentiate between language development and learning differences. Educators in districts reviewed by the Council have reported a need for more training and cross-departmental collaboration in evaluations. The lack of interdisciplinary training contributes to inconsistent identification practices (Kangas, 2017).

Table 7 summarizes research findings on misconceptions and biases that contribute to the misidentification of ELs for special education services, often stemming from limited understanding of second language acquisition, inappropriate assessment practices, and deficit-based interpretations of student performance. These misconceptions may be rooted in a failure to recognize the compound effects of bilingualism and in a lack of instruments to measure the learners' bilingual abilities and full linguistic repertoire (Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014). The table also highlights related systemic issues that reinforce these patterns.

Table 7. Misconceptions Contributing to the Misidentification of English Learners for Special Education

Misconception/Bias	Impact on Students	Related Systemic Issues
Misunderstanding of Multilingual Students' Cognitive and Language Development		
Interpret language learning difficulties as cognitive deficits. Educators assume that slow L2 development signals a learning disability.	Leads to over-referral to special education, especially in early grades.	Lack of training in second language acquisition; absence of bilingual evaluation tools (Abedi, 2009; Kangas, 2017; Schissel & Kangas, 2018).
Expect monolingual norms for language development. Educators compare ELs to monolingual peers without accounting for L2/bilingual language and literacy learning trajectories.	ELs are labeled as “behind” or “delayed” when they are developing typically for bilingual learners.	Inadequate teacher preparation; monolingual bias in curriculum and assessment (Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014; Kormos, 2017, 2020).
Assume that limited English proficiency equals low intelligence. Educators equate language proficiency with cognitive ability.	ELs are underestimated and tracked into remedial or special education programs.	Implicit bias; lack of linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy (Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Umansky & Avelar, 2023).
Inadequate Assessment Tools and Processes		
Use inappropriate or biased assessments. Educators administer available tests that are typically in English and/or normed on monolingual populations.	Results do not reflect ELs' true abilities, leading to misdiagnosis.	Lack of state resources or policies to support the use of bilingual assessments (Schissel & Kangas, 2018).
Perceive second language acquisition and special education as similar. Educators and evaluators are not trained to differentiate between typical L2 development and learning disorders.	ELs are either over- or under-identified for special education.	Gaps in interdisciplinary training; fragmented service delivery (Kangas, 2017; Towson et al., 2024).

Table 7. Misconceptions Contributing to the Misidentification of English Learners for Special Education, continued

Misconception/Bias	Impact on Students	Related Systemic Issues
Deficit-Based Interpretations		
Ignore the role of environmental and instructional barriers/challenges. Educators attribute academic struggles solely to the student, not to lack of access or support, or gaps in educational trajectories.	ELs are pathologized rather than supported through improved instruction.	Deficit-based school culture; lack of inclusive, high-quality Tier 1 instruction (Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Kormos, 2020).

Research shows that multilingual learners are disproportionately represented in certain disability categories, such as specific learning disabilities and speech or language impairments, raising concerns about the validity and equity of identification processes (Artiles et al., 2005; Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Sullivan, 2011). As a result of misidentification, dually identified students might not receive the appropriate combination of language development and disability-related services they need to succeed, contributing to poor academic outcomes (Burr et al., 2015; Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Sullivan, 2011; Umansky & Avelar, 2023). Moreover, they are frequently excluded from enrichment opportunities such as advanced coursework or the Seal of Biliteracy, further limiting their academic trajectories (Burr et al., 2015; Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Umansky & Avelar, 2023).

Systemic Barriers in Serving Dually Identified Students

Dually identified students often experience fragmented and inequitable support due to unclear service models, staffing shortages, and systemic misunderstandings—many of which stem from the siloed nature of laws and funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels. These gaps limit access to inclusive, linguistically responsive instruction, hindering students' academic progress. Common examples include the following:

Staffing Shortages. A widespread shortage of bilingual educators, particularly in special education, leads to staffing decisions that limit access to appropriate services for dually identified students and may result in increased use of self-contained settings. Understaffed English learner instruction and services undermine a district's capacity to serve all identified English learners, including those who have special needs. Moreover, dually identified students might not receive language acquisition support if existing bilingual staff are not assigned to provide such support. Staffing shortages can undermine the integrity and goals of a district's bilingual education, limiting the availability of special education services in students' dominant home languages. For instance, in some schools, classes intended to be taught in Spanish are delivered in English due to staffing shortages (Kangas, 2017). In several districts reviewed by the Council, shortages of bilingual special education personnel and the absence of coordinated service models led to students being placed in more restrictive or self-contained settings, not because those settings were the most appropriate placements for the students, but because they were the only options available within the schools' staffing and program structures.

Misinterpretation of Legal Requirements. An English learner with disabilities is legally entitled, under federal law, to receive English language instruction and special education services in tandem, not sequentially. Because there is no federally required legal document for EL services comparable to the legally required IEP for special education, language services are often perceived by district staff as a quasi-legal, negotiable service. Studies of students identified as both English learners and students with disabilities indicate that these two support systems are often seen as conflicting priorities, with special education services frequently taking precedence over language development programs (Kangas, 2014; Lopes-Murphy, 2020; Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2024; Schissel & Kangas, 2018). Council reviews mirror the findings of a study of teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of dually identified students, which documented that students’ special education needs were prioritized over English language services due to the “unspoken hierarchy” in which special education services take precedence (Stutzman & Lowenhaupt, 2022). Acting on the “unspoken hierarchy” affects student schedules. Dually identified students may be pulled from language development classes to receive special education services, which can negatively affect English development (Cuba & Tefera, 2024).

The federal education law provision that gives parents the right to decline English language instruction services (ESEA 1112(e)(3)(A)(viii)) further exacerbates the misconceptions about the primacy of IEPs and can result in diminished language development services for dually identified students. Because some educators believe that “the IEP will supersede... basically anything...” (Kangas, 2017, p. 23) and parents have the right to decline or waive EL services, educators may erroneously perceive EL services as less essential or replaceable by special education services. A recent study found that ever-waived ELs (ELs who had waived language services at any point) were 25 percent more likely than the comparison peer group of never-waived ELs to be placed in special education services (Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2024).

Limited Collaborative Structures. Many districts lack effective, consistent collaboration between multilingual learner and special education departments when serving dually identified students, resulting in inconsistent services (Cuba & Tefera, 2024). Effective coordination between EL and special education staff is hampered by scheduling conflicts, insufficient staffing, and a lack of leadership prioritization. In some cases, students receive minimal language development support despite having significant language development needs (Kangas, 2017). Furthermore, while a majority of all students with disabilities served under IDEA, Part B, spend 80 percent or more of their day in general education, ELs with disabilities are often included in general education settings at lower rates and receive more intensive, segregated, or pull-out services (OSEP, 2022). In the absence of clear protocols for collaboration and coordination, weak communication leads to scheduling conflicts and service gaps that fail to provide dually identified students with both English development and special education support, compromising students’ academic and linguistic growth.

Gaps in Instruction and Special Education Services for Dually Identified Students

Many schools continue to operate without coherent systems to support dually identified students. Consequently, dually identified students often fall through the cracks due to systemic oversights, limited resources, ineffective collaboration, and entrenched deficit-based beliefs, contributing to the fragmentation of services and limiting access to bilingual and inclusive education.

Lack of Defined Services. Schools often lack clear frameworks for coordinating English language development and special education, resulting in inconsistent implementation. Past Council reviews have found master plans that do not include necessary provisions for serving dually identified students, including in MTSS or *Child Find* processes and academic interventions. This absence of integrated planning reflects a broader pattern identified in the literature, where dually identified students are often excluded from both EL and special education planning structures (Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Kangas, 2017). Without clear service models, students are left without coordinated instruction, supports, and services that address both their language and learning needs. Moreover, dually identified students may have limited exposure to learning grade-level content when they are pulled out of their core instructional environment to receive special education support or English language instruction.

English-only Special Education Services. Dually identified students often receive services only in English, rather than in the language they understand best, missing opportunities to build on their dominant home language strengths (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016). Moreover, IEPs might include only at-home instructional supports in English, even though parents are not English speakers. This not only undermines efforts to build parents' capacity to support their child at home but also contradicts research showing that bilingual interventions can support development in both languages and improve outcomes for students with disabilities (Simon-Cereijido & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2014).

Deficit-based Perceptions. Educators may view dually identified students as limited in both languages, leading to lower expectations and reduced academic rigor (Cioè-Peña, 2017; García et al., 2024; Kangas, 2017). The belief that dually identified students have a “limited capacity” to learn multiple languages may negatively affect their achievement by limiting students' access to the benefits of dominant home language development and bilingualism. These perceptions are often rooted in misunderstandings of bilingualism and learning differences, and contribute to exclusion from enrichment opportunities and rigorous instruction (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Cuba & Tefera, 2024). Deficit-based perceptions also include the belief that multilingual students and families are unmotivated and uninvolved in their education, despite evidence to the contrary. Such assumptions can erode trust and limit meaningful family engagement. Table 8 presents common misconceptions and biases regarding dually identified students, which contribute to challenges in identification, placement, and support practices.

Table 8. Misconceptions about Dually Identified Students

Misconception	Impact on Students and Families	Related Systemic Issues
Language and Learning		
View bilingualism as a cognitive burden. Assume that learning two or more languages overwhelms students with disabilities.	Exclude students from dual language programs and reduce dominant home language support.	Lack of bilingual special education models; limited professional learning on bilingualism and disability (Kangas, 2017; Schissel & Kangas, 2018).
Conflate language acquisition with disability. Misinterpret typical second language development as evidence of a learning disorder.	Overidentify ELs for special education or delay appropriate services.	Inadequate training in English development; lack of valid bilingual assessments (Cuba & Tefera, 2024).
Default to English-only instruction. Believe that English immersion is always the most effective approach.	Undermine dominant home language development and cross-linguistic transfer.	Weak fidelity to bilingual models; lack of dominant-home-language-inclusive instructional strategies and interventions (Kangas, 2017).
Student Capacity and Potential		
Lower expectations for academic potential. Believe that dually identified students cannot succeed in rigorous academic settings.	Deny access to advanced coursework, enrichment, and high-quality instruction.	Absence of accountability for equitable access; deficit-based school culture (Cioè-Peña, 2017, 2020; Cuba & Tefera, 2024).
Ignore intersectional identities. Focus on a single label (e.g., EL or disability) rather than the interaction of multiple identities/needs.	Misalign services and overlook complex student needs.	Policies and training that ignore intersectionality; lack of disaggregated data (Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Schissel & Kangas, 2018).
Family Engagement and Service Delivery		
Treat language and disability services as mutually exclusive. Incorrectly inform families that students can receive either ESL/ESOL or special education services, often conveying a priority for special education services.	Provide incomplete information and support, often neglecting language development.	Siloed service models; lack of integrated dual-service policies (Kangas, 2017).
Ignore cultural perceptions and beliefs about learning differences and schooling or remain unaware of them. View families' culturally rooted understandings of learning differences as different from dominant norms, without recognizing those understandings as meaningful perspectives.	Misalign services and overlook complex student needs. Undermine trust and collaboration with families.	Lack of cross-cultural training; absence of culturally aware frameworks.

Table 8. Misconceptions about Dually Identified Students, continued

Misconception	Impact on Students and Families	Related Systemic Issues
Family Engagement and Service Delivery, continued		
Assume families are uninvolved or incapable. View EL families, especially immigrant families, as disengaged or lacking knowledge.	Undervalue or limit family participation.	Lack of multilingual communication; cultural mismatch between schools and families (Cuba & Tefera, 2024).

Ineffective Engagement of Multilingual Learner Families

The families of dually identified students often navigate complex educational systems shaped by unfamiliar languages, cultural expectations, and special education processes. Their perceptions—shaped by cultural/traditional beliefs and practices, access to information, and systemic barriers—can influence how they engage with schools and advocate for their children. Key challenges identified through Council reviews of English learner and special education programs, working group discussions, and research findings include:

- **Language and communication barriers.** Families frequently lack access to translated materials or interpretation services during key meetings, such as IEP meetings. This limits their ability to understand their child's rights and participate meaningfully in decision-making.
- **Limited understanding of dual services.** Many families lack clear information about how language development and special education services should be delivered together (Kangas, 2017; Liu et al., 2017; Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2024). In some districts, families were asked to waive EL services without fully understanding the implications or understanding that their child has a legal right to receive both English language instructional services and special education services.
- **Cultural perceptions of learning differences.** Immigrant families may hold different cultural beliefs about learning differences, which can affect their willingness to pursue evaluations or accept special education services. Without culturally responsive outreach, schools risk miscommunication or disengagement.
- **Compliance-driven engagement.** Family engagement is often limited to procedural requirements rather than authentic partnership. Meetings may be scheduled without flexibility, and communication is often one-directional, leaving families feeling excluded from the educational process.
- **Lack of trust and relationship-building.** Families may hesitate to engage due to prior negative experiences with schools or broader systems. Without intentional trust-building, families may defer to school decisions even when they have concerns, given their cultural norms of respecting educational institutions and teachers.

Some districts are beginning to implement more inclusive strategies, such as multilingual family liaisons, joint EL–special education information sessions, and visual tools to explain service models.

PART III—A MODEL

Dual Language Immersion as a Model for Serving Dually Identified Students

Dual language immersion (DLI) programs present a promising approach for meeting the intersecting needs of English learners with disabilities. By integrating language development with academic instruction in both English and students' dominant home languages, DLI programs promote bilingualism and biliteracy while supporting equitable access to content. For dually identified students, this model offers a pathway to strengthen their linguistic assets and receive targeted support aligned with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

What Dual Language Immersion Programs Offer

DLI programs offer inherent opportunities to coherently and simultaneously develop biliteracy and content knowledge for all students. For English learners in particular, DLI provides opportunities to further develop their dominant home language and to learn content through their dominant home language, rather than only through English, a language they are newly learning. Students who receive instruction in their dominant home language demonstrate stronger academic outcomes and have more equitable access to rigorous content (Wackerle-Hollman et al., 2020).

Moreover, DLI programs offer dually identified students opportunities to build on their command of the dominant home language while receiving the special education services and accommodations specified in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Dual language immersion programs encourage the use of students' dominant home language to support the development of their English language skills and biliteracy. Development of the dominant home language can facilitate English development through cross-linguistic transfer. In addition, the use of bilingual interventions can improve outcomes in both languages for students with disabilities (Gutiérrez-Clellen et al., 2014; Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Simon-Cereijido & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2014).

Research shows that programs that develop the dominant home language are effective in supporting English development. Home language proficiency, English vocabulary, and frequency of English use are significant predictors of English development. Gutiérrez-Clellen et al. (2012) found that children with stronger Spanish language skills and higher initial English proficiency benefited more from bilingual instruction. These findings suggest that home language skills play an important role in English acquisition and that continued development of the home language may support English growth. In contrast, children with lower levels of English proficiency showed weaker rates of English growth in English-only settings, suggesting that an English-only approach may provide fewer opportunities for these learners to build on their existing linguistic resources.

The social contexts in which children learn influence their language development. Children who speak a minority language at home may also belong to minoritized groups that disproportionately experience socioeconomic disadvantage and marginalization (e.g., Spanish and Tagalog speakers in Canada and the United States). In these circumstances, minority languages are less widely spoken, undervalued by society, and lack institutional support. As a result, children may be at risk of losing their home language as they acquire the majority language. Moreover, limited integration with speakers of the majority language can reduce English learners' exposure to that language (Paradis, 2010). DLI programs, especially when implemented schoolwide, create a powerfully affirming environment in which both languages are equally valued and celebrated, thereby supporting bilingual development while countering the social marginalization and undervaluation of minority languages (Paradis, 2010).

Dual language immersion programs can strengthen student achievement. Studies have shown that students in dual language immersion programs outperform their peers on standardized reading assessments (Steele et al., 2017). In a study of dually identified students with consistent exposure to both their dominant home language and English, Kay-Raining Bird et al. (2016) found that the students demonstrated language skills on par with those of native English speakers on standardized language tests. Dual language immersion is an effective instructional method that yields academic achievement among dually identified students, particularly when both languages are supported consistently and intentionally (Simon-Cereijido & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2014; Wackerle-Hollman et al., 2020).

Cognitive Benefits of Bilingualism in Dually Identified Students

For dually identified students, the benefits of bilingualism are especially important because they relate directly to cognitive processes often implicated in learning differences, including working memory, attentional control, and cognitive flexibility (Steele et al., 2017). Rather than viewing bilingualism as an added burden, this research suggests that developing two languages can support the very executive processes students use to manage complex academic and linguistic tasks (Koda, 2008; Kwon et al., 2021). In this context, bilingualism is not only an outcome of DLI programming but also a potential support for students who are learning through two languages while also navigating learning differences.

- **Working memory functions.** Bilingualism may support memory processes essential to vocabulary development, oral language use, reading comprehension, and task completion. This is particularly relevant for dually identified students, who often experience challenges with retaining and manipulating language-based information (Kormos, 2017).
- **Attention control and cognitive flexibility.** Because multilingual learners must attend to a target language while managing input from multiple languages, multilingualism may strengthen the executive processes involved in focusing, shifting attention, and adapting to instructional demands. These processes are especially valuable for dually identified students who benefit from support in managing complex language and academic tasks (Kwon et al., 2021).

In inclusive DLI settings, these cognitive benefits reinforce the value of sustaining instruction in both languages while providing appropriate scaffolds, accommodations, and special education services. Table 9 presents the cognitive advantages associated with multilingualism, specifically in working memory and executive function, and highlights their implications for dually identified students.

Table 9. Cognitive Benefits of Multilingualism for Dually Identified Students

Cognitive Domain	Multilingual Advantage	Implications for Dually Identified Students
Working Memory	Multilingual children perform better than their monolingual counterparts on tasks that measure short- and long-term auditory-verbal memory and recognition memory.	These enhanced memory functions are especially relevant for students with specific learning disabilities, who often struggle with memory-related tasks and benefit from instructional models that strengthen these domains.
Executive Functions	Enhanced connectivity between the prefrontal and occipital regions in multilingual individuals indicates greater engagement of brain regions associated with executive function.	These neural advantages support students who require both language development and special education services by enhancing their ability to manage complex cognitive tasks.
Executive Function: Attention Control	The prefrontal cortex, which is essential for managing complex cognitive tasks, shows greater activation in multilingual individuals.	Improved attention control helps dually identified students sustain focus and shift attention effectively during instruction, which is often a challenge for students with executive function deficits.
Executive Function: Cognitive Flexibility	Exposure to diverse writing systems and sound patterns may support the brain's ability to manage the increased linguistic processing demands.	This flexibility supports adaptive learning strategies and responsiveness to varied instructional approaches, which is essential for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
Executive Function: Visuospatial Processing	The occipital lobe, primarily responsible for visuospatial processing but also engaged in language processing, is more active in multilinguals.	Supports visual learning strengths and enhances comprehension through multimodal instruction—an effective strategy for students with diverse learning profiles.

Source. Author-created based on prior research (Koda, 2008; Kormos, 2017; Kwon et al., 2021).

A Primer on Dual Language Immersion (DLI) Programs

Structural and instructional differences exist between *one-way* and *two-way* models, which refer to the types of students served. While all models aim to support bilingualism, biliteracy, and academic achievement, they differ in student composition, language allocation, and implementation strategies. These distinctions are especially important when considering how each model serves dually identified students.

Features of Dual Language Immersion Models

Feature	One-Way	Two-Way
Student demographics	Primarily students from one language background (typically ELs).	Balanced mix of English-dominant and partner language-dominant students.
Language allocation	50/50: 50% partner language, 50% English throughout the program. 90/10 or 80/20: Starts with 90% or 80% partner language, gradually shifts to 50/50 by upper elementary. The specific language allocation varies by program, but often begins with more instructional time in the dominant home language of students (L1).	50/50: 50% partner language, 50% English throughout the program. 90/10: Starts with 90% partner language, gradually shifts to 50/50 by upper elementary.

Source. Adapted from Sugarman (2018).

Benefits of Developing Dually Identified Students' Dominant Home Languages in Dual Language Immersion Programs

Research shows that DLI programs not only promote biliteracy but also support long-term academic achievement and English proficiency, particularly for students whose dominant home language matches the partner language of instruction (Kormos, 2017, 2020; Steele et al., 2017). Table 10 illustrates how dominant home language skills can support English language development across both language-based and code-based aspects of language. Many of the ways that a dominant home language can support English language development are built into dual language immersion instruction, such as providing content instruction in both languages and fostering oral language development through peer interaction.

Table 10. How Dominant Home Language Supports English Language Development in Dual Language Immersion

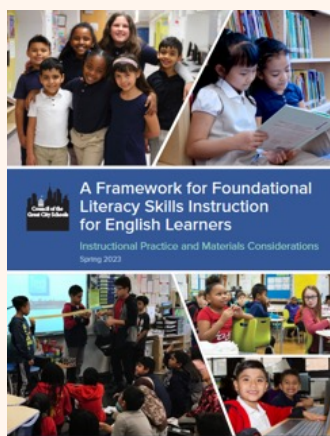
Aspect of Language Learning (Council of the Great City Schools, 2023) ¹⁰	How Dominant Home Language Supports English Language Development	What Dual Language Immersion Programs Do
Language-based Skills		
Oral Language. Encompasses both receptive (listening) and productive (speaking) skills. Includes understanding and producing narratives, learning pronunciation, vocabulary, and discourse norms.	Dominant home language oral skills can serve as a foundation for English language development. Students with intact oral language comprehension in their dominant home language do not exhibit problems with English listening skills.	Support expressive and receptive language development in both languages, which is critical for students with language-based learning difficulties.
Comprehension and Meaning-Making. Involves activating background knowledge and using strategies to extract meaning from spoken and written language.	Dominant home language comprehension strategies can transfer to English. Successful metacognitive strategies may have been developed in the dominant home language, but children may struggle to transfer them to English without support.	Use content instruction in both languages to reinforce comprehension strategies. Strengthen metacognitive awareness and support access to grade-level content through the language students understand best.
Word Knowledge. Understanding word meanings, usage, and pronunciation in both oral and written forms. Includes morphological awareness and word generation.	Dominant home language vocabulary depth supports word learning in English. Phonological decoding skills in the dominant home language help learners decode and retain English vocabulary.	Enhance vocabulary development and support reading comprehension in both languages, especially for students with limited working memory.
Code-based Skills		
Phonological and Phonemic Awareness. Recognizing syllables and rhymes; manipulating phonemes to form and alter words. Foundational for mapping sounds to print.	Dominant home language phonological awareness is a strong predictor of reading achievement in English. Early assessments of dominant home language phonological skills and rapid naming ability are highly accurate in identifying potential English reading challenges.	Reinforce foundational reading skills in both languages and support early identification of reading difficulties across languages.

¹⁰ Council of the Great City Schools. (2023). *A framework for foundational literacy skills instruction for English learners: Instructional practice and materials considerations*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED629876.pdf>

Table 10. How Dominant Home Language Supports English Language Development in Dual Language Immersion, continued

Aspect of Language Learning (Council of the Great City Schools, 2023)	How Dominant Home Language Supports English Language Development	What Dual Language Immersion Programs Do
Code-based Skills, continued		
Print Knowledge. Understanding that print conveys meaning and follows conventions (e.g., directionality, letter recognition).	Dominant home language literacy experiences support English print awareness. The simultaneous growth of spelling and decoding skills across two writing systems reflects significant cross-linguistic interaction.	Promote biliteracy and support decoding and fluency development in both languages, which is especially beneficial for students with SLDs.
Decoding and Phonics. Establishing grapheme-phoneme correspondence to decode unfamiliar words and develop fluency.	Dominant home language decoding skills transfer to English. Phonological decoding is a universal predictor of reading development across languages.	Strengthen decoding efficiency and support reading fluency in both languages.
Early Writing. Expressing meaning through written symbols, from scribbles to structured sentences. Supports encoding, spelling, and composition.	Dominant home language writing strategies and syntactic awareness play a supportive role in learning to write in English. English learners with specific learning disabilities (SLDs) who demonstrate stronger writing abilities in the dominant home language tend to produce more organized and coherent texts in English.	Support written expression and organization, helping students transfer writing strategies across languages.

Source. Author-created based on prior research (Alderson et al., 2015; Erdos et al., 2014; Geva & Ryan, 1993; Koda, 2008; Kormos, 2017, 2020; Kwon et al., 2021; Ndlovu & Geva, 2008; Perfetti et al., 1992; Steele et al., 2017).



CGCS Foundational Literacy Framework

The *Framework for Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction for English Learners* (Council of the Great City Schools [CGCS], 2023) was developed to guide Tier I literacy instruction for English learners in English-medium settings. While not written specifically for dual language immersion (DLI), its principles are highly relevant because they emphasize the role of oral language, comprehension, and linguistic transfer in literacy development.

The language aspects, such as oral language, word knowledge, phonological awareness, and early writing, originate from this framework's *comprehensive and connected approach*. These components reflect research-based insights into how literacy develops across languages and how first language (L1) skills can support second language (L2) acquisition.

Features of Dual Language Immersion Programs That Support Dually Identified Students

Dual language immersion programs are uniquely positioned to meet the complex needs of dually identified students by integrating language development, content teaching, and inclusive practices. Their effectiveness depends on a set of interconnected features: asset-oriented program design, inclusive access to language and content, coordinated delivery of language and special education services, holistic staffing and collaboration, culturally responsive instruction with high expectations, and meaningful family engagement.

Asset-Oriented Program Design

DLI programs are grounded in an asset-based philosophy that recognizes students' home languages and cultural backgrounds as strengths. Instruction in the dominant home language not only supports comprehension and engagement but also affirms students' identities. This approach fosters a sense of pride and belonging, which is essential for academic success. Multilingual communication between schools and families strengthens partnerships and encourages families to become active participants in their children's education. By promoting community building and cultural responsiveness, DLI programs create environments where students and families feel seen, valued, and supported.

Inclusive Access to Language and Content

DLI programs support dually identified students by delivering academic content in both English and the student's dominant home language. This integrated approach allows students to continue developing their home language, which serves as an asset in building academic knowledge, while also developing English proficiency. Students' proficiency in their home language supports meaningful and robust family communication and contributes to students' asset-based identity formation.

Integrated Support for Language and Special Education Services

Dually identified students often face challenges in both language acquisition and cognitive or academic development. Traditional instructional models tend to address these areas separately, which can result in fragmented services or missed opportunities for growth. In contrast, DLI programs are designed to address both needs simultaneously. Instructional strategies for language development—such as using visuals, repetition, and scaffolding—can be incorporated within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), allowing students to access grade-level content while receiving the support they need.

Students receive services and accommodations in accordance with their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 plans during instruction, in either language, to meet both their language learning and special education needs. Aligning and coordinating special education services with language instruction builds coherence and minimizes the need to pull out dually identified students to receive services. Moreover, developing the dominant home language enhances English literacy, as students can make connections between languages and reinforce their understanding of key concepts.

Holistic Staffing and Collaboration

DLI programs require a holistic staffing approach that encompasses a range of specialized professionals to create an effective bilingual learning environment. Holistic staffing means:

- having classroom teachers—in all grades—who meet the specific language proficiency requirements and cultural competencies needed for each position;
- having qualified individuals in specialized roles such as bilingual reading specialists, special education providers, and parent engagement coordinators who can communicate effectively with all families; and
- having administrative staff who understand the unique pedagogical approaches used in dual language education.

DLI programs rely on and support effective teacher collaboration, such as strategic planning time that recognizes the additional knowledge and responsibilities required for dual language instruction, especially to ensure coherence and parity in content learning through two languages. A collaborative school culture that values linguistic diversity recognizes that ideas and communication can take many forms, and that students can acquire different modalities of communication.

Culturally Responsive Instruction and High Expectations

Culturally responsive pedagogy is central to the success of DLI programs. Instruction is delivered in both English and the target language using methods that reflect students' cultural and linguistic experiences. Scaffolding and differentiated supports are embedded into instruction to ensure that all students, including those who are dually identified, can access rigorous academic content. Classrooms emphasize collaboration and peer interaction, creating rich opportunities for language development and social learning. Importantly, academic rigor is maintained across all content areas. Success is measured not solely by language proficiency, but also by students' progress toward their individualized academic goals, supported by the services and accommodations to which they are entitled. (See Table 11.)

Table 11. Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Instruction and High Expectations in DLI: Practices, Rationale, and How It Looks

Culturally Responsive Practice	Why It Matters for Dually Identified Students	How It Looks in DLI Programs
Integrating students' home languages and cultures into instruction	Affirms students' identities and promotes engagement. Supporting the dominant home language affirms students' identities and fosters a more inclusive, emotionally supportive learning environment. An asset-based, growth mindset creates a safe and supportive environment where students can stay motivated and persevere through challenges.	Teachers incorporate students' dominant home language in instruction, use culturally relevant texts, and validate multilingualism as an asset.

Table 11. Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Instruction and High Expectations in DLI: Practices, Rationale, and How It Looks, continued

Culturally Responsive Practice	Why It Matters for Dually Identified Students	How It Looks in DLI Programs
Embedding scaffolding and differentiation into rigorous content instruction	Ensures access to grade-level content while addressing cognitive processing needs. Explicit explanation of linguistic structures and ample practice are essential for students with SLDs.	Teachers use sentence frames, visuals, and guided practice in both languages to support comprehension and expression.
Maintaining high academic expectations for all students	Counters deficit thinking and promotes equitable outcomes. Students with SLDs can be successful language learners if their needs are met in an inclusive learning environment.	Instruction is aligned with grade-level standards, with accommodations and supports to ensure progress toward IEP goals.
Fostering peer collaboration and interaction	Enhances oral language development, social-emotional learning, and peer modeling. Opportunities for students to work in a variety of groupings support inclusion.	Classrooms use cooperative learning structures and bilingual peer support to promote interaction and shared learning. Sociocultural approaches to language learning incorporate meaningful peer-to-peer interactions, affording ample opportunities for students to work together to build knowledge and successfully accomplish tasks.

Ongoing, relevant, and high-quality professional learning is required to support educators in building their knowledge of robust pedagogical biliteracy practices, fostering growth mindsets, and supporting the design and orchestration of rigorous content instruction that also develops academic biliteracy in culturally and linguistically affirming DLI settings.

Meaningful Family Engagement to Support Dually Identified Students

Meaningful family engagement is a cornerstone of effective DLI programs. This involves building trusting relationships, honoring families' cultural and linguistic knowledge, and actively involving them in decision-making processes. DLI programs recognize that families are essential partners in supporting students' academic and linguistic development. Schools create welcoming environments where families feel valued and empowered to advocate for their children's educational needs. Communication is provided in families' preferred languages, and staff members are more likely to be trained to navigate conversations about learning differences and language development with cultural sensitivity. Table 12 summarizes research findings on common experiences and perceptions among families of dually identified students and illustrates how DLI programs can address these concerns through inclusive, culturally responsive practices.

Table 12. How DLI Programs Address Common Experiences and Perceptions of Families of Dually Identified Students

Topic	Experiences and Perceptions of EL or Immigrant Families with Dually Identified Students	How DLI Programs Address Families' Concerns About Dually Identified Students
Language and Academic Development		
Home Language vs. English Development	Some families prioritize English for perceived academic and economic benefits, while others value maintaining the dominant home language for cultural identity and communication. Concerns may arise that bilingualism could hinder English development (Drysdale et al., 2015; Gutiérrez-Ciellen et al., 2012).	DLI programs promote additive bilingualism, demonstrating that strong skills in the dominant home language support English development, especially for students with language impairments (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016). DLI programs help families understand bilingual language development and its benefits.
Cognitive and Learning Concerns	Families may worry that learning two languages will overwhelm children with disabilities or learning difficulties (Drysdale et al., 2015; Kormos, 2017).	Research shows bilingualism does not impede language development and may enhance cognitive functions like working memory and executive control (Kwon et al., 2021).
Assessment and Progress Monitoring	Families may distrust assessments that do not accurately capture their child's full abilities, especially when they are only conducted in English. They may also be unaware of how progress is tracked in both languages (Kormos, 2017; Sheng et al., 2012).	DLI programs can incorporate assessments in both the dominant home language and English and use conceptual scoring to better reflect bilingual students' knowledge. DLI staff are better equipped to help parents understand the assessments used to screen students and monitor their progress.
Teacher Expectations	Families may perceive that educators hold low expectations or deficit views of their children due to language status or disability (Artiles et al., 2010; Cooc, 2018; Kangas, 2017).	DLI programs can foster asset-based perspectives and culturally responsive teaching. DLI teachers inherently believe in students' ability to learn multiple languages.
Program Access		
Access and Participation in DLI Programs	Families may be unaware that DLI programs are appropriate for children with disabilities or may face barriers to access (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Simon-Cerejido & Gutiérrez-Ciellen, 2014).	DLI programs can include dually identified students and provide instruction and services in both languages.
Instructional Quality and Language Fidelity	Families may be confused or disappointed when bilingual programs are delivered mostly in English (Kangas, 2017).	DLI programs are designed to provide instruction in both languages with fidelity and consistency.

Table 12. How DLI Programs Address Common Experiences and Perceptions of Families of Dually Identified Students, continued

Topic	Experiences and Perceptions of EL or Immigrant Families with Dually Identified Students	How DLI Programs Address Families' Concerns About Dually Identified Students
Program Access, continued		
Access to Enrichment and Academic Opportunities	Families might not be made aware of enrichment opportunities or rigorous instruction for their children due to school staff members' assumptions about their abilities (Cuba & Tefera, 2024).	DLI programs can ensure equitable access to advanced coursework and recognition.
Language and Culture		
Language Attrition and Identity	Families may notice their children losing their dominant home language and worry about cultural disconnection or identity loss (Simon-Cerejido & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2014).	DLI programs support dominant home language development, which helps preserve cultural identity and prevents language loss, thereby maintaining important family connections.
Special Education Identification and Rights	Families may fear stigma or misdiagnosis due to language differences being mistaken for disabilities. They may also lack awareness of their rights (Artiles et al., 2010; Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Schissel & Kangas, 2018).	DLI programs can clarify the distinction between language acquisition and disability and support families through bilingual communication.

How Dual Language Immersion Addresses Systemic Issues

Dual language immersion programs offer an asset-based approach for meeting the needs of dually identified students, while also serving as a model for effective program design, instructional practices, and districtwide strategy. Designing and implementing DLI programs requires considerable collaboration among instructional leaders from various content areas and disciplines, as well as corresponding, sustained district support to deliver content learning and the full scope of educational services in two languages. This collaboration extends to offices responsible for registration, student placement, and transportation, which are vital to ensuring that families are informed and that students have access to DLI programs throughout the district. These hallmarks of district support and coordination for DLI programs are powerful practices that help erode silos and mitigate the systemic challenges that school districts face in serving dually identified students. (See Part II.) Below are examples of common systems-level challenges in serving dually identified students, along with ways inclusive DLI program practices can mitigate them.

- **Lack of understanding of the needs of dually identified students among leaders.** Leadership teams in districts and schools that understand the unique pedagogical approaches used in dual language education and the needs of dually identified students are better equipped to design instructional programs that address both language development and special needs.

- **Disproportionality and misidentification affecting dually identified students.** Hiring qualified multilingual personnel who communicate effectively across cultures and understand learning disabilities enables schools and districts to screen multilingual learners accurately by using linguistically and culturally responsive assessments and referral and diagnostic protocols.
- **Systemic barriers in serving dually identified students.** The strategic and holistic staffing practices of DLI programs provide a model for assembling teams of qualified professionals, such as special education teachers, English language development (ELD) teachers, intervention specialists, diagnosticians, and therapists. Supported by collaborative structures and norms, these teams collectively possess the knowledge and expertise needed to address the layered educational and social-emotional needs of dually identified students.
- **Gaps in instruction and services for dually identified students.** Guided by a comprehensive and coherent vision for integrated services and instruction, staffing assignments ensure that dually identified students receive uninterrupted English language development instruction and special education services across grade levels.
- **Ineffective family engagement.** Culturally and linguistically responsive multilingual parent engagement teams can communicate respectfully and effectively with multilingual parents, using multilingual staff or language access tools and resources to support parents throughout the special education process and help them make informed decisions for their children.

Table 13 presents common systemic issues related to serving dually identified students, explains how DLI programs address these issues, and identifies the resulting benefits for dually identified students and their families.

Table 13. How Dual Language Immersion Programs Address Systemic Issues in Serving Dually Identified Students

Systemic Issue	How DLI Programs Address the Issue	Benefits for Dually Identified Students and Families
Lack of leadership expertise in dual language and disability-inclusive pedagogy	DLI programs are led by leadership teams with knowledge of bilingual education and the needs of dually identified students.	Provides more equitable access to instruction and support, and families are better positioned to engage in decision-making when leaders implement inclusive, linguistically responsive practices (Kormos, 2020).
Inadequate identification of multilingual learners with disabilities	DLI programs hire staff with relevant language proficiency, cultural competence, and training in SLDs to ensure accurate screening.	Reduces misidentification and ensures appropriate support. Teachers need research-based content knowledge of basic linguistic concepts and SLDs.
Fragmented service delivery across language and special education programs	DLI programs coordinate teacher assignments to ensure uninterrupted access to both ELD and special education services.	Promotes continuity of instruction and development in language and content learning. Students with SLDs can be successful language learners if their needs are met in an inclusive learning environment.

Table 13. How Dual Language Immersion Programs Address Systemic Issues in Serving Dually Identified Students, continued

Systemic Issue	How DLI Programs Address the Issue	Benefits for Dually Identified Students and Families
Limited access to specialized intervention and MTSS supports	DLI programs employ interventionists and special educators trained in bilingual and disability-responsive instruction.	Provides targeted support for struggling students and reduces over-referral to special education.
Insufficient family engagement in special education processes	DLI programs create multilingual parent engagement teams to support families through culturally and linguistically appropriate communication.	Builds trust and strengthens family participation in decision-making by affirming students' identities through support of their dominant home language, contributing to a more inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environment.

Source. Author-created based on prior research (Kormos, 2020; Rhinehart et al., 2024).

The Issue of Excluding Dually Identified Students from Dual Language Immersion

Despite the growing body of research supporting the benefits of bilingualism, many districts continue to steer English learners and dually identified students away from, or counsel them out of, dual language immersion programs due to academic challenges. This practice often stems from deficit-based assumptions about students' capacity to learn in two languages, a misunderstanding of bilingualism and disability, and systemic barriers such as staffing shortages and fragmented service delivery. The “informal hierarchy” that prioritizes special education over language instruction may also contribute to this (Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Kangas, 2017).

These decisions can deprive students of critical opportunities to develop their home language, access rigorous content, and benefit from integrated supports that DLI programs are uniquely positioned to provide. Research shows that bilingualism can enhance executive functioning, working memory, and metalinguistic awareness—areas often impacted by learning disabilities—and that students with consistent L1 support perform comparably to monolingual peers on standardized assessments (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Kormos, 2017, 2020).

Troubleshooting the Issue. Approaches to addressing this issue, drawn from Kangas (2017), Kormos (2020), and Schissel and Kangas (2018), include:

- **Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).** Use tiered interventions that integrate language development and special education supports within the DLI setting.
- **Collaborative service models.** Coordinate between EL and special education departments to deliver integrated instruction and avoid siloed decision-making.
- **Asset-based assessments.** Use bilingual assessments and avoid conflating language acquisition with disability.
- **Professional learning.** Train educators to distinguish between second language development and learning disabilities, and to implement inclusive bilingual strategies.

PART IV—A PLAYBOOK

Implementing Inclusive DLI Programs

This companion to the *Dual Language Immersion (DLI) Playbooks* developed by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) describes components considered crucial for the effective implementation of DLI programs and elaborates on the features needed to successfully serve dually identified students.¹¹ The original OELA DLI playbooks provide foundational guidance for designing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality DLI programs that promote multilingualism and ensure access for English learners. They are organized into four key components:

- **Playbook 1: Policy.** Supports stakeholders in developing and advocating for comprehensive policies that promote multilingualism and equitable access to DLI programs. It provides guidance for state educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, and communities to create pathways for all students—especially ELs and other underrepresented groups—to become multilingual.
- **Playbook 2: Foundational Conditions.** Offers evidence-based guidelines for establishing equitable and sustainable DLI programs. It addresses system-level structures, educator capacity, funding, and enrollment practices to ensure that ELs are prioritized and supported.
- **Playbook 3: Family and Community Engagement.** Focuses on building authentic partnerships with families and communities. It outlines strategies for SEAs, LEAs, and schools to foster inclusive engagement and empower families to advocate for DLI access and quality.
- **Playbook 4: Staffing.** Provides strategies to increase the number of qualified bilingual/multilingual educators. It includes recommendations for licensure reform, grow-your-own programs, and professional learning systems to support recruitment and retention.

While the OELA DLI playbooks offer comprehensive guidance for DLI program design and implementation, they do not explicitly address the unique needs of dually identified students. This companion playbook fills that gap by:

- **Offering practical guidance** for districts and schools to embed inclusive practices into planning, implementation, and evaluation processes, addressing misidentification, fragmented service delivery, and staffing shortages that disproportionately affect dually identified students.
- **Providing targeted strategies** for developing systems to integrate language development and special education services within DLI settings.

11 U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2024). *Dual language immersion playbooks*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/oela-resources/playbooks/dual-language-immersion-playbook>

Using This Playbook Alongside the OELA DLI Playbooks

This resource offers strategies and recommendations for implementing inclusive DLI programs within the broader context of the foundational conditions and practices outlined in the OELA DLI playbooks. While some recommendations in this playbook overlap with those in the OELA DLI playbooks, this document does not elaborate on them, as the resource is designed to extend—not replace—the foundational guidance provided by OELA. For broader strategies related to multilingual program design, policy development, staffing, and family engagement, readers should refer to the original OELA DLI playbooks. This companion playbook aims to deepen understanding and strengthen practices that specifically support dually identified students in DLI programs.



OELA Dual Language Immersion Playbooks

This playbook builds on the foundational guidance provided in the OELA Dual Language Immersion (DLI) Playbooks, which support states, districts, schools, families, and communities in designing equitable, high-quality DLI programs for English learners. The OELA playbooks cover: (1) Policy Development, (2) Foundational Conditions, (3) Family and Community Engagement, and (4) Staffing.

While some recommendations may overlap, this companion playbook focuses specifically on dually identified students—English learners with disabilities—and provides targeted strategies to address their unique needs. For broader DLI guidance, refer to the original OELA playbooks.

How Dual Language Immersion is Conducive to Serving Dually Identified Students

The effective and sustained implementation of DLI programs requires considerable support and collaboration among content-area departments, human resources, district initiative teams, and operational offices. Such a level of collaboration is also required to provide special education services and English language instruction to meet the needs of dually identified students. Successful DLI programs that coordinate their resources or inputs to deliver asset-based, linguistically and culturally responsive instruction and services provide a conducive environment for aligning resources and services to serve dually identified students. Moreover, the asset-based approach to instruction and service delivery, holistic staffing, screening protocols, and teacher collaboration in DLI programs can inform district efforts to serve dually identified students.

DLI programs provide unique affordances to design and deliver inclusive, asset-oriented practices for meeting the needs of dually identified students—English learners who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 plans to address special needs (Kwon et al., 2021; Rhinehart et al., 2024; Steele et al., 2017).

- Dual language instructional models are among the most promising in ensuring the academic success of English learners and their acquisition of English proficiency.
- The multifaceted benefits of bilingualism accrue to all students, including those with disabilities.
- Developing and maintaining the dominant home language is particularly valuable for dually identified students, especially when such students can receive special education services in their dominant home language.
- DLI programs are well-equipped to engage with multilingual parents in ways that are linguistically affirming and culturally responsive, thereby strengthening the home-to-school connection and helping to demystify the special education process for parents so they can engage in educational decision-making.

Critical Features of Inclusive DLI Programs for Dually Identified Students

Building on the foundational conditions outlined in the OELA DLI playbooks,¹² this playbook outlines conditions and practices that are uniquely important for designing and sustaining instruction—and identifies five interrelated features that are essential for inclusive DLI programs for dually identified students. As summarized in Table 14, the critical features are: (1) inclusive access to language and content, (2) integrated support for language development and special education services, (3) holistic staffing and collaboration, (4) culturally and linguistically responsive instruction with high expectations, and (5) meaningful family engagement. Each feature addresses a common barrier faced by dually identified students, while also reinforcing the others. These features were identified through a review of the research base, analysis of findings from existing Council reports, and input from urban district leaders and practitioners. Across these sources, a consistent thread emerged. Dually identified students are best served in coherent systems that integrate multilingual education, special education, and grade-level instruction. The five critical features, therefore, serve not only as a description of effective inclusive DLI programs but also as an organizing framework for planning, implementation, and continuous improvement.

Table 14. Critical Features of Inclusive DLI Programs for Dually Identified Students



I. Inclusive Access to Language and Content

What it is: Ensuring that dually identified students have full access to both English language acquisition and academic content in DLI programs. This includes instruction in both English and the partner language, access to grade-level curriculum, and inclusive enrollment policies.

Why it matters: Dually identified students often face barriers to accessing rigorous content due to assumptions about their capacity to learn in two languages or due to

12 U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2024). *Dual language immersion playbooks*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/oela-resources/playbooks/dual-language-immersion-playbook>

scheduling conflicts between EL and special education services. Providing instruction in both languages supports cross-linguistic transfer and affirms students' identities, which is critical for engagement and achievement.



II. Integrated Support for Language Development and Special Education Services

What it is: Coordinated delivery of EL and special education services within DLI classrooms. This includes aligning IEP goals with bilingual language development objectives and ensuring that services are not siloed or delivered in isolation.

Why it matters: Dually identified students are entitled to both language development and disability-related services under federal law (i.e., IDEA, Title III, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act). Fragmented service models often result in students missing one set of supports to receive the other. Integrated models reduce service gaps and promote coherence in instruction.



III. Holistic Staffing and Collaboration

What it is: Strategic staffing that includes bilingual special educators, interventionists, and collaborative planning structures within and across school-based teams. Holistic staffing ensures that students receive linguistically and cognitively appropriate instruction and special education services.

Why it matters: Staffing shortages and a lack of bilingual special education personnel often result in inappropriate placements or English-only services. Collaboration among EL, special education, and general education staff is essential to meet the complex needs of dually identified students. Schools must plan for shared responsibilities and coordinated service delivery.



IV. Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction with High Expectations

What it is: Instruction that reflects students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, uses differentiated supports, and maintains rigorous academic expectations. This includes using culturally appropriate materials and affirming multilingualism as an asset.

Why it matters: Deficit-based assumptions often lead to lowered expectations and exclusion from enrichment opportunities. Culturally responsive pedagogy affirms identity, reduces anxiety, and promotes engagement. High expectations are essential for equitable outcomes.



V. Meaningful Family Engagement

What it is: Authentic partnerships with families that include multilingual communication, culturally aware outreach, and shared decision-making. Families are engaged as advocates and collaborators in their child's education.

Why it matters: Families of dually identified students often face language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and limited access to information about special education services and English language instruction. Meaningful engagement builds trust, improves service alignment, and empowers families to advocate effectively.

Source. Author-created based on prior research (Cuba & Tefera, 2024; Gutiérrez-Clellen et al., 2012; Kangas, 2017; Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Kormos, 2017, 2020; Muñoz-Muñoz et al., 2022; Rhinehart et al., 2024).

Structure of Playbook: Inclusive DLI for Dually Identified Students Playbook

These five critical features are evident to varying degrees across a school system's functions and operations, as school districts operationalize them in distinct ways. The key features should be evident in leadership priorities and resource allocation, as well as in districts' and schools' policies, protocols, and classroom practices at various stages of program design and implementation. Organized around the major stages of implementation, this document provides practical guidance on specific system-level strategies and elements to help districts sustain quality DLI programs that address students' special needs and develop biliteracy through:

- Instructional frameworks with embedded supports for dually identified students;
- Policies and processes for valid and reliable screening and appropriate placement that build on each student's linguistic and cultural assets while addressing learning differences;
- Strategic staffing, relevant and high-quality professional learning, and collaborative structures that support implementation; and
- Coherent and continuous access to services for special education and English language development.

Specifically, the five critical features for inclusive DLI programs are organized into three major stages of implementation, highlighting system-level strategies at both the district and school levels. Each stage is linked to relevant sections of the OELA DLI playbooks. Readers are encouraged to become familiar with those sections because this playbook builds directly on their guidance. Table 15 shows how each stage aligns with the relevant OELA DLI playbooks.

Table 15. Alignment of Planning and Implementation Stages with OELA DLI Playbooks

Stage	Focus Areas	Alignment with OELA DLI Playbooks
1	Visioning and Planning A. Vision and Strategic Direction —Articulating inclusive goals and values for dually identified students in DLI programs. B. Policy and Structural Planning —Designing systems, policies, and frameworks that support inclusive access and integration. C. Instructional Planning (or Program Design) —Preparing for classroom-level implementation, staffing, and instructional alignment.	Policy Playbook (Establishing multilingualism as an asset and setting policy foundations for DLI programs.) (pp. 5–9) Foundational Conditions Playbook (Creating vision, leadership, and equitable access structures.) (pp. 10–14)
2	Support and Implementation A. Service Delivery and Instructional Practice —Implementing integrated EL and special education services, inclusive instructional strategies, and classroom supports. B. Staffing, Professional Learning, and Collaboration —Recruiting, assigning, and training staff to support dually identified students in DLI settings. C. Family and Community Engagement —Facilitating ongoing, culturally responsive engagement with families and community partners.	Foundational Conditions Playbook (Operationalizing support systems and instructional resources.) (pp. 10–14) Family and Community Engagement Playbook (Building authentic, bidirectional partnerships with families and communities.) (pp. 15–19) Staffing Playbook (Recruiting, preparing, and retaining bilingual educators.) (pp. 20–25)
3	Continuous Improvement A. Ongoing Monitoring of Program Implementation —Using disaggregated student data to monitor access, progress, and outcomes for dually identified students. Analysis of student-level data and structured reflection by multidisciplinary teams to ensure that services and instruction are delivered as planned and meet student needs, or necessary refinements are made to instruction, services, or program design. B. Overall Program Evaluation —Identifying gaps, adjusting practices, and sustaining inclusive DLI models over time using the critical features of inclusive DLI programs.	Policy Playbook (Ensuring equitable access and accountability through policy and assessment.) (pp. 5–9) Foundational Conditions Playbook (Sustaining programs through evaluation and resource alignment.) (pp. 10–14) Family and Community Engagement Playbook (Empowering families to advocate and lead in program sustainability.) (pp. 15–19) Staffing Playbook (Supporting professional growth and retention for long-term success.) (pp. 20–25)

STAGE 1: Visioning and Planning

At the beginning of the implementation process, school districts need a clearly stated vision, consistent with the OELA DLI playbooks' recommendations, for serving dually identified students through timely and accurate identification and the continuous provision of required English language development and special education services. This district vision, translated into policy, will guide the structural planning for resource allocation, content areas for DLI instruction, and offices responsible for operations, including registration and student placement. Furthermore, the district vision guides instructional planning, including staffing guidelines and expectations, for the specified DLI program design. Visioning and planning at the school level should align with the district's vision, goals, and resource parameters.

The visioning and planning stage encompasses the following aspects:

- A. **Vision and Strategic Direction**—Articulating inclusive goals and values for dually identified students in DLI programs.
- B. **Policy and Structural Planning**—Designing systems, policies, resources, and frameworks that support inclusive access and integration.
- C. **Instructional Planning (or Program Design)**—Preparing for classroom-level implementation, staffing, and instructional alignment.

The following sections specify district- and school-level actions associated with the listed aspects. These actions are specifically related to creating access to DLI programs for dually identified students to supplement recommendations in the OELA DLI playbooks. The five critical features for inclusive DLI programs are more evident in certain aspects of the visioning and planning stage than others.

A. Vision and Strategic Direction

The district provides the vision and strategic direction to establish asset-based programs, such as inclusive DLI, in which English learners and students with disabilities are held to high expectations, and educators know and believe that all students can develop biliteracy and succeed in school. The instruction and services in asset-based DLI programs notably provide dually identified students with access to English language development and grade-level content. The asset-based approach also means that instruction is culturally and linguistically responsive, and that families of dually identified students are understood, valued, and welcomed as meaningful partners and informed decision-makers in their child's education. These four critical features are intertwined, weaving a multifaceted vision that is centered on high expectations for dually identified students, biliteracy, and access to content.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

Establish a Clear Vision for Inclusive DLI

- **Establish and promote a clear district vision and strategic direction for inclusive DLI programs.** A shared vision with explicit goals for biliteracy and accessibility is essential to guide district offices and school leadership in developing and operating inclusive DLI programs. This vision should reflect a commitment to the success of dually identified students and recognize their capacity to develop biliteracy.

- **Define a district-wide vision that values multilingual learners and promotes biliteracy for dually identified students.** An inclusive DLI vision should affirm the linguistic and cultural assets of multilingual learners and emphasize high expectations for biliteracy development, regardless of disability status.
- **Articulate a district-wide vision for multilingual family engagement.** As part of the district's broader strategic direction, clearly define goals and strategies for engaging multilingual families, especially those of dually identified students. This should be a shared responsibility among departments, including family engagement, multilingual education, and special education.
- **Create and integrate an instructional framework for inclusive services.** Develop a framework that merges multilingual learner education services with special education supports. This framework should be embedded into broader district strategic plans and initiatives to ensure coherence and sustainability.

Build Leadership Capacity and Shared Responsibility

- **Ensure district leaders understand both language acquisition and learning disabilities.** District leaders involved in implementing DLI programs must have foundational knowledge of English language development and special education. This dual understanding is critical for designing programs that meet the needs of all learners.
- **Align professional learning with strategic planning to build shared responsibility for inclusive DLI.** Strategic planning for inclusive DLI programs must include a deliberate focus on cultivating shared responsibility among district and school leaders for serving dually identified students. This involves embedding professional learning into the district's strategic vision to ensure leaders understand and embrace the dual goals of language development and access to special education services.

Engage Families as Partners

- **Prioritize culturally and linguistically responsive engagement strategies.** Districts should ensure that family engagement approaches reflect the community's cultural and linguistic diversity and support families in understanding and navigating special education services, including participation in IEP meetings.
- **Celebrate family contributions with care and purpose.** Honor the role of multilingual families, including those of dually identified students, in shaping inclusive school communities.

SCHOOL ACTIONS

Align School Vision with District Priorities

- **Align school-level DLI goals with district priorities.** Schools should ensure that their DLI program goals reflect the district's broader vision for serving dually identified students. This includes articulating a program design that integrates biliteracy instruction with special education services.
- **Promote a schoolwide culture that affirms multilingualism and learning differences.** Schools should embed a vision of inclusivity into their strategic direction by fostering a positive culture that values linguistic diversity and respects diverse learning needs.
- **Incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy and high expectations into DLI planning.** Strategic planning must include a commitment to culturally responsive instruction and the belief that dually identified students can achieve biliteracy and access grade-level content.

Strengthen Leadership and Collaboration

- **Integrate bilingual and special education staff into school leadership teams.** Strategic planning for inclusive DLI programs must involve bilingual and special education professionals in leadership structures to guide and sustain implementation. Their expertise is essential in shaping a schoolwide vision that supports multilingual learners with disabilities. For example, schools should define clear expectations for all staff—including general education teachers, specialists, and interventionists—to ensure that dually identified students:
 - receive instruction in both program languages consistent with the DLI model;
 - access special education services as outlined in their IEP or 504 plan; and
 - engage with grade-level content through inclusive instructional practices.
- **Establish collaborative expectations for staff.** Strategic plans should include articulated expectations for collaboration among teachers and support staff to meet the language development and special education needs of dually identified students.

Family Communication and Engagement

- **Set measurable goals for family engagement.** Schools should include specific, measurable objectives in their strategic plans to increase engagement and satisfaction among families of dually identified students.
- **Engage parents in planning.** Strategic planning should include opportunities for multilingual families to provide input into DLI program design, fostering trust and increasing understanding of the special education process.
- **Identify and partner with community organizations.** Schools should identify affinity groups and community organizations that support multilingual families and include partnership development as a strategic goal to enhance engagement and collaboration.

B. Policy and Structural Planning

The district's vision is realized through its policies, guidance, and resources that provide sustained and strategic support for dually identified students in DLI programs. All critical features of inclusive DLI programs should be evident to varying degrees in an aligned set of policies, structures, and resources for instructional and operational planning at both the district and school levels. Policies should reflect the district's vision for integrated language development and special education, including viable expectations and the resources schools need to implement inclusive DLI programs. Additionally, policies and planned structures should foster cross-departmental collaboration to integrate inclusive DLI program needs with districtwide initiatives and improvement efforts. The district and school actions listed below are grouped under *policy planning* and *structural planning*.

- **Policy planning** refers to the formal guidelines and frameworks that shape how inclusive DLI programs are designed and implemented. This includes program policies, staff- and student-related policies, instructional frameworks, and assessment guidance.
- **Structural planning** refers to the systems and resource strategies that support the implementation of policies at both the district and school levels. This includes resource-allocation factors and formulas, staffing plans, scheduling expectations for teacher collaboration and planning, and structures for cross-departmental meetings to monitor student progress.

Policy Planning

Policy planning establishes the district-level policies and guidance needed to support inclusive access and integrated services for dually identified students in DLI programs. This section focuses primarily on district actions, though schools may help inform or carry them out, depending on the local context.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

Guiding Principles, Vision, and Accountability

- **Define guiding principles for serving dually identified students.** Establish district-wide principles that integrate English language development and special education services, and specify the corresponding resources—such as staffing and funding—needed for robust implementation of inclusive DLI programs.
- **Ensure instructional guides reflect asset-based approaches.** Instructional frameworks and district initiatives should incorporate asset-based strategies that support multilingual learners and dually identified students in accessing grade-level content and developing biliteracy.
- **Ensure that school accountability metrics provide valid measures of the progress of dually identified students.** District policy should recognize the hard work of principals and educators in schools committed to providing equal access to education for dually identified students, including recognition of the nonlinear nature of language development and the complex instructional work it entails.

Accessibility and Service Provision

- **Affirm support for special education services in the dominant home language.** District policies and guidance should promote the provision of special education services in students' dominant home languages, when possible. For example, if the child requires speech and language services, those services could be provided in the child's dominant home language. Enrollment and outreach strategies should prioritize placement of dually identified students in DLI programs to support this goal.
- **Establish inclusive enrollment and placement policies.** Ensure that registration and enrollment policies provide families of dually identified students with clear information and the opportunity to select DLI programs for their children.
- **Adopt transportation policies that support access to DLI.** Transportation policies should enable equitable access to DLI programs for dually identified students, removing logistical barriers to enrollment.
- **Create policies for exiting dually identified students from EL services.** Develop clear procedures to ensure that dually identified students are not exited from EL services solely due to their special education status. Dually identified students should continue receiving both EL and special education services as long as needed (Liu et al., 2017).
- **Clarify that exiting EL status does not require exiting DLI.** District guidance should affirm that students who exit EL status may remain in DLI programs to continue developing biliteracy, benefiting both the individual student and the overall program.

Structural Planning

Structural planning translates district vision into the systems, resource strategies, and collaborative structures needed to ensure dually identified students have sustained access to integrated language development and special education supports in DLI programs.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

Cross-departmental Collaboration

- **Adopt structures to cultivate cross-departmental collaboration.** Establish policies and district structures that promote collaboration across departments, integrating inclusive DLI program components and needs with district-wide initiatives and improvement efforts.
- **Develop cross-departmental structures for family engagement.** Create systems to cross-train and coordinate parent engagement personnel from EL and special education offices to support families of dually identified students effectively.
- **Establish collaborative processes across operational departments.** Coordinate efforts among registration, placement, and transportation departments to ensure that families of dually identified students are informed about and can access DLI programs across the district.

Staffing and Resource Allocation

- **Forecast staffing needs and track bilingual special education capacity.** Develop mechanisms to anticipate staffing needs and support holistic staffing in DLI programs, including the recruitment of special education interventionists and diagnosticians who can provide services in DLI partner languages.
- **Enable dynamic staffing to meet evolving student needs.** Track which special education professionals can provide services in the partner languages of DLI programs to support effective program implementation, and establish mechanisms that allow for flexible staffing adjustments to ensure continuity of services, including support for struggling students and emerging needs.
- **Allocate coordinated resources to meet IDEA requirements.** Ensure that staffing and contractual resources for interpretation and translation services are sufficient to meet IDEA requirements for informed parental decision-making.
- **Establish criteria and a process for selecting high-quality instructional materials.** In coordination with content areas, multilingual education, intervention services, and special education, districts should develop robust criteria and processes for selecting instructional materials and supplemental supports that are rigorous, culturally responsive, and designed to develop biliteracy while meeting the needs of dually identified students.

Family Communication and Engagement

- **Equip district offices and schools with resources for multilingual family communication.** Provide professional learning, interpretation/translation services, and other supports to ensure linguistically and culturally responsive communication with multilingual families.
- **Create structures to meet language access requirements systemwide.** Develop systems to manage demand for interpretation and translation services to meet the needs across departments, including special education, counseling, and specialized programs.

- **Delineate strategic investments in communication systems.** Make district investments in systems, software, and contractual interpretation services to support effective communication with multilingual families, including for IEP meetings and parent-teacher conferences.
- **Identify community partners to establish and sustain partnerships in support of multilingual family engagement.** Include goals in strategic plans to build and sustain partnerships with community organizations that support multilingual families of dually identified students.
- **Include multilingual families in advisory structures.** Embed multilingual family representation in district advisory committees and planning bodies related to DLI and special education to ensure initiatives are responsive to family needs.

SCHOOL ACTIONS

Staffing and Resources

- **Assess staffing capacity and identify service gaps.** Evaluate current staffing to identify gaps in providing language development and special education services, and use findings to inform staffing priorities.
- **Establish staffing priorities in school-level plans.** Strategically assign teachers to maximize staff expertise in serving dually identified students. Explore district-supported incentives to attract educators for hard-to-fill positions.
- **Use rigorous criteria to select culturally relevant materials.** Ensure instructional materials are culturally and linguistically appropriate and aligned with the needs of dually identified students.

Scheduling and Collaborative Structures

- **Develop master schedules that support integrated services.** Create schedules that allow dually identified students to receive both EL instruction and special education services in inclusive environments that foster integration with the school community.
- **Establish structures for collaborative planning and professional learning.** Design protocols and protect time for meaningful collaboration among teachers and specialists to support integrated service delivery.

Family Engagement and Communication

- **Create structures to meet language access requirements.** Assign staff and develop systems to meet interpretation and translation needs for special education services, minimizing reliance on bilingual instructional staff for these tasks.
- **Delineate strategic investments in communication systems.** Include in school plans and budgets investments in systems, software, interpretation services, and staff to support effective communication with multilingual families, including for IEP meetings and parent-teacher conferences.
- **Map community assets to expand engagement capacity.** Identify and leverage community organizations and resources to strengthen school capacity to engage multilingual families around DLI and special education services.

C. Instructional Planning (or Program Design)

The district's vision for inclusive DLI programs is brought to life through intentional classroom-level implementation, staffing, and instructional alignment. This category focuses on the systems and practices that ensure dually identified students receive high-quality, integrated instruction within DLI settings. The five critical features of inclusive DLI programs are reflected in coordinated instructional planning, staffing models, and operational supports that promote access and equity.

Instructional planning should be guided by clear expectations for inclusive practices, supported by professional learning, and informed by data-driven decision-making. These efforts require collaboration across school teams to align curriculum, instructional strategies, and staffing to meet the diverse needs of dually identified students in DLI programs.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

Program Design and Cross-Departmental Collaboration

- **Provide guidance and support for school program design.** Ensure that school program designs recognize the benefits of providing special education services in DLI partner languages to address students' language development and special education needs. Guidance and support should ensure that school programs include (a) instructional goals that reflect both the language development and special education needs of dually identified students, and (b) integrated biliteracy instruction and special education services.
- **Set cross-departmental goals for instructional planning.** Develop joint planning structures that enable cross-training of special education, general education, and EL teachers. Align planning for content instruction, language development, and special education services to support integrated learning experiences.

Professional Learning

- **Expand professional learning opportunities for educators.** Identify the professional learning needs of all educators serving dually identified students and provide learning opportunities focused on:
 - the intersection of English language development and learning differences;
 - role clarity and shared responsibilities among educators; and
 - instructional priorities for inclusive DLI classrooms.
- **Embed opportunities for school leaders in professional learning plans.** As part of a coherent strategic direction for inclusive DLI programs, districts should ensure that school leaders are equipped to implement integrated services effectively. Professional learning must be aligned with the district's vision and include guidance on instructional practices, collaboration models, and inclusive program design. This support helps translate strategic goals into actionable practices at the school level, reinforcing the district's commitment to biliteracy and accessibility for all students.
- **Plan cross-program professional learning for instructional leaders.** Instructional leaders across content areas and programs should receive targeted professional learning to build their understanding of inclusive DLI practices and the district's vision for high expectations for dually identified students.

- **Include district and instructional leaders in professional learning on educational rights.** Incorporate training on the legal rights of dually identified students—including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, IDEA, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—into district-wide professional learning plans to ensure compliance.

Family Communication and Engagement

- **Develop family engagement frameworks that reflect needs in language development and special education.** Create resources and guidance that help families understand both language development and learning differences, and their role in supporting dually identified students.
- **Establish guidelines for community partnerships.** Develop protocols for partnering with community organizations to support multilingual families and enhance district outreach efforts.

SCHOOL ACTIONS

Program Design

- **Ensure that school instructional goals address both language development and special education needs.** Ensure school plans include instructional goals that reflect both the language development and special education needs of dually identified students.
- **Draft school plans that integrate biliteracy instruction and special education services.** School-level planning for DLI programs recognizes that providing special education services in DLI partner languages benefits dually identified students and strengthens the biliteracy curriculum and the instructional coherence of DLI programs.

Professional Learning

- **Establish expectations and structures for co-teaching and planning.** Create schedules and protocols that ensure general educators, EL specialists, and special educators have protected time to co-plan, reflect, and align instructional goals.
- **Identify staff learning needs through collaborative input.** Use tools such as surveys, student data analysis, and feedback from instructional leaders to determine areas for growth in serving dually identified students.
- **Plan targeted professional learning for school staff.** Provide professional learning focused on:
 - inclusive instructional practices and language development strategies;
 - coordinated special education supports, accommodations, and services; and
 - effective collaboration across roles serving dually identified students.

Monitoring Practices and Outcomes

- **Design instructional walkthroughs to reflect inclusive practices.** Conduct classroom observations and reviews that emphasize cultural responsiveness and high expectations for multilingual learners with learning differences.
- **Develop data review processes to monitor student progress.** Establish systems to regularly review disaggregated student data to ensure dually identified students are meeting instructional goals.

Family Communication and Engagement

- **Plan for building language capacity among staff.** Prioritize staff who regularly interact with families to lead multilingual outreach, support two-way communication, and engage multilingual families on matters related to special education and supporting struggling students.
- **Allocate language access resources for high-demand events.** Ensure interpretation and translation services are available for events such as back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, and IEP meetings.
- **Design responsive approaches to parent meetings.** Consider factors that affect the participation of families of dually identified students, including work schedules, transportation, and child care, and offer flexible meeting formats (e.g., in-person, virtual, digital platforms, chat groups) to increase participation.

Team Reflection on STAGE 1: Visioning and Planning

Vision and Strategic Direction

- How does our district or school vision reflect high expectations for dually identified students?
- In what ways are multilingualism and learning differences viewed as assets in our planning?
- Are families of dually identified students meaningfully engaged in shaping our vision?
- How do we ensure shared responsibility across departments for serving dually identified students?

Policy and Structural Planning

- Do our policies ensure access to both language development and special education services?
- How are departments collaborating to support inclusive DLI programs?
- Are enrollment, placement, and transportation policies equitable for dually identified students?
- How do our staffing structures support bilingual special education service delivery?

Instructional Planning (or Program Design)

- How are IEP goals integrated into instructional planning for DLI classrooms?
- Are instructional materials culturally and linguistically responsive?
- What structures support collaboration among EL, special education, and general education staff?
- How are families involved in instructional planning and decision-making?

STAGE 2: Support and Implementation

In Stage 2 of the implementation process, and consistent with OELA DLI playbook recommendations, districts and schools develop programs that are aligned with the vision for DLI models for dually identified students. Strategic and holistic staffing enables qualified personnel to implement the program as designed, while intentional and robust family engagement supports parents in making informed decisions about their children's education. Community engagement supports the school in maintaining an inclusive and multilingual environment. This document outlines district and school actions organized around three components:

- A. **Service Delivery and Instructional Practice**—Designing programs and services that meet both the English language development and special education needs of dually identified students as they develop biliteracy and learn grade-level content.
- B. **Staffing, Professional Learning, and Collaboration**—Strategically hiring teachers and professionals who collectively equip a DLI program to provide content and language development instruction in both languages, and the full array of instructional support and special education services in the language most appropriate for the child.
- C. **Family and Community Engagement**—Developing effective two-way communication and engagement with multilingual families and empowering them to make informed decisions for their children who are dually identified.

Certain features of an inclusive DLI program will be more relevant to some components than for others. The district and school actions described below are organized primarily around the three implementation components and identify the inclusive DLI features most relevant to each component.

A. Service Delivery and Instructional Practice

The district's vision for inclusive DLI programs is realized through instructional practices and service models that support dually identified students in developing biliteracy, accessing grade-level content, and receiving individualized supports. Instructional practices should align with IEP goals, and services should be delivered through collaborative staffing models in the language that supports the greatest progress. These efforts require intentional planning, shared responsibility across educators, and ongoing reflection to ensure that instruction remains inclusive, responsive, and effective.

Service Delivery

Service delivery in inclusive DLI settings involves coordinating language development, special education supports, scheduling, and access so that dually identified students can receive integrated services as they develop biliteracy and learn grade-level content.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

Program Design

- **Support schools in designing inclusive DLI programs aligned with legal and instructional requirements.** Provide guidance to schools on integrating IEP goals and aligning scheduling and services across English language development and special education. Develop protocols for joint service delivery that support co-teaching models and shared planning time.

- **Provide guidance on DLI program design tailored to school contexts.** Support schools in determining program components that integrate language learning and special education services, including:
 - language allocation models (e.g., minutes per day or week);
 - grade-level progression of language instruction (e.g., 90/10 to 50/50);
 - subject-specific language use;
 - language used for specials and after-school activities; and
 - staffing models (e.g., bilingual teachers versus separate language teachers).

Identifying and Supporting Students

- **Establish culturally and linguistically responsive referral processes for accurate identification of dually identified students.** Include in the referral and pre-screening process an examination of factors related to the child's second language acquisition, acculturation process, instructional context, and instructional practices, which may affect classroom behaviors and academic performance (Artiles et al., 2010; Klingner & Eppolito, 2014; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006).
- **Assign multidisciplinary teams to use valid and reliable metrics to determine the special needs of multilingual students.** Valid and reliable metrics include performance on assessments designed for multilingual students and home language proficiency. Multidisciplinary teams of qualified staff who understand students' cultural, linguistic, and learning difference profiles can examine these factors alongside data from measurement instruments to determine whether academic challenges result from acquiring a new language, from a disability, or from both factors.
- **Coordinate operational departments to support access to DLI.** Establish collaborative processes among registration, placement, and transportation departments to ensure that students and their families are informed and can access DLI programs across the district. Ensure district lottery systems for DLI are inclusive and implemented with fidelity.

SCHOOL ACTIONS

Identification and Assessment

- **Implement valid and reliable screening and identification processes.** Use appropriate tools and develop staff expertise to distinguish language learning from learning disabilities in multilingual learners suspected of having disabilities.
- **Establish structures and protocols to support families in decision-making.** Incorporate family input to interpret screening data and determine next steps for referral and assessment.
- **Assign staff to monitor student progress.** Designate qualified staff to track the progress of dually identified students using appropriate assessments and protocols. If staffing is limited, coordinate with the central office or other schools to form multidisciplinary teams.

Language Access and Collaboration

- **Build leadership understanding of inclusive DLI pedagogy.** Ensure school leadership teams understand the pedagogical approaches used in dual language education and the needs of dually identified students to counter misconceptions (e.g., bilingualism is harmful for students with disabilities).

- **Coordinate interventions across departments.** Use dual language materials and shared planning to deliver interventions in students' dominant home languages, supporting both language development and special education needs.
- **Ensure special education services are linguistically appropriate.** Consider cross-departmental staffing to supplement expertise in linguistically appropriate interventions (e.g., a specialist who provides professional learning for both EL and special education staff).
- **Ensure instructional materials and accommodations are accessible in both languages.** Implement IEP accommodations consistently across both languages of instruction and ensure materials support biliteracy and accessibility.

Instructional Practice

Instructional practice in inclusive DLI settings should support biliteracy development, access to grade-level content, and the individualized needs of dually identified students.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

Integrated Support

- **Ensure instructional leaders understand language development and learning disabilities.** Provide professional learning for staff in key instructional roles to distinguish between second-language development and learning disabilities, and to understand how learning issues manifest in each area.
- **Support integrated instructional models.** Provide resources and guidance for co-teaching and push-in models that integrate EL and special education supports in DLI classrooms.
- **Develop structures to leverage cross-functional expertise.** Establish multidisciplinary, culturally and linguistically responsive evaluation teams (e.g., EL specialists, special educators, diagnosticians) to develop and share effective instructional and service strategies for supporting dually identified students across content areas and disabilities.
- **Implement MTSS frameworks using linguistically appropriate measures with attention to the needs of dually identified students.** Implement MTSS systems that use home- and partner-language assessments to identify the language development and disability-related supports needed for struggling students.

Assessments and Instructional Materials

- **Review assessment validity and reliability.** Regularly evaluate the assessments used in DLI settings to ensure they are valid and reliable for monitoring the progress of dually identified students.
- **Ensure instructional materials meet inclusive criteria.** Ensure that district-wide criteria for the adoption of instructional materials also support biliteracy development, grade-level content learning, and accessibility in both languages for DLI programs.

SCHOOL ACTIONS

An ideal approach for supporting dually identified students would address both their needs related to English language development and their disabilities (Short et al., 2018; Virginia Department of Education, 2017). The school actions described in this section are not exhaustive. Instead, they provide illustrative examples of instructional practices that intentionally address the needs of dually identified students in developing biliteracy and accessing grade-level content, drawing on the research presented in Part I of this document.¹³

Inclusive Instructional Goals and Explicit Practices

- **Align instruction with the language development goals in students' IEPs.** Ensure that DLI instruction includes language development goals from students' IEPs and aligns instructional strategies accordingly.
- **Implement scaffolds that address both language and learning differences.** Use tools such as language frames and co-taught lessons to support students' linguistic development and IEP goals.
- **Use inclusive and culturally responsive instructional materials.** Select texts and materials that reflect diverse cultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds, maintaining high expectations with appropriate supports.
- **Celebrate collaborative planning and instructional efforts.** Recognize successful implementation of co-planning, integrated instruction, and evaluation practices that support inclusive service delivery.

Addressing Cognitive and Affective Factors

- **Equip teachers to facilitate language learning while also addressing motivation, anxiety, and self-esteem.** Developing students' identities as successful learners, and specifically language learners, requires careful lesson design and orchestration that minimizes language learning anxiety and teaches students how to respond to setbacks.
- **Affirm linguistic and cultural identities to help students develop a growth mindset.** Affirming and building on the linguistic and cultural identities of dually identified students fosters more constructive responses to difficulties in language learning and helps students develop a growth mindset about their ability to tackle new or difficult content and tasks.

Reflective Practices

- **Engage in reflective practices.** Encourage educators to conduct peer observations of instruction and examine student work to assess instructional rigor and responsiveness to both language development and special education needs.
- **Monitor student progress and adjust instruction accordingly.** Use formative assessments and observation protocols to track engagement, language use, and progress toward IEP goals in both languages.

13 For more specific guidance on supporting learning differences, see Table 4, "Cognitive and Affective Factors for Language Learning Impacted by Learning Disabilities"; Table 5, "How Dominant Home Language Development Supports Cognitive and Affective Factors in Developing Language-based Skills"; and Table 6, "How Dominant Home Language Development Supports Cognitive and Affective Factors in Developing Code-based Skills."

Literacy and Supporting Language Development

Literacy instruction, strategies, and accommodations must be informed by research and best practices for multilingual students with disabilities. The academic success of dually identified students includes ensuring that they develop the full continuum of literacy skills needed to engage independently with increasingly complex grade-level texts and build content knowledge, as described in *Foundational Literacy Skills Instruction for English Learners* (Council of the Great City Schools, 2023). The research cited in this document affirms the central role that oral language development and comprehension play in developing broad literacy skills, such as understanding connected text; code-based reading skills, such as phonics and fluency; and biliteracy among multilingual students. Specifically, connections between teaching foundational skills to ELs and supporting dually identified students in DLI settings include:

- **Use the dominant home language in instruction.** Instruction that incorporates the dominant home language supports both language development and academic achievement. Bilingual interventions, including DLI programs, have been shown to improve outcomes in both the dominant home language and English, especially when the dominant home language is used consistently and meaningfully (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Simon-Cereijido & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2014).
- **Leverage cross-linguistic transfer.** Instruction should leverage cross-linguistic transfer, especially in morphosyntax and vocabulary, as dominant home language skills can facilitate English development (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016).

Using effective instructional strategies and supports for literacy development is also helpful for building knowledge more generally. The underlying reasons for learning difficulties may differ between students with disabilities and English learners. Nevertheless, several instructional practices are effective in supporting students with disabilities, English learners, and dually identified students with needs related to English language development and disabilities. (See Table 16.)

Table 16. Instructional Practices and Supports for Language and Literacy Development That Are Beneficial to English Learners and Dually Identified Students

Practices	Benefits for Dually Identified Students	Benefits for English Learners
Multimodal representation of concepts during instruction. Pace instruction appropriately and incorporate auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning modalities, along with relevant scaffolds (Kormos, 2017). Modalities may include listening; speaking or otherwise demonstrating understanding; viewing or reading; writing; and engaging in hands-on experiences.	✓ Accommodates various disabilities and learning preferences. ✓ Supports students with reduced working memory or slower processing speeds. ✓ Enhances comprehension and retention for students with diverse learning profiles.	✓ Provides multiple ways to process language input, including listening, reading, viewing, and hands-on experience. ✓ Provides multiple ways to demonstrate understanding of concepts.

Table 16. Instructional Practices and Supports for Language and Literacy Development That Are Beneficial to English Learners and Dually Identified Students, continued

Practices	Benefits for Dually Identified Students	Benefits for English Learners
Multiple means of expression. Allow students to demonstrate content knowledge or understanding of a word or skill through verbal and nonverbal forms, including the dominant home language, pictures, words, gestures, collages, and demonstrations.	✓ Accommodates communication barriers and diverse ability levels. ✓ Enables students to demonstrate content knowledge or understanding of a word or skill in multiple ways.	✓ Enables students to demonstrate understanding of a word, skill, or concept before attaining full verbal proficiency in English.
Use of conceptual scoring. Credit correct responses in either language to reflect bilingual students' knowledge more accurately (Sheng et al., 2012).	✓ Recognizes students' assets across their full linguistic repertoires.	✓ Draws on students' full linguistic repertoires when assessing their knowledge.
Sufficient wait or processing time. Allow 9–24 seconds of wait time before calling on students, recognizing that some students need additional time to process information.	✓ Provides essential processing time for students with disabilities.	✓ Provides additional time to process input and formulate responses in a new language.
Images to build meaning and support comprehension. Highlight critical nouns and verbs, and embed visual supports to clarify word meanings and central messages.	✓ Supports understanding of lexical functions and improves comprehension for students with learning disabilities.	✓ Clarifies lexical functions and creates visual connections that support language comprehension.
Activation of prior knowledge. Use brainstorming and connections to previously experienced situations to introduce new learning.	✓ Builds on existing strengths and familiar experiences to develop knowledge and vocabulary.	✓ Connects new language concepts and vocabulary to familiar experiences and existing conceptual knowledge in the dominant and newly developing languages.
Intentional repetition and repeated exposure to key words and phrases. Focus instruction on key words, concepts, phrases, and language structures to build vocabulary and grammatical knowledge.	✓ Provides the repeated encounters that students with specific learning disabilities often need to retain new information. ✓ Strengthens memory for key words and sentence-level features needed to understand concepts.	✓ Builds recognition of word and phrase patterns in the new language. ✓ Strengthens vocabulary acquisition and conceptual understanding.
Explicit teaching of language structures. Provide direct instruction in grammar, syntax, and spelling rather than relying solely on implicit learning through modeling (Kormos, 2017).	✓ Makes grammar, syntax, and spelling more visible and accessible than implicit instruction alone.	✓ Makes new language structures, including grammar, syntax, and spelling, more visible when students may not recognize them through modeling alone.

Table 16. Instructional Practices and Supports for Language and Literacy Development That Are Beneficial to English Learners and Dually Identified Students, continued

Practices	Benefits for Dually Identified Students	Benefits for English Learners
Repeated practice with reading, language modeling, and structured language supports. Use interactive reading strategies, such as dialogic reading, in both the dominant home language and English. Provide sentence frames, sentence starters, and formulaic expressions to support oral and written language production.	✓ Supports vocabulary development and narrative skills in students with expressive vocabulary delays. ✓ Supports self-expression and oral language development by scaffolding communication.	✓ Builds vocabulary and familiarity with narrative structures in the new language. ✓ Supports oral language development and self-expression by explicitly teaching phrase and sentence structures.
Maximizing motivation and minimizing anxiety in language learning lessons. Design and facilitate lessons that help students view themselves as successful language learners while reducing anxiety, such as allowing students to speak in small groups before speaking to the whole class.	✓ Increases students' willingness to communicate in a new language. ✓ Supports students experiencing self-esteem concerns related to language learning.	✓ Increases students' willingness to communicate in a new language. ✓ Supports students experiencing self-esteem concerns related to language learning.
Affirmation of linguistic and cultural identities. Help students develop a growth mindset by increasing awareness of their linguistic and cultural assets and teaching constructive ways to respond to setbacks.	✓ Promotes constructive responses to difficulties in language learning. ✓ Builds confidence in students' ability to approach new or challenging content and tasks.	✓ Promotes constructive responses to difficulties in language learning. ✓ Builds confidence in students' ability to approach new or challenging content and tasks.

Source. Adapted from Lopes-Murphy (2020).

B. Staffing, Professional Learning, and Collaboration

The educational needs of dually identified students are multifaceted, encompassing both English language development and learning difference needs; meeting these needs requires educators with specialized knowledge to work in a coordinated manner, often within scheduling and spatial constraints. This coordination is often hindered by structural factors, such as unclear or overlapping staff responsibilities. Sometimes, coordination is complicated by educators' expectations for dually identified students and their beliefs about who should be responsible for their education (i.e., lack of shared responsibility). Job duties may overlap, be insufficiently clear, or even create unintended hurdles for shared responsibility in serving dually identified students. Additionally, expectations regarding shared responsibility and collaboration may be insufficiently clear, leaving them open to individual interpretation. Districts and schools can foster collaboration by establishing clear roles for various types of educators and a sense of shared responsibility for dually identified students.

Staffing

Effective support for dually identified students in DLI settings depends on strategic staffing structures that ensure specialized expertise, role clarity, and coordinated collaboration across instructional and support staff.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

Recruitment

- **Recruit qualified bilingual special educators and interventionists.** Based on an analysis of district staffing needs, recruit educators with expertise in both second language acquisition and special education. District qualifications may exceed state requirements to ensure that teachers are prepared to meet the complex needs of dually identified students.
- **Hire professionals with relevant language proficiency and diagnostic expertise.** Recruit diagnosticians, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and other specialists who possess language proficiency, cultural competency, and knowledge of learning disabilities. Establish processes and criteria to confirm that hired staff meet the language proficiency requirements for their roles.
- **Develop a centralized recruitment pipeline for bilingual special educators.** Create systems to attract and retain qualified teachers, including incentive mechanisms such as differential pay, stipends, and additional release time for planning and collaboration. Support current staff in acquiring relevant endorsements and certifications to serve dually identified students in DLI programs.

Strategic Staffing and Collaboration

- **Assign staff based on qualifications and training.** Develop protocols and priorities for assigning educators to roles that align with their qualifications and training related to serving dually identified students. This ensures instructional integrity and compliance with service delivery requirements.
- **Deploy centralized teams to support schools at critical times.** Establish specialized district teams that can be temporarily assigned to schools to conduct screenings, provide instructional planning support, or assist with integrating special education and biliteracy instruction. This approach addresses staffing gaps in schools with limited resources or intermittent service needs.
- **Establish clear expectations for educators serving dually identified students.** Ensure that job descriptions, evaluations, and negotiated contracts reflect the responsibilities of educators working with dually identified students. Clarify that expertise in special education and second language acquisition is distinct and not interchangeable.
- **Develop coordinated service guidelines.** Based on district goals for interdepartmental collaboration, develop flowcharts and service guidelines for supporting dually identified students who are struggling academically, including guidelines for collaboration between MTSS teams and the multilingual education office.
- **Provide interdepartmental instructional support and foster shared responsibility across content areas and departments.** Promote a culture in which content-area instructional leaders and relevant offices share responsibility for educating dually identified students. Establish expectations for collaboration to ensure that content areas and departments provide instructional support to DLI schools serving dually identified students in delivering English language development, special education services, and grade-level content learning.

- **Provide guidance for effective teacher collaboration.** Distribute sample protocols and planning guides to support collaboration in lesson design, instructional delivery, and reviews of student learning.
- **Allocate funding for school-based collaboration time.** Provide district resources to support dedicated collaboration time for special education and EL instructional teams to develop coherent instruction and services for dually identified students.
- **Share success stories to reinforce an inclusive culture.** Highlight examples of student growth, effective collaboration, and instructional innovation to build shared commitment to inclusive DLI practices.

Table 17 identifies the necessary skills and knowledge across teams, as well as expectations for carrying out specific responsibilities related to the instruction of dually identified students. This table is provided as an example to assist districts in strategic staffing and team assembly.

Table 17. Example of Planning Tool for Staffing Instructional Roles and Expectations in Inclusive Dual Language Immersion Programs

Instructional Staffing Roles and Expectations		
Task or Duty	Knowledge and Expertise	Team Composition (Full-Time Equivalent)
Screening and assessment	Second language acquisition, disabilities, and fluency in other languages Use of interpretation resources	
Diagnosis and placement	Intersectionality of disabilities and second language acquisition EL programs Special education services School master schedule and staff qualifications	
Instructional planning and coaching	EL proficiency progression and ELD instruction IEP or 504 goals and accommodations Content areas Co-planning and collaboration	
Co-teaching	Classroom roles Co-teaching models	
Monitoring: analysis of student work and outcomes	ELD progression IEP goals Accommodations	

SCHOOL ACTIONS

Strategic Staffing

- **Coordinate staffing with district offices to meet student needs.** Hire school-based staff or collaborate with central office teams to access special education professionals who can screen multilingual students and support instructional planning aligned with IEP goals.
- **Implement holistic staffing practices to support integrated instruction and services.** Work with district offices to hire qualified personnel who can teach grade-level content in DLI settings, provide timely academic support, and deliver special education services. This holistic staffing approach should ensure uninterrupted English language development and special education services across grade levels while addressing students' academic and social-emotional needs.
- **Hire multilingual front office and family engagement staff.** Recruit staff who are multilingual or trained to use interpretation tools and software to communicate effectively with families in their preferred languages so families can meaningfully participate in the special education process for their child.

Role Clarity and Collaboration

- **Establish school teams with clear expectations for educators serving dually identified students.** Make hiring decisions consistent with district job descriptions, evaluation requirements, and negotiated contracts that reflect educators' responsibilities for serving dually identified students.
- **Foster shared responsibility across instructional roles.** Promote a culture in which content area teachers, EL specialists, and special educators share responsibility for educating dually identified students. Establish expectations for collaboration to ensure that classroom instruction integrates English language development, special education services, and grade-level content.
- **Foster effective collaboration among educators.** Facilitate collaboration between teachers and specialized staff, emphasizing mutual respect and culturally responsive interactions.
- **Facilitate strategic integration in team meetings to monitor student progress, centering collaboration on data and decision-making.** Facilitate deep conversations focused on student data, instructional planning, and next steps for supporting dually identified students. If possible, incorporate time into existing meetings (e.g., MTSS cycles) for staff to jointly review progress data and determine supports for dually identified students.
- **Establish protocols for intentional collaboration.** Define goals and protocols for educators to productively collaborate in:
 - grade-level teams that address language, content, and special needs;
 - vertical teams that monitor progress and plan supports;
 - coordinating special education services; and
 - sharing promising practices across grade levels.
- **Provide dedicated time and structures for collaborative planning.** Ensure schedules and meeting space include protected time for ESL/ESOL, special education, and general education teachers to co-plan and align instruction.

Professional Learning

High-quality, relevant professional learning reinforces the knowledge, teacher capacity, and instructional practices needed to bring asset-oriented program design to life and supports two additional critical features of inclusive DLI programs:

- Inclusive access to language and content; and
- Integrated services for language support and special education services.

The extent to which professional learning is centrally coordinated and content is determined at the district level varies across districts, especially in the case of DLI-related professional learning and meeting the needs of dually identified students. Thus, some of the district actions below may be applicable at the school level instead.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

- **Provide differentiated professional learning opportunities.** Offer role-specific, differentiated training on culturally responsive teaching, language development, and scaffolding strategies to support learning differences and inclusive practices.
- **Ensure professional learning includes training for enrollment personnel.** Provide guidance to support equitable identification and placement of dually identified students in specialized programs.
- **Include targeted learning on serving dually identified students.** Ensure professional learning plans include:
 - distinguishing second language development from disability-related learning differences;
 - implementing valid screening protocols for multilingual learners; and
 - integrating language development goals into IEPs and Section 504 plans.
- **Train instructional leaders to support inclusive practices.** Provide professional learning for central office and school-site leaders to build understanding and consensus that dually identified students require both EL and special education services.
- **Offer cultural responsiveness training to support professional collaboration.** Provide training to build mutual understanding among educators from distinct fields and reduce communication barriers.

SCHOOL ACTIONS

- **Lead joint professional learning for EL and special education teachers.** School leadership teams should create opportunities for collaborative learning focused on:
 - intersectionality of language acquisition and learning disabilities;
 - instructional strategies that address both needs; and
 - integration of IEP goals and accommodations into DLI instruction.
- **Establish coaching cycles for collaborative teams.** Support instructional teams through peer-observation and feedback cycles as they design and deliver integrated English learner and special education instruction.

- **Train instructional coaches to embed inclusive practices.** Provide coaches with professional learning to guide collaboration and embed inclusive practices into coaching and evaluation tools to meet the needs of dually identified students.
- **Support collaborative structures for instructional reflection.** Ensure time, space, and resources are available for teachers to jointly examine student work, reflect on lesson design, and improve instructional practices.

C. Family and Community Engagement

The educational experience of dually identified students is shaped not only by classroom instruction but also by the relationships schools build with families and communities. Multilingual families often face barriers to accessing information and participating in decision-making, especially when navigating both language development and special education (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; Oh & Mancilla-Martinez, 2024). These barriers may stem from unclear communication about program options or assumptions about family roles in the education process. Districts and schools can foster strong partnerships by establishing clear, accessible communication channels, offering culturally responsive engagement opportunities, and supporting families in making informed decisions about their children's education within inclusive DLI programs.

DISTRICT ACTIONS

Multilingual Communication Infrastructure

- **Operate a centralized interpreter request system.** Ensure interpreters are available for IEP meetings and other key events, and provide staff training on using interpreters, translation software, and multilingual communication tools.
- **Use multilingual communication platforms to support two-way engagement.** Leverage equipment and systems to facilitate multilingual communication at both the district and school levels, enabling two-way dialogue and tracking family participation.
- **Support multilingual communication goals through staffing and training.** Deploy qualified interpreters, provide resources, and train relevant staff in cross-cultural communication to ensure families can participate fully in the special education process.

Family Engagement and Partnerships

- **Implement multilingual family engagement strategies within special education plans.** Support multilingual family engagement by:
 - providing workshops and visual tools that explain how special education and English language services are integrated;
 - sharing success stories to build trust and awareness; and
 - including culturally responsive engagement practices in staff professional learning.
- **Monitor multilingual family engagement across advisory structures.** Track participation in special education, DLI, and multilingual learner advisory committees to inform outreach and engagement strategies.

- **Maintain partnerships with family-serving organizations.** Collaborate with community organizations to provide culturally and linguistically relevant wraparound services for families of dually identified students.
- **Identify community partners to establish and sustain partnerships in support of multilingual family engagement.** Establish a strategic plan goal to build and sustain partnerships with community organizations that support multilingual families of dually identified students.

SCHOOL ACTIONS

Family Engagement

- **Facilitate opportunities for multilingual families to connect.** Create spaces for families to share experiences and build familiarity with DLI instruction and special education services.
- **Host workshops focused on bilingualism and learning differences.** Provide sessions that address the intersection of language development and special education, including meetings specifically for families of dually identified students.
- **Distribute accessible materials about DLI services.** Provide videos, guides, and other resources in families' preferred languages to explain how DLI programs meet the needs of dually identified students.
- **Use asset-based communication strategies.** Highlight student strengths in family communication and reinforce the belief that all students can learn grade-level content and develop biliteracy, regardless of learning needs or differences, when provided appropriate supports.
- **Engage families in monitoring IEP progress.** Use multilingual surveys and focus groups to gather feedback and involve families in tracking their child's progress, informing both classroom practices and home supports.

Staffing and Capacity Building

- **Maintain parent engagement teams to support multilingual families.** Ensure teams are trained to communicate respectfully and effectively with families, guiding them through the special education process.
- **Train front office and engagement staff in culturally responsive practices.** Equip staff to communicate in languages other than English and foster welcoming, inclusive environments for families of dually identified students.
- **Ensure interpreter availability without disrupting instruction.** Provide qualified interpreters for IEP meetings without pulling instructional staff away from student-facing responsibilities. Use district-wide interpreter services when needed.
- **Review engagement data to inform school leadership decisions.** Examine multilingual family engagement metrics and feedback in leadership meetings to refine outreach strategies and improve support structures for families of dually identified students.

Team Reflection on STAGE 2: Support and Implementation

Service Delivery and Instructional Practice

- Are EL and special education services for dually identified students coordinated and delivered in both languages?
- How do instructional practices reflect inclusive pedagogy and support biliteracy?
- Are accommodations implemented consistently across both languages of instruction?
- How do we ensure that MTSS frameworks address both language and learning differences?

Staffing, Professional Learning, and Collaboration

- Do staff have the necessary qualifications and training to serve dually identified students?
- Is collaboration among EL, special education, and general education staff structured and supported?
- How is professional learning tailored to the needs of inclusive DLI programs?
- Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined for all educators supporting dually identified students?

Family and Community Engagement

- Are families informed and empowered to make decisions about DLI and special education?
- How do we ensure multilingual communication and cultural responsiveness in engagement?
- Are community partnerships leveraged to support family engagement?
- How do we build trust and affirm families' cultural and linguistic knowledge?

STAGE 3: Continuous Improvement

The process of continuous improvement at both the district and school levels involves examining student data, teacher instructional practices, DLI programs and services, and collaborative structures and practices to ensure that DLI programs support dually identified students' biliteracy development, provide appropriate special education services, and facilitate grade-level content learning. Programs follow protocols to maintain the quality of instruction and services, demonstrating a strong commitment to adjusting practices in response to identified gaps or areas for improvement.

District actions focus on systematic monitoring and evaluation of programs and practices, while schools focus on direct implementation at the classroom level. However, in districts with only one DLI program, both the overall program evaluation and implementation monitoring would likely occur at the school level. This document outlines district and school actions organized into two levels of program monitoring:

- A. **Ongoing Monitoring of Program Implementation**—Using data to assess student access and progress, evaluate service delivery and instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments to meet the needs of dually identified students.

- B. Overall Program Evaluation**—A comprehensive review of implementation, support structures, resources, and student outcomes helps identify gaps and areas for improvement to sustain inclusive DLI models that result in academic success for dually identified students.

A. Ongoing Monitoring of Program Implementation

The district's vision for inclusive DLI programs is sustained through ongoing evaluation of student outcomes and program effectiveness. Effective monitoring practices require intentional collection and analysis of student-level data, structured reflection by multidisciplinary teams, and a commitment to using findings to refine instruction, services, and program design. These efforts ensure that inclusive DLI programs remain responsive and equitable and continue to improve. The monitoring activities are organized around three focus areas:

- **Student access and progress**—Examining student enrollment, progress, and outcome data to ensure that dually identified students have equal access to DLI programs, make progress while enrolled, and achieve academic success.
- **Services and instructional practice**—Monitoring instructional practices, special education services, and support structures to ensure instruction and services meet the needs of dually identified students. This includes ensuring the quality and availability of relevant professional learning that builds staff capacity, as well as establishing effective structures and protocols that promote collaboration across departments and support coherent, coordinated service delivery.
- **Family engagement**—Analyzing quantitative and qualitative data on family participation and multilingual communication efforts to strengthen meaningful family engagement in educational decision-making and support for dually identified students.

Student Access and Progress

Monitoring program implementation involves using disaggregated data to monitor access, progress, and outcomes for dually identified students across both language development and special education services.

- **Review identification patterns for disproportionality.** Analyze special education referral and identification data across schools to identify and address disproportionality for multilingual learners. Document and monitor referral processes to minimize overidentification and ensure timely and appropriate identification of multilingual students with disabilities.
- **Ensure inclusive recruitment and admission practices.** Review policies and procedures to remove barriers and promote equitable access for dually identified students, including access to dual language immersion (DLI) programs.
- **Examine disaggregated data to monitor access and outcomes.** Analyze data disaggregated by English learner status, disability type, and English language proficiency level to track access, progress, and outcomes for dually identified students.
- **Acknowledge and celebrate student growth across multiple domains.** Recognize progress in English language development, academic content mastery, and special education goals to affirm the strengths and potential of dually identified students.
- **Monitor access, enrollment, and retention trends.** Track enrollment, participation, and attrition of dually identified students in DLI programs to support equitable access and sustained participation.

Services and Instructional Practice

Districts and schools need to ensure that instruction and services for dually identified students are delivered as planned and aligned with both language development goals and IEP requirements. Instructional and service evaluation should include regular review of implementation practices, documentation of service provision, and collaborative reflection to identify gaps between planned and actual delivery. These efforts help ensure that students receive the supports to which they are entitled and that instructional practices remain inclusive, consistent, and effective.

- **Ensure access to language and special education services.** Review student schedules to ensure that dually identified students have access to instruction in both languages and that services align with DLI programming and district goals.
- **Monitor the effectiveness of integrated supports.** Use student data, educator feedback, and classroom observations to monitor integrated supports and adjust instruction.
- **Equip instructional staff with resources and appropriate evaluation tools.** Provide access to assessment protocols and tools—along with the required professional learning—suitable for evaluating students in DLI programs, including dually identified students.
- **Conduct classroom observations and peer reviews.** Use walk-throughs and peer feedback to assess whether instruction:
 - develops biliteracy and addresses special needs;
 - reflects inclusive approaches with high expectations; and
 - includes effective and appropriate accommodations.
- **Use student work to assess the rigor and effectiveness of instruction.** Analyze student work to evaluate the quality of instruction and the impact of accommodations provided to dually identified students.
- **Support data-informed refinement of instruction and services.** Equip teams—including EL teachers, MTSS staff, and special educators—to reflect on data, refine instruction and services, and clarify roles to improve service delivery and instruction.
 - Review service alignment to ensure IEP goals are addressed within DLI instruction.
 - Apply student data to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions for dually identified students.
- **Use instructional walk-through tools to monitor classroom practices.** Develop or adapt district tools to observe instruction and services for dually identified students. Include bilingual and special education teachers in the development and refinement of these tools.
- **Review inclusive practices in evaluation and coaching tools.** Ensure that evaluation instruments and coaching protocols reflect inclusive instructional practices and guide ongoing coaching and feedback.
- **Monitor cross-departmental collaboration.** Ensure formal processes and sustained structures are in place to support coordination between special education and English learner programs so dually identified students receive both language supports and special education services.
- **Monitor staff schedules to ensure adequate collaboration time.** Ensure educator schedules have sufficient time for cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary teams to plan, deliver, and reflect on instruction and related services.

- **Monitor the efficacy of team reflections to improve instructional practices.** Survey teachers to assess the effectiveness of collaborative discussions to refine inclusive practices and strengthen teacher collaboration. Review and revise protocols and efforts accordingly to support instructional teams in using structured collaboration to:
 - reinforce understanding of staff roles; and
 - share promising practices across disciplines.

Family Engagement

Ongoing monitoring of family engagement helps districts and schools assess the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of multilingual communication and partnership efforts supporting dually identified students.

- **Share family and community engagement data with schools.** Use engagement metrics to inform school-level strategies and strengthen partnerships with multilingual families.
- **Track family participation and feedback.** Establish channels for two-way communication and opportunities for families to provide anonymous feedback. Use that feedback to improve outreach, communication, and engagement strategies with the goal of improving instruction and services for dually identified students. Monitor attendance and engagement in IEP meetings and DLI events.
- **Assess family engagement using culturally responsive tools.** Include multilingual surveys or protocols to assess the satisfaction of multilingual parents of dually identified students with the enrollment and placement process. Supplement survey data with focus groups conducted in languages spoken by families, when possible, to deepen understanding.
- **Evaluate family engagement strategies and partnerships.** Assess the effectiveness of outreach efforts and partnerships with family-serving organizations in addressing the needs of multilingual families with dually identified students.
- **Examine and improve family engagement practices.** Ensure that engagement efforts help families understand how services in both languages support biliteracy and address special education needs. Conduct anonymous surveys and foster two-way communication to learn how to improve the engagement of families of dually identified students.

B. Overall Program Evaluation

Overall program evaluation helps districts and schools identify gaps, adjust practices and resources, and sustain inclusive DLI models that support academic success for dually identified students. The critical features of inclusive DLI programs for dually identified students, described in the opening section of Part IV, can serve as important benchmarks for this work. Table 18 presents key evaluation areas and questions that districts and schools can use to assess implementation, identify strengths and needs, and inform continuous improvement.

Table 18. Key Evaluation Areas and Questions for Overall Program Evaluation of Inclusive DLI Programs

Evaluation Area	Key Evaluation Questions
Inclusive Access to Language and Content for Dually Identified Students	- Does the DLI program ensure that dually identified students have full access to both English language acquisition and academic content? - Does the program provide instruction in both English and the partner language, as well as access to the grade-level curriculum? - Are recruitment and enrollment policies inclusive of dually identified students?
Integrated Support for Language Development and Special Education Services	- Are service models providing English language development and special education services in a coordinated, coherent fashion, reflected in IEPs, and compliant with IDEA and Title VI requirements? - When implemented in a DLI setting, do these models support biliteracy development?
Holistic Staffing and Collaboration	- Are district structures and resources in place to recruit and hire the range of qualified staff needed to support multilingual learners experiencing academic difficulty or identified for special education? - Do staffing decisions ensure that students simultaneously receive linguistically and cognitively appropriate instruction and special education services, and that biliteracy is developed in DLI programs?
Professional Learning and Coaching	- Is professional learning resulting in educators' greater understanding of second language acquisition, learning differences, and their intersectionality? - Is related coaching provided to support teachers in evolving their instructional practices? How effective is it?
Guidance and Structures to Foster a Culture of Effective Collaboration	How effective are the district's guidance and structures in clarifying staff responsibilities and fostering collaboration to meet the language development and special education needs of dually identified students?
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction and High Expectations	Does the instruction that dually identified students receive reflect their cultural backgrounds, affirm their linguistic assets in developing biliteracy, and maintain rigorous academic expectations while providing appropriate scaffolds?
Meaningful Family Engagement	- What do disaggregated data analyses reveal about the nature, scope, and quality of engagement for families of dually identified students? - Are partnerships with families authentic and supported through multilingual communication, culturally aware outreach, and shared decision-making? - Are families engaged as informed advocates for their child's education? Are district and school language access plans being well executed by well-trained staff who can navigate conversations about learning differences and language development with cultural sensitivity and communicate with families in their preferred languages?

Additional Considerations

The research, working group discussions, and review of existing Council of the Great City Schools reports conducted for this project identified numerous important and complex issues for the successful design and delivery of instruction and special education services for dually identified students. The scope and timeline of this project did not include an exhaustive examination of all these issues. We prioritized a narrower set of concrete actions in the three stages described in Part IV.

However, several issues that surfaced warrant acknowledgment. This final section briefly discusses these topics to prompt reflection and further examination. The issues are organized around three broad categories:

I. Assessments and Measuring Progress

- Screening and Identification
- Measuring Student Progress

II. Monitoring Classroom Instruction

- Staffing and Roles

III. Professional Learning and Coaching

- Instructional Coaching and Planning
- Suggested Content of Professional Learning

I. Assessments and Measuring Progress

The validity and appropriateness of assessments for multilingual learners are a persistent challenge, given the lack of assessments in languages other than English and the dearth of assessments designed expressly for English learners across a range of specific purposes. This challenge makes the accurate and valid identification of English learners with disabilities particularly difficult (Kormos, 2017). Similarly, once an English learner is found eligible for special education, measuring the student's ongoing progress remains challenging because multiple domains and indicators must be considered, including English language development, content learning, educational goals specified in the IEP, and disability-specific measures of progress.

Screening and Identification

The dearth of valid screening assessments makes it difficult for school districts to identify learning disabilities in English learners accurately. Districts, therefore, play a critical role in ensuring consistency and reliability in identification practices by, first, building staff knowledge and capacity to conduct linguistically and culturally appropriate screening and identification and, second, reviewing assessment tools and monitoring identification trends. District staff engage in an ongoing process that includes:

- regularly reviewing and updating assessment tools to reflect current best practices for multilingual learners;
- ensuring assessments and their administration are culturally and linguistically responsive; and
- monitoring identification trends across the district to detect and address disproportionality.

Assessments are just one step in the screening process, embedded within a broader formal district-determined protocol. Carefully thought-out district protocols can help mitigate the over- and under-identification of English learners, resulting from inadequate assessments.

The Importance of Data Collection and Disaggregation

Bilingual or multilingual children are not a homogeneous group; they include children who have heard two or more languages since birth and others who began hearing English after age 3 or when they first enrolled in U.S. schools. Additionally, multilingual children come to school with a wide range of exposure to bilingualism—English and their dominant home language. These experiences vary in duration, intensity, and context. Therefore, comprehensive and accurate data collection that reflects the heterogeneity of English learners' experiences is necessary throughout the entire identification process for English learners in special education—from pre-referral and identification to monitoring progress. District data collection and reporting capabilities, along with knowledgeable staff, are fundamental for examining disaggregated data on language proficiency and the nature of students' bilingualism to discern atypical language development from typical second language acquisition markers. Two factors are key to determining whether a student may have a reading or language-related disability and whether the student's development is typical for a developing dual language learner.

- ***Exposure to English.*** Knowing the conditions and timing of early exposure to English is an important piece of information for understanding the child's bilingual language development and for creating student cohorts for comparison to help determine potential disabilities.
- ***“True peers” comparison data and analysis.*** Understanding the language development trajectory of heterogeneous EL groups requires reliable, high-quality, disaggregated data. English learner results, especially if using monolingual-normed standardized assessments, should be interpreted in comparison with their “true peers” (i.e., bilinguals to bilinguals versus bilinguals to monolinguals), including observed data trends:
 - grouped by monolingual and bilingual status;
 - organized by chronological age; and
 - organized by length of exposure to the target language.

Screening Protocol. Traditional special education referral and evaluation processes often fail to account for the complexities of second language acquisition and diverse backgrounds, leading to both over- and under-identification of multilingual learners. Comprehensive, linguistically responsive protocols that are effectively implemented help mitigate misidentification of ELs resulting from the use of non-EL-sensitive standardized tools, a lack of staff understanding of second language development, or a lack of culturally responsive evaluation tools. The district can establish culturally and linguistically responsive protocols that include the following:

- **Pre-referral.** Language learning conditions afforded to English learners at different ages play a key role in determining their English language development. Thus, the pre-referral phase should aim to gather information that provides a comprehensive picture of the child's development in the dominant home language and the circumstances of the child's initial exposure to English. Pre-referral data collection would include information on:
 - students' language development trajectories, including how long each English learner has been exposed to English (as an additional language or L2) and the nature and intensity of English learning opportunities (at home and in school);
 - which language is dominant, in the case of simultaneous bilinguals; and
 - culturally relevant information about awareness, understanding, and attitudes toward learning differences.

Considering Early Exposure to Bilingualism

Studies show that bilingual children in bilingual schools who are first exposed to English before age 3, referred to in research as simultaneous bilinguals, demonstrate the strongest reading performance in both languages (Kovelman et al., 2008). Simultaneous bilinguals can be expected to perform just as well as their monolingual peers on a variety of reading tasks, including phonological awareness, phonological decoding, and word recognition. When gaps are present, simultaneous bilinguals may take less time than sequential bilinguals to catch up with their monolingual peers. Attention to comprehension development is necessary, as research shows that early (or simultaneous) bilingual children's performance on comprehension tasks was lower than that of children from monolingual English homes. Late bilinguals (also known as sequential bilinguals) who begin learning another language after age 3, typically in school settings, may initially perform less optimally in their new language but should eventually catch up to their monolingual peers, provided they receive quality instruction in language development (Kovelman et al., 2008). Bilingual development also supports broader aspects of cognitive and social factors that contribute to academic success.

- **Protocols and instruments.** Standardized tests normed on monolinguals fail to distinguish between language differences and disabilities, making it necessary to establish formal processes for collecting critical complementary information about English learners to help clinicians and educators understand the child's English language exposure patterns, English language development instruction received, development of the dominant home language, and potential disabilities.

- **Staffing.** Hiring qualified multilingual staff includes those who can provide translation and interpretation services to administer screeners and communicate with families, as well as knowledgeable diagnosticians and other staff who can distinguish between language acquisition and disabilities.
- **Relevant professional learning.** Require relevant professional learning for multidisciplinary teams of educators and professionals who administer screening processes and subsequently interpret all relevant measures, including complementary information used to create EL/ bilingual student profiles, with the goal of distinguishing language learning from disabilities.
- **Multidisciplinary teams.** Multidisciplinary teams evaluating English learners should always include educators and professionals equipped for cross-cultural and multilingual communication and diagnosticians knowledgeable about second language acquisition to interpret the screener results, using data from both the dominant home language and English, and drawing on input from families and educators who understand the student's linguistic and cultural context.

Measuring Student Progress

For dually identified students, assessment needs are shaped by the intersection of English language proficiency, home language development, and learning differences, adding significant complexity to assessment design. Few valid assessments for content knowledge exist in languages other than English, and English learners, as well as students with disabilities, are often assessed with instruments that were not designed or validated for their needs. These assessment limitations create major barriers that prevent English learners, students with disabilities, and dually identified students from fully demonstrating their linguistic and cognitive capabilities. Valid and meaningful assessment practices for dually identified students, particularly in dual language immersion settings, therefore require thoughtful integration of tools that account for both language development and learning differences. Districts can support such valid assessment practices by considering the following:

- **Establishing a clear protocol for assessment review.** Assign a dedicated team of multilingual and special education educators to actively participate in the district's ongoing review and selection of assessment instruments. This process should reflect current best practices for measuring progress among multilingual learners and students who are dually identified, while ensuring that assessments are free of cultural and linguistic barriers that could compromise the reliability of results. These considerations apply not only to assessments conducted in English but also to those used to evaluate developing proficiency in DLI programs and in the district's world language strands and Seal of Biliteracy initiatives.
- **Exploring supplemental formative assessment protocols** (e.g., portfolios, writing samples, video or audio samples) for dually identified students to show their progress in acquiring English proficiency, meeting their IEP goals, learning grade-level content, and developing proficiency in the partner language.
- **Designing data systems** that include not only the standardized assessment results but also data from formative assessments to generate a more comprehensive and accurate picture of dually identified students' progress.

II. Monitoring Classroom Instruction

Ensuring high-quality instruction for dually identified students in DLI programs requires classroom-observation and monitoring tools that reflect bilingual pedagogy, inclusive education principles, and the critical features described in this playbook. These tools can help educators and leaders assess how effectively classrooms integrate language development, grade-level content, and individualized supports. Table 19 outlines key considerations for classroom observation, including the rationale for each practice, teacher behaviors that support implementation, and expected student actions that indicate meaningful engagement and access. Some of these considerations may already be reflected in the classroom-observation tools or protocols used by your district, while others could be incorporated into existing instruments.

Table 19. Considerations for Observing and Monitoring Inclusive Dual Language Immersion Classrooms and Instructional Practices

Consideration	Rationale for Supporting Dually Identified Students	Teacher Actions	Dually Identified Student Actions
Language Allocation Fidelity	Ensures students receive instruction in both languages, supporting biliteracy and cross-linguistic transfer	Deliver instruction in both program languages according to the model (e.g., 90/10, 50/50)	Engage with content in both languages; demonstrate understanding through oral and written responses
Integration of IEP Goals	Aligns instruction with disability-related supports and ensures legal compliance	Embed IEP goals into lesson plans; implement accommodations in both languages	Use supports to access content; demonstrate progress toward IEP and ELD goals
Use of Multimodal Scaffolds	Supports diverse learning needs	Use visuals, sentence frames, manipulatives, and guided practice	Participate using various modalities; respond using varied formats, including visuals, gestures, or structured language
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Materials	Affirms identity and increases engagement, motivation, and comprehension	Select complex, grade-level texts and materials that are responsive to students' backgrounds and languages	Connect experiences to content
Explicit Language Instruction	Supports language development for students learning English and for students with processing or memory challenges	Teach vocabulary, syntax, and phonological awareness explicitly in both languages	Practice new language structures; use strategies like repetition and semantic mapping
Collaborative Teaching Structures	Promotes shared ownership and integrated service delivery	Co-plan and co-teach with EL and SPED staff; align instructional goals	Receive consistent support across subjects; benefit from coordinated instruction

Table 19. Considerations for Observing and Monitoring Inclusive Dual Language Immersion Classrooms and Instructional Practices, continued

Consideration	Rationale for Supporting Dually Identified Students	Teacher Actions	Dually Identified Student Actions
Student Engagement Across Languages	Ensures equitable participation and access to learning	Use inclusive grouping strategies; monitor engagement in both languages	Participate in peer interactions; express ideas in both languages
Formative Assessment in Both Languages	Provides accurate data on progress and informs instruction	Use bilingual assessments and conceptual scoring; adjust instruction based on data	Demonstrate knowledge using both languages; show growth in language and content

Staffing and Roles

Designing and sustaining inclusive DLI programs requires a strategic and flexible staffing approach that reflects both the foundational conditions outlined in the OELA DLI playbooks and the integrated service delivery model described in this document. Targeted and robust recruitment and hiring practices are vital for districts to staff their schools and services, ensuring that dually identified students receive high-quality, coordinated instruction and services. Districts must also set expectations and provide support for how such staff work together. Clearly defined functional responsibilities, district and school cultures that promote and expect shared ownership, and structures that foster collaboration across roles support the delivery of high-quality, coordinated instruction and services for dually identified students. In the case of DLI programs, this collaboration and coordination should be evident in both languages of instruction and in the development of biliteracy.

Table 20 outlines the key functional roles and maps their responsibilities across two domains:

- **General DLI responsibilities:** Functions that support multilingualism, biliteracy, and equitable access to grade-level content for all students.
- **Responsibilities for dually identified students:** Specific actions required to meet the legal, instructional, and linguistic needs of students who require both language development and special education services.

Roles, titles, and assigned functions can vary significantly across school districts and schools, depending on state and district staffing qualifications and negotiated bargaining agreements. In light of this diversity, the table lists functional roles and responsibilities for illustrative purposes, identifies collaborative relationships, and provides notes to guide flexible staffing decisions. The table focuses on functions rather than specific job titles. Districts and schools will need to define the titles and roles applicable in their local contexts.

Table 20. Functional Roles and Responsibilities in Inclusive Dual Language Immersion Programs

Functional Role	General DLI Responsibilities	Responsibilities for Dually Identified Students	Collaborates With	Notes for Adaptation and Implementation
DLI Program Lead (District or School)	Set vision and goals for DLI; ensure program design, staffing, and implementation fidelity; promote multilingualism as an asset	Ensure integration of EL and SPED services; monitor compliance with IDEA and Title III; support cross-departmental collaboration and shared ownership	EL and SPED departments, school leaders, content area leads, data teams	May be a principal, assistant principal, or district program manager
DLI Classroom Teacher	Deliver grade-level content in both languages; implement biliteracy instruction; use culturally responsive pedagogy	Integrate IEP goals into instruction; use scaffolds and multimodal strategies; monitor progress in both languages; collaborate with EL and SPED staff	EL specialists, SPED staff, instructional coaches	Should demonstrate proficiency in the applicable language of instruction or service delivery and have training in inclusive language learning pedagogy
EL Specialist/ Language Development Support	Support English language development; co-plan and co-teach; monitor ELP progress; support reclassification	Distinguish language acquisition from disability; align ELD instruction with IEP goals; participate in IEP meetings; contribute to MTSS and inclusive service delivery	DLI teachers, SPED staff, family engagement teams	May be itinerant or embedded in the school
SPED Provider/ Interventionist	Deliver disability-related services; implement accommodations; support inclusive instruction	Provide services in students' most proficient language; collaborate with EL and general education staff; use bilingual assessments and conceptual scoring	DLI teachers, EL specialists, diagnosticians	Should be trained in bilingual special education or collaborate with bilingual staff
Instructional Coach/Inclusion Facilitator	Support teacher collaboration and coaching cycles; embed inclusive practices; guide professional learning	Facilitate co-planning across EL, SPED, and general education; support implementation of integrated instructional models for dually identified students	Teachers, school leaders, EL, and SPED teams	May be shared across schools or embedded in one site

Table 20. Functional Roles and Responsibilities in Inclusive Dual Language Immersion Programs, continued

Functional Role	General DLI Responsibilities	Responsibilities for Dually Identified Students	Collaborates With	Notes for Adaptation and Implementation
Multidisciplinary Team Member (e.g., Diagnostician, Psychologist, SLP)	Conduct evaluations; support accurate identification and placement; contribute to service planning	Use culturally and linguistically responsive tools; distinguish between language acquisition and disability; support bilingual service delivery	SPED and EL teams, families, and school leaders	Should have access to assessments for multilingual learners and training to administer culturally and linguistically responsive protocols
Family Engagement Liaison/Coordinator	Build trust with multilingual families; facilitate communication; support program awareness and advocacy	Help families navigate special education and language services; provide interpretation and translated materials; support informed decision-making	Front office staff, interpreters, instructional teams	May be a dedicated role or shared across programs
Enrollment and Placement Support	Ensure equitable access to DLI; communicate program options; monitor enrollment trends	Ensure accurate placement of dually identified students; understand legal rights under IDEA and Title III; support inclusive enrollment policies	Family engagement staff, school leaders, district operations	Should be trained in inclusive enrollment policies and legal rights
Data and Monitoring Lead	Track student progress; disaggregate data by language and demographic groups; support program evaluation	Monitor outcomes for dually identified students; track IEP and ELP progress; support instructional teams with data-informed decisions	School leadership, instructional leads, EL and SPED teams, coaches	May be a data analyst, MTSS coordinator, or team lead
Central Office Support Team (Cross-Departmental)	Provide technical assistance; coordinate staffing and resources; develop policies and guidance	Support integrated service models; ensure professional learning addresses the intersections of EL and SPED services; monitor implementation	EL, SPED, curriculum, and operations teams	Can include program directors, specialists, or strategic support teams
Front Office/Administrative Support	Support multilingual communication; manage logistics for family engagement and enrollment	Ensure interpreter availability for IEP meetings; support culturally responsive communication; assist with scheduling and access to services	Family engagement staff, instructional teams	Should be trained in cultural responsiveness and communication tools

III. Professional Learning and Coaching

This section addresses the professional learning and coaching needed to support inclusive DLI implementation for dually identified students, first by highlighting how instructional coaching can strengthen planning and lesson design, and then by outlining the core professional learning content that educators and staff across roles need.

Instructional Coaching and Planning

To ensure that instruction in DLI classrooms is inclusive, linguistically responsive, and aligned with the needs of dually identified students, instructional coaches play a critical role in supporting teachers during the planning process. Effective coaching integrates principles of bilingual pedagogy, special education, MTSS, and UDL to help teachers design lessons that are accessible, rigorous, and affirming for all learners.

Table 21 outlines key coaching questions organized by instructional domain. These questions are designed to guide collaborative lesson planning conversations and help ensure that instruction reflects the five critical features of inclusive DLI programs: inclusive access, integrated support, holistic staffing and collaboration, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, and meaningful family engagement.

Table 21. Instructional Coaching Questions for Planning Inclusive Dual Language Immersion Lessons

Instructional Domain	Coaching Questions
Co-Teaching and Collaboration	- Have EL and SPED staff been included in planning this lesson? - What co-teaching model (e.g., station, parallel, team) will be used? - How are IEP and ELD goals embedded in the lesson objectives and activities?
Scaffolding and Differentiation	- What scaffolds (visuals, sentence frames, manipulatives) will support access to content and language development? - How are accommodations aligned with students' IEPs and language proficiency levels? - Are UDL principles (multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression) reflected in the lesson design?
Language Integration	- How will instruction be delivered in both languages with fidelity to the designated DLI model? - How is cross-linguistic transfer supported? - How will students use their dominant home language to access content and demonstrate understanding?
Grouping and Engagement	- How are student groups structured to promote peer modeling and inclusive participation? - Are grouping strategies responsive to students' language and learning needs? - What opportunities exist for oral language development and collaborative learning?
Assessment and Monitoring	- What formative assessments will be used in both languages to monitor progress in content learning and toward IEP goals? - How will data be used to inform instruction and MTSS interventions? - Will conceptual scoring be used to credit understanding and literacy across languages?
Culturally Responsive Instruction	- Are materials and tasks culturally responsive? - How does the lesson affirm students' identities and promote a growth mindset? - Are there opportunities for family engagement or home-school connections?

Suggested Content of Professional Learning

For educators and staff serving dually identified students in DLI programs, professional learning must reflect the intersection of multilingualism, disability, and inclusive instructional practice. The complexity of supporting students who require both language development and special education services demands targeted, role-specific learning that goes beyond compliance training. Effective professional learning must build capacity across all levels of the system—from district leadership to classroom teachers—to implement asset-based, linguistically responsive, and collaborative approaches. Staff members at every level of the district play specific and essential roles in ensuring that dually identified students receive high-quality, integrated instruction and services in DLI settings. Position-specific knowledge and skills enable staff in each role to design and implement inclusive DLI programs effectively.

District Staff

- **Role:** Set the vision, policies, and systems that support inclusive DLI programs and ensure compliance with legal obligations.
- **Essential Knowledge and Skills:**
 - **Legal and instructional obligations for dually identified students.** Understanding IDEA, Title III, Title VI, and EEOA requirements to ensure compliance and integrated service delivery.
 - **Designing inclusive DLI frameworks and staffing models.** Providing professional learning that supports the development of instructional frameworks, staffing plans, and resource-allocation strategies that reflect asset-based approaches.
 - **Cross-departmental collaboration and shared responsibility.** Equipping district leaders to facilitate collaboration across EL, special education, and general education departments to support integrated services.
 - **Monitoring program effectiveness and supporting implementation.** Equipping district leaders to use disaggregated data to evaluate access, progress, and outcomes for dually identified students.

School Leaders

- **Role:** Translate district vision into school-level practice, lead inclusive instruction, and foster a collaborative school culture.
- **Essential Knowledge and Skills:**
 - **Inclusive program design and implementation.** Designing programs that integrate biliteracy instruction with special education services and aligning school goals with district priorities.
 - **Strategic staffing and scheduling for integrated services.** Assigning staff intentionally and protecting time for collaboration and co-planning.
 - **Instructional leadership for inclusive practices.** Observing, coaching, and evaluating instruction that supports biliteracy and addresses learning differences.
 - **Culturally responsive family engagement.** Building multilingual family partnerships and navigating conversations about learning differences and language development with cultural sensitivity.

Teachers

- **Role:** Deliver grade-level content through integrated instruction that supports biliteracy and addresses language development and learning differences.
- **Essential Knowledge and Skills:**
 - **Collaborative planning and co-teaching models.** Using co-planning protocols, shared instructional responsibilities, and integrated service delivery models.
 - **Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.** Affirming students' identities, reducing language learning anxiety, and maintaining high academic expectations.
 - **Instructional tools and assessment practices.** Using formative assessment, conceptual scoring, and progress-monitoring practices in both languages.
 - **Differentiated instruction for dually identified students.** Applying scaffolding strategies, multimodal instruction, and integration of IEP goals into biliteracy instruction.

Instructional Coaches

- **Role:** Guide teacher collaboration, embed inclusive practices, and support instructional improvement in both languages taught in the DLI program.
- **Essential Knowledge and Skills:**
 - **Facilitating inclusive coaching cycles.** Supporting collaborative planning and feedback cycles that integrate EL and special education goals.
 - **Embedding inclusive practices into coaching.** Using observation and guidance tools that support biliteracy and learning differences.
 - **Supporting peer reflection and cross-disciplinary collaboration.** Facilitating reflection across roles and disciplines to strengthen instructional coherence.

Specialized Support Staff

(e.g., bilingual special educators, interventionists, diagnosticians, psychologists, speech-language pathologists)

- **Role:** Deliver linguistically appropriate services and support accurate identification, intervention, and progress monitoring for dually identified students.
- **Essential Knowledge and Skills:**
 - **Culturally and linguistically responsive assessment.** Using bilingual assessments and conceptual scoring to evaluate student needs accurately.
 - **Understanding bilingual development and learning differences.** Understanding how cross-linguistic transfer and bilingualism intersect with learning disabilities.
 - **Collaborative service delivery in DLI settings.** Integrating services with general education and EL instruction.

Front Office and Family Engagement Staff

- **Role:** Facilitate multilingual communication and culturally responsive engagement with families.
- **Essential Knowledge and Skills:**
 - **Multilingual communication and interpretation tools.** Using interpretation platforms and multilingual communication systems effectively.
 - **Cultural responsiveness and learning difference awareness.** Understanding diverse family perspectives and navigating special education processes respectfully.
 - **Building trust and supporting family decision-making.** Creating welcoming environments that empower families to engage in educational decision-making.

Enrollment and Placement Personnel

- **Role:** Ensure equitable access to DLI programs and accurate placement of dually identified students.
- **Essential Knowledge and Skills:**
 - **Inclusive enrollment policies and legal rights.** Understanding IDEA, Title III, and EEOA requirements to ensure equitable access and appropriate placement.
 - **Communicating program options to families.** Explaining DLI models and services in accessible, culturally responsive ways.
 - **Monitoring access and addressing barriers.** Identifying and removing logistical, procedural, or systemic barriers to DLI participation.

Multidisciplinary Teams

- **Role:** Conduct screenings, interpret assessments, and plan integrated services collaboratively.
- **Essential Knowledge and Skills:**
 - **Joint training across EL, special education, and general education.** Developing shared understanding of bilingualism, learning differences, and instructional integration.
 - **Use of bilingual evaluation tools and conceptual scoring.** Assessing students using tools and processes that reflect their full linguistic repertoire.
 - **Collaborative decision-making protocols.** Using structured processes to interpret data, plan services, and align IEP goals with language development.

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APPENDIX

Council of the Great City Schools Strategic Support Teams

The Council of the Great City Schools' Strategic Support Teams (SSTs) are expert groups composed of senior leaders from other urban school districts who conduct intensive reviews of specific operational or instructional areas—such as special education or English learner services—at the request of a district. These teams diagnose challenges, share best practices, and provide actionable recommendations to help districts improve performance and build internal capacity. Their findings and recommendations are published in a report for district stakeholders and are typically publicly available.

For systemic barriers in serving dually identified students, the following Strategic Support Team reports contained relevant findings referenced in Part II of the document:

Special Education	Bilingual Education
- Albuquerque, 2006, 2019 - Anchorage, 2015 - Austin, 2010 - Boston, 2009 - Buffalo, 2014 - Chicago, 2011, 2012 - Cincinnati, 2013 - Cleveland, 2017 - Clark County, 2019 - Des Moines, 2015 - Detroit, 2018 - Fresno, 2018 - Guilford County, 2003 - Providence, 2011, 2019 - Rochester, 2009 - Sacramento, 2017 - Shelby County, 2016 - St. Louis, 2004 - St. Paul, 2012	- Buffalo, 2009 - Chicago, 2014 - Des Moines, 2015 - East Baton Rouge, 2022 - Guilford County, 2002 - Providence, 2011 - Providence, 2019

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COUNCIL MEMBER DISTRICTS

Albuquerque, Anchorage, Arlington, Atlanta, Aurora, Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Bridgeport, Broward County (Ft. Lauderdale), Buffalo, Charleston County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Cleveland, Columbus, Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Durham, Duval County (Jacksonville), East Baton Rouge, El Paso, Fayette County (Lexington), Fort Worth, Fresno, Guilford County (Greensboro, N.C.), Hawaii, Hillsborough County (Tampa), Houston, Indianapolis, Jackson, Jefferson County (Louisville), Jersey City, Kansas City, Little Rock, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Madison, Miami-Dade County, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Nashville, New Orleans, New York City, Newark, Norfolk, Oakland, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange County (Orlando), Palm Beach County, Philadelphia, Phoenix Union, Pinellas County (St. Petersburg), Pittsburgh, Portland, Providence, Puerto Rico, Richmond, Rochester, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Ana, Shelby County (Memphis), Seattle, St. Louis, St. Paul, Toledo, Tulsa, Washington, D.C., Wake County (Raleigh), Washoe County (Reno), Wichita, and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County



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