



**DC Language Immersion Project**

Multilingual Education = Increased Opportunity + Stronger Community



NATIONAL FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE CENTER

# Demographics and Equity of Dual Language Immersion Programs in Washington, DC

An analysis of the demographics of kindergarteners in DC public dual language immersion (DLI) schools as compared with non-DLI schools to move beyond anecdotal evidence and inform the debate on equity of access to and enrollment in DLI programs. The report highlights areas of concern and identifies policies and further research needed to allow the District's most vulnerable students equitable access to these opportunity-boosting programs.

# NEED FOR THIS STUDY

Journalists, researchers, parents, and policymakers in DC and nationally grapple with questions regarding the demographics of DLI programs, such as whether some populations are pushing other populations out, whether some demographics are enrolling less than others and why, and whether DLI programs are gentrifying/becoming Whiter faster than others.

To help address these questions, this report **reviews existing research, policies, and overall demographics of the District** and **directly compares DLI schools with non-DLI schools** in aggregate for the first time.

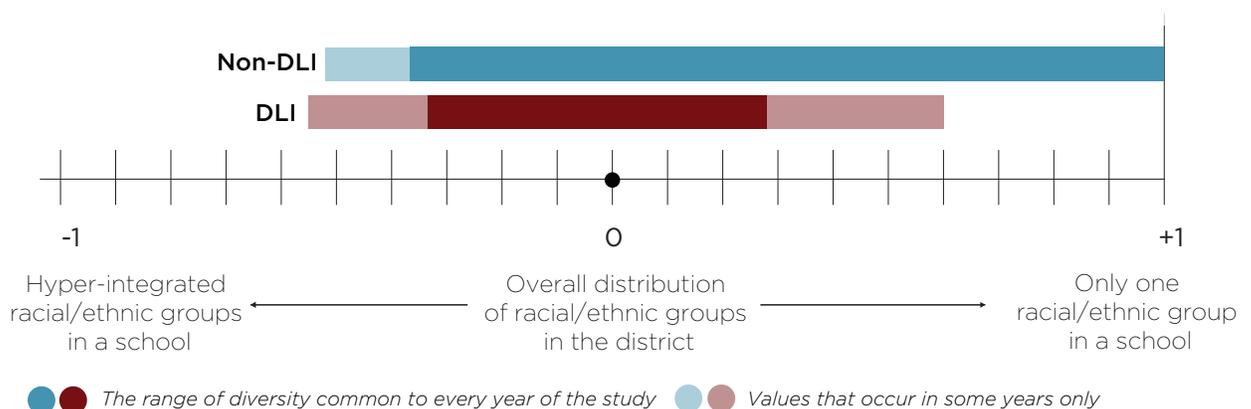
## MAIN FINDINGS

### DLI schools are racially/ethnically more diverse

DLI schools were racially/ethnically more diverse (had a more even distribution of racial/ethnic groups on average) than non-DLI schools located in the same wards, regardless of sector. Additionally, unlike non-DLI schools, DLI schools had no instances of having close to only one racial/ethnic group.

DLI schools had **smaller proportions of Black students** and **larger proportions of Hispanic students**, on average, than non-DLI schools, probably due in part to the locations of the schools and their different degrees of accessibility for different groups of students, as well as a lottery requirement among DCPS DLI schools that reserves seats for Spanish-dominant students. DLI schools and non-DLI schools had **similar proportions of White and Asian students**.

### Range of Racial/Ethnic Diversity in DC DLI and Non-DLI Schools (SY 2010-11 to SY 2015-16)



## METHODOLOGY

**Longitudinal analysis** to determine whether DLI and non-DLI schools changed demographically from SY 2010-11 to SY 2015-16, and, if so, whether they changed in similar ways to each other.

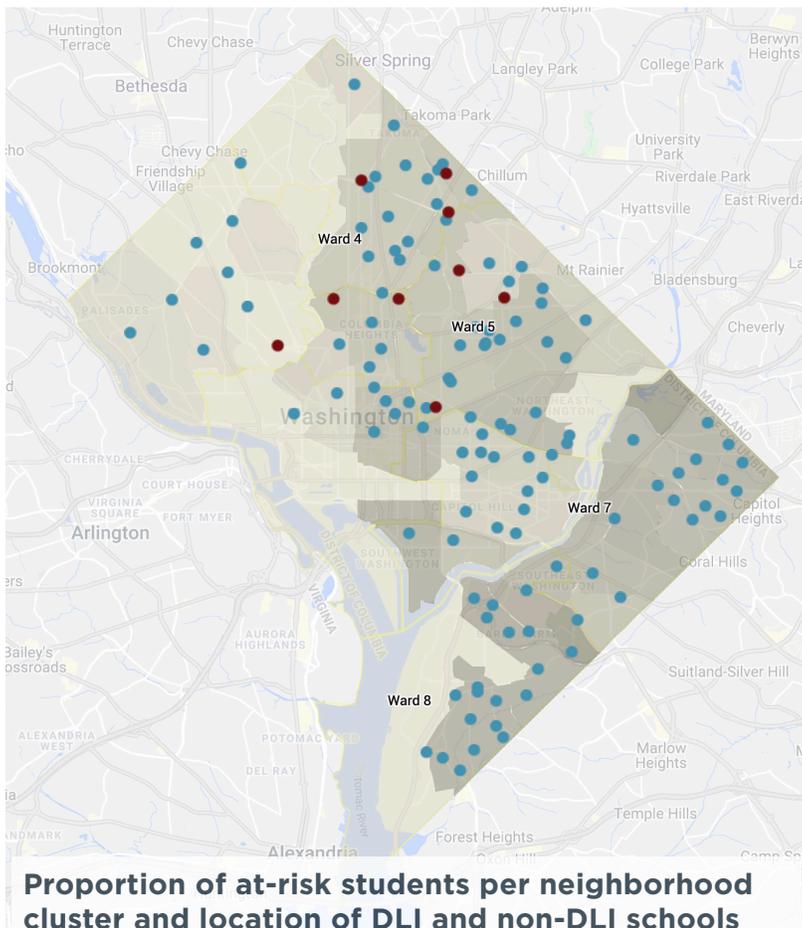
**One-year snapshot** focusing on SY 2015-16, to examine racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and special education differences between the demographics of DLI and non-DLI schools, controlling for school location.

We looked at the kindergarten populations of 149 DC public schools (140 non-DLI and 9 DLI). Of the nine DLI schools, six were public charter schools and three were DC Public Schools.

## DLI schools have fewer at-risk students

Socioeconomically, DLI schools differed significantly from non-DLI schools. A randomly selected DLI school in SY 2015–16 can be expected to have **20.8% fewer at-risk students** than a randomly selected non-DLI school.

Because less than 4% of the variance is explained by the DLI status of the school, while **a notable amount is explained by the wards the schools are in**, this presents an opportunity to address equity of access through policies focusing on the locations of new DLI programs and on lottery preferences that can counterbalance the effects of existing school location.

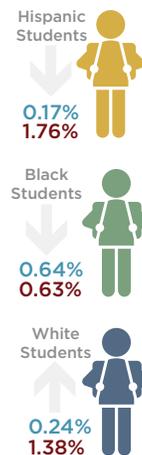


**Proportion of at-risk students per neighborhood cluster and location of DLI and non-DLI schools (SY 2015–16)**

## DLI schools and non-DLI schools changed in the same direction but at different rates

Racial/ethnic proportions in DLI and non-DLI schools over the years of the study **changed in the same directions** (decreases in proportions of Black and Hispanic students and an increase in proportion of White students); statistically significant differences of less than 2% were found in the rates of change between DLI and non-DLI schools.

In an average kindergarten cohort of 61 students, DLI schools were found to have **1 less Hispanic student on average per year** and **1 additional White student on average every 1–2 years**. The decrease in Hispanic students may or may not be linked to the increase in White students; these changes are averages across schools, and this study did not examine changes in proportions of demographic groups at individual schools. Other factors may also be at play, including the introduction of a new non-Spanish DLI school and movement of existing DLI schools during the period of the study.



## DLI AS A TOOL FOR INTEGRATION

In the context of highly segregated DC schools and high-demand/low-supply DLI programs, an opportunity exists to use DLI programs as a tool to integrate schools. Linguistic, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity can be promoted through a strategic approach to the location of new DLI programs, as well as lottery and enrollment policies.

At the classroom level, DLI programs promote diversity by framing it as an asset through cross-cultural practices positioning students and families as language and culture brokers for each other and through presenting a counter-narrative to dominant racial ideologies that disregard non-European cultures.

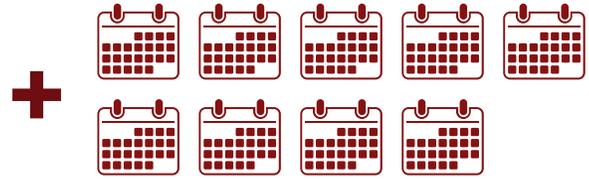
# EQUITABLE ACCESS TO DLI MATTERS

Decades of rigorous research conducted all over the nation indicate that DLI programs benefit students regardless of racial/ethnic, linguistic, or socioeconomic background.

## Higher academic achievement

DLI students from a variety of backgrounds achieve at or above the level of their peers on standardized assessments while also becoming proficient in another language.

- Nine months ahead in English reading by eighth grade
- Measurable advantages in math
- Advantages regardless of language spoken at home
- Closing or substantial reduction of achievement gaps for African American students, low socioeconomic status students, and special education students

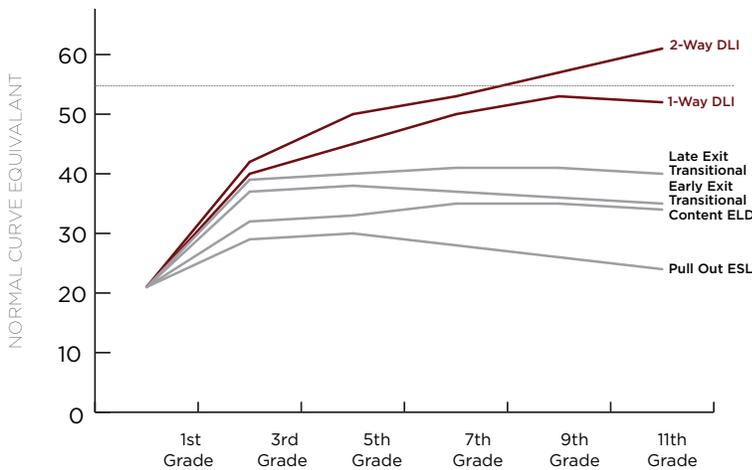


**9 months ahead in English reading by 8th grade**

*Steele et al., 2017; Watzinger-Tharp et al., 2016; Thomas & Collier, 2012*

## Highly effective and long-lasting intervention for ELs

### English learners' long-term achievement by program model (Thomas & Collier, 2012)



- Proficiency in English is key to increase English learners' (ELs') overall achievement.
- DLI programs matching the student's native language are the most effective intervention to durably increase English proficiency and to close the English reading gap.
- DLI programs lead to higher levels of proficiency in the heritage language, which have been positively associated with the quality of parent-adolescent relationships and ethnic identity.

*Umansky & Reardon, 2014; Valentino & Reardon, 2015; Oh & Fuligni, 2009*

## Improved access to college and jobs

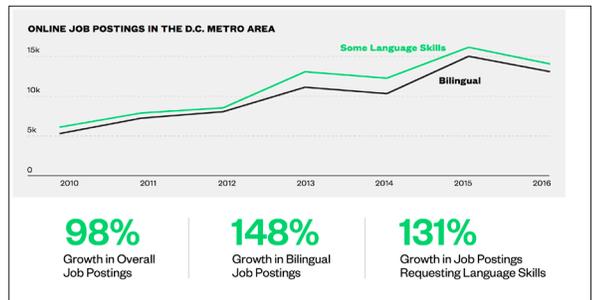
The demand for multilingual employees:

- is increasing across the U.S.;
- is expected to continue to grow; and
- in the DC region, over the period of this study, more than doubled.

In some contexts, bilingual employees earn more money than their monolingual peers or receive an advantage in hiring.

Multilingual skills can equate to college credits, thereby reducing college costs and duration.

### Demand for multilingual employees in DC region (2010–2016)



**98%**  
Growth in Overall Job Postings

**148%**  
Growth in Bilingual Job Postings

**131%**  
Growth in Job Postings Requesting Language Skills

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Deliberate action on the part of DC's decision makers can help harness the integrating potential of DLI programs and address the underrepresentation of at-risk students in DLI programs, which have been shown to be academically advantageous to students across many different demographics and to provide language skills that are increasingly valuable in the workplace. **To prevent the further widening of the District's opportunity gap, policymakers must act urgently to ensure equitable access to key 21st century skills.**

## 1. DLI programs should be added in neighborhoods with high densities of at-risk students, and investments should be made in targeted outreach to families of at-risk students

It takes between 28 and 68 minutes for students to travel by metro to the DLI schools in the study from the closest-in metro stations in Ward 7 and 8. Commutes from students' homes to metro stations add more time. To increase access to DLI programs for at-risk students, additional DLI programs should be implemented in under-enrolled and under-resourced schools and across elementary, middle, and high schools. Systemic support should include funding DLI teacher preparation, adjusting certification requirements, incentivizing grow-your-own teacher programs, funding professional development to increase awareness of and willingness to plan and implement DLI programs, and targeting outreach to parents and caregivers of at-risk students.



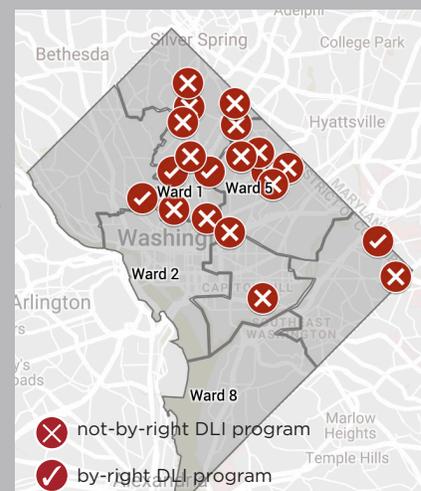
## 2. DLI programs should have at-risk and EL lottery preferences, and these should replace dominant language lottery preference

Instead of the current dominant language lottery preference, which is problematic for many reasons, the District should implement a preference for at-risk students and a preference for ELs. This policy would need to go hand in hand with a policy expanding DLI programs as, even if all the existing 7,898 seats (SY 2018-19) in current DLI programs were occupied by ELs, there would not be enough seats for all of the 10,423 ELs who currently live in the District.

## 3. Strand DLI programs should be accessible to in-boundary students by-right in high at-risk neighborhoods

In the schools that guarantee access to students living within the school's geographic boundary (by-right schools), students should have by-right access to both programs in a school and not only to the English-only strand as is currently the case in four DLI programs.

Additionally, moving away from strands to whole school DLI programs increases access to DLI programs and decreases the in-school segregation that the different lottery treatment of each strand and other factors have created.



**Only 4 of the District's 18 DLI elementary programs guarantee by-right access (SY 2019-20)**

## FUTURE DC RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Increasing accuracy and widening scope of this study through student-level data, by-strand data, data from more recent school years and additional grades, and longitudinal analysis of changes in student populations of individual schools following the implementation of a DLI program
- » Researching impact of the lottery on populations applying for and entering DLI programs
- » Investigating motivations of students and families that apply for DLI enrollment and students and families that don't
- » Determining the impact of DLI programs on student academic achievement

## DC LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROJECT

DC Immersion engages families, supports educators, researches best practices, and advocates for a systemic approach to equitably increasing opportunity and strengthening community through multilingual education. We believe in a quality multilingual education for every child in the nation's capital to become an empathetic citizen of the world and for the District and its future workforce to compete successfully in the global marketplace.

Learn more at <http://www.dcimmersion.org> and follow DC Language Immersion Project on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn @dcimmersion.

## UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND'S NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

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This report can be found online at: [www.dcimmersion.org/demographicsequity](http://www.dcimmersion.org/demographicsequity)

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