Pre-Kindergarten Teachers' Feedback on the Dual Language Program

February 2016

Overview

Austin Independent School District (AISD) district staff met with pre-kindergarten (pre-K) teachers in the dual language (DL) program on January 11th and February 25th, 2016, to obtain their feedback about the DL program model currently being implemented at AISD, and discuss recommendations about proposed changes in the DL program delivery model.

In both meetings, the teachers were grouped into small teams of about 5 members and were asked to provide feedback on which aspects of the current DL program should be required or optional, and how the program implementation could be improved. In addition, in the February meeting, a facilitator presented three possible DL delivery models and asked the teams to discuss the models and provide feedback. Teachers' responses were noted, and the most common response themes were summarized in this report. This information is being used by the district's bilingual innovation design team to make recommendations for improving the implementation of the DL program in the 2016 – 2017 and 2017 – 2018 school years.

Comments about the 3 DL delivery models

The following 3 delivery models were proposed by the facilitator:

Option 1 consisted of a 50/50 model with sequential language learning in language arts (i.e., students learn in the native language first from pre-K through grade 1, followed by a gradual increase in the amount of time learning in their second language during grades 2-5)

Option 2 consisted of a 70/30 model with simultaneous language learning in language arts (i.e., students learn language in both native and second language simultaneously, beginning with 90% native language in pre-K, gradually increasing second language learning up to 50% by grade 3)

Option 3 consisted of a 80/20 model with simultaneous language learning in language arts (i.e., students learn language in both native and second language simultaneously, beginning with 90% native language in pre-K, gradually increasing second language learning up to 50% by grade 5)

Most teachers indicated they liked the fact that in options 2 and 3, pre-K students would get the majority of their instruction in their native language, but also indicated they had concerns about aspects of those options. The following were the most often mentioned issues:

- Pre-K students need to build a base knowledge in their native language before switching to a second language. A second language may be better introduced during social interactions.

- Pre-K students do not have a grasp of the second language yet, therefore introducing math in the second language (English) seems above what they can do at that point.

- It would be too confusing for pre-K students to switch between languages within one subjects (for example, one week of math in English and the following week in Spanish).

- In options 2 and 3, the 10% English Language Development (ELD) is included in language arts, and in this case, teachers may not have the freedom to choose what activities can be used for this portion. Pre-K students are still developing their native language skills and are too young to begin working on English language arts.

Required or Optional DL Components

When asked to suggest required DL components based on the program model currently being implemented, pre-K DL teachers listed the following:

- Cooperative or bilingual pairs

- Language arts in the native language

- Labels

- Theme walls

- Student work displayed

- Social time in English

However, when asked to suggest optional components, teachers listed the following:

- Student generated alphabets

- Labels

- Color coding of Spanish and English

- Bilingual pairs

In addition, some pre-K teachers indicated they would prefer if cognates were allowed on theme walls and if students could be paired in different ways, such as on ability or language preference.

Improving DL Program Implementation

The pre-K teachers at the meeting provided the following suggestions for improving implementation of the DL program:

- Do not limit students' choice of bilingual center activities based on the language of the day.

- Bilingual learning centers in students' second language are not meaningful to them. Instead, create "social blocks" where students would get to play and learn in the second language.

- Young children need to learn how to be in a classroom first, then they can be paired.

- Allow more flexibility in pairing of students (e.g., allow pairing by general ability).

- Switch language of the day to be English on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and Spanish on Tuesdays and Thursdays, or look at the language needs at the campus before determining the best pattern.

- Allow more flexibility in the student generated alphabet.

- Allow math to be taught in Spanish first and then transitioned to English.

- Language of the day should be campus wide but outside the classroom (it is difficult to implement in the classroom). Also, it should function more as social interaction and to transition activities throughout the day.

- Do walkthroughs when the teacher is available for the environment check, and do learning walkthroughs at appropriate instructional times. Also, observers in walkthroughs should be more flexible (they are currently done by individuals who do not veer from expectations).

- Have clear and specific goals for the program implementation and provide training that states those goals.

- Allow word walls to have the same word on the English and the Spanish sides. Students can learn from having access to the same word in both languages.

- Allow student generated alphabets to be implemented in the second semester instead of in the first semester.

In addition, some pre-K teachers suggested that the following components of the DL program be omitted: student generated alphabets; English word wall if English phonics are not being taught; bilingual pairs; color coding bins for centers.