

## Dual Language Program Implementation at Austin Independent School District, 2017–2018

Since 2016–2017, the Dual Language (DL) program at Austin Independent School District (AISD) has gone through various changes that allowed principals to better accommodate their campuses' student demographics and language needs, while maintaining key elements of DL education (<https://www.austinisd.org/multilingual>). A Bilingual Innovation Design Team (BIDT), consisting of principals, teachers, parents, community representatives, and staff from the AISD Multilingual Education Team (MET), collaboratively identified elements that are critical for bilingual instruction. These elements were based on bilingual education research and practice and were used to create an observation guide for bilingual classrooms. In 2016–2017, the bilingual specialists, MET staff, and staff from the Department of Research and Evaluation conducted brief preliminary classroom observations in a small number of classrooms, using the observation guide. The data from these observations were used to edit and improve the observation guide for use in 2017–2018.

Nine key elements of DL education are represented as categories in the 2017–2018 observation guide: language of instruction, vocabulary and content enrichment, authentic student work, classroom and school libraries, teaching for transfer, lesson cycle, assessment, collaborative learning, and daily writing.

This report summarizes results from classroom observations using the observation guide to examine the level of DL program implementation in 2017–2018.

### Results

**A total of 167 classrooms were observed across 30 elementary schools:** Allison, Andrews, Barrington, Becker, Blanton, Casey, Cook, Galindo, Govalle, Harris, Hart, Houston, Maplewood, McBee, Menchaca, Oak Hill, Overton, Palm, Pecan Springs, Perez, Pillow, Reilly, Ridgetop, Sanchez, Sunset Valley, Travis Heights, Webb Primary, Widen, Williams, Wooten.

Classroom observations lasted an average of 30 minutes, and observers were asked to rate whether each item in the guide was “evident” or “not evident.” In addition, observers could leave items blank or indicate they had “not observed” the item at that specific time, but that it may have occurred when they were not in the classroom (both of these cases were treated as missing observations). The classrooms observed ranged from pre-kindergarten (pre-K) to 5<sup>th</sup> grade (see Table 1 in the appendix). Since teaching strategies and foci change as grade level increases, data from classroom observations were also grouped by pre-K, early elementary grade levels (kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade), and upper elementary grade levels (3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade). Figures 1 through 9 show the items related to each of the key elements in the observation guide and the percentage of times each item was evident, not evident, or missing.

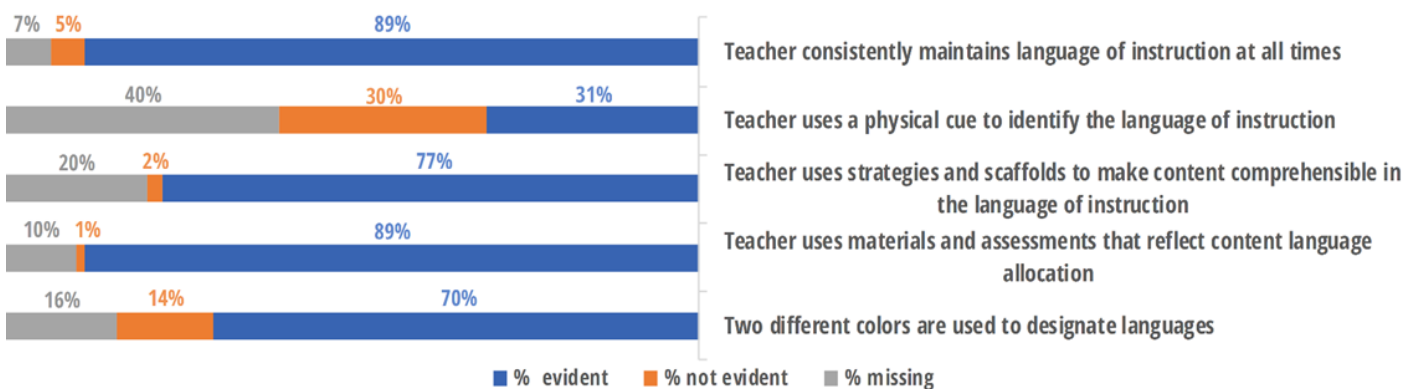


Over all, the data indicate that some elements were observed more often than others. Most of the items representing consistent use of language of instruction, vocabulary and content enrichment, classroom library, and collaborative learning were evident in at least 70% of the classrooms, indicating that teachers in those classrooms were progressing toward high implementation of those aspects of the DL program. However, the same was not true for the following program elements: authentic student work displayed, teaching for transfer, lesson cycle, assessment, and daily writing.

## Language of Instruction

DL programs require a strict adherence to language of instruction (LOI) in the content areas, without translation from the teacher, but still ensuring that content is comprehensible to all students. Consistent LOI provides a framework for developing and maintaining the heritage language of the student while acquiring the second language. Classroom observations indicated that some aspects of this program element were observed more often than others. Between 70% and 89% of the time, there was evidence that teachers maintained LOI, used strategies and scaffolds to help students understand the lesson content, used assessments and materials that reflected language allocation, and used two different colors to designate each language (Figure 1). However, observers reported evidence of teachers using physical cues to identify the LOI in only 30% of the classrooms visited. It is interesting to note that when the classroom observations were disaggregated by school grade level, it became apparent that teachers at earlier grade levels were slightly more inclined than teachers at higher grade levels to use physical cues (i.e., 47% at pre-K, 29% at kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and 19% at 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades, Table 2). Two of the items representing LOI were part of the original observation guide used to perform preliminary classroom observations in 2016–2017. Based on the observation data collected in 2016–2017, teachers seemed to be more consistent in maintaining LOI (89% of the classrooms) and in using strategies and scaffolds to make content comprehensible (77% of the observations) in 2017–2018 than in 2016–2017 (46% and 35%, respectively), suggesting an improvement in implementation of this element of DL programs.

Figure 1.  
Language of Instruction



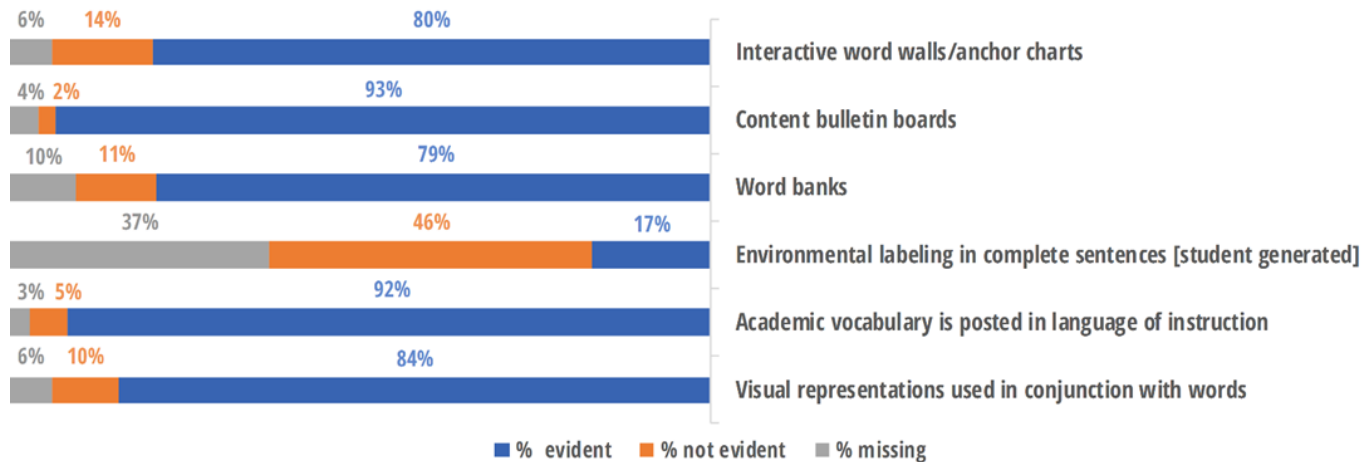
Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

## Vocabulary and Content Enrichment

This aspect of DL education refers to the process of acquiring academic content and vocabulary in both languages. Environmental elements of the DL classroom serve the purpose of promoting and valuing the language development of both languages and catch students' attention, thus helping them associate a word with its meaning. Labels, word walls, and visual representations, for example, provide references students can use in conversation and writing activities, and showcase the richness of both languages. Similar to what was observed for LOI, five out of the six items representing vocabulary and content enrichment were evident between 79% and 93% of the time during observations (Figure 2). Content bulletin boards and posted academic vocabulary were observed more than 90% of the time, while visual representations, word walls, and word banks were observed 79% to 84% of the time. However, environmental labeling was present in few classrooms (17%), and this low evidence rate was present at all grade levels (Table 2). When observers

were asked about this low percentage of occurrence, they commented that they had observed labeling in many classrooms, but in several of those instances, the labels were neither student generated nor in complete sentences, and consequently they marked this item as not evident (46%) or left it blank (37%). Consistent with this, in 2016–2017, this item did not require that labels be generated by students and it was observed more often (46%) than in 2017–2018.

**Figure 2.**  
**Vocabulary and Content Enrichment**

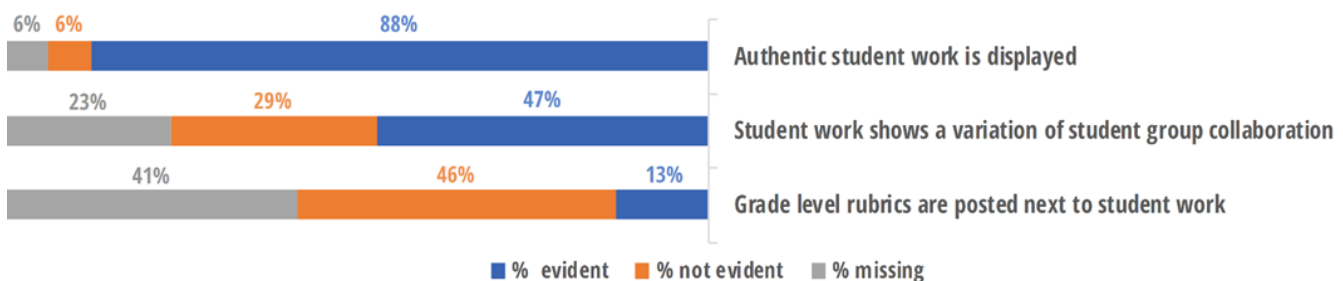


Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

### Authentic Student Work Displayed

This element refers to displaying student work in areas of the classroom to value students’ original work and to allow students to observe and learn from each other’s work. Observers reported that authentic student work was displayed in 88% of the classrooms visited (Figure 3). However, that work represented various groupings in only 47% of the classrooms, and rubrics clearly outlining expectations were posted next to student work in only 13% of the classrooms. Disaggregating the data by earlier and later elementary levels, a larger percentage of teachers in later elementary classrooms (63%) than in earlier elementary classrooms (38% for pre-K and 43% for early elementary) seemed to vary their grouping of students. Furthermore, 23% of the classrooms were missing a rating for this item, indicating that observers were not sure whether there were multiple groupings in those classrooms. Regarding posted rubrics (13%), observation rates were low regardless of grade level (19% for pre-K, 12% for early elementary, and 13% for upper elementary). However, during debriefing sessions, observers indicated that rubrics may have been posted out of sight, such as online or in notebooks.

**Figure 3.**  
**Authentic Student Work Displayed**



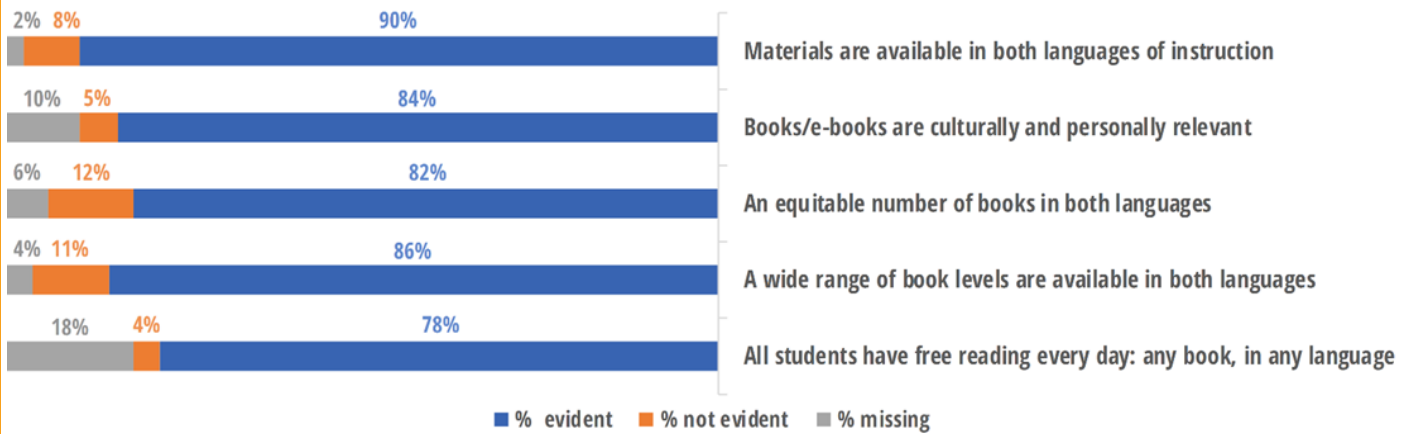
Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

### Classroom and School Libraries

According to this program element, libraries that support DL programs should have an equitable number of books and materials in both languages, and those books should represent a range of reading levels. Observers indicated that in the majority of schools and classrooms observed (82% to 90%), libraries contained an equitable number of books in both

languages, in a range of reading levels, and that books were culturally and personally relevant in both languages (Figure 4). The only aspect of libraries that was observed at slightly lower frequency (78%) was whether students had free reading every day. This may be the case because, apart from checking the daily schedule posted at the entrance of the classroom, observers would not have seen this activity unless they visited the classroom at the specific time scheduled for free reading activities.

**Figure 4.**  
**Classroom and School Libraries**

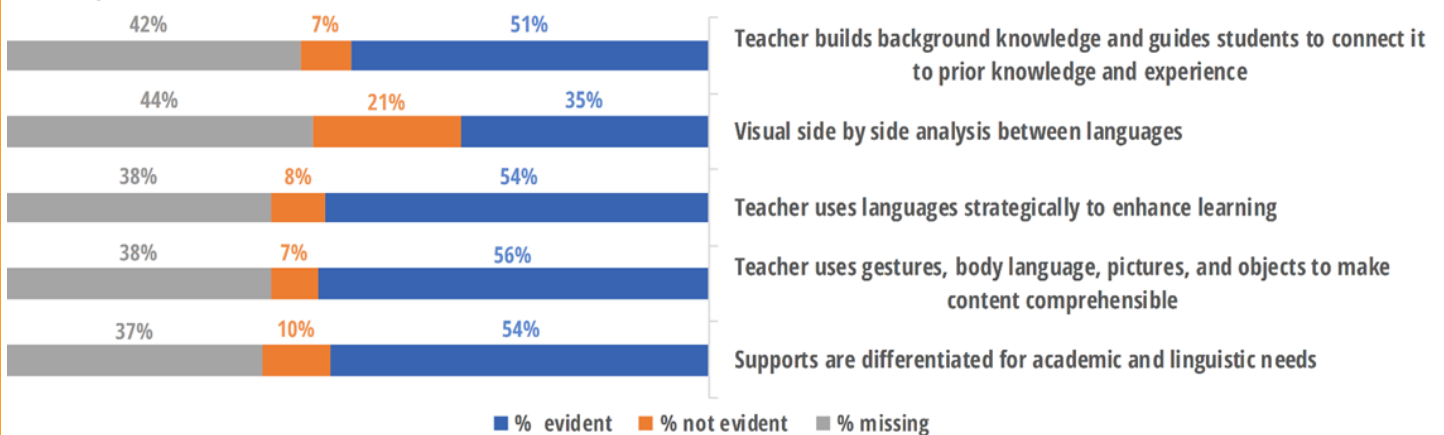


Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

### Teaching for Transfer

Teaching for transfer refers to the instructional process whereby students master concepts and vocabulary in the LOI and then transfer their knowledge of the concepts and vocabulary to the partner language. Classroom observations indicated that most of the items within this element were evident around 50% of the time (Figure 5). Building of background knowledge and guiding students to connect that knowledge to prior knowledge was observed 51% of the time, whereas using gestures, pictures, and body language to make content comprehensible was observed 56% of the time. However, visual side-by-side analysis between languages was only observed 35% of the time, suggesting that teachers may have had difficulties implementing this aspect of the DL program. Observers indicated that some teachers seemed to run out of time and therefore were not be able to perform this activity, and that more professional development opportunities would probably help those teachers in planning and implementing this item. It is important to note that visual side-by-side analysis is a new concept to DL program implementation at AISD; consequently, it seems reasonable that teachers need more training on this aspect of the program.

**Figure 5.**  
**Teaching for Transfer**



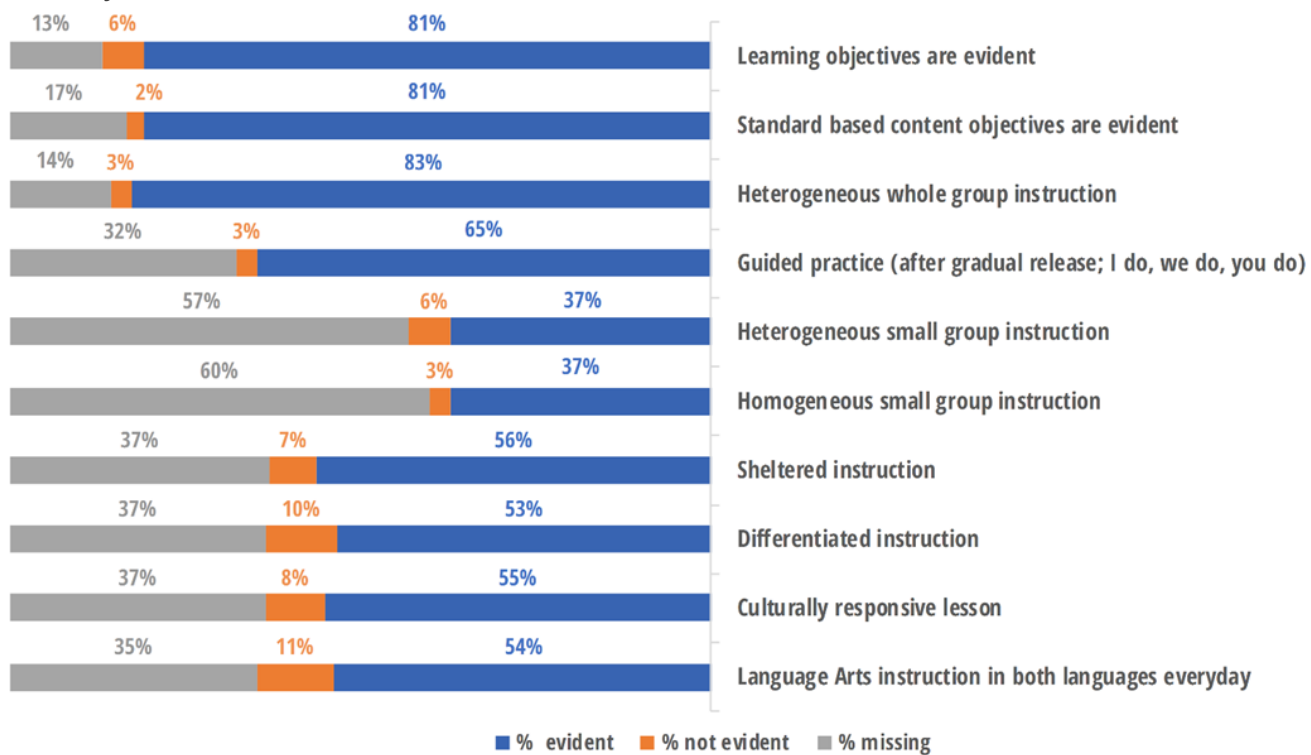
Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations



## Lesson Cycle

The lesson cycle should be structured to support on-grade level language and content objectives; use culturally responsive pedagogy; and reflect the use of heterogeneous small- and whole-group instruction, as well as sheltered instruction. Observations indicated that some aspects of this element were implemented consistently, whereas others were evident in just a few classrooms (Figure 6). For example, clear evidence of learning and content objectives were present in 81% of the classrooms observed, and heterogeneous group instruction was evident in 83% of the classrooms. However, small-group instruction (heterogeneous or homogeneous) was observed in only 37% of the classrooms. Yet, the majority of observers (around 60%) indicated that small-group instruction may have occurred when they were not in the classroom conducting their observation. In addition, in a later conversation, bilingual specialists who conducted observations indicated that small-group instruction typically takes place in the earlier part of the school day, and in many cases, they conducted their observations later in the school day and therefore may not have been present when this activity took place.

Figure 6.  
Lesson Cycle

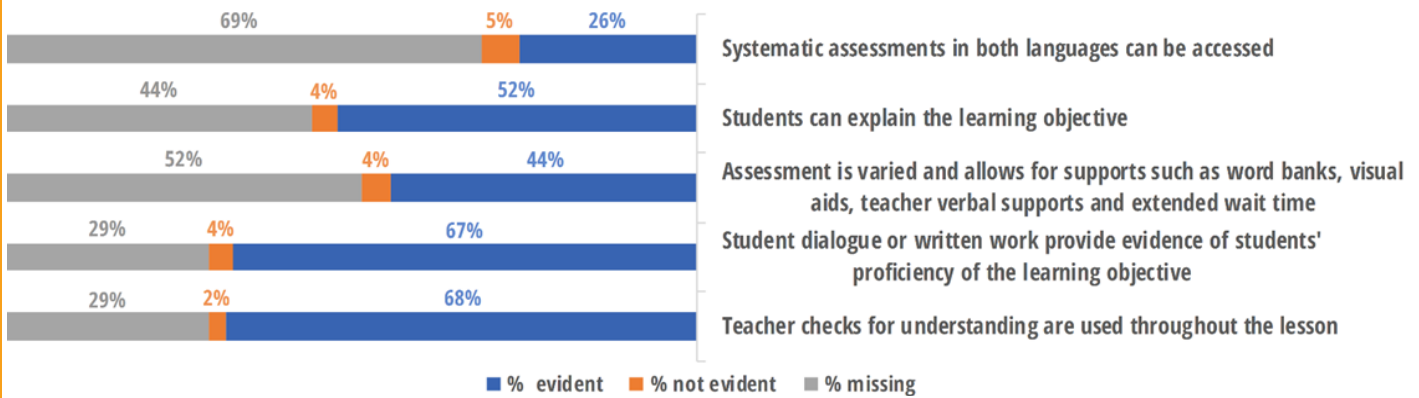


Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

## Assessment

Assessment is the process of collecting information or evidence of a student's learning progress and achievement over a period of time in order to improve teaching and learning. Observers indicated that in nearly 70% of the classrooms, students' written work provided evidence of students' proficiency in the learning objectives, and teachers checked for understanding throughout the lesson (Figure 7). However, there were very few observations of systematic assessments in both languages (26%) or of the use of supports, such as word banks and visual aids, during assessments (44%). Yet, 69% and 52% of the observations for these two items, respectively, were left blank or registered as not taking place while the observer was in the classroom. Consequently, it is possible that these aspects of DL learning assessments were implemented with higher fidelity, but in order to register them, observers would have had to made multiple visits to each classroom or coordinate with the teachers to be present during formal assessment times. Part of the ongoing efforts of the MET staff is to ensure the reliability of the findings from assessments that were created for monolingual learners and that are being applied to bilingual learners.

**Figure 7.  
Assessment**



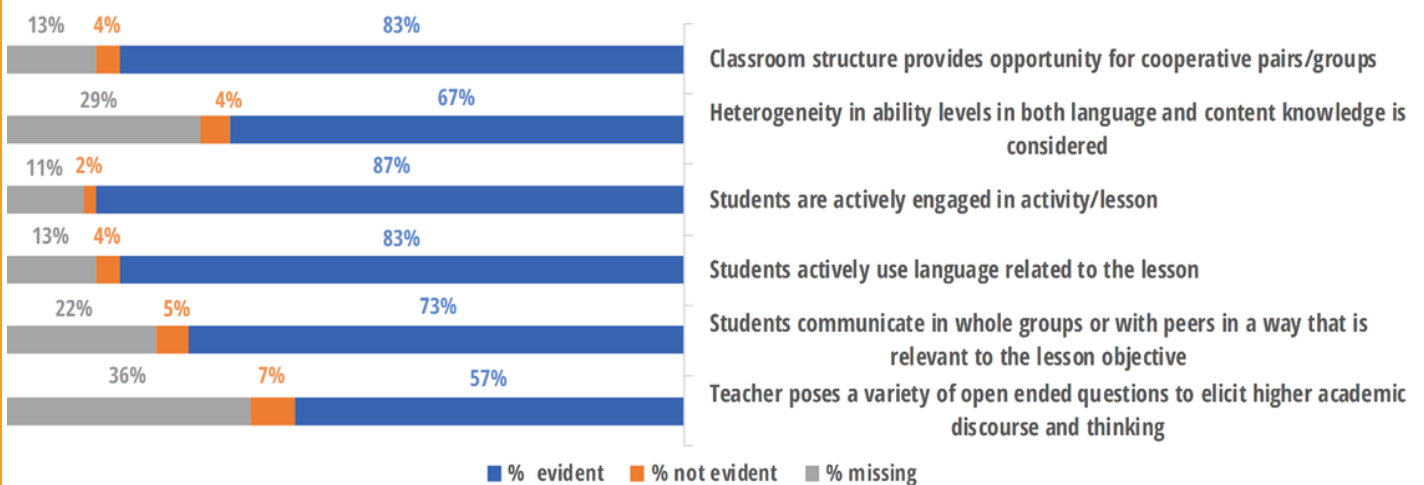
Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

### Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is an approach to teaching and learning that involves heterogeneous groups of students working toward a common goal. Grouping of students is intended to increase language development as students work together to complete assignments and projects, and to build leadership and collaboration skills. Pairing or grouping should vary from small group to large group and from homogeneous to heterogeneous (in terms of language proficiency, content knowledge, and comprehension).

The majority of items within collaborative learning were evident in at least 73% of the classrooms observed (Figure 8). Observers most commonly reported that students were actively engaged (87%) and actively used language related to the lesson (83%), and the classroom structure provided opportunities for cooperation between students (83%). However, discussions with open-ended questions were not as readily evident (57% of observations). When examining the percentage of missing observations for this item, in 36% of all classrooms, observers indicated that such open-ended discussions may have occurred when they were not in the classroom. Consistent with this, classroom observations lasted on average 30 minutes (a small portion of daily classroom time). Moreover, comparing the current observation rates for items under collaborative learning with preliminary observations from 2016–2017, all items were implemented at a higher rate this year than in the prior year (Table 3). In fact, the two items with lowest observation rates (heterogeneity in ability levels is considered, 67%, and teacher poses a variety of open-ended questions, 57%) were evident in more than 30% more classrooms in 2017–2018 than in 2016–2017.

**Figure 8.  
Collaborative Learning**

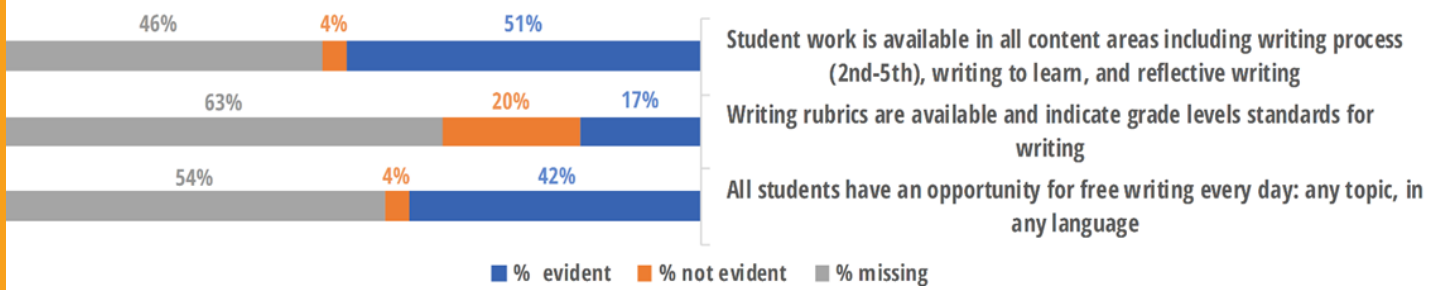


Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

## Daily Writing

This aspect of the DL program focuses on ensuring that students have varied daily writing opportunities that allow them to reflect on topics from all content areas and to practice writing. In addition, daily writing activities should help students learn to self-evaluate and give students the opportunity to receive direct teacher feedback. Observations indicated that students' written work in all content areas was evident in 51% of the classrooms (Figure 8). However, writing rubrics were only evident in 17% of the observed classrooms. In addition, evidence of daily opportunities for free writing was similarly infrequent (42% of the classrooms). However, some observers pointed out that writing rubrics may have been inside students' workbooks (in lower grades) or available electronically (in upper grades), and consequently may not have been easily observed. In addition, apart from examining a history of lesson plans or visiting classrooms several days in a row, it would have been difficult to verify that free writing (in any language or topic) occurred every day. It is interesting to note that when comparing the current observation rates for daily writing items with preliminary observations from 2016–2017, there was an increase in the percentage of times each of the items representing this element was evident in the classrooms observed (22%, 14%, and 24%, respectively, Table 3).

Figure 9.  
Daily Writing



Source. 2017 and 2018 AISD classroom observations

## Summary and Suggestions

Classroom observation data from a sample of classrooms in 2017–2018 indicated that AISD schools implemented several elements of the DL program with a high degree of fidelity, and that in comparison with classroom observations conducted in 2016–2017, schools had improved and strengthened their program implementation of all DL elements outlined in the observation guide. Yet, some items representing the DL key elements had low observations rates, indicating areas where improvement can be made to program implementation.

The following steps are suggested going forward:

- MET staff should continue providing support and professional development opportunities regarding DL implementation, with particular attention to certain program elements, such as teaching for transfer, daily writing, and assessments.
- MET staff should plan longer classroom observation sessions and possibly more frequent visits (spread throughout the year) to each classroom observed. In addition, observations should be strategically planned to coincide with the time when activities described in the guide would naturally take place.
- In addition to visiting classrooms, observers should examine lesson plans and students' journals, and should speak with teachers about items in the guide that were not easily observed (e.g., rubrics, opportunities to write every day in both languages, daily assessments).
- MET staff should continue reexamining the DL elements to accurately represent the evolution of DL implementation in AISD schools.

## Appendix

Table 1.  
Schools and Classrooms Observed, by Grade Level

Grade level	Classrooms observed
Pre-K	33
Kindergarten	41
1 <sup>st</sup>	38
2 <sup>nd</sup>	23
3 <sup>rd</sup>	11
4 <sup>th</sup>	12
5 <sup>th</sup>	9

Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

Table 2.  
Evidence Rate of Observation Guide Items for Whole Group and by Lower and Upper Elementary Grade Levels

Key element	Item	2017–2018 school year						
		<i>n</i>	% evident	% not evident	% missing	Pre-K	K - 2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> - 5 <sup>th</sup>
Language of instruction	Teacher consistently maintains language of instruction at all times	167	89%	5%	7%	91%	92%	75%
	Teacher uses a physical cue to identify the language of instruction	167	31%	30%	40%	47%	29%	19%
	Teacher uses strategies and scaffolds to make content comprehensible in the language of instruction	167	77%	2%	20%	91%	78%	63%
	Teacher uses materials and assessments that reflect content language allocation	167	89%	1%	10%	94%	90%	78%
	Two different colors are used to designate languages	167	70%	14%	16%	75%	75%	50%
Vocabulary/content enrichment	Interactive word walls/anchor charts	167	80%	14%	6%	63%	85%	78%
	Content bulletin boards	167	93%	2%	4%	84%	96%	94%
	Word banks	167	79%	11%	10%	53%	87%	84%
	Environmental labeling in complete sentences [student generated]	167	17%	46%	37%	19%	13%	16%
	Academic vocabulary is posted in language of instruction	167	92%	5%	3%	72%	96%	97%
Authentic student work	Visual representations used in conjunction with words	167	84%	10%	6%	88%	84%	81%
	Authentic student work is displayed	167	88%	6%	6%	91%	88%	88%
	Student work shows a variation of student group collaboration (partner/triads/groups)	167	47%	29%	23%	38%	43%	63%
Classroom/school libraries	Grade level rubrics are posted next to student work	167	13%	46%	41%	19%	12%	13%
	Materials are available in both languages of instruction	167	90%	8%	2%	91%	90%	88%
	Books/E-books are culturally and personally relevant	167	84%	5%	10%	78%	86%	84%
	An equitable number of books in both languages	167	82%	12%	6%	75%	85%	78%
	A wide range of book levels are available in both languages	167	86%	11%	4%	84%	86%	84%
All students have free reading every day: any book, in any language	167	78%	4%	18%	75%	82%	66%	



Table 2 (continued)

Key element	Item	2017–2018 school year						
		n	% evident	% not evident	% missing	Pre-K	K - 2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> - 5 <sup>th</sup>
Teaching for transfer	Teacher builds background knowledge and guides students to connect it to prior knowledge and experience	167	51%	7%	42%	63%	51%	47%
	Visual side by side analysis between languages (cognate charts, anchor posters)	167	35%	21%	44%	28%	34%	50%
	Teacher uses languages strategically to enhance learning (i.e. build oracy, sentence stems)	167	54%	8%	38%	63%	56%	53%
	Teacher uses gestures, body language, pictures, and objects to make content comprehensible	167	56%	7%	38%	72%	57%	47%
	Supports are differentiated for academic and linguistic needs	167	54%	10%	37%	59%	57%	47%
Lesson cycle	Learning objectives are evident	167	81%	6%	13%	63%	87%	78%
	Standard-based content objectives are evident	167	81%	2%	17%	69%	86%	75%
	Heterogeneous whole group instruction	167	83%	3%	14%	78%	85%	78%
	Guided practice (after gradual release; I do, we do, you do)	167	65%	3%	32%	53%	69%	56%
	Heterogeneous small group instruction	167	37%	6%	57%	38%	43%	22%
	Homogeneous small group instruction	167	37%	3%	60%	34%	44%	22%
	Sheltered instruction	167	56%	7%	37%	56%	60%	53%
	Differentiated instruction	167	53%	10%	37%	56%	55%	41%
	Culturally responsive lesson	167	55%	8%	37%	56%	57%	44%
	Language Arts instruction in both languages everyday	167	54%	11%	35%	50%	61%	34%
Assessment	Systematic assessments in both languages can be accessed	167	26%	5%	69%	22%	25%	34%
	Students can explain the learning objective	167	52%	4%	44%	44%	49%	69%
	Assessment is varied and allows for the use of supports such as word banks, visual aids, teacher verbal supports and extended wait time	167	44%	4%	52%	41%	41%	59%
	Student dialogue or written work provide evidence of students' proficiency of the learning objective	167	67%	4%	29%	63%	69%	75%
	Teacher checks for understanding are used throughout the lesson (formative assessments)	167	68%	2%	29%	66%	68%	72%
Collaborative learning	Classroom structure provides opportunity for cooperative pairs/groups (triads or groups of four)	167	83%	4%	13%	94%	80%	81%
	Heterogeneity in ability levels in both language and content knowledge is considered	167	67%	4%	29%	69%	68%	63%
	Students are actively engaged in activity/lesson	167	87%	2%	11%	97%	84%	81%
	Students actively use language related to the lesson	167	83%	4%	13%	81%	86%	81%
	Students communicate in whole groups or with peers in a way that is relevant to the lesson objective	167	73%	5%	22%	69%	76%	72%
Daily writing	Teacher poses a variety of open ended questions to elicit higher academic discourse and thinking	167	57%	7%	36%	53%	57%	63%
	Student work is available in all content areas including writing process (2 <sup>nd</sup> - 5 <sup>th</sup> ), writing to learn, and reflective writing	167	51%	4%	46%	38%	57%	53%
	Writing rubrics are available and indicate grade levels standards for writing	167	17%	20%	63%	6%	19%	25%
	All students have an opportunity for free writing every day: any topic, in any language	167	42%	4%	54%	50%	42%	38%

Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

Table 3.  
Observation Guide Items Evidence Rate for Current and Prior Year

Key element	Item	2017–2018 school year		2016–2017 school year	
		<i>n</i>	% evident	<i>n</i>	% evident
Language of instruction	Teacher consistently maintains Language of Instruction at all times	167	89%	37	62%
	Teacher uses a physical cue to identify the language of instruction	167	31%	–	–
	Teacher uses strategies and scaffolds to make content comprehensible in the LOI	167	77%	37	51%
	Teacher uses materials and assessments that reflect content language allocation	167	89%	–	–
	Two different colors are used to designate languages	167	70%	–	–
Vocabulary/ content enrichment	Interactive word walls/anchor charts	167	80%	37	73%
	Content bulletin boards	167	93%	37	87%
	Word banks	167	79%	–	–
	Environmental labeling in complete sentences [student generated]	167	17%	37	49%
	Academic vocabulary is posted in language of instruction (LOI)	167	92%	37	81%
Authentic student work	Visual representations used in conjunction with words	167	84%	–	–
	Authentic student work is displayed	167	88%	37	75%
	Student work shows a variation of student group collaboration (partner/triads/ groups)	167	47%	37	43%
Classroom/ school libraries	Grade level rubrics are posted next to student work	167	13%	–	–
	Materials are available in both languages of instruction	167	90%	37	97%
	Books/E-books are culturally and personally relevant	167	84%	37	79%
	An equitable number of books in both languages	167	82%	37	78%
	A wide range of book levels are available in both languages	167	86%	37	75%
Teaching for transfer	All students have free reading every day: any book, in any language	167	78%	–	–
	Teacher builds background knowledge and guides students to connect it to prior knowledge and experience	167	51%	37	14%
	Visual side by side analysis between languages (cognate charts, anchor posters)	167	35%	37	24%
	Teacher uses languages strategically to enhance learning (i.e. build oracy, sentence stems)	167	54%	37	14%
	Teacher uses gestures, body language, pictures, and objects to make content comprehensible	167	56%	37	30%
Lesson cycle	Supports are differentiated for academic and linguistic needs	167	54%	37	8%
	Learning objectives are evident	167	81%	37	46%
	Standard based content objectives are evident	167	81%	–	–
	Heterogeneous whole group instruction	167	83%	37	46%
	Guided practice (after gradual release; I do, we do, you do)	167	65%	37	32%
	Heterogeneous small group instruction	167	37%	–	–
	Homogeneous small group instruction	167	37%	–	–
	Sheltered instruction	167	56%	37	30%
	Differentiated instruction	167	53%	37	24%
	Culturally responsive lesson	167	55%	37	14%
Language Arts instruction in both languages everyday	167	54%	–	–	

Table 3 (continued)

Key element	Item	2017–2018 school year		2016–2017 school year	
		<i>n</i>	% evident	<i>n</i>	% evident
Assessment	Systematic assessments in both languages can be accessed	167	26%	–	–
	Students can explain the learning objective	167	52%	37	8%
	Assessment is varied and allows for the use of supports such as word banks, visual aids, teacher verbal supports and extended wait time	167	44%	–	–
	Student dialogue or written work provide evidence of students' proficiency of the learning objective	167	67%	–	–
	Teacher checks for understanding are used throughout the lesson (formative assessments)	167	68%	37	24%
Collaborative learning	Classroom structure provides opportunity for cooperative pairs/groups (triads or groups of four)	167	83%	37	51%
	Heterogeneity in ability levels in both language and content knowledge is considered	167	67%	37	30%
	Students are actively engaged in activity/lesson	167	87%	37	51%
	Students actively use language related to the lesson	167	83%	37	38%
	Students communicate in whole groups or with peers in a way that is relevant to the lesson objective	167	73%	37	43%
Daily writing	Teacher poses a variety of open ended questions to elicit higher academic discourse and thinking	167	57%	37	22%
	Student work is available in all content areas including writing process (2 <sup>nd</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> ), writing to learn, and reflective writing	167	51%	37	22%
	Writing rubrics are available and indicate grade levels standards for writing	167	17%	37	14%
	All students have an opportunity for free writing every day: any topic, in any language	167	42%	37	24%

Source. 2018 AISD classroom observations

## AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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April 2018

Publication 17.18