Special Report:
Supporting Dual Language Learners in State-Funded Preschool

The 2016-2017 State of Preschool survey included supplemental questions intended to shed light on state policies to support dual language learners (DLLs) in state-funded preschool. This is the second time a dual language supplement has been collected; the first was in 2014-2015. While many questions included in this second survey were asked two years ago, others were added, revised, or deleted to provide a clearer portrait of state preschool program policies that specifically relate to DLLs.

Nationwide, young DLLs comprise about 23% of the preschool-aged population. Dual language learners live in every state. Yet our data show that most state preschool programs do not collect data on children's home language, which makes it difficult to implement policies to support effective classroom practices for DLLs. Most state preschool programs do have at least some policies in place to support DLLs, but these policies vary widely across state programs in both quality and quantity. With non-English speaking families making up a disproportionate share of low-income households, participation in preschool that meets their specific learning needs is critical to prepare DLLs to thrive in kindergarten.

ENROLLMENT OF DLLs IN STATE-FUNDED PRESCHOOL

Research has found that young DLLs particularly benefit from participation in high-quality preschool programs, making access an important issue. Information on participation by children's home language—knowing how many DLLs are in the general population and how many are enrolled in the state preschool program—is a starting place for understanding and increasing access. Unfortunately, only 26 state-funded preschool programs in 24 states and Guam, as shown in DLL Table 1, collect data on child home language. In those states, on average, 29% of children in state preschool were DLLs; whereas nationwide, about 23% of the preschool-aged population are DLLs. DLL Figure 1 color codes states by the percentage of state preschool enrollment reported to be DLL.

When state preschool enrollment is restricted by income and other risk factors, DLL children would be expected to represent a higher percentage of preschool enrollment as they are disproportionately represented in low-income populations. Eleven of the programs that report enrollment of DLLs determine preschool eligibility by age only. In seven of these states, DLL enrollment in preschool is relatively consistent with, or surpasses, the proportion of DLLs in the state population. That, at least, is reassuring. Across all 60 state preschool programs nationwide, 32 target low-income populations. Nineteen state preschool programs use non-English home language as an eligibility criterion, including five programs that also reported information on children's home language. In four of these five programs, the percentages of DLLs in state preschool exceeds the percentage of DLLs in the state population.

Six states with a high proportion of DLLs in their populations also have high DLL enrollment in state preschool: California, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Texas. However, several states with high populations of DLLs—including Arizona, Florida and New York—cannot report the home language of children enrolled in their state-funded preschool programs.

Five states report a substantially lower DLL enrollment in state preschool than expected given the proportion of DLLs in their general populations: Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma.

On the flip side, three states with a low proportion of DLLs in the population report a relatively high enrollment of DLLs in preschool: Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington.
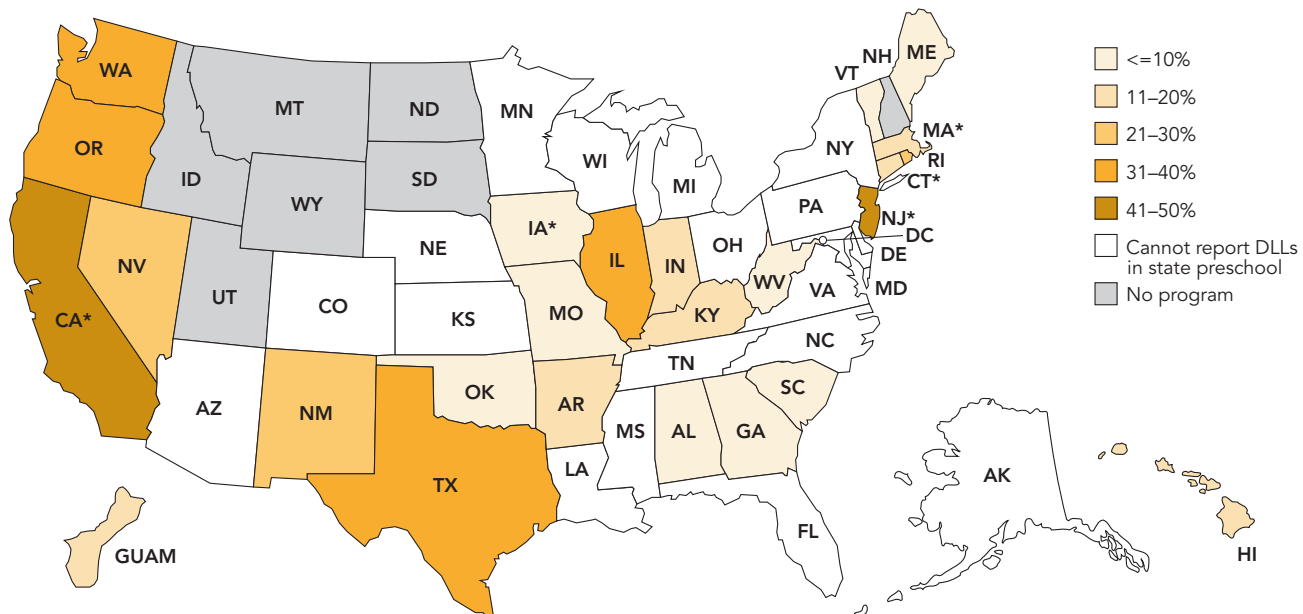
POLICIES TO SUPPORT DLLS IN STATE PRESCHOOL

Thirty-five state preschool programs have specific policies to support DLLs. As can be seen in DLL Table 2, these policies vary widely across the states. All 35 programs permit bilingual instruction. However, only four states expect programs to group DLLs together in classrooms which can provide an opportunity for targeting specialized supports and reduce children's sense of isolation. This practice can also lead to language segregation if not combined with guidance on ensuring mixed home languages in the classroom. States that stand out for having at least seven of the nine DLL policies we highlight in DLL Table 2 include Kansas, Maine, Minnesota Head Start, Nevada, and Texas. Of these states, only Nevada and Texas have a high population of DLLs. However, other high DLL population states, have important policies in place. The California TK program, for example, requires written program plans for serving DLLs, provides extra funding for serving DLLs, monitors quality of DLL supports, and mandates specialized training for teachers working with DLLs.

DLL TABLE 1: ENROLLMENT OF DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN STATE PRESCHOOL

STATE	Number of DLLs in state preschool	Percent of state preschool enrollment that are DLLs	Percent of DLLs in the state	Home language other than English used as eligibility criteria for state preschool
Alabama	713	5%	8%	No
Arkansas	2,301	11%	9%	Yes
California*	62,928	47%	44%	No
Connecticut*	81	17%	20%	No
Georgia	7,245	9%	17%	No
Hawaii	40	11%	22%	Yes
Illinois	22,559	31%	25%	Yes
Indiana	264	15%	11%	No
Iowa*	840	3%	12%	No
Kentucky	2,178	11%	7%	No
Maine	224	4%	4%	No
Massachusetts*	702	15%	25%	No
Missouri	151	6%	7%	No
Nevada	554	30%	31%	No
New Jersey*	19,956	44%	30%	No
New Mexico	2,565	25%	28%	No
Oklahoma	3,209	8%	14%	No
Oregon	2,885	31%	23%	No
Rhode Island	245	24%	17%	No
South Carolina	2,260	9%	9%	No
Texas	88,567	40%	35%	Yes
Vermont	179	2%	6%	No
Washington	3,996	34%	23%	Yes
West Virginia	204	1%	3%	No
TOTAL	224,846	29%	23%	5
Guam	10	14%	41%	No

* Data on enrollment of DLLs in state preschool was only available for one state-funded preschool program in these states.

DLL FIGURE 1: PERCENT OF STATE PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT THAT ARE DLLs

* Data on enrollment of DLLs in state preschool was only available for one state-funded preschool program in these states.

DLL TABLE 2: POLICY REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO SERVING PRESCHOOL DLLs

STATE/PROGRAM	Approved written plan for supporting DLLs is required	Extra funding allocated for serving DLLs	Bilingual instruction is permitted	Monitoring focused on the quality of bilingual instruction	Children are screened in their home language	Children are assessed in their home language	DLLs are placed in classes with other children with same home language	Policies to support families of preschool DLLs	Staff have training/qualifications related to working with DLLs	Total policy supports for preschool DLLs
Alabama*	✔		✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		6
Alaska										None
Arizona										None
Arkansas*										None
California SPP*			✔		✔	✔		✔		4
California TK	✔	✔	✔	✔				✔	✔	6
Colorado			✔					✔		2
Connecticut CDCC										None
Connecticut SR										None
Connecticut Smart Start*										None
Delaware			✔	✔	✔	✔		✔		5
District of Columbia		✔	✔		✔	✔		✔		5
Florida										None
Georgia*			✔					✔		2
Hawaii*			✔					✔		2
Illinois*			✔	✔		✔			✔	4
Indiana*										None
Iowa Shared Visions	✔		✔		✔	✔		✔		5
Iowa SWVPP*	✔		✔		✔	✔		✔		5
Kansas Preschool	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔		7
Kansas State Pre-K	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		8
Kentucky*										None
Louisiana 8(g)										None
Louisiana LA 4										None
Louisiana NSECD										None
Maine*	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	9
Maryland										None
Massachusetts IPLE*										None
Massachusetts UPK			✔					✔		2
Michigan			✔							1
Minnesota HdSt	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	7
Minnesota VPK		✔	✔					✔	✔	4
Mississippi										None
Missouri*										None
Nebraska			✔					✔		2
Nevada*		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		7
New Jersey Abbott*	✔		✔	✔	✔			✔		5
New Jersey ECPA	✔		✔	✔	✔			✔		5
New Jersey ELLI	✔		✔	✔	✔			✔		5
New Mexico*			✔		✔	✔		✔		4
New York	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		✔		6
North Carolina	✔		✔		✔			✔		4
Ohio										None
Oklahoma*		✔	✔					✔	✔	4
Oregon HdSt*			✔		✔	✔		✔		4
Oregon Preschool Promise*										None
Pennsylvania RTL										None
Pennsylvania HSSAP										None
Pennsylvania K4 & SBPK										None
Pennsylvania PKC			✔					✔		2
Rhode Island*	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔		✔		6
South Carolina*	✔		✔		✔	✔		✔		5
Tennessee			✔					✔		2
Texas*	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	8
Vermont*										None
Virginia										None
Washington*			✔					✔		2
West Virginia*	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔		✔		6
Wisconsin 4K										None
Wisconsin HdSt										None
TOTAL	17	11	35	14	21	19	4	33	7	
Guam										None

* State preschool programs reported enrollment by home language or DLL status.

POLICIES TO SUPPORT FAMILIES OF PRESCHOOL DLLs

Family engagement in their young child's learning and education has long been an expectation for effective preschool. Family engagement can be particularly challenging when family members do not speak English. DLL Table 3 reports on state policies to support families of DLLs for the 33 state preschool programs with at least one such policy. Thirteen state preschool programs require all three of the family support policies included in our survey: use of home language in recruitment, use of home language in program communications, and systematic collection and use of information on home language: Alabama, California (SPP & TK), District of Columbia, Iowa (Shared Visions and SWVPP), Kansas Preschool, Maine, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Texas, and West Virginia.

Two states with lower than expected DLL preschool enrollment considering their DLL population (Hawaii and Oklahoma) do not require that programs translate recruitment information into the home languages of those eligible. Twenty-six programs require recruitment information to be provided in families' home languages. Twenty state programs require communications about a child to be shared in the family's home language, and 23 have policies to collect and use information gathered about the language inputs in the home (e.g. a home language survey).

DLL TABLE 3: POLICIES TO SUPPORT FAMILIES OF PRESCHOOL DLLs

STATE/PROGRAM	Recruitment, enrollment, and outreach information provided in home language	Communication with the family about the program or child in the family's home language	Collect and use information on language inputs in the home (e.g., a home language survey)	Other policies to support families of DLLs
Alabama	✔	✔	✔	
California SPP	✔	✔	✔	
California TK	✔	✔	✔	
Colorado	✔	✔		
Delaware	✔	✔		
District of Columbia	✔	✔	✔	
Georgia	✔			
Hawaii			✔	
Iowa Shared Visions	✔	✔	✔	
Iowa SWVPP	✔	✔	✔	
Kansas Preschool	✔	✔	✔	
Kansas State Pre-K	✔	✔		
Maine	✔	✔	✔	
Massachusetts UPK	✔	✔		
Minnesota HdSt	✔	✔		
Minnesota VPK	✔			
Nebraska			✔	
Nevada	✔	✔	✔	
New Jersey Abbott	✔		✔	
New Jersey ECPA	✔		✔	
New Jersey ELLI	✔		✔	
New Mexico	✔	✔	✔	
New York	✔	✔	✔	✔
North Carolina	✔			✔
Oklahoma			✔	
Oregon HdSt			✔	
Pennsylvania PKC	✔	✔		
Rhode Island			✔	
South Carolina			✔	
Tennessee	✔	✔		
Texas	✔	✔	✔	
Washington			✔	
West Virginia	✔	✔	✔	
TOTAL	26	20	23	2

QUALIFICATIONS OF STAFF WORKING WITH PRESCHOOL DLLs

Qualified teachers are key to providing the high-quality early learning experiences that help prepare young children for kindergarten. Preschool effectiveness for DLLs will be higher when teaching staff have specific knowledge and skills to support the unique learning and development needs of DLLs. Only nine state preschool programs have even one policy relating to staff qualifications for teachers of DLLs. Six programs can report whether teachers are fluent in a language other than English, but none of these have specialized staffing requirements relating to DLLs. Delaware, Illinois and Oregon's supplemental Head Start program require bilingual staff in the classroom if a specified percentage of the children speak the same non-English home language. Six state programs require lead teachers to have specific training to work with DLLs, and three of these require lead teachers to have a bilingual certification or license (California TK, Illinois, and Texas). No states require specific training for teacher assistants—even though the assistant teacher more often speaks the home language of DLL children. Maine does not require DLL training for teaching staff, but does require it for program administrators.

DLL TABLE 4: POLICIES RELATED TO PRESCHOOL STAFF QUALIFICATIONS FOR WORKING WITH DLLs

STATE/PROGRAM	Bilingual staff are required if a specified % of children speak the same non-English language	Specific training or qualifications related to working with DLLs			Lead teachers required to have a bilingual certification/ license/ endorsement	Percent fluent in a language other than English	
		Lead teachers	Assistant teachers	Program administrators		Lead teachers	Assistant teachers
Arkansas						3.2%	5.5%
California TK		✔			✔	Not Reported	
Delaware	✔					Not Reported	
Illinois	✔	✔			✔	Not Reported	
Maine				✔		Not Reported	
Minnesota HdSt		✔				Not Reported	
Minnesota VPK		✔				Not Reported	
Mississippi						0%	0%
New Jersey Abbott						23%	38%
Oklahoma		✔				Not Reported	
Oregon HdSt	✔					Not Reported	
Rhode Island						2%	20%
Texas		✔			✔	Not Reported	
Washington						11%	34%
TOTAL	3	6	0	1	3		
Guam						50%	25%