Illinois K-2 Workgroup Indicator Discussion Guide
Dual Language Learners (DLLs)

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Indicator Summary

An increasing proportion of Illinois students are English learners, and most of those students are concentrated in the early grades. 11 percent of K-12 students in Illinois and 18 percent of students in Chicago Public Schools are English learners,[1] and over 26 percent of three- and four-year olds in the state speak a language other than English at home.[2] For students under age eight who are simultaneously learning English and another home language, the term dual language learner (DLL) more accurately reflects young English learners' unique language and literacy needs.[3] DLLs are a diverse group of students from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and bilingualism and biliteracy are increasingly recognized as cognitive and social assets for children.[4] Supporting DLLs early is critical to their later academic performance, and research shows that DLLs who are effectively supported in both their home language and English can thrive in school.[5] Because K-2 grades are a pivotal time for DLL learning, it could make sense to emphasize equity and excellence for this student group via Illinois' K-2 quality indicator.

Some aspects of Illinois' state plan and state policies already support DLL students. Illinois includes children in K-2 grades in the current ESSA measure of English language proficiency growth. ACCESS, Illinois' English proficiency assessment, is administered to DLL children starting in kindergarten or first grade (kindergarten is optional). The state creates a growth trajectory for each child to achieve full English proficiency within five years based on their baseline English language proficiency.[6] Schools' ratings are based on English learners meeting or exceeding that growth trajectory. Five years is the maximum timeline to English proficiency allowed by ESSA, and it aligns with developmental best practice for DLLs. Illinois also tracks both current and former DLLs, which allows schools to show continued growth among students who have mastered English language proficiency. Illinois is among a minority of states tracking DLLs and their home languages in state pre-K programs, and is one of just eight states where training on DLL instruction is required for pre-K teachers (though this mandate has been delayed due to shortages of qualified teachers).[7]

While DLL performance is already measured in school quality ratings, there are other relevant measures to consider. This could include disaggregating other established indicators to reveal any gaps and ensure DLLs have equitable access to learning opportunities. For example, family engagement is particularly important for DLL's academic performance because parents play a key role in educating children in their home language.[8] Or, because ESSA requires states to report and disaggregate pre-K access data, schools may discover particular needs and barriers to high-quality pre-K within immigrant communities.[9] Schools could get even better information from looking at their data by students' home language, not just student DLL status.

Most DLLs in American schools learn in monolingual, English-only classrooms, but this is likely not the best environment for ideal language and literacy development.[10] DLLs benefit from

consistent instruction and exposure to both their home language and English; however, the research is not conclusive enough to say how much support and what kinds of support for each language are most effective for specific kinds of DLL students.[11] There are some promising studies indicating that dual immersion instructional models, where students are taught simultaneously in both their home language and English, are beneficial for both DLLs and non-DLLs.[12]

The same strategies which have been shown to best serve DLLs are also beneficial to all young children, such as vocabulary-building activities, a high-quality and well-rounded curriculum, and differentiated and data-driven instruction.[13] Even if teachers do not speak a child's home language, they can create learning environments that are culturally and linguistically responsive by stocking classrooms with multilingual materials, supporting and encouraging home language and literacy development, assessing students in their home language, and connecting with family and community resources to understand and embrace each child's cultural and linguistic background.[14]

Measurement Options and ESSA Alignment

Illinois already measures young students' English language proficiency growth directly. Other measures could give schools a roadmap to improve DLL students' access to learning opportunities, and close opportunity and achievement gaps.

DLL Access to High-quality Learning Opportunities: A school could get credit or a higher rating for offering dual immersion instructional models or certifying that they offer a set of high-quality learning supports and equitable opportunities for DLLs. But, to define and verify the quality of those learning opportunities, more in-depth research, observation, and reviews would be needed.

Valid and Reliable: Maybe
    - Illinois would either ask schools to self-certify that they used or offered some combination of research-driven DLL instruction strategies, which may not be reliable, or invest in deeper onsite quality reviews for some or all schools. The state would also need to demonstrate that access measures were appropriate for students in many different classroom contexts and from many different linguistic backgrounds. The research base on specific DLL instructional models is still growing, and may not be strong enough to support firm conclusions in all cases.
- **Meaningfully Differentiated:** Maybe
    - Many schools in Illinois might not have enough DLL students in early grades to meet group size requirements to report this indicator. Among schools who do have substantial numbers of DLL students per grade, many may offer similar resources and programs, throwing differentiation into doubt.
- **Comparable:** Maybe
    - Illinois would need to define access to resources and supports carefully to ensure comparability, especially if schools self-report their offerings. Schools may claim to offer a dual immersion program, but their program might not fit the typical definition of dual immersion or meet best practice standards.
- **Reportable Annually and By Subgroup:** Yes

  - Access to resources could theoretically be reported annually and by subgroup within DLL students (e.g. DLL and Special Education, DLL and male), but group sizes in the vast majority of schools would likely be too small to support reliable data for more subgroups.
- **Additional Considerations:** Developing, defining, and validating an indicator of DLL instructional strategies and supports that would be developmentally appropriate for young children, and collecting these new data from schools, would take considerable work and resources. Quality of instruction could matter just as much for DLL success, if not more, than access to certain resources or program models, and an overly prescriptive definition of DLL learning opportunities could unintentionally restrict schools from doing what is best for their population of students.

Cross Cutting Measures: In any other K-2 quality measure, Illinois could give extra weight or consideration to DLL performance, especially if there is evidence that DLLs are uniquely impacted by that indicator. For example, research indicates school culture and family engagement is particularly relevant for DLL students' learning and development, so Illinois could emphasize DLLs within a family engagement metric.[15] Emphasizing DLL pre-K access in accountability is another possibility supported by research that points to the benefits of high-quality early learning for DLLs.[16]

- **Valid and Reliable:** Yes
  - If there is a strong research base for the unique impact of an indicator for DLLs, and if it otherwise meets ESSA standards, giving extra DLL weight to that indicator would also meet validity and reliability standards.
- **Meaningfully Differentiated:** Maybe
  - Illinois should investigate whether the indicator in question is differentiated for DLL students within and between schools.
- **Comparable**: Yes
  - If an indicator is comparable otherwise, DLL results would be too.
- **Reportable Annually and by Subgroup**: Yes
  - If results are reportable otherwise, DLL results would be too, and combined subgroup results should not be necessary if those subgroups are otherwise reported.
- **Additional Considerations:** This would introduce an extra layer of complexity to an already complex quality rating, and it may be less effective at communicating to schools where their priorities should lie around educating DLL students.

Examples From Other States

All states must incorporate measures of English proficiency in their academic achievement indicator under ESSA, but few states thus far have included DLL and/or K-2 metrics in their school quality indicators. Among states that have emphasized DLLs in their ESSA plans, there are some standouts:

- **English Language Proficiency Growth and Data:** Illinois received praise for their ACCESS growth model and for tracking former DLLs, New Jersey allotted 20 percent of school scores to English Learning performance, and Louisiana found a way to ensure small subgroups of DLL students would still count toward schools' ratings.[17]

- **Teaching Biliteracy and Bilingualism:** Indiana, Louisiana, Hawaii, and North Carolina mention the benefits of dual language immersion in their plans and allocate funds for bilingual teacher training.[18]
- **Pre-K Access for DLLs:** Nevada plans to allocate extra funds for full-day pre-K and kindergarten in schools with high DLL populations.[19]

Pros/Cons of Using This Indicator in K-2 Accountability Ratings

Pros	Cons
• Emphasizes a growing population of students specifically funded and required by ESSA. • Could encourage the adoption of promising interventions and instructional strategies beneficial to both DLLs and non-DLLs. • Cross-cutting measures very likely to meet ESSA standards. • Encourages biliteracy and bilingualism, which are assets to students in their long-term learning.	• DLL language learning outcomes already included the IL academic indicator – additional emphasis could introduce unnecessary complexity. • Resource/opportunity measures require further research and definition, and overly prescriptive requirements could prevent schools from doing what works best for their unique DLL populations. • Emphasizes DLLs over other subgroups. • Resource-driven measures could penalize districts with very small DLL populations, or fewer resources overall.

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