



RESEARCH BRIEF (10-minute read)

Key Recommendations on Dual Language Learners/English Learners (DLLs/ELs) with Disabilities from the National Academy of Sciences

SELECTED KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Academy of Sciences convened a committee in 2017 to recommend the following regarding DLL/ELs with disabilities:

- *Early identification practices could be improved.* DLLs/ELs are less likely to be referred to early intervention or early special education programs than their non-DLL/EL peers with serious consequences for students.
- *Learning two languages does not place DLLs/ELs at greater risk for having a language impairment or other disability.* Furthermore, if a student has a disability, learning two languages does not compromise their language or cognitive development.
- *Dual-language interventions for language impairment demonstrate equal or faster growth of English skills compared to English-only interventions.* Dual-language interventions also allow for development of home language.

What is the National Academy of Sciences?

The National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine is a non-profit organization that convenes renowned experts to provide objective, evidence-based recommendations to inform and guide policies on a variety of topics. Their consensus reports and recommendations are traditionally peer-reviewed and often provide a “state of the field” overview for policymakers, researchers, and other relevant stakeholders.

In 2017, their *Committee on Fostering School Success for English Learners: Toward New Directions in Policy, Practice, and Research*¹ convened to examine existing research on DLL/ELs from birth to age 21 with the goal of informing policies to improve educational outcomes for students. The Committee included many prominent DLL/EL experts in the field, such as those within our own Stanford University network: Dr. Alfredo Artiles and Dr. Kenji Hakuta (Emeritus).

How are the recommendations relevant to the Stanford-Sequoia Collaborative?

The Committee's report includes highly relevant recommendations on a variety of topics related to DLL/ELs. Our research brief focuses on summarizing key recommendations from one chapter of the report (Ch.10) on a topic of continued interest among local members of the Stanford-Sequoia Collaborative: dually-identified DLLs/ELs. If you'd like to read the full report, you can access it [online](#).

Selected Recommendation 1. DLLs/ELs are less likely to be referred to early intervention or early special education than their non-DLL/ELL peers.

- Patterns of under- and overrepresentation of DLLs/ELs in special education vary by disability category, grade level, length of residence in the country, and language proficiency of students. Accordingly, there is observed heterogeneity in identification across states and districts and

more research is needed to explore these patterns. However, an overarching emerging pattern is that DLLs/ELs are less likely to be referred to *early* intervention or *early* special education than non-DLLs/ELs. Identifying DLLs/ELs for special education at later grades affects their development, and better methods for identifying DLLs/ELs for special education early are needed. More detailed information on these findings is available on p.369 of the full report.

Selected Recommendation 2. Learning two languages does not place DLLs/ELs at greater risk for having a language impairment or other disability.

- A review of more than 60 studies over the course of 30 years shows that DLLs/ELs with language impairments can become bilingual.² Furthermore, students with disabilities do not face negative consequences from learning two or more languages.^{3,4} More detailed information on these findings based on disability type is available on p.360 of the full report.

Selected Recommendation 3. Dual-language interventions for language impairment demonstrate equal or faster growth of English skills compared to English-only interventions.

- In general, studies suggest that DLLs/ELs with disabilities take longer to reclassify than DLLs/ELs without disabilities. These estimates for reclassification of DLLs/ELs with disabilities range from 5.5 years to 9.2 years based on instructional model, pedagogy, and student characteristics—dual language interventions show equal or faster growth of English skills. More detailed information is available on p.367 and p.382 of the full report.

Request for Reflection

Nationwide, students who have been identified as DLL/ELs with disabilities have been understudied. Numerous factors make it difficult to differentiate between second language acquisition and disabilities, and more research is needed to better understand and serve this student population. What additional research can be conducted locally within the Stanford-Sequoia Collaborative to further explore and integrate these recommendations?

Our Collaborative Commitment. *Research and policy briefs prepared by members of the Collaborative aim to make academic research and policy knowledge more accessible by providing district partners, researchers, and community stakeholders in the Stanford-Sequoia K-12 Research Collaborative with information about relevant topics related to the needs and interests of our community. Our goal in disseminating research and policy briefs is to improve communication between stakeholders and to advance our collective understanding of policies, research, and community interests. Have feedback on how to improve? Please share with us by filling out this [survey](#).*

Notes:

¹ National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine. (2017). *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24677>.

² Kohnert, K., and Medina, A. (2009). Bilingual children and communication disorders: A 30-year research retrospective. *Seminars in Speech and Language, 30*(4), 219-233.

³ Chen, D., and Gutiérrez-Clellen, V. (2013). Paper 6. Early intervention and young dual language learners with special needs. In Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care (Eds.), *California's Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners: Research Overview Papers* (pp. 209-230). Sacramento: California Department of Education.

⁴ Kay-Raining Bird, E., Genesee, F., and Verhoeven, L. (2016). Bilingualism in children with developmental disorders: A narrative review. *Journal of Communication Disorders, 63*, 1-14.