

Research Brief

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Examining Language Program Models in SFUSD Based on Recommendations from the National Academies of Education 2017 Report

Overview: This memo explains an analysis of San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)’s expected components or principles intended to guide their language program models. This analysis compares SFUSD language program principles against recommendations and findings from the 2017 National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine report (referred henceforth as “the NAS report”) titled, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*.¹ Where appropriate, other literature in addition to the NAS Report supplements the analysis in an attempt to “test” whether the components have merit from a research base other than the NAS report.²

Comparison: To analyze the SFUSD Language Programs Components, we searched the NAS Report to see how these components are more or less discussed in the report. In Table 1, in the first column, we list each component in the SFUSD Language Program, and in the second column, we list the related evidence from the NAS Report. If the evidence from the NAS Report is lacking substance, we explore other research literature on the topic to see if we can find other supporting evidence.

March 2024

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 The National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine convenes researchers and other leaders to build reports, conduct research and design workshops that are meant to provide independent, objective advice that informs policy using research evidence. In this case, we relied on this NAS report because it convened a group of experts who reviewed the literature on multilingual learner education and learning and summarized the key findings in a report.

Table 1: Components sitting across three SFUSD language components and associated evidence from the NAS (2017) Report and other sources of research evidence

Language Program Components	Related Evidence from the 2017 National Academies Report
<p>Component #1: Provide instruction in both, English and the target language, everyday</p>	<p>Findings discussed in the report suggest that it will be important to have daily instruction in English as well as the target language, which supports this component.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #1 “Dedicated time for instruction focused on oral proficiency” is one of four practices the NAS report recommends to develop oral language proficiency (NAS Report, p. 267). - Finding #2 The NAS report cites several studies suggesting that “a daily block of time focused on the development of oral English language proficiency can be beneficial.” (NAS Report, p. 270).
<p>Component #2: Make efforts to level the use of language to create a balance of language status</p>	<p>This topic of “balancing the language status” is discussed in the NAS report in less detail. It does describe the topic in two ways which seems to suggest language status is important to attend to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #1 - The report cites one study where they refer to language status as a contextual factor influencing families' beliefs when identifying students for receiving special education services. Some families’ perspectives on students’ development of their first language instruction (L1) were influenced by the higher or lower status their first language received within their schooling context, which influences how they engaged in the disability identification process (NAS Report, p. 139). <p>Given the lack of discussion of “balancing language status” in the NAS report, we reviewed another more recent study to explore the topic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #2: Palmer et al. (2019) suggest that “two-way dual language bilingual education programs” will require a focus on “critical consciousness” during instruction to promote equity within the socially, culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse classrooms. From this study, one might extrapolate that balancing language status may be enacted by teachers’ development of a critical consciousness in their classroom with practices such as interrogating power, critical listening, historicizing schools, and embracing discomfort <p>One note - it may be helpful for district and school leaders to explore more research and practice documentation for how to effectively “level the use of language to create balance.” It is not clear from the Palmer et al article how to realize “critical consciousness” using specific practices that may be age and developmentally appropriate.</p>
<p>Component #3: Allocate</p>	<p>The NAS report describes that research has only begun to study the</p>

<p>instructional time for <i>cross-linguistic transfer</i> in addition to ELD time as it goes both ways between languages, and students develop different metalinguistic skills</p>	<p>relationship between classroom configurations and student outcomes. The report describes the debate of keeping language instruction separate or allowing students to “mix languages in the classroom.” The report calls for more research to study the effects of these two approaches. (p. 262). The report does call out these two findings which are in support of this component:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #1: “There is no evidence that cross-linguistic influences are pervasive (i.e., broad in scope) or long-lasting, except possibly in the case of children who acquire an L2 after their L1)” (NAS Report, p. 139). - Finding #2: “Indeed, cross-linguistic interactions are now viewed largely as facilitative or as evidence of linguistic competence or resourcefulness (NAS Report, p. 244). <p>One other note - we recommend that SFUSD leaders examine research on the concept of “translanguaging” to help the schools understand practices that will help them achieve this component in practice. We cite a couple of articles here that could be helpful (e.g., Palmer et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2018).</p>
<p>Component #4a: Comply with 50% in target language/50% in English; programs and have a clear content and language allocation plan with resources for each content area</p> <p>Component #4b: Comply with 80% in target language/20% in English; programs and have a clear content and language allocation plan with resources for each content area</p>	<p>The NAS report describes how the division of language instruction and content during the school day is not explored thoroughly by the research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #1: In Dual Language Immersion Programs, “[t]here is almost no research related to promising and effective methods for developing both ELs’ L1 knowledge and skills and the partner language knowledge and skills of English-proficient students (e.g., Spanish or Chinese) in these programs, or to methods for equalizing status among the students” (NAS Report, p. 300). - Finding #2: There needs to be more research describing the features that “influence the successful acquisition of language and content” in a Dual Language Immersion Program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - student ratios of English speakers to partner language speakers in two-way programs - the number of instructional hours allotted to each language - the proportion of school staff and leadership that is bilingual - the use of target languages within and across content areas (Boyle et al., 2015) (NAS Report, p. 300). <p>Given the lack of discussion of “division of language instruction” in the NAS report, we reviewed three other studies to explore the topic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #3: Lindholm-Leary (2007) describes how at least 50 percent of instruction throughout elementary school needs to be delivered in the partner language in order to promote bilingualism and biliteracy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #4: Bialystok (2012) describes how the development of literacy skills and what the author calls “meta-linguistic” skills in bilingual educational settings are related, especially in young children, given the reality of cross-linguistic transfer. - Finding #5: Padilla et al. (2013) and Padilla et al. (2022) demonstrate the long term positive effects of bilingual schooling programs, and the programs studied could be reviewed to support decisions about “division of instruction.” <p>However, we caution that these components lack a robust research base and provide some recommendations given the lack of evidence.</p>
Component #5: Engage parents and community organizations in a series of events throughout the school year	<p>The NAS report describes research findings supporting family engagement is positively associated with multilingual learner outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #1: “Engagement of families, including both English-speaking families and families of ELs, is associated with positive student outcomes, such as higher grades and test scores, higher language proficiency, better social skills, increased high school graduation rates, and enrollment in postsecondary education (NAS report, p. 277) - Finding #2: Immigrant parents in particular place a high value on the education of their children and on learning English themselves to provide better economic resources for their families (NAS report, p. 277). <p>The NAS report says less about engagement with community organizations.</p>
Component #6: Hire teachers with bilingual authorization	<p>One of the key recommendations from the NAS report relates to the component of hiring teachers with bilingual authorization, and consequently is backed up by a robust body of research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding #1 - Key recommendation: “Education agencies at all levels should support efforts to recruit, select, prepare, and retain teachers, care and education practitioners, and education leaders qualified to serve DLLs/ELs. Consistent with requirements for pre-K to 12, program directors and lead teachers in early learning programs should hold a B.A. degree with certification to teach dual language learners.” (p. 14). - Finding #2: Teachers need to be linguistically, culturally, and pedagogically prepared to meet the academic and sociocultural needs of ELs (NAS Report, p. 276) <p>Although not mentioned in the NAS report, we would also suggest that it may not only be about hiring teachers with the bilingual authorization, but also providing teachers with professional development to maintain and improve their skills as language and content teachers.</p>

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Overall findings from this comparison are three fold. First, there is ample research evidence in the NAS report for three of the six language program components:

- #1: Provide instruction in both English and the target language, everyday
- #5: Engage parents and community organizations in a series of events throughout the school year
- #6 Hire teachers with bilingual authorization

There is some research evidence in the NAS report for two of the six language program components, and other more recent research exploring these topics backs up the components' importance.

- #2: Make efforts to level the use of language to create a balance of language status
- #3: Allocate instructional time for *cross-linguistic transfer* in addition to ELD time as it goes both ways between languages, so that students develop different metalinguistic and metacognitive skills

However, there is one component not investigated thoroughly and for which, in fact, the report makes a call for more research.

- #4a: Comply with 50% in target language/50% in English - programs and have a clear content and language allocation plan with resources for each content area
- #4b: Comply with 80% in target language/20% in English - programs and have a clear content and language allocation plan with resources for each content area

Given the lack of research reported in the NAS report on the component #4a and #4b, and our lack of research evidence collected in our literature searchers, we recommend SFUSD explore these components further by:

- Clarifying the uses of the languages (e.g., for instruction, regular social interaction, giving directions, etc.) during these different proportions of the day. For example, as the component is written now, a possible wrong interpretation is Spanish could be used 50% of the time, but in “non-academic” ways—which may be in opposition to the goal of ensuring equal status.
- Describing a process that explains what it looks like for teachers and principals to help their schools “comply” with the language allocation plan guidelines.
- Documenting the implementation of the proportionality in languages in a few case studies to better understand the challenges or barriers to maintain these proportions.
- Examining more research on cross-linguistic transfer by Ellen Biaylstok, among others, to see if this provides more insights into the division of language instruction.
- Developing an approach to helping schools evaluate the implementation. How will teachers and school leaders be able to evaluate the implementation of their allocation plan? What exactly does it mean to comply with the division of language instruction?

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