

ENGLISH LEARNERS

Dual Language and English Language Development: Minutes, Models, and Outcomes

Partner Beaverton School District

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Beaverton School District (located just outside Portland) has Oregon’s third largest population of multilingual students, including English learners, who bring valuable cultural, linguistic, and individual strengths, assets, and diversity to the classroom. The federal government requires all schools to provide English learner students with access to rigorous grade-level content and quality English language instruction. However there are different models to do so. The Beaverton multilingual department wanted to be sure they were offering students evidence-based language and content learning.

Since 2015, Beaverton School District has partnered with Education Northwest to support programs for multilingual learners through research and technical assistance. Some of the outcomes of this partnership include two research studies, one (2019) compares the outcomes of the different English language development models, and one (2024) examines the outcomes of dual language over time.

Comparing instructional models

In 2019 Beaverton had at least four different English language development models. These included “pull-out,” which involves moving English learner students out of their usual classroom for English language instruction; co-teaching, in which a language development teacher joins the classroom (or the classroom teacher is endorsed in both content and language instruction); English language development class period in middle and high schools, where English is taught as content, and dual language—a model in which all students in the class learn together in both English and a partner language. But which model was most effective and for how many minutes of the day? The district partnered with Education Northwest to find out.

Researchers identified two steps to answering this question. First, they had to confirm which of the programs students were actually enrolled in. Then, they compared student performance in two ways to determine which model was most effective. One measure was growth on the standardized English proficiency tests that students in the district take each year. The other was the amount of time it took students to be reclassified—in other words, how long does it take for a given child no longer to be considered an English learner student, and how does this vary by English Language Development program?

The Beaverton data confirmed that students in co-teaching and dual language models showed the fastest growth in their English language proficiency. Students in pull-out and those whose parents waived English language development support showed the slowest growth. Researchers also found diminishing returns after about fifty minutes of English language instruction a day.

Examining dual language outcomes

Building off our first study and other national research, Education Northwest and the district's multilingual department, in consultation with researchers Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas, codedesigned a longitudinal evaluation of district dual language programs.

The goals of this evaluation were to track the outcomes of the district's dual language programs over time, provide data to inform the district's dual language program expansion, and build the dual language research base. Our research addresses the following question: How do English learner students who participate in Beaverton's Spanish-English dual language programs perform academically in comparison to peers who do not participate in dual language programs?

We found that participation in Beaverton's dual language program had positive impact on English learner students' English language arts and math achievement, decreased the number of long-term English learners, and had a promising relationship to graduation and postsecondary participation. These findings come as no surprise—a growing body of research suggests that dual language programs are highly effective for students classified as English learners and, when implemented well, dual language may be the most effective program option.