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**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GUIDE:
ENGAGING WITH FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WHO ARE
DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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Meaningful connections and cultural and linguistic supports for children are built in the larger context of their community and family.

Family engagement benefits all children when it is based in partnership, builds trust, and is a collaborative relationship. Collaboration is key for supporting a child who is learning more than one language. Through authentic relationships, programs can honor a child and family's home language while building individualized supports for a child's language development.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is the third in a series of guides designed to support program leaders, including education managers, as they develop practices and systems to support the full and effective participation of children who are dual language learners. Dual language learner (DLL) means a child who is acquiring two or more languages at the same time, or a child who is learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. Use this series of guides, including a guide dedicated to integrating culturally and linguistically responsive practices and one on intentional language support to review the latest evidence-based practices that support children who are dual language learners and their families. In this guide program leaders can explore best practices for engaging with families of children who are dual language learners, as well as tools and resources to use to improve family engagement program wide.

USING THIS GUIDE: AN EXAMPLE



Rosa is the director of a Head Start program in rural North Carolina. She is proud of the work her family does to engage with families of children who are dual language learners, but feels as though there is still room for improvement. Rosa could use this guide as a starting place to help develop a strategic, program-wide plan for family engagement. By reviewing the guiding principles outlined below Rosa can assess what her program is doing well, and what practices they could adopt to improve. By reviewing the tools resources embedded throughout, Rosa can make decisions about professional development she could organize for program staff, as well outline specific practices that her program can implement as part of a strategic family engagement plan.



WHY IS FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SO IMPORTANT?

Families are the first and most important teacher for their children. Much of what we learn in our lives we learn at home with our families, and in our communities. *Everything* we learn is influenced by our family, culture, and community. Partnering with families is the only way to learn about each child's background, strengths, and interests. For home visitors this may come naturally as you build and deepen one-one relationships in each visit. Centers or family childcare programs will need to be intentional about making time to build relationships and make connections between a child's home learning environment and the classroom or childcare learning environment. These connections are what make learning meaningful, relevant, and sustainable. Research indicates that family engagement supports key school readiness skills including early literacy and social skills¹.

ENACTING CHANGE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

MAKE SURE THAT PROGRAM STAFF WORK TO UNDERSTAND EACH FAMILY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR HOME OR TRIBAL LANGUAGE AND THEIR GOALS FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Families are the first and most important teachers. Every family and community may have a slightly different view of how to best support children's development. This is especially true of children's language development. While the research is clear that supporting a child's home or tribal language is the best way to support children's language growth and development across domains, the realities of families' everyday lives can make supporting that decision more complicated.
 - Some families may not have access to the latest information about bilingual language and literacy development. They may believe that learning more than one language may confuse a child, even though this is not the case.
 - Other families may face daily discrimination when they use their home or tribal language. For some, using their home or tribal language may trigger negative memories and emotions. It is important to know that past and present trauma and structural factors, like systemic racism and discrimination, affect how families choose to support their own child's language growth.
 - Many communities and families are determined to support their child's continued language development in their home or tribal language, and may express frustration that more services are not available to help them in that work. Head Start and Early Head Start programs can help alleviate these frustrations by working intentionally to support the language goals of the families within their programs, as well as providing support to families as they navigate community agencies.
- For all of these reasons and more, it is particularly important to begin a conversation with families from a place of genuine curiosity and openness and respect for the family's heritage language. Aim your conversations, and the conversations of program staff at understanding the entire context that a family is working and living within.

¹ Powell, D. R., Son, S. H., File, N., & San Juan, R. R. (2010). Parent-school relationships and children's academic and social outcomes in public school pre-kindergarten. *Journal of School Psychology, 48*(4), 269–292.

COMMUNICATE THE VALUE OF BILINGUALISM TO PARENTS AND FAMILIES IN A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE MANNER

- Many families eagerly seek support in using their home or tribal language, but some families may not be sure that they should continue to use the home or tribal language. There are many myths and misunderstandings about bilingualism. Program-wide, systemic support is key to countering these myths. It's critical for administrators, teachers, home visitors, coaches, family workers, and support staff to actively affirm and communicate the value of bilingualism and home language.
- The first step in communicating the value of bilingualism to families is to understand their relationship to their home or tribal language. Recognize that there are many factors that influence a family's choice to either support or discourage use of their home or tribal language.
- Once your program has an understanding of the family's individual context, consider which benefits of bilingualism are most important to communicate. We often talk about cognitive and academic benefits first, but it is important to understand the importance of language to identity and culture. Language is a part of culture. Learning and growing a home or tribal language is one of the best ways to stay connected and grounded in culture, community and identity. For example, supporting a child's home language could help them to form deeper relationships and connections with grandparents and extended families.
 - Language is more than just the words we speak. It is a way of knowing and being. Across all languages there are ideas, sentiments and understandings that are almost impossible to fully translate. Knowing one's home or tribal language is a way to understand life from a perspective that is deeply rooted in culture and community identity.
 - There are also health benefits to bilingualism. Research indicates that knowing and using more than one language can delay the onset of dementia for approximately 5 years. Bilingualism can support lifelong brain health.



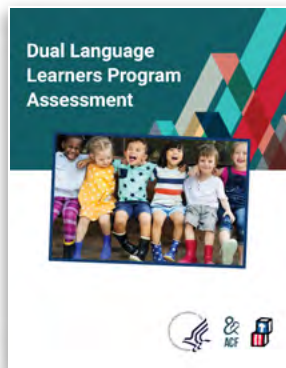
ESTABLISH A BIDIRECTIONAL CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PROGRAM STAFF AND HOME

- Bidirectional communication, which involves active listening, knowledge exchange and, eventually, shared understanding is the key to developing authentic partnerships with families.
- Creating a culture of openness within the learning environment is critical to developing bidirectional communication. Creating a culture of openness takes work and reflection. Here are a few questions to consider:
 - Do you listen first?
 - Are you open to all feedback and responsive to needs?
 - Do you actively provide language assistance services?
 - Are conversations responsive to a family's culture, without making assumptions or falling back on stereotypes?
- Work with program families and communities to provide the resources they want or need. Sometimes we make assumptions about what might be useful to families, spend time and money developing a resource, and then find that it is not actually beneficial. For example, it is not useful to translate a written document into a language that is only spoken, not read.
- When needed, provide regular interpretation services.
- Collaborate with families on developing individualized language development supports that connect a child's home environment with their group socialization or learning setting. What is the child learning and interested in at home that could be used across all learning settings? What is the child learning in the classroom that could be explored further at home? Building these connections makes learning meaningful for a child.
- For centers and family child care programs, invite parents to be involved in the program, either by coming to the classroom, or supplying photos or other materials that could be shared in the learning environment.



SYSTEM-WIDE TOOLS AND APPROACHES

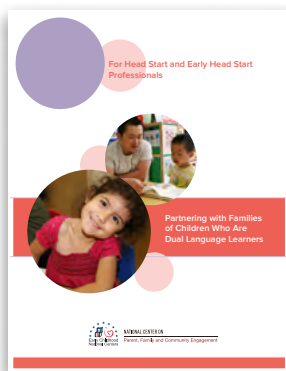
THE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS PROGRAM ASSESSMENT (DLLPA)



The Dual Language Learners Program Assessment (DLLPA) is a powerful tool that can be used to improve communication and engagement with families of children who are dual language learners. Family and community engagement is critical to supporting children’s development. Because of its essential role, there is a dedicated section in the DLLPA that enables programs to explore and improve their family and community engagement supports. Program leaders can use the DLLPA to identify areas of strengths and areas to improve by completing this self-assessment. Access resources for improving practices using the hyperlinks within the DLLPA. Section nine specifically addresses Family and Community Engagement Program Services:

- DLLPA: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/guide-dual-language-learners-program-assessment-dllpa/dual-language-learners-program-assessment-dllpa-users-guide>

SUPPORTING SCHOOL READINESS



Family engagement and parent partnership is key to school readiness. **Culturally and linguistically responsive practices are the foundation to** positive and goal-oriented relationships

- To dive deeper, explore this resource on Partnering with Families of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners, which can be used as a professional development resource: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/partnering-families-children-who-are-dual-language-learners>



THE EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK (ELOF)



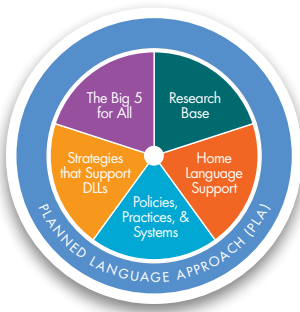
		ELOF DOMAINS			
		APPROX. AGE 3	2.5-4.5	4.5-5	5-6
HEAVY-CURRICULAR SKILLS	Approaching Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language Development	Cognitive Development	Physical Development
	Approaching Proficiency	Social and Emotional Development	Language Development	Cognitive Development	Physical Development

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) is an excellent tool to help adults better understand what they should be doing to provide effective, meaningful, learning experiences that support important early learning outcomes.

Programs can use the ELOF as a tool to support their work with families to develop responsive and intentional home and tribal language supports. The ELOF also provides information on developmental progressions, and examples of behaviors to observe and support that can be helpful to note when discussing children's developmental gains and areas that need support with families. Program leaders can use the ELOF and embedded resources to support their team's professional development around language development to help them be better prepared to answer families' questions.

- Explore the ELOF here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>
- Use the ELOF Effective Practice Guides to explore more examples of what practices and strategies for support language and literacy look like: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/effective-practice-guides/effective-practice-guides>

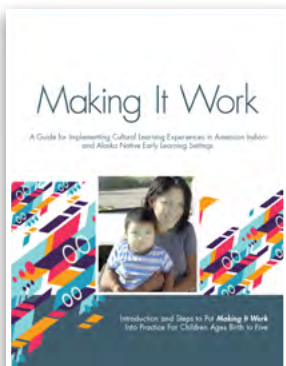
THE PLANNED LANGUAGE APPROACH (PLA)



The Planned Language Approach (PLA) is a comprehensive, systemic, research-based way for Head Start and Early Head Start programs to support children's language development, particularly those who are dual language learners. A core element of the PLA is home language support. Home and tribal language support is grounded in family and community engagement. This section of the PLA has resources to support family engagement, as well as tools that can be used to help understand and communicate the importance of developing intentional home and tribal language supports. Program leaders can explore the PLA and embedded resources here to support their team's professional development and improve practice:

- PLA: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/home-language-support>

MAKING IT WORK (MIW)



Making It Work (MIW) is a suite of resources that helps American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) programs to connect their own unique traditional cultural skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways with the ELOF domains or state and tribal early learning guidelines using their selected curriculum.

- Programs can use the Making it Work guide to connect tribal cultural skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways to research-based guidelines, including the ELOF and state and/or tribal early learning guidelines: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/making-it-work-implementing-cultural-learning-experiences-american-indian-alaska-native-early>

SPECIFIC PROGRAM PRACTICES

BUILD A PROGRAM-WIDE CULTURE THAT AFFIRMS AND CELEBRATES FAMILY KNOWLEDGE, EXPERTISE, AND WAYS OF BEING

- **Practice and model cultural humility.** To practice cultural humility means to not assume that you are an expert on any other culture than your own and to actively seek out and listen to the experiences of others. For many years and in many communities, the dominant language in the United States has been and remains English. It can be easy to equate dominant, or most common with “best” or “right” because that is what many people are used to. But in reality, of course, no language is better or more correct than any other language. For everyone working to support young children, and especially program leaders and those supporting families, it is important to acknowledge that all languages hold value and we should strive to celebrate each one.
 - Consider hiring or working with a multilingual family mentor liaison. A family mentor liaison supports instructional coaching staff and home visiting staff. These liaisons use a family mentor perspective—they emphasize cultural humility, reflect on their own biases, and work to continually develop the relationship.
 - Explore this resource that discusses mentor coaching:
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/article/introduction-mentor-coaching>
- **If you feel comfortable and prepared, be open to talk with families about inequities or stigma they may be facing.** As you develop partnerships with families, talking about stigma and inequities can help families build trust, and provide an opportunity for them to share their own experiences. To support these conversations, program leaders can use the following resources for team trainings and professional development.
 - To dive deeper into understanding how bias can show up in the classroom watch this Front Porch series webinar by Dr. Walter Gilliam - Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions, and Why We Should Care: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/preschool-expulsions-suspensions-why-we-should-care>
 - Children naturally notice differences between people, but it can sometimes be upsetting to adults. Use this resource to help guide conversations about differences.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/talking-children-about-differences-similarities>



DEVELOP AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES THAT ARE BASED IN STRENGTHS AND MUTUAL RESPECT AND SHARE EXPERTISE

- **Partnerships are relationship-based.** They are built by recognizing the strengths of each partner and establishing a culture of open communication. Use the following resources to support professional development among program staff.
 - Review the Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/article/relationship-based-competencies-support-family-engagement>
 - Learn more about building authentic partnerships in this training: Partnerships that Foster Development and Learning: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/article/partnerships-foster-development-learning>
 - For specific strategies for supporting children who are dual language learners, check out this resource: Partnering with Families of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/partnering-families-dll.pdf>
- **Support professional development by encouraging program staff to complete the Individualized Professional Development (iPD) course, Celebrating DLLs: Spring Into Practice.** This interactive course has four, on-demand modules that guide learners through research-based effective practices that support children who are dual language learners and their families. Module three focuses on building partnerships with families and takes learners through an engaging scenario.
 - Resource: iPD course *Celebrating DLLs: Spring Into Practice* available in the iPD Portfolio <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/article/individualized-professional-development-ipd-portfolio>



- **Recognizing and supporting families' strengths** is the best way not only to build an authentic relationship, but also to center community and support school readiness.
 - Resource: Family Engagement and School Readiness: Building on Family Strengths to Promote Success <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/family-engagement-school-readiness-building-family-strengths-promote-success>
 - Resource: Family Engagement and Cultural Perspectives: Applying Strengths-based Attitudes <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/family-engagement-cultural-perspectives.pdf>
 - Watch a video about how one AIAN program effectively partnered with families and local community to bring cultural traditions and tribal language to their Head Start and Early Head Start programs. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/partnerships-change-listening-voices-families>
- **Support children who are dual language learners by actively working to understand families' relationship with their home or tribal language and English.** Do they have worries or concerns about their child speaking their home or tribal language? Do they need resources or other supports?
 - This resource can be used to help program staff gather information about how families use and relate to language: *Gathering and Using Language Information that Families Share* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/gathering-using-language-info-families-share.pdf>
 - In center-based programs and family childcare, **collaborate with parents and families to improve classroom supports.** For example, consider developing a parent partnership program, where parents and teachers work together to build strategies to support children's language development at home and in the classroom. For example, a work group of parents and teaching staff work together to identify language gaps and helpful strategies that can be used in the classroom and at home.
- **Consider advancing families' advocacy work.** In addition to elevating parents' voices in your program, identify supports that would help them elevate their voice in the community. For example, one Head Start program developed an advocacy program for parents. In this program, the parents were given advocacy training and encouraged to create projects that were most important to them. Parents helped make real policy changes as a result of this program. One change included a new regulation requiring landlords to provide 30 days notice before eviction.
 - Resource: Enhance Parents' Advocacy and Leadership Skills: A Guide for Head Start and Early Head Start Staff <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/enhance-parents-advocacy-leadership-skills-guide-head-start-early-head-start-staff>

CREATE A PROGRAM-WIDE ENVIRONMENT THAT VALUES AND CELEBRATES BILINGUALISM AND MULTILINGUALISM

- There are many ways to create an environment that values and celebrates bilingualism. One important way is to **actively communicate the value of bilingualism**, both to program staff and to children and families. Use these resources as your guide.
 - Dual Language Learners (DLLs) Research to Practice Briefs: Primed and Ready to Learn. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/dual-language-learners-dlls-research-practice-briefs-primed-ready-learn>
 - The Importance of Home Language Series: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/importance-home-language-series>
 - Home Language for Success in School and life: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/home-language-success-school-life>
- In addition to incorporating children's language and culture in the learning environment, **consider ways your program can make intentional connections between home and school**. For example, inviting families to come in and read a book that is meaningful to them. Then, program staff can continue to read that book in the classroom and encourage families to read the book at home as well. For home-based programs, consider ways to incorporate children's home language and culture both into home-visiting sessions, as well as group socializations. Use these resources to support your work.
 - Inviting and Supporting Cultural Guides and Home Language Models: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-supporting-cultural-guides-language-models.pdf>
 - Including Children's Home Languages and Cultures: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-childrens-home-languages.pdf>
 - Creating Environments That Include Children's Home Languages and Cultures: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-creating-environments.pdf>
- Part of creating a welcoming environment is **making sure that families have the supports they need**. It is particularly important to make sure that translators and interpreters are available and that policies, procedures and regular classroom updates are translated as much as possible. If your program doesn't have the budget or access to these services, consider creative alternatives. For example, create a newsletter that includes pictures of class, books that will be read, etc. The pictures make the information more accessible to everyone. Pictures also make it possible for children to use the newsletter to tell their parents what they are learning about.

REFLECTION

Program leaders are encouraged to use these questions for their own reflection after working through this guide. These questions can also be used with program staff as reflection tools during a professional development training or experience.

What is one thing you can do to develop more intentional partnerships with families of children who are dual language learners?

What is one change that will require more planning, but that you can implement in the near future?

What additional resources do you need to be able to support culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families?