

Top Ten Research Findings on Minority Language Learners in Two-way Immersion Programs

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Two-way immersion programs have increased in popularity over the past 20 years, from a handful of programs in the 1980s to approximately 350 programs today. Part of the reason for this popularity is that research has consistently shown the positive impact of two-way immersion programs on the achievement and language proficiency outcomes of both native English speaking and English language learning (ELL) students. The findings that are presented below derive from research reviewed in the two chapters cited following the top ten list.

- ELL students who participate in high quality two-way immersion programs achieve at levels that are comparable or superior to their ELL peers in the district and state. This is true whether one examines proficiency in English or achievement in reading and math as measured in English.
- ELL students from two-way immersion programs who are reclassified by state criteria as proficient in English on average tend to achieve in reading/language arts and math measured in English at levels that surpass those of English speakers who are being instructed only in English.
- ELL students in 90:10 programs attain the same levels of proficiency in English and the same or higher standards of achievement in reading/language arts and math (measured in English) as ELL students in 50:50 programs. Thus, more exposure to instructional time in English does not lead to an improvement in English language proficiency or achievement in reading/language arts and math as measured in English.
- There are significant correlations between achievement in English and Spanish for both reading/language arts and mathematics. Thus, the ELL students who score the highest in reading, language and math achievement on achievement tests as measured in English also score the highest on achievement tests measured in Spanish.
- While ELL two-way immersion students who are identified for special education services score low in reading/language arts measured in English, they achieve at levels that are commensurate with their English-only peers in English-only instruction. In addition, they tend to achieve close to grade level in reading/language arts measured in Spanish. Thus, these bilingual students have an advantage over their monolingual peers in that they possess bilingual language skills and they have literacy skills in two languages.
- By fifth or sixth grade, almost all ELL students who had attended a two-way immersion program since kindergarten or first grade were rated as proficient in both languages. In addition, almost all of the students with a two-way immersion background who took the Spanish Advanced Placement test in grade 10 scored high enough for Advanced Placement credit.
- In studies of secondary students who had been in a two-way immersion program in elementary school, results with both 90:10 and 50:50 programs showed that students had very positive attitudes toward school and the two-way immersion program. Most students believed that learning through two languages helped them learn to think better, made them smarter, and helped them do better in school. Students also felt valued in the program, were glad they participated in it, and would recommend it to other students. Although most students were in agreement, ELL students felt even stronger that the program challenged them to do better in school, gave them more confidence to do well in school, and gave them a better education.

The national rate for school dropout for Hispanic students, especially Hispanic ELLs, is higher than for any other ethnic group, and it has increased while that for other groups has decreased. Among high school students with two-way immersion backgrounds, most are in agreement that they are not inclined to drop out of school. However, even 87% of 9th and 10th graders, together with 93% of 11th and 12th graders, say they will not drop out of school. Of those who have at least considered dropping out, most say they will stay in school

because they need an education. Almost one half of ELL students felt that the two-way immersion program kept them from dropping out of school.

In studies of middle and high school ELLs in two-way immersion programs, the majority of students say that they want to go to college, that getting a good education is the best way to have a better life when they are older, that getting good grades is important, and that good grades are important for getting into college.

In a follow-up study of the math achievement of two-way immersion ELL students in high school, even though the students had begun second grade with very low scores in math, by sixth grade and continuing into ninth grade, the students were achieving at grade level in math measured in English. In addition, the students were largely enrolled in college-bound coursework in math.

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