

# Eighth-Grade Dual Language Students' Feedback on the Dual Language Program

## Secondary Dual Language Program 2019–2020

### Introduction

Eighth-grade students completing the middle school Spanish-English Dual Language (DL) Program were surveyed about their experiences related to participating in the program, during the spring of 2020. It is important to note that some students completed the survey after school closures were enforced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is possible that their responses were influenced by those circumstances.

At the middle school level, the secondary DL Program offers students two content courses taught in Spanish each year: a core content and a Spanish-language course. The program is intended for all students who have participated in a DL program in elementary school, students coming from Spanish-speaking countries or homes, and students who have participated in a Spanish immersion program.

The survey asked students about whether they wanted to continue DL; and their attitudes about being bilingual; things about the program they enjoyed, found difficult, and would like improved. The survey questions were multiple choice with open-ended options. The survey was administered at 10 middle schools, and a total of 309 students responded (Bedichek  $n = 32$ , Burnet  $n = 24$ , Covington  $n = 24$ , Lamar  $n = 16$ , Lively  $n = 61$ , Martin  $n = 16$ , Paredes  $n = 33$ , Sadler Means  $n = 10$ , Small  $n = 63$ , and Webb  $n = 30$ ). The survey had an 83% response rate. The full survey is presented in Appendix A.

### Results

#### *Continuation of DL in High School*

Currently in the Austin Independent School District, DL is available in a limited format at four high schools (Akins, Crockett, Navarro and Travis). In an effort to inform future DL plans for the school district, eighth-grade students were asked if they wanted to continue DL in high school. Additionally, students were asked which high school they planned to attend, in order to know whether or not their intended high school offers DL or not. The majority of students responded that they would like to continue DL in high school (63%), while just over a quarter (29%) were not sure, and the rest (9%) did not wish to continue DL. About half (48%) of students who said they wanted to continue DL in high school were planning to attend high schools without DL programs or were not sure which high school they would attend yet. Specifically, 38% of students who wished to continue DL were going to enroll in a high school that did not offer DL and 10% were not sure which high school they were going to.

#### *Bilingualism Beliefs*

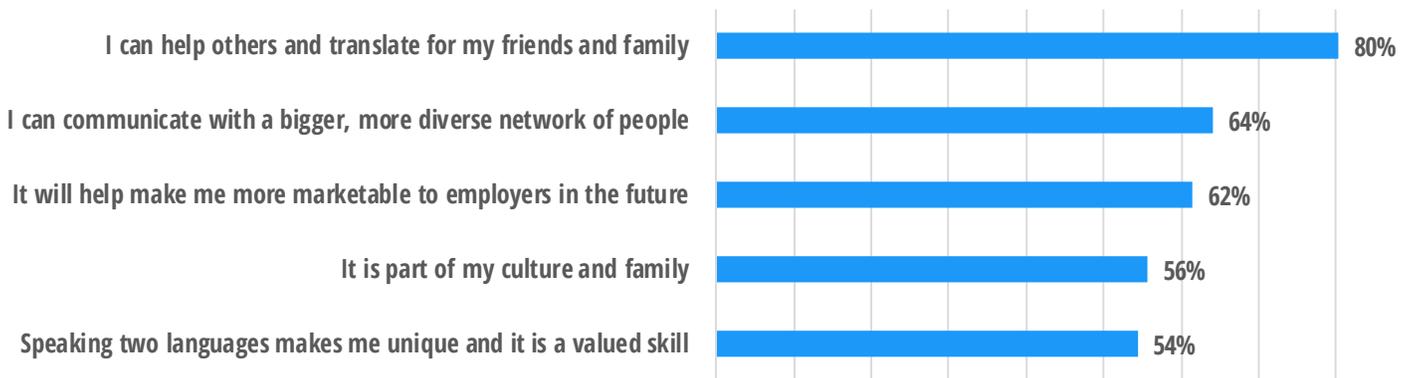
Students were asked to say whether or not they were proud of being bilingual and to explain why or why not. Multiple choice options included common themes based on open-ended responses from students last year; an “other” option was provided for students to give addi-



tional explanation. Students could choose as many reasons as they wished from the multiple choice options. The vast majority (97%) of students agreed with the statement that they felt proud of being bilingual. Students chose a variety of reasons for feeling proud to be bilingual, with many (80%) responding that it allowed them to translate for friends and family (Figure 1). Three students chose the “other” option to name things they specifically enjoyed about being bilingual.

Figure 1.

**Reasons Students Were Proud to be Bilingual (n = 298)**



Source. Spring 2019-2020 Eighth-Grade Dual Language Climate Survey Results.

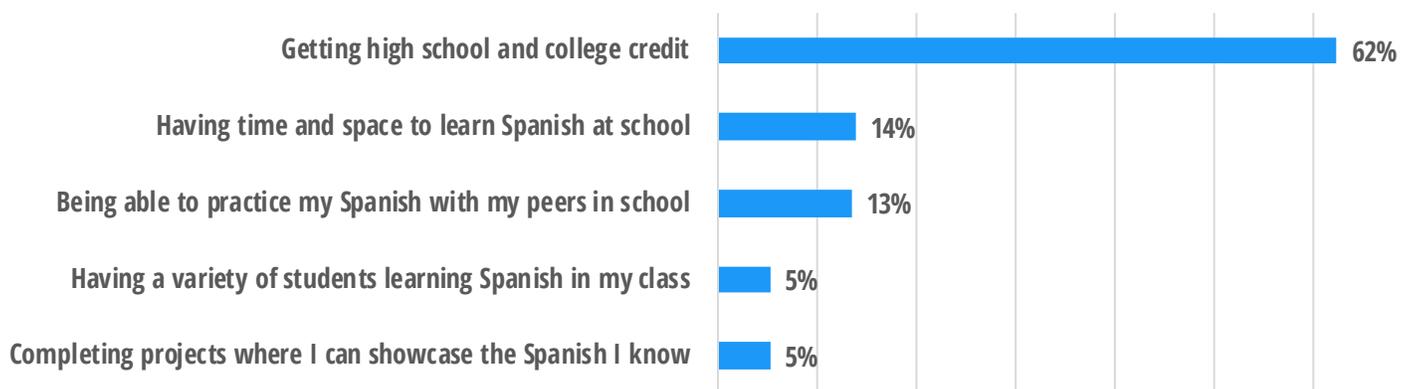
Note. Percentages do not add up to 100 because students were able to choose more than one response.

**What Students Enjoyed about the DL Program**

Students were asked to choose one option they felt was the factor they liked most about being in the DL Program. Multiple choice options included common themes based on open-ended responses from students last year; an “other” option was provided for students to give additional explanation. The large majority (62%) of students felt that the opportunity to earn high school and college credit was what they liked most about the DL Program (Figure 2). Of the 11 students who chose the “other” option, about half named their teacher, classmates, or both as what they liked best about the program.

Figure 2.

**Reasons Students Enjoyed Being in the DL Program (n = 290)**



Source. Spring 2019-2020 Eighth-Grade Dual Language Climate Survey Results.

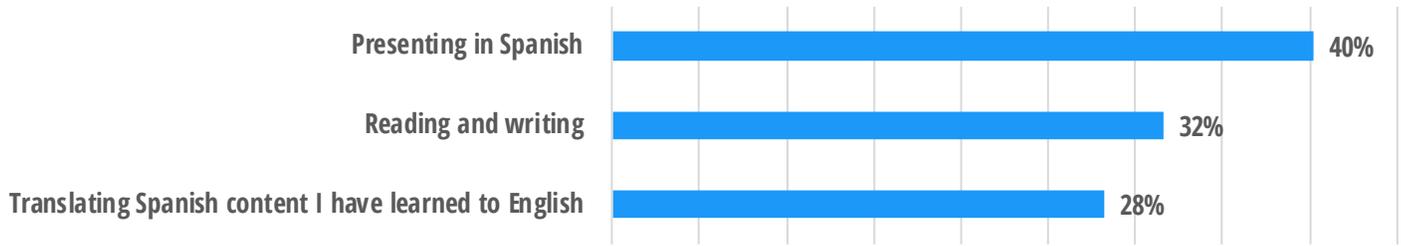
Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 because values are rounded.

## Difficulties of the DL Program

Students were asked to choose one option they felt was the most difficult part of being in the DL Program (Figure 3). Presenting in Spanish was the most commonly chosen area of difficulty. Multiple choice options included common themes based on open-ended responses from students last year; an “other” option was provided for students to give additional explanation. Of the 35 students who chose the “other” option, 11 said that nothing was difficult about being in the DL Program, while others named aspects such as grammar and translating as the most difficult for them.

Figure 3.

### Areas Students Felt Were Difficult in the DL Program ( $n = 266$ )



Source. Spring 2019-2020 Eighth-Grade Dual Language Climate Survey Results.

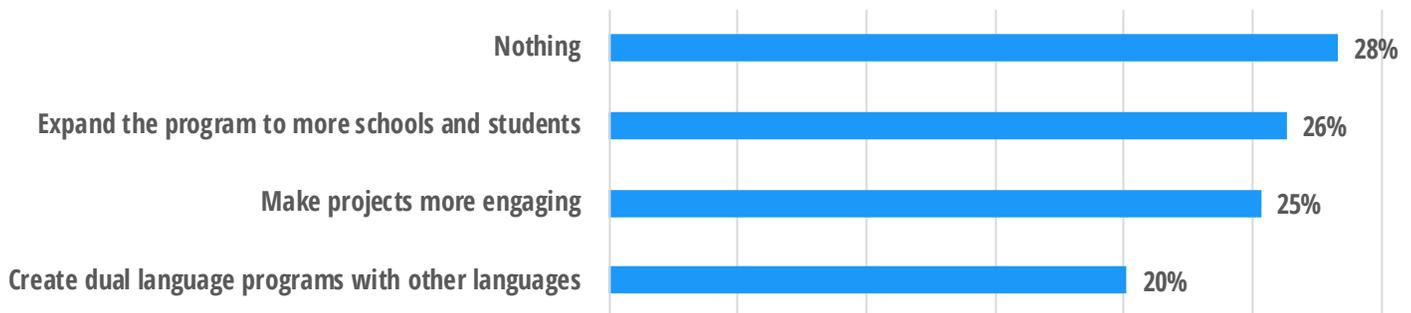
Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 because values are rounded.

## Room for Improvement in the DL Program

Students were asked to choose one option they would most like to change about the DL Program (Figure 4). Multiple choice options included common themes based on open-ended responses from students last year; an “other” option was provided for students to give additional explanation. A little less than a third (26%) of students felt nothing needed to be improved; the next most common request was to expand the DL Program to more schools and students. Of the eight students who chose the “other” option, two reiterated wishes to expand the program, while others named aspects related to curriculum and enrollment in the program.

Figure 4.

### Areas Students Felt Need Improvement in the DL Program ( $n = 293$ )



Source. Spring 2019-2020 Eighth-Grade Dual Language Climate Survey Results.

Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 because values are rounded.

## Conclusions and Future Directions

The vast majority of eighth-grade DL students surveyed were proud to be bilingual. They were able to use their bilingual skills of speaking, reading and writing to translate for friends and family, which many of them named as their top reason for being a proud bilingual. Additionally, the students saw how being bilingual was an asset that will benefit their future.

Thus, it is not surprising that most students wanted to continue the DL Program in high school. It is possible that the portion of students who responded “maybe” to the question of whether they wanted to continue DL chose that response because they were unsure if their high school provided DL. In the same vein, results showed that almost half of students who wished to continue DL were slated to attend a high school that does not provide DL or were not sure which high school they would attend yet.

Because most students responded that the opportunity to earn high school credit and college credit they received from participating in the DL Program was their favorite aspect of participating, offering more high school level DL courses may promote the enrollment of more students in courses offering an opportunity for college credit. Furthermore, about half of students said they wished to see the DL Program expanded to more schools and in more languages. This could bring widespread benefits to students, as we know that more than half of DL students planned to use their bilingual skills in future careers, and honing their bilingual skills at the high school level would support their ability to do so. Lastly, researchers have found that receiving college credit in high school is correlated with a higher chance of attending college, especially for underrepresented students (Hoffman, 2003). Thus, if the aforementioned prediction that more DL students may be motivated to enroll in high school DL courses offering the opportunity for college credit is true, expanding DL to more high schools could have a positive impact on college readiness and enrollment.

The survey results from this year echo those from last year.

## References

Hoffman, N. (2003). College credit in high school: Increasing college attainment rates for underrepresented students. *Change*, 35(4), 42–48.



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## Appendix A

### *Eighth-Grade Dual Language Student Survey*

1. Please select your current school.

2. Do you want to continue dual language in high school to work towards achieving The Seal of Bilingualism?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure yet

3. Which high school do you plan on attending?

4. I feel proud to be able to speak in two different languages.

- Yes
- No

5. Please choose the options below that best explain why you are proud to be bilingual. Select all that apply.

- I can communicate with a bigger, more diverse network of people.
- I can help others and translate for my friends and family.
- It will help make me more marketable to employers in the future.
- It is part of my culture and family.
- Speaking two languages makes me unique and it is a valued skill.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. (If “No” was chosen in question 4) Please explain why you are not proud to be bilingual.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What did you like best about the dual language program?

- Completing projects where I can showcase the Spanish I know.
- Having time and space to learn Spanish at school.
- Having a variety of students learning Spanish in my class.
- Being able to practice my Spanish with my peers in school.
- Getting high school and college credit.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. What was most difficult about the dual language program?

- Reading and writing
- Translating Spanish content I have learned to English
- Presenting in Spanish
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

***Appendix A continued***

9. What would you like to improve about the dual language program?

- Make projects more engaging
- Expand the program to more schools and students
- Create dual language programs with other languages
- Nothing
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you.