

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

## Secondary Dual Language Program 2020–2021

### Introduction

Eighth-grade students completing the middle school Spanish-English Dual Language (DL) Program were surveyed during the late fall and early spring of the 2020–2021 school year about their experiences related to participating in the program. It is important to note that some students who responded to the survey were participating in a remote, virtual version of the DL program, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the middle school level, the secondary DL Program offers students two content courses taught in Spanish each year: a core content course and a Spanish-language course. A two-way program includes instruction in both English and Spanish to help students excel academically while becoming bilingual, biliterate and bicultural. A two-way program is intended for both native Spanish speakers and native English speakers. The secondary DL program comprises 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; their attitudes about being bilingual; and components of the program they enjoyed, found difficult, or would like improved. Multiple choice options included common themes based on open-ended responses from students in past years; an “other” option was provided for students to give an additional explanation. The survey questions were multiple choice with open-ended options. Out of 10 DL middle schools, seven responded to the survey. A total of 187 students responded out of all 390 8<sup>th</sup>-grade DL students (Burnet  $n = 8$ , out of 22; Lamar  $n = 13$ , out of 33; Lively  $n = 86$ , out of 94; Martin  $n = 20$ , out of 26; Paredes  $n = 25$ , out of 30; Small  $n = 19$ , out of 43; and Webb  $n = 16$ , out of 48). The majority of respondents’ home language was Spanish (83%) and ethnicity was Hispanic (89%). A little more than half (56%) of respondents were emergent bilinguals, about a fifth (21%) were fully bilingual, and the rest (33%) were fully bilingual but had been emergent bilinguals within the past 5 years.

### Results

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

Currently, in the Austin Independent School District (AISD), DL is available in some grade levels at four high schools (Akins, Crockett, Navarro and Travis). In an effort to inform future DL plans for the school district, 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students were asked if they wanted to continue DL in high school. Additionally, students were asked which high school they planned to attend. About half (58% Spanish natives; 50% English natives) of students indicated they would like to continue DL in high school, while more than a third (36% Spanish natives;

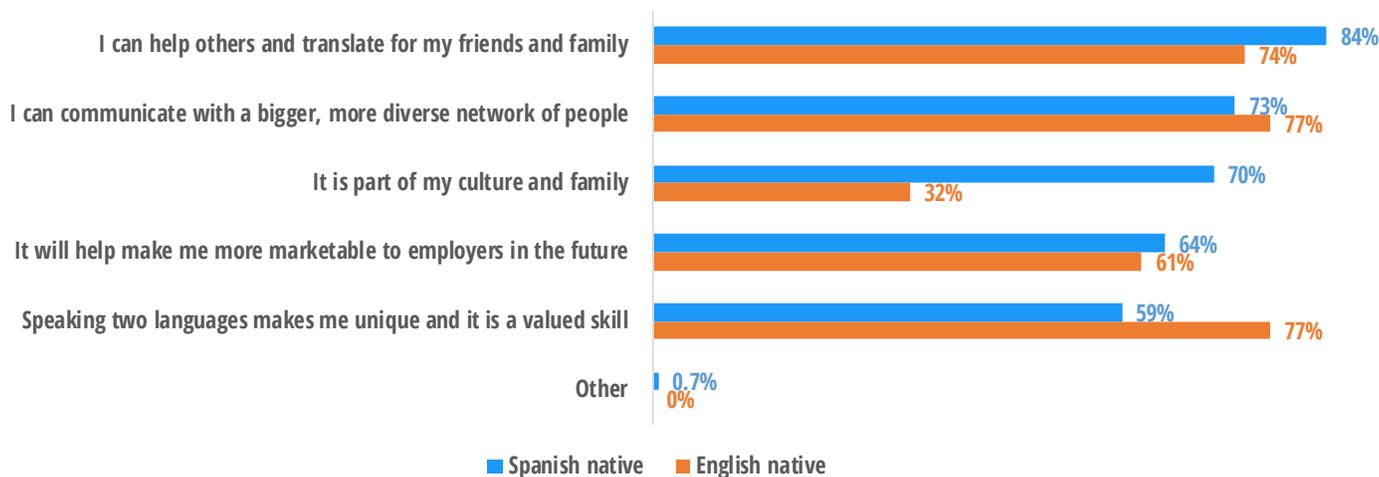
41% English natives) were not sure, and the rest (6% Spanish natives; 9% English natives) did not wish to continue DL. About half (56%) of students who said they wanted to continue DL in high school were planning to attend high schools with DL programs. However, 44% of students who wished to continue DL were going to enroll in a high school that did not offer DL or were not sure which high school they were going to attend.

### **Bilingualism Beliefs**

Students were asked whether or not they were proud to be bilingual. Students could choose one or more reasons for being proud from the multiple-choice options and give an additional explanation. If a student was not proud of being bilingual, they could give an explanation. Almost all (97%) students agreed with the statement that they felt proud to be bilingual. Students chose a variety of reasons for feeling proud to be bilingual. Native Spanish speakers and native English speakers responded similarly on all but two reasons for being proud to be bilingual (Figure 1). The proportion of respondents feeling proud to be bilingual because it is a part of their culture and family was higher for native Spanish speakers, and the proportion of respondents being proud to be bilingual because it makes them unique and it is a valued skill was higher for native English speakers. The reason for being proud to be bilingual, most commonly chosen by native Spanish speaker respondents, was the ability to help others and translate for friends and family (84%). For native English speaker respondents the most commonly chosen reason for being proud to be bilingual was tied between being able to communicate with a bigger, more diverse network of people (77%) and being unique due to being bilingual, which is a valued skill (77%).

Figure 1.

#### **Reasons Students Were Proud to Be Bilingual**



Source. Spring 2020–2021 Eighth-Grade Dual Language Survey Results (Spanish natives,  $n = 148$ ; English natives,  $n = 31$ ).

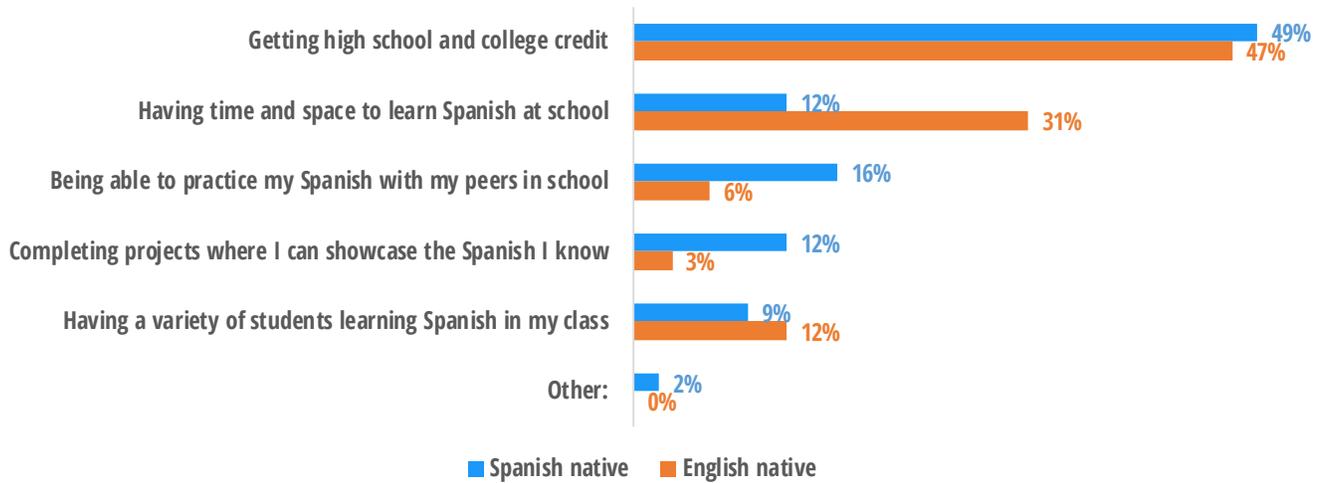
Note. Percentages do not add up to 100 because students were able to choose more than one response.

### **What Students Enjoyed About the DL Program**

Students were asked to choose one factor they liked most about being in the DL Program. About half (49% Spanish natives; 47% English natives) of students felt that the opportunity to earn high school and college credit was what they liked most about the DL Program (Figure 2). About a third (31%) of native English speakers felt having time and space to learn Spanish at school was their most liked factor of DL compared with 17% of native Spanish speakers who felt this way. More native Spanish than native English speakers chose factors related to practicing Spanish and showcasing Spanish skills as their most liked factor of DL.

Figure 2.

### Reasons Students Enjoyed Being in the DL Program



Source. Spring 2020–2021 Eighth-Grade Dual Language Survey Results (Spanish natives,  $n = 152$ ; English natives,  $n = 32$ ).

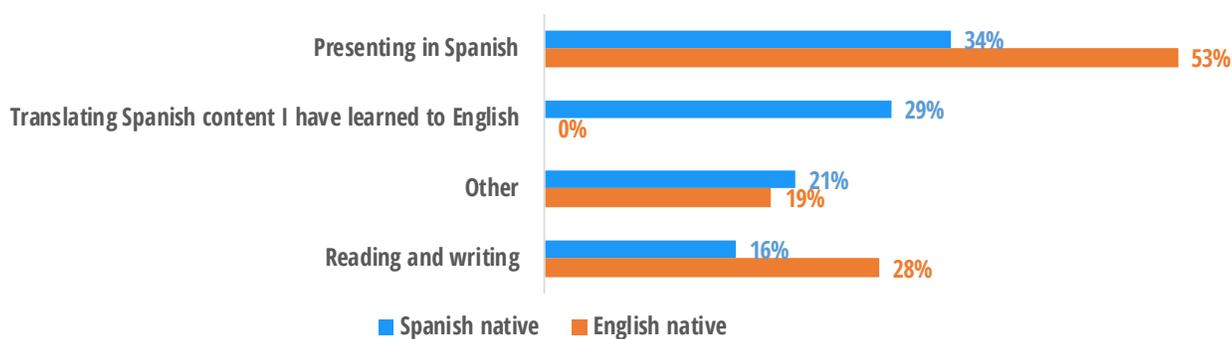
Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 because values are rounded and do not include “other” choice response.

### Difficulties of the DL Program

Students were asked to choose one factor that was the most difficult part of being in the DL Program (Figure 3). Presenting in Spanish was the most commonly chosen area of difficulty for both native Spanish and native English speakers. Translating content learned in Spanish back into English was the second-most common factor chosen by native Spanish speakers as the most difficult part about DL (29%), but no native English speakers chose this factor as most difficult for them (0%). Of the 38 students who chose the “other” option, Spanish natives either said that nothing was difficult about being in the DL Program or named the workload, while English natives mostly named Spanish grammar as the most difficult for them.

Figure 3.

### Areas Students Felt Were Difficult in the DL Program



Source. Spring 2020–2021 Eighth-Grade Dual Language Survey Results (Spanish natives,  $n = 152$ ; English natives,  $n = 32$ ).

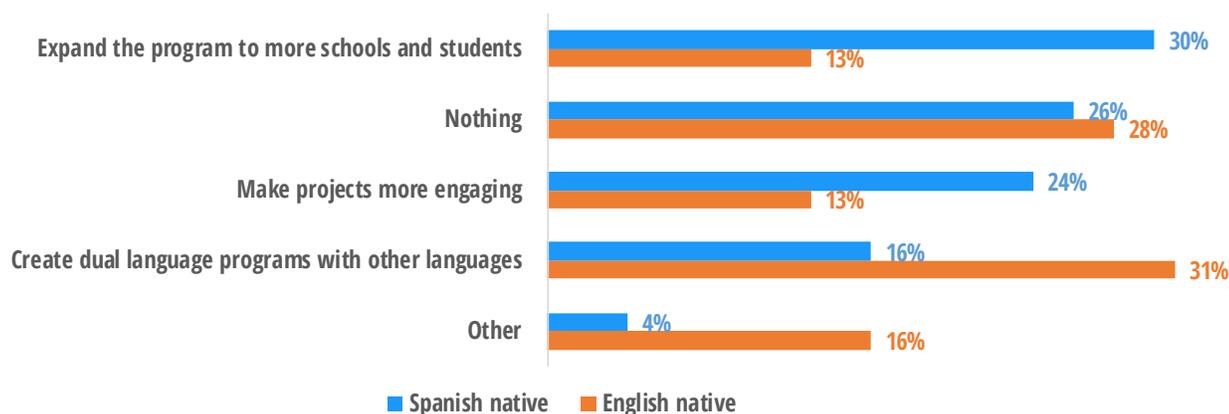
Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 because values are rounded.

## 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). About a quarter (26% Spanish natives; 28% English natives) of students felt nothing needed to be improved. Almost a third (30%) of native Spanish speakers said they would like the DL program to expand to more schools and students, while about a third (31%) of native English speakers said they would like the DL program to expand to more languages. Of the 11 students who chose the “other” option, English natives requested help with Spanish grammar and speaking, while both Spanish and English natives requested less time devoted to projects and writing.

Figure 4.

### Areas Students Felt Need Improvement in the DL Program



Source. Spring 2020–2021 Eighth-Grade Dual Language Survey Results (Spanish natives,  $n = 152$ ; English natives,  $n = 32$ ).

Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 because values are rounded and do not include “other” choice response.

## Conclusions and Future Directions

Compared with previous years, the 2020–2021 school year’s 8<sup>th</sup>-grade DL survey received about half the number of responses. This is likely due to the difficulty of reaching students during remote schooling under the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, the survey was given during the late fall and early spring of the 2020–2021 school year, whereas previous surveys were given in late spring.

Nearly all 8<sup>th</sup>-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. More native Spanish than native English speakers felt pride in being bilingual because it is a part of their culture and family, while more native English speakers felt being bilingual made them unique and that it is a valued skill. Finally, the majority of students saw how being bilingual was an asset that will benefit them in the job market. These findings are very similar to those from previous years.

More than half of students wanted to continue the DL Program in high school. Native Spanish speakers were slightly more likely than native English speakers to say they wanted to continue DL. However, this difference was not significantly different because there were far fewer native English than native Spanish respondents. The overall percentage of students who wished to continue DL was lower than last year by 6 percentage points. A confidence interval analysis shows that this drop in percentage may just be due to chance and is not significantly different from the previous year.

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 did not provide DL or were not sure which high school they would attend.

Half of 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, and more than half responded that they would like to see DL expanded to more schools or in more languages. Currently, it is a goal of AISD to expand DL to more high schools. This could benefit students, as we know that more than half of DL students planned to use their bilingual skills to make themselves more marketable to future employers, and honing their bilingual skills at the high school level would support their ability to do so. Additionally, offering more high school DL courses would promote the enrollment of more students in courses that offer an opportunity for college credit. 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, expanding DL to more high schools could have a positive impact on college readiness and enrollment.

## References

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



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