Building Quality Improvement in the Early Learning and Care System that Embraces Dual Language Learners and Supports the Early Learning Workforce

Dual Language Learner Policy Platform - Companion Document
February 2020
We would like to express our gratitude to all of our partners and experts from the field that have elevated the policy priorities outlined in the DLL Policy Platform. This policy brief is a companion document to the DLL Policy Platform and specifically highlights the importance of building quality improvement that includes DLL children and their families.

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS WHO PROVIDED DEEP INSIGHT TO THE WORK HAPPENING IN CALIFORNIA TO ENSURE DLL CHILDREN ARE SET UP FOR SUCCESS STARTING FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD:

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Advancement Project California is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization working on systems change. California staff in Los Angeles and Sacramento work to expand opportunities in our educational systems, create healthy built environments, build participatory and representative communities, and shift public investments toward equity. We develop rigorous, evidence-based solutions, innovate technology and tools with coalition partners to advance the field, broker partnerships between community advocates and the halls of power, and build racial and economic equity. With the understanding that education is an essential component in improving the lives and opportunities of all Californians, we work across the state and with a diverse set of stakeholders to improve the early learning and K–12 education systems. We believe that effective and respectful partnerships are the bedrock of fixing a system responsible for educating California’s children.
California is home to the nation’s largest population of dual language learners (DLLs)—children learning a second language while developing their home language. Children who are DLLs comprise 60 percent of children under age six in California, making up the majority of the state’s youngest learners. DLLs enter the education system with valuable linguistic, cultural, and intellectual assets that contribute to California’s diversity, and research shows that when high-quality early childhood programs are designed to build on these strengths, DLL children thrive. As the state strengthens its early learning and care (ELC) system, quality improvement systems and resources must be relevant and responsive to all children, families, and providers that serve them—particularly from low-income and culturally and linguistically diverse communities—to ensure equitable access to early learning opportunities.

In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom and state leadership made a historic investment of $2.3 billion to strengthen California’s early learning system, including $5 million to develop a Master Plan to ensure all children have the critical foundation they need for healthy development and learning. Building on the Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education’s report, the Master Plan will provide actionable recommendations to guide the implementation of a well-aligned, comprehensive early learning system. This includes options for “an actionable quality improvement plan” and guidelines on program quality for subsidized child care providers that take into account “class, race, language access, implicit bias, and lived experience.” The Master Plan is an important opportunity to build a high-quality, early learning system that meets the needs of California’s diverse children, including the state’s vast DLL population.

This policy brief shines light on promising efforts across the nation and in California that have taken different approaches to program quality improvement that better supports DLL children, their families, and the providers that serve them. Specifically, this brief provides an overview of: (1) federal policy guidance and a landscape of states’ efforts to include DLLs in quality improvement systems and considerations; (2) examples of promising efforts in Fresno, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties that are taking leadership to ensure that DLL children are meaningfully integrated into quality improvement; and (3) key takeaways for state leadership. Without meaningful inclusion of DLL children and families in quality improvement systems and resources, the state will design a system that does not serve the majority of its youngest learners. Now is the time for our state leadership to be intentional about building on the rich language assets of California’s youngest DLLs to ensure their optimal development.
Quality early learning programs are critical to all children’s success. However, the criteria and guidelines used in assessing quality—that are based on norms for native English speakers—may overlook the specific needs of DLL children, such as the use of the home language in pedagogical practice. It is important to define, assess, and support quality improvement that comprehensively integrates the unique strengths and needs of DLLs. Research shows that learning is facilitated when teaching practices, curricula, and learning environments build on children’s inherent capacities and are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for each child. The persistent achievement gap between DLLs and their monolingual English-speaking peers makes it clear that the quality of experiences they receive in California’s current early learning system is not adequate to meet DLLs’ potential. Supports are needed across all program settings (home- and center-based) so that providers (monolingual and bilingual) are knowledgeable and skilled in the provision of appropriate pedagogy and intentional practices that strengthen the child’s home language alongside strong English language development.

I. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS THAT INCLUDE DLLS AND THEIR FAMILIES

At the federal level, the Head Start Program Performance Standards that govern Head Start and Early Head Start programs across the nation present clear guidance for programs that serve children who are DLLs and their families. The Office of Head Start highlights the importance of culturally, linguistically, and developmentally responsive experiences that ensure the full and effective participation of DLLs and their families; and an assessment in children’s strongest languages, which includes their home language. Head Start has developed resources to support staff to provide high-quality services for DLLs, including the Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders, which address culturally relevant and diverse programming and the importance of continued home language development as part of high-quality programs. Developing procedures in programs to identify children who are DLLs, and providing professional development opportunities to support early language and literacy development in the home language, are key to ensure DLL children’s progress in learning and development.
The 2016 Federal DLL Policy Statement, issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education, states that programs should optimize DLLs’ early experiences by holding high expectations, capitalizing on their cultural and linguistic strengths, and providing individualized developmental and learning supports. The Policy Statement recommends that states include indicators for DLLs in their quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and create tiered reimbursement systems with greater compensation tied to higher benchmarks. Indicators may include:

- having a systematic process for identifying children who are DLLs at program enrollment;
- establishing written plans for working with DLL children and procedures to improve communication with their families across all aspects of the program;
- providing information to families in their home language;
- implementing evidence-based curriculum and intentional plans to support home language and English language development in the program and at home;
- requiring professional development for staff in culturally and linguistically responsive practice, and supporting comprehensive learning and development of DLLs; and
- employing at least one bilingual staff with credentials who is proficient in the home language of most of the DLLs in the program.

Both the Head Start Program Performance Standards and DLL Policy Statement present research-based practices and program-wide supports for the workforce that can improve early learning quality for DLLs.
What is the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)?

The QRIS reflects a state, county, or region’s framework for what constitutes a high-quality early learning and care (ELC) program. Programs may include Head Start, public preschool, family and home care, and center-based programs.²

• While each QRIS is unique, they generally evaluate child development and school readiness, staff qualifications and training, learning environment and teacher-child interactions, family partnerships, program administration, health and safety standards, and child assessments.

• The level of quality in early learning settings has increasingly been assessed, improved, and communicated with families using QRIS. Quality standards can be provided to families and communities through ratings systems.

Quality Counts (QC) is the QRIS for California. Currently, the statewide QC matrix³—a set of criteria to evaluate program quality—has minimal content specific to DLL children. While the statewide matrix remains the standard for all participating programs across all counties, there has been flexibility at the regional and county level to augment the matrix with local indicators based on local needs and goals. For example, the table below shows a part of the QRIS matrix for Fresno County (Element 3 and 4). Their quality improvement matrix includes local indicators (written in blue in the table below as local additional requirements) in addition to the general statewide QRIS indicators, with the goal of better serving the majority of DLL children in their community. Local indicators that are DLL-specific include: professional development hours for providers on working with DLLs; and written action plans on high-quality teacher-child interactions to support language development for DLLs.

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<th>Common Tier 3 POINTS</th>
<th>Common Tier 1 POINTS</th>
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². See the QRIS definition in the QRIS Handbook for more information.
³. The statewide QC matrix is available at https://www.qualitycountsca.org/.

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NATIONAL EFFORTS TO INCLUDE DLLS IN QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

In their state or regional QRIS, several states have intentionally included quality indicators that are directed toward supporting DLL children and families in their communities. Building on the Build Initiative’s national landscape of Quality Rating Scoring Systems that incorporated issues of race, culture, and language, the Migration Policy Institute conducted an analysis of QRIS from 11 states—Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin—and surfaced various quality indicators used to support DLLs. The indicators, grouped thematically, address the importance of cultural and linguistic responsiveness:

- professional development to support language acquisition and cultural responsiveness;
- culturally responsive environments and practices (curriculum, instruction, activities, materials);
- cultural responsiveness and linguistic accessibility in communication with families;
- bilingual staff and language use (identification of home languages to inform practice);
- inclusive strategies, activities, and partnerships in family and community engagement; and
- diversity policies (staff diversity, admissions policy, self-assessment of cultural competence).
Overall, the landscape reflects a range of quality indicators that aim to create culturally and linguistically appropriate learning environments and experiences for DLL children. Some states include explicit DLL-specific indicators, while other states refer more generally to indicators related to culture and language. For example, there are quality indicators that reward providers for their knowledge of children’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds and encourage that they build on DLL children’s home experiences in the classroom. Some quality indicators specifically focus on ensuring the development of DLLs’ first- and second languages, and other indicators highlight affirming environments that are measured with screenings and assessments that are valid and reliable for the population served. Some states call out professional development hours specific to supporting DLLs and working with diverse children and families. Oregon and Washington have emphasized bringing a focus to racial equity via: the development of a racial equity framework in designing QRIS®; data collection of race, ethnicity, and home language; and surveying providers to identify training needs specific to DLLs and embedding cultural competency in all trainings.

*Examples include Washington State (Department of Early Learning) and Oregon (Department of Education).

Developmentally, Culturally, and Linguistically Responsive Early Learning Environments

Envision a classroom with confident and curious learners actively engaging in their home language and English, and where children build on their learning from connections they bring from their families and cultures. Pictures, posters, and artwork reflect the diversity of children and cultural traditions in the classroom and are used in learning opportunities throughout the day. New concepts are taught in the home language, and intentional English language development builds on that learning. Children engage in rich oral language with hands-on activities that bring concepts to life. Through a variety of books, dramatic play areas, and games related to the theme, children engage in pre-literacy activities in both languages to spark their curiosity and build their knowledge of the world around them. Envision a classroom of DLL children, who, in time, become bilingual and biliterate, and are thriving.
CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUILDING QRIS FRAMEWORKS THAT ARE INCLUSIVE OF DLLS’ NEEDS

The national landscape of efforts to include criteria for what constitutes quality for DLLs presents encouraging, initial steps to create quality improvements that foster culturally and linguistically responsive early learning experiences. However, approaches to raise the quality of programs through QRIS have also exposed several issues that merit considerations.

1. **Placement of DLL-specific indicators within the QRIS matrix.** If the majority of children served in the early learning system are DLLs, then culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments must be set as the foundation of quality for all programs. If DLL-specific indicators* are only present at the highest tiers of quality on the QRIS matrix, it can signal that culturally and linguistically responsive practices are not foundational elements but rather “nice to have” exceptional elements reserved for the highest quality programs. DLL needs must be addressed starting from the lowest tier up to the highest tier of quality and supported with quality improvement resources for the workforce.

2. **Workforce supports that take into consideration the circumstances of providers.** Appropriate resources to support the workforce must accompany the increase in qualifications to work with DLLs. Resources include coaching, professional development opportunities for both providers and program leadership, and funds to purchase materials in multiple languages. Women of color comprise a great portion of the early childhood workforce and often serve DLLs and low-income communities. There is an incredible opportunity to build and support an inclusive, early learning system that provides linguistic and cultural competency for the state’s diverse children. The system must be intentional about not unfairly penalizing providers for cultural differences or challenges unrelated to program quality. Talented, non-English-speaking providers may need professional development or materials offered in their home language to apply to participate in quality improvement efforts. Without such intentionality, new quality improvement requirements that aim to improve quality for DLLs may further prevent providers of color from participating in QRIS resources and quality improvement opportunities.

3. **Culturally and linguistically appropriate measures.** Quality improvement greatly depends on how indicators are measured in practice and the types of evidence used to demonstrate improvement. There is great need for developing observation tools that can appropriately identify and evaluate quality environments and experiences for DLLs, and that take into account cross-cultural differences in interpersonal relationships and behavior that inform teacher-child interactions in diverse communities. Evaluation tools are generally based on norms for native English speakers and may not reflect specific needs of children acquiring a second language. Moreover, assessors need to be equipped with the appropriate linguistic and cultural competence to fairly and adequately assess DLLs. As DLL-specific indicators are explored and added, there must be intentionality in measuring quality improvement in practice.

Quality improvement must set culturally and linguistically responsive practice as the foundation of quality for all children. It will be important for the state to provide capacity-building and resources for the workforce, alongside DLL-specific indicators in the quality improvement system, and invest in the development of measurement tools to appropriately evaluate practice for DLL children.

* DLL-specific indicators may include specific number of professional development hours on working with DLLs; and/or written action plans on high-quality, teacher-child interactions to support language development for DLLs.

"Assessments need to reflect the child’s actual knowledge. I have witnessed teachers who mark that a child cannot count to 10 because the child cannot count to 10 in English when the child has demonstrated that skill in Spanish.”

- Myeisha, Center-based Teacher (Bay Area); Quote from Dual Language Learner Policy Platform
Within California, Fresno, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties have all recognized the rich diversity in their communities and the significant number of young DLL children in early learning programs. Early childhood leaders in these counties have come together to ensure that DLLs and their families are a key component of defining quality early learning and care programs, and consideration when supporting quality improvement. Each county brings different approaches of intentionality in serving DLLs into their quality improvement efforts and have made investments and systems change to better support the workforce. The profiles below highlight these local efforts:

**FRESNO COUNTY**

- **Cross-sector leadership collaboration that prioritizes DLLs as central to quality early learning.** Grounded in the county-needs assessment data that highlighted the great number of DLLs and the critical need to specifically support DLLs’ learning and development, leaders across the education continuum—in early learning, school districts, and institutions of higher education (IHEs)—came together to develop a shared vision for supporting DLLs from cradle-to-career. Multiple funding streams and philanthropic support for improving the quality of early childhood programs centered on intentionally supporting the DLL children of Fresno. The Early Stars—Quality Counts for Fresno County—Steering Committee reflects this wide spectrum of partners: school districts, IHEs, and numerous agencies serving young children, such as First 5, the local planning council, Head Start, and the Resource and Referral agency. Collective buy-in of the early childhood community and cradle-to-career continuum allowed for a systemic, integrated, and aligned approach to focusing on prioritizing the needs of DLLs in quality conversations.

- **DLL-specific local indicators included in quality improvement system.** Fresno is the only county in California to use the local flexibility in the statewide Quality Counts matrix to include local indicators specific to DLLs. The DLL-specific indicators apply to all early childhood sites participating in Early Stars—Quality Counts for Fresno County. Indicators include:
  1. visibly posted culturally and linguistically appropriate lesson plans, and written action plans for high-quality, teacher-child interactions to support the language development of DLLs;
  2. at least six hours (annually) of professional development dedicated to working with DLLs; and
  3. written resources, in their home language, for parents to help promote healthy choices.
Inclusion of DLL-specific quality indicators have allowed for the development of a systemic approach to build on the cultural and linguistic strengths of DLL children and address their needs across program sites. The DLL indicators have also led to investments in DLL-specific supports for the workforce—providers and program leadership with professional learning communities.

- **Extensive workforce supports for working with DLLs: coaching, professional learning communities (PLCs), training, and technical assistance.** Professional development on working with DLLs and their families has been a priority in Fresno County. Multiple PLCs bring together and build trust among educators, administrators, and coaches. These sustained efforts have supported all educators (including program leadership) in creating affirming environments for DLLs to thrive. One of the notable PLCs is the Fresno Language Project that provides aligned messaging, instructional strategies, extensive one-on-one coaching on the Personalized Oral Language Learning (POLL) strategies, and comprehensive supports to set all educators up for success in working with DLLs. The 80 participants in this PLC include family child care homes, centers, Head Start, districts, child care resource and referral, and the county office of education. Professional development anchored on the POLL strategies offer concrete approaches that support the home language, oral language, and overall linguistic growth of DLLs. These capacity-building efforts have supported programs to meet the DLL-specific local quality indicators in the quality improvement system.
• **Meaningful parent engagement in the collection of DLL home language data.** Strong parent-educator relationships are foundational to creating quality experiences and environments for all children—but in particular for DLLs. Research indicates that engagement of families is associated with positive student outcomes, including higher language proficiency, better social skills, and increased graduation rates. At program enrollment and throughout the year, early educators engage parents and family members through Parent Interest Interviews. These intentional, face-to-face conversations have been a powerful approach to inform educators about the home experiences of DLL children, guide them to create affirming learning environments in the program setting, and support intentional teaching. In addition to collecting valuable information on the child and family’s home language and language use, the process has allowed for parents to express their vision and goals for their child, and also created space for garnering family interests on volunteering in the classroom to support integrating children’s home languages.

**SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY**

• **Cross-sector leadership collaboration that prioritizes DLLs as central to quality early learning.** A member of the Bay Area Quality Rating and Improvement Partnership, Quality Connections—Quality Counts for San Francisco County—has a long track record of supporting early learning quality improvement for multilingual DLL children. Eight hours of DLL-specific professional development are an embedded standard for educators in all city-funded early learning programs. Quality Connections administrators have extensive institutional knowledge and tools, including rating instruments, child assessment and screening tools, and state certified curriculum frameworks, that have been translated into several languages and shared with partner counties. Administrators and policymakers meet regularly to discuss how system-level policy changes impact DLL children. Grounded in data on the number of multilingual DLLs and their readiness assessments, the county also established cross-sector commitment and goals with institutions of higher education (IHE) to realize a multilingual workforce essential for DLL instruction (BA cohort model with San Francisco State University).
• Robust system of supports for multilingual workforce in working with DLLs. Support for the multilingual early learning workforce is a key component of the county’s quality improvement approach. The county promotes innovative models for training, such as Soy Bilingüe, and parent engagement, such as Abriendo Puertas, to strengthen DLL pathways to school readiness. Through Quality Connections, educators can access in-depth training series in working with DLLs in English, Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin, and in formats that combine training and technical assistance. Educators can also engage in professional learning communities (PLCs) for those implementing Soy Bilingüe in Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin. The facilitation in multiple languages has allowed educators to directly apply concepts and strategies without having to translate what they have learned post-trainings. The PLCs, led by First 5 San Francisco, review best practices and innovative strategies, family engagement activities, assessment tools and reflections on documentation, and language plans for DLLs.

• Guidance to assessors in working with DLLs, and recruiting a diverse, multilingual assessor pool. A notable approach is the guidance provided to assessors in culturally relevant behavioral markers and language use, and linguistically appropriate observations with translated assessment reports. The County identified miscoding in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observational instrument that measures the quality of teacher-child interactions in classroom settings, and trained assessors on understanding the language development of DLLs and practices that support their learning. The County made investments to support the professional development of assessors, and to recruit diverse, multilingual assessors that are capable of communicating and assessing the sites’ languages of instruction. The County maintains trilingual training, assessment, coaching, and rating capacity, through all professional development opportunities—such as the California Preschool Instructional Network, Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, Desired Results Developmental Profiles, and Program for Infant/Toddler Care.

SAN MATEO COUNTY

• Intentional professional development for educators and program leadership on DLL practices and meaningful partnerships with DLL families. The Early Childhood Language Development Institute (ECLDI), a project of San Mateo County Office of Education, provides trainings, technical assistance, and coaching for educators and program leaders, including tools for self-reflection, as well as a parallel series of interactive workshops for DLL families. Anchored in evidence-based practices, the DLL professional development modules (total of 16 hours) aim to ensure the early learning workforce is skilled and committed to: (1) preserving and encouraging children’s home languages and cultures; (2) developing teaching and learning practices for dual language learning; (3) fostering culturally and linguistically relevant early learning experiences, practices, and policies; and (4) cultivating meaningful connections with DLL families to support language and literacy development in both languages. The Institute has also collaborated closely with California State University, Channel Islands, to expand its DLL modules to develop DLL courses with concrete strategies on dual language learning based on the POLL strategies.
• Family engagement professional learning communities (PLCs) and communities of practice. Families provide the cultural and linguistic foundation on which DLL children develop and learn. The foundation for San Mateo County’s professional development modules and resources is their focus on family engagement as an intentional strategy to promote quality early learning experiences and practices that lay the foundation for DLLs’ academic and life success. Friday CAFÉs (Community and Family Engagement) are monthly professional learning communities (PLCs) for family engagement practitioners that are hosted in different unconventional settings, including museums, and designed to provide networking opportunities that spark innovative thinking and build connections. The CAFÉ PLCs aim to shift the approach of family engagement from transactional to relational where DLL families are actively involved in affecting their child’s educational experiences. Additionally, the Early Learning Family Engagement Communities of Practice was launched in 2019 to support educators and family engagement practitioners with concrete family engagement strategies. This includes support for implementation of Parent Cafés—a peer support PLC for families—and other site-based family engagement offerings.
As Governor Newsom and state leadership strengthen California’s early learning system, it is important that quality improvement systems and resources have a focus on DLL children—and the workforce that supports them—as a key component of quality improvement. As the Master Plan provides recommendations for an actionable quality improvement plan, it is important to consider the following takeaways from other states and internal efforts leading the way in California.

1. **Ensure that DLLs and culturally and linguistically responsive practices are meaningfully included in the Quality Counts system requirements, including the rating framework, incentive system, and professional development provisions.** Quality Counts (QC) is the state’s flagship effort to improve early learning quality. However, the QC statewide matrix has minimal content specific to DLLs and fails to comprehensively acknowledge the role of language and culture in pedagogical practice. For all children to fully benefit from high-quality early learning, quality improvement systems and resources must intentionally embed DLLs. Without DLL-specific indicators, programs are not incentivized to prioritize DLL-responsive practices amid the range of competing quality requirements. DLL-specific indicators that reflect the needs of the majority of California’s youngest children are important to create program buy-in and commitment to resources dedicated to serving DLLs and their families.

2. **Provide financial incentives and resources for capacity-building to ensure quality improvement efforts include a focus on DLLs and funding support for the early learning workforce that are specific to serving DLLs.** Efforts to include DLLs in the quality improvement system need to be accompanied by quality improvement dollars for capacity-building. There should be systemic incentives to coordinate, develop, and share locally designed professional development and curriculum resources that support DLLs. Workforce is a foundational component of quality. Support for DLLs should translate into support for those that educate and care for them, which includes resources for professional development, coaching, trainings, and professional learning communities for both educators and program leadership to ensure high-quality early learning.

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“You have to make sure DLLs are embedded into the system, in our case in the Quality Counts (QC) local requirements, which help support the streamlining of this effort to make systemic change.”
—Lupe Jaime, Senior Director of Early Care and Education, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (Fresno County);
Quote from Dual Language Learner Policy Platform

“Investing into our teachers and the teaching workforce is probably the single biggest investment one can make to ensure our dual language programs are successful.”
—Dean Tagawa, Executive Director, Early Childhood Education Division, Los Angeles Unified School District;
Quote from Dual Language Learner Policy Platform
3. **Develop a uniform process to identify DLLs across the early learning and care system that involves meaningful engagement and partnerships with DLL families.** Accurate data is critical to continuous quality improvement and to inform responsive practice. Identification and data on DLLs could include home language, language exposure, and families’ aspirations for their child. DLL families must be sought after as partners to support culturally and linguistically responsive practices that validate the home language. Meaningful and intentional process of family interviews could inform language use, or the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) observation tool could be modified to provide data on language used by the child. It is important to integrate any new requirements into existing mandates to not overburden early educators.
As California strengthens its early learning and care system, a focus on young DLL children—who make up the majority of children under age six—and the educators that support their learning, must be a central component of defining high-quality programs and supporting quality improvement. Federal policy guidance and examples of efforts in and outside of California present various quality improvement approaches that the state can adopt to create culturally and linguistically responsive environments for DLL children to thrive. Explicit acknowledgement of the need to embrace DLLs in the quality improvement system is critical to create systemic supports for DLLs. While there are great strides across the state—in Fresno, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties—it is challenging to sustain and scale existing efforts without a statewide commitment reflected in policy to ensure investments, systems, and capacity-building of the workforce serving DLLs are standard for all programs. It is important to note that two of the exemplars counties noted in this brief had substantial philanthropic funding to invest in professional development and build cross-system collaboration. Additional quality improvement funds must accompany a statewide policy commitment to provide much of the support that is needed to create an equitable early learning system. Now is the time to ensure state leaders are building a system that leverages the rich diversity of California and supports all children to thrive.
ENDNOTES


9 Reauthorized in 2016, the Head Start Program Performance Standards are federal regulations that govern Head Start programs across the nation.


16 J. Sugarman and M. Park, “Quality for Whom?”
Building Quality Improvement in the Early Learning and Care System That Embraces Dual Language Learners and Supports the Early Learning Workforce

The Starting Smart and Strong Initiative is a 10-year effort to ensure all children grow up healthy and ready for kindergarten by improving the quality of adult-child interactions.

This includes: Fresno City College, Fresno State University, Fresno Pacific University, First 5 Fresno County, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Fresno County Child Care and Development Local Planning Council, Fresno County Office of Education, Public Health Department, Head Start, Fresno Unified School District, Clovis Unified School District, Resource and Referral agency, Program for Infant and Toddler Care, California Preschool Instructional Network, Licensing, Migrant Head Start, and representatives for children with special needs.

In Fresno County, Quality Counts participants receive coaching upon agreement to participate, and are publicly rated after six months for their baseline rating. During the first six months, providers work with a coach to draft action plans and create nurturing and learning environments that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive (e.g. integrating diverse dolls, creating labels in different languages). After their baseline rating, providers are rated again in two years. The Program Coordinator for Fresno County Office of Education provides a sample “DLL Action Plan Creation Guide” for participating providers so providers have a basic guideline/template to build their DLL action plan, which is required for Tier 2 and 5 of Element 4. This self-assessment and coaching plan provided for Quality Counts participants has allowed for greater buy-in from providers, who were hesitant to join Quality Counts should they be rated low at the start due to a lack of resources and supports.

Funded by Packard Foundation as a part of the Starting Smart and Strong Initiative, the Fresno Language Project is a pilot project that aims to increase quality early learning in Fresno and involves five key organizations: Central Valley Children’s Services Network, Head Start, Early Head Start, LightHouse, and Fresno Unified School District.

This include providers, coaches, raters, practitioners, and leadership from licensed family child care, State Preschool programs, Head Start, Early Head Start, and County Office of Education centers.


