



**Multistate Association for Bilingual Education – Northeast, Inc**

*An educational nonprofit promoting multilingualism, equity and social justice in communities*

**Written Testimony Before the State Joint Committee on Education  
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To the Chairs and Members of the State Joint Committee on Education, thank you for your attention to this written testimony on behalf of Dual Language Education programs in the Commonwealth as part of the VIRTUAL Oversight Hearing regarding Observations and Lessons from K-12 School Reopenings in the Commonwealth during the COVID-19 emergency held on October 27, 2020. For the record, I am Phyllis Hardy, Executive Director of the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education-Northeast, Inc. (MABE). MABE is a non-profit organization that promotes bilingualism and multiculturalism as assets that provide cognitive, social, emotional, educational, and employment advantages for all students. MABE's mission is to identify, promote and disseminate research-based programs and practices that support bilingualism and multiculturalism for educational success. We have a close relationship with the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and many of the Dual Language Education programs. We provide advocacy, networking support, technical assistance and professional development opportunities to meet their unique needs.

I am writing to share the experiences of Dual Language Education programs with remote and hybrid teaching and learning.

**Dual Language Education programs are experiencing some success.**

Teachers and students are building relationships. Students are feeling safe, are happy to be learning together again, and are willing to take risks learning in a new language. Teachers are working hard collaborating with colleagues to plan lessons adapting the pedagogy known to be most effective for teaching academic content in two languages through technology. Online teaching resources (songs, movement, stories, videos, documentaries, etc.) in Spanish, Portuguese and other target languages are accessed and shared across programs. Communication with parents occurs through a variety of social media tools, e.g., email, WhatsApp, text messages, phone calls, visits to homes by keeping social distance and wearing masks, etc. Much was learned last spring that are being applied this fall - in program implementation, in language allocation schedules (amount of time teaching content in English and the partner language), in delivering curriculum, in teaching early digital literacy skills to students and parents, and in communicating with families.

**Dual Language Education programs continue to experience deep challenges around equity.**

The challenges to families and children continue to be exacerbated. Most students in Dual Language Education programs are from racially and/or linguistically marginalized backgrounds. Many students in Dual Language Education programs are from low income families. Access to technology is not an option for every student. Technology challenges include access to quality and stable WIFI, functioning Chromebooks for each individual student, and inexperience with digital literacy skills. Teachers are spending time teaching digital literacy to parents, which is essential but also takes time away from time on learning hours. Students' learning is impacted when at home without supervision to support online learning because of parent work schedules or because older siblings are taking care of younger siblings, and when students are in day care with limited adult supervision. Family Engagement has been a pervasive area of concern in education, and especially for Dual Language Education program families. As a result of the pandemic, the lack of district investment in translation and

interpretation services have brought to the forefront the severe breakdown in communication with families and student speakers of languages other than English. At this time, families are having less access to information than they had before, because of the very limited language support services available through digital means.

The challenges to the programs under the current virtual learning paradigm were pre-existing to the pandemic, but have been exacerbated by it in ways that overtly show the major inequities that Dual Language Education programs still face. The integrity of the pedagogy in Dual Language Education programs has been compromised, due to lack of statewide and districtwide understanding of the program structure and existing biases that favor delivering instruction in English only. Children in Dual Language Education programs require their instruction in both English and the partner language to be successful in gaining the solid academic outcomes widely proven from well implemented programs.

Funding distribution for sufficient staff and materials in both program languages is another inequitable issue. District leaders must be mindful about equitable solutions that align with the program goals. When making decisions such as purchasing Lexia, an online literacy program for general education students in English, a comparable program should be available in languages of their district Dual Language Education program, typically, Spanish or Portuguese. In some districts, staff are reallocated to teach smaller groups of students learning remotely, and due to scheduling conflicts, may be teaching outside of their licensure and may not be teaching in the language they were hired to teach in. Additional planning and curriculum development time is needed, apart from the general education programs, for Dual Language Education programs to collaborate. During this “new normal”, time is needed to create new, innovative, technology-based lessons that support language and literacy development in two languages, and to develop interesting, diverse and current curriculum to meet content, language and literacy standards. Changes to staffing, resources, curriculum materials, and assessments impacted by synchronous and asynchronous learning must be available in both English and the partner language if implementation with fidelity to the program goals is the expectation.

The current virtual learning paradigm is a critical challenge to the existence of Dual Language Education programs and to the growth of new Dual Language Education programs, as research has shown that programs that do not maintain fidelity to their program goals are less effective in closing the academic achievement gap. After 15 years of policy that eliminated Bilingual Education, the Massachusetts Legislature acknowledged the power and promise of Dual Language Education for all our students and passed the LOOK Act. Although the LOOK Act allows districts to implement Dual Language Education programs, mindsets and policies remain that are barriers to their implementation and success. Without the proper support, the potential of Dual Language Education to provide an equitable and enriching education for all will not be realized.