EDUCATION FINANCE AND POLICY

EFP Takeaways

Dual Language Education and Student Achievement

Background

Two-way dual language (DL) classrooms enroll students of two different language backgrounds and teach curriculum in both languages—for example, English and a partner language. There has been a rapid growth in these programs in the U.S., from about 10 in 1980 to nearly 250 by 2000. Andrew Bibler of the University of Nevada estimates the effect of attending a DL school on student achievement. His work is published in vol. 16 issue 4 of *EFP*.

The Study

Bibler uses school choice lotteries from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS) in North Carolina to estimate how attending a school with a DL program affects student achievement, specifically end-of grade math and reading exam scores. Two schools in CMS offer two-way English-Spanish classes, and they use the two-way model in grades 1 through 5. The author focuses on students who identified one of those two DL schools as their first choice in the lottery in their kindergarten year. Data come from CMS and the North Carolina Education Research Data Center.

For more details:

- View the full issue.
- See the full article in *Education Finance and Policy*.
- Sign up here to receive future *EFP Takeaways*.
- Summary of:
  Bibler, A. (2021). Dual Language Education and Student Achievement. *Education Finance and Policy, 16 (4): 634-658*.

Findings

The author finds that students who won the lottery to attend a DL school scored higher on math and reading exams. The effect sizes are similar for English learners (ELs) and non-ELs. These effects are substantially larger than the average effect of being assigned to another magnet school in the district.

For English learners, there is little evidence that winning a seat to a DL school alters the probability of reclassification out of EL status throughout their elementary education.

The author concludes that implementation of the DL program matters for student achievement and score improvements likely depend on specific details and structure of the DL program. The article suggests that future research should consider the language of instruction as key to understanding the mechanisms driving student achievement.