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First 5 California Dual Language Learner Pilot Study Reveals Significant Challenges

Sacramento, CA — First 5 California released a new brief by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) as part of the \$20 million initiative to promote high-quality early learning environments for children learning more than one language. The brief, *Quick Facts: The Landscape of Early Learning and Care Programs Serving Dual Language Learners in California*, summarizes findings from a survey of directors in early learning programs across California, and is now available at californiadllstudy.org/reports. The brief highlights multiple approaches for supporting dual language learners (DLLs), challenges encountered by administrators, and implications for serving DLLs as the early learning and care system recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Proposition 227 effectively dismantled bilingual instruction in 1998 by severely restricting bilingual education in K–12 classrooms. However, Californians’ attitudes have shifted in recent years. Proposition 227 was repealed by Proposition 58 in 2016. Additionally, since about 2008, resources became more readily available to educators for enhancing their ability to provide classroom instruction with tools vital for shaping local practices in early learning settings. In support of this trend, First 5 California launched the Dual Language Learner Pilot Study in 2017 to better understand and identify effective strategies for supporting young DLLs.

“We have a tremendous responsibility to uplift all our families and to ensure the best possible futures for California’s children. Optimizing the development of DLLs in early learning and care settings is crucial for making progress toward equitable opportunities for young DLLs,” said Monica Fitzgerald, Commissioner and Associate Professor at St. Mary’s College of California.

The study finds the majority of licensed centers and family child care (FCC) homes in California serve DLLs. Though the concentration of DLLs is greater in FCCs than in centers, centers are more likely to serve a multilingual group of children with three or more languages represented, while FCCs are more likely to serve children who all speak the same language. The impact of COVID-19 on services for DLLs is significant. School closures and reduced group size requirements disproportionately impacted DLLs’ ability to return to early learning programs.

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“The impact of the pandemic has fallen hard on DLL children, their families, and the people who educate and take care of these children,” said Mayra E. Alvarez, Commissioner and President of The Children’s Partnership. “More than ever, high-quality language instruction and resources for DLLs are critical in supporting their social-emotional growth, cultivating their sense of identity, and ensuring their educational success.”

California has an opportunity and responsibility to support DLLs in reaching their full academic potential. The next phase of the study will identify instructional approaches that support learning outcomes for DLLs and examine the scalability of instructional, professional development, and family engagement strategies as well as infrastructure components that contribute to effectiveness, as the early learning system recovers from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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First 5 California was established in 1998 when voters passed Proposition 10, which taxes tobacco products to fund services for children ages 0 to 5 and their families. First 5 California programs and resources are designed to educate and support teachers, parents, and caregivers in the critical role they play during a child’s first five years – to help California kids receive the best possible start in life and thrive. For more information, please visit www.cfc.ca.gov.