DPS Exemplary Schools Case Study:
Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8

WORKING DRAFT 2

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DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study Overview

The Denver Public Schools (DPS) University of Colorado Denver (UCD) English Language Acquisition (ELA) Exemplary Schools Case Studies investigated DPS schools with a high density of learners of English as a second or additional language and high levels of students who qualified for a free or reduced price lunch that were experiencing the most success with English language learners (ELL students). The study was conducted by the DPS UCD Research Collaborative between December 2010 and March 2011. The purpose of the study was to identify school-wide practices that have been successful in supporting the achievement of these students. Six schools (two elementary, two middle, and two high schools) were identified on the basis of five criteria: (1) an open enrollment policy, (2) at least 40% of total enrollment consisting of ELL students, and at least 100 English language learners enrolled, (3) a total School Performance Framework (SPF) rating greater than 49% for elementary schools, and greater than 45% for middle schools and high schools, (4) at least 50% of students in the school qualified for a free or reduced price lunch, and (5) high gains on the CSAP and CELA tests for the past three years relative to other schools serving the same grade levels. Two additional elementary schools, which did not meet all criteria, but have good reputations among area educators were also studied. The case studies involved three sources of data: 1) photographs providing environmental scans of the language resources and supports for ELL students in the schools; 2) documents and public information (e.g., websites) as well as student performance data; and 3) interviews with school leaders, teachers, and other support personnel. This report will detail the practices uncovered at Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8 (focusing on grades the elementary grades K-5).

NOTE: This case study of Bryant Webster is ongoing. These preliminary assertions and explanations are based on 6-12 interviews with staff members, photographic inventories, and archived data collected between December 2010 and March 2011 only. We anticipate that further study, e.g., observations in classrooms and additional interviews, will expand our understanding of the school's practices.

The following assertions emerged as key components contributing to the success of Bryant Webster in working with English language learners:

- **Collaborative, cohesive horizontal and vertical planning for language and content instruction**
- **Thematic units that provide context and comprehensible input across languages and content areas**
- **High expectations for language development and content knowledge with active support**
- **Shared responsibility for all students; familial community for students**
- **Teachers prepared in language development theory, research, and strategies**
- **Bryant Webster is a learning organization**

The following sections of this report will include a more in-depth explanation of the study, a brief history and demographic description of the school, and a more detailed narrative of the case study.
assertions and how the described practices are facilitating academic growth for ELL students at Bryant Webster (to be found beginning on page 10).

DPS Exemplary Schools Case Study: Context and Purpose of the Study

As of October 1, 2010, there were 26,761 identified English language learners (non-exited ELL students in grades ECE-12) enrolled in Denver Public Schools. Of these students, 17,544 received ELA services at a designated ELA program school. Spanish was the primary language for 15,246 (87%) of these students, while other common languages included Vietnamese, Arabic, Somali, Nepali and Karen/Burmese http://ela.dpsk12.org/

Denver Public Schools and University of Colorado Denver are working in collaboration on the DPS ELA Exemplary Schools Study to examine practices within DPS schools in which learners of English as a second (or additional) language are outperforming their peers in similar schools. The purpose of the study is to provide guidance to DPS and other districts in improving the educational performance of English language learners by describing practices currently used in six DPS schools in which English language learners are experiencing the most academic success. The primary research question addressed by this study is:

- What are the school-wide practices of schools that are successfully serving a high number of English language learners?

This study was formulated in accordance with the Department of Justice Court Order, which provides guidance to and approval of the DPS English Acquisition program, and includes guidance regarding research on the effectiveness of DPS ELA programs. One goal of this study is to identify practices that have been successful across different school contexts. This report focuses on the practices at Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8, specifically in grades K-5.

Study Design and School Selection Criteria

This study of school practices involved three sources of data: 1) observations/photographs of language resources in the school environment; 2) documents and public information (e.g., school websites, newsletters) as well as aggregate data on student performance; and 3) multiple interviews with school leaders, teachers, and other support personnel. In this preliminary phase, the study did not include students as participants.

A three-step process was used to select high performing schools for English language learners in DPS. For the purposes of this study, English language learners at DPS were defined as those students who were currently receiving ELA services, opted out of services, or exited from ELA services.

Step 1: In order to select the case study schools, schools were identified at the elementary, middle, and high school level, which met four criteria:
1) at least 40% of the school’s total enrollment consisted of English language learners,
2) at least 100 ELL students were enrolled at the school,
3) at least 50% of students at the school qualified for a free or reduced price lunch, and
4) the school received a School Performance Framework (SPF) rating greater than 49 for elementary schools, and greater than 45 for middle schools and high schools.

For the SPF, every school in DPS that contains at least one grade that takes CSAP (grades 3-10) is assigned one of the following accreditation ratings every September using data collected during the previous three school years: Distinguished, Meets Expectations, Accredited on Watch, Accredited on Priority Watch (added in 2010) or Accredited on Probation. Ratings then relate to how much autonomy schools are given, the support needed, corrective action taken and compensation earned by principals, assistant principals and teachers. For this study, the SPF rating was used to ensure that the schools chosen were not on probation and were meeting expectations or nearly meeting expectations (for all students, not only ELL students).

Step 2: Performance data for English Language Learners on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) Reading, CSAP Writing, CSAP Math and the Colorado English Language Assessment (CELA) were analyzed for each school for the past three years. Schools from the initial list, which were making the largest gains were identified, weighting gains in 2010 the highest, 2009 second highest, and 2008 third. Data presented in Table 1 below show the three-year weighted averages of the CSAP median growth percentiles for each school and average gain (Z score) on CELA. Based on these criteria, three schools at each educational level, for a total of nine schools, were identified as candidates for the case study.

Step 3: The student recruitment and retention policies at the nine schools were investigated to determine whether the schools had policies for admittance or dismissal related to performance, special education needs, or behavioral problems. In narrowing the selected schools to six, researchers agreed that at least one school at each level should be a comprehensive neighborhood school, as opposed to a charter school or magnet school. The six schools included Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8 (study focused on the elementary grades), Force Elementary, Merrill Middle, West Denver Preparatory Charter – Federal Campus (a middle school), Abraham Lincoln High, and Bruce Randolph High.

Once the schools had been narrowed to six high performing schools, two additional elementary schools of interest were selected based on a combination of their relatively high performance and reputation among educators in the district. Both schools added additional characteristics to the pool of schools, including learners of English from diverse linguistic backgrounds and concentration on math and science. These two additional “reputational” schools were Goldrick Elementary and the Math and Science Leadership Academy (K-3).
History of Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8 School

Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8, located at Quivas St. and West 36th Avenue in northwest Denver, serves students in Early Childhood Education (ECE) through eighth grade. The school has been in the same location since 1931. Pamela Linan is the current principal at Bryant Webster. The mission of Bryant Webster states that culture, language and traditions are of high value at the school, students are afforded high levels of respect, and high expectations are set for all students. Additionally, support staff members are valued and have been brought on to teach Music, Technology, Library Science, Art, and Physical Education. A Social Worker, Psychologist, and Nurse are also available to students and their families.

Bryant Webster is an ECE-8 school. The focus of this study was on the elementary grades in the school. Bryant Webster is also a magnet Dual Language school for students in grades ECE-5 and currently a Transitional Native Language Instruction (TNLI) school for students in grades 6-8. The move to dual language began in 2005-06, starting in ECE and kindergarten, and expanding by one grade each year. The school now has dual language, Spanish-English, in grades ECE-5. Next year, the school will expand the Dual Language program to 6th grade. As a Dual Language program, all students in the school receive services under the Spanish/English immersion model. Bryant Webster works to help children become bi-literate in both English and in Spanish. Because Bryant Webster is not a neighborhood school, students have to apply to participate in the magnet program and all students need an attendance reason as to why they are not attending their neighborhood school. ELL status is an acceptable attendance reason. When the students reach 6th grade, they must again provide an attendance reason for staying at Bryant Webster.

Demographic Overview of Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8 School

In the 2009-10 school year (the school year based on which schools were selected for the study), 440 students were enrolled in Kindergarten through eighth grade at Bryant Webster. Of these students, 292 were in grades K-5 and 148 were in grades 6-8. The majority of students at Bryant Webster were Hispanic/Latino (95%) and 63% of students spoke Spanish. Among the 2009-10 student body, 94% qualified for a free and reduced price lunch. In the 2009-10 school year, Bryant Webster received an SPF rating of 61%, indicating that they were meeting expectations. According to the Bryant Webster school website (http://bryantwebster.dpsk12.org/about), half of the teachers at the school have Masters degrees, and all have been trained in techniques to foster literacy development and standards-based instruction as well as teaching second language learners. Bryant Webster is a NCLB sending school, meaning it did not meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) last year.

Of the students enrolled in Bryant Webster in the 2009-10 school year, 58% (257 students) were designated as English language learners (including students currently receiving ELA services, students opted out of services, and students who have exited from ELA services). Among the ELL students at Bryant Webster, 166 were designated as currently receiving services, 23 as opted out of
services, and 68 as exited from ELA program services. The large majority of the ELL students at Bryant Webster spoke Spanish.

AMAO 1 (Annual Measurable Achievement Objective) is an indicator of English language acquisition. It represents the number of students who are making progress on the CELA exam. In 2010, 57% of ELL students at Bryant Webster were making progress. Further, the three-year (2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10) weighted average gain (Z score) on the CELA for ELL students at Bryant Webster was 0.24 standard deviations above the mean, meaning they showed above average growth; this is compared to a state-wide gain of 0. Three year weighted averages are included here as these data are less subject to year-to-year fluctuations.

The three-year weighted averages of the CSAP median growth percentiles for English language learners (median growth percentiles indicate how well these students are growing in comparison with other students) were 59 in Reading, 60.6 in Writing, and 54.8 in Math, compared to the state average of 50. The median student growth percentile is the middle score if the individual student growth percentiles are ranked from highest to lowest. A “typical” school would have a median student growth percentile of 50.

The charts below display student demographics (including primary home languages and ethnicities of students throughout the school), the CSAP and CELA growth scores of ELL students at the school, and the proficiency levels of Bryant Webster students on the CELA Overall and CSAP. All non-exited ELL students (who include students who are opted out of services) take the CELA exam, which test students on four domains – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Colorado students in grades 3 through 10 take the CSAP exam.

**Primary Home Language Spoken by Bryant Webster Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N=454)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Administrator Portal pulled February 22, 2011 (the Administrator Portal uses data from the 2010-11 DPS October Count, matched with current student enrollment).

Note: Data describe students throughout the entire school, not just ELL students; data include students ECE-8th grade.
Ethnicity of Students at Bryant Webster, 2009-10

(Hispanic, 94.5%)

Source: DPS Strategy Department, Count of Student Membership by Ethnicity by School, 2009-10 from October Count 2009.
Note: Data describe students throughout the entire school, not just ELL students; data include students ECE-8th grade.

Achievement Growth of English Language Learners 2008, 2009, 2010 (arrows refer to Bryant Webster Dual Language ECE-8)

Source: Developed using data from the DPS AllScores repository.
Note: Comparison includes 45 DPS elementary schools with more than 41 English language learners in grades 4 and 5 with CSAP growth percentiles.
English Language Proficiency Level, CELA Overall


Percentage of ELL Students Who were Proficient or Above on CSAP Reading

Source: DPS Department of English Language Acquisition, November 2010.
* Data not available
Note: Data include Dual Language K-5 and TNLI 6-8; data only include the English version of the CSAP.
Sample Sizes: 2009 – Non-Exited ESL: N=43;Exited ELL N=89; Non ELL N=117; 2010 – Non-Exited ESL: N=44; Non-Exited Bilingual 16; Parent Opt-Out N=16; Exited ELL N=70; Non ELL N=131
**Percentage of ELL Students Who were Proficient or Above on CSAP Writing**

![Percentage of ELL Students Who were Proficient or Above on CSAP Writing](image)

Source: DPS Department of English Language Acquisition, November 2010.
* Data not available

Note: Data include Dual Language K-5 and TNLI 6-8; data only include the English version of the CSAP.
Sample Sizes: 2009 – Non-Exited ESL: N=43; Exited ELL N=89; Non ELL N=116; 2010 – Non-Exited ESL: N=44; Non-Exited Bilingual 16; Parent Opt-Out N=16; Exited ELL N=70; Non ELL N=131

**Percentage of ELL Students Who were Proficient or Above on CSAP Math**

![Percentage of ELL Students Who were Proficient or Above on CSAP Math](image)

Source: DPS Department of English Language Acquisition, November 2010.
* Data not available

Note: Data include Dual Language K-5 and TNLI 6-8; data only include the English version of the CSAP.
Sample Sizes: 2009 – Non-Exited ESL: N=43; Non-Exited Bilingual N=19; Exited ELL N=90; Non ELL N=117; 2010 – Non-Exited ESL: N=44; Non-Exited Bilingual 38; Parent Opt-Out N=17; Exited ELL N=70; Non ELL N=132
Summary of Findings from Case Study

School-wide practices that support the success of learners of English as a second or additional language at Bryant Webster:

- Collaborative, cohesive horizontal and vertical planning for language and content instruction
- Thematic units that provide context and comprehensible input across languages and content areas
- High expectations for language development and content knowledge with active support
- Shared responsibility for all students; familial community for students
- Teachers prepared in language development theory, research, and strategies
- Bryant Webster is a learning organization

Collaborative, cohesive horizontal and vertical planning for language and content instruction

Teachers at Bryant Webster share responsibility for all of the school’s children. As two teachers put it: “Everybody tries to work together.” “We are all responsible for the students.” This shared responsibility plays out vertically from grade to grade, and horizontally across grades. Teachers look at data for all children in their grade level, in both Spanish and English, and across content areas. Grade level teams have common planning times, but also plan with another articulating grade level team, e.g., the second grade teachers plan with the third grade teachers. Within grade level teams, “both teachers do teach all content areas to all students across the grade.” Teachers plan together in English and Spanish so that there is continuity of content across the languages in which the child is learning. The grade level teams also are supported with vertical team planning by teachers of other grades and administrators. Teachers collaborate to differentiate instruction for individual children, across grade level classrooms. In addition to addressing individual needs of students collaboratively, teachers participate in data-driven, school-wide, unified improvement plans. This year the focus of that plan is to improve math.

Teaching in a dual language school means dual planning. Bryant Webster’s teachers want to be in the school despite the extra work of dual language. In return, they get lots of support: “Nobody works in isolation.” This finding from the initial interview was supported by visuals of similar materials in various classrooms and similar types of displays. These included similar word wall designs, similar teacher made charts on how to act as a partner, job boards, and boards for content and language objectives. The visual data suggest a shared approach across grades horizontally and vertically. Interviews with teachers supported the importance of this school-wide practice.
Thematic units to provide context and comprehensible input across languages and content areas

Each grade level team teaches the DPS curriculum through thematic units. The theme organizes instruction in both English and Spanish, across the grade. They also link themes across content areas, e.g., writing and science. Teachers plan the thematic units for the academic year during the summer. The thematic units provide context that makes the content more comprehensible across first and second languages and across content areas. The thematic units also provide planned redundancy of key concepts across content areas and modes of communication, i.e., visuals, listening, oral production, reading, written production, and hands on projects and products. This multi-modal redundancy is valuable in developing proficiency in both languages as well as key concepts, e.g., when students are studying non-fiction in language arts, the content of their lessons includes key concepts they are studying in science. For example,

“So that when they’re learning during writing, when it’s an earth or a materials unit, whatever they’re doing in science, they’re reading about that during reading time, they’re writing about it during writing time, and doing it in both classrooms, and so...it’s really going deeper into content areas...And, seeing it across the day.”

There was visual evidence to support this finding. For example, one class in a grade was studying El clima (the climate) and the other was studying the water cycle. One class in another grade was learning “La granja,” (the farm) and the other was learning “Old MacDonald.”

The thematic units are evaluated after each unit, and the evaluations inform planning for the next year. One issue teachers discussed is the challenge of finding authentic Spanish materials to support the units. In spite of the challenge, the teachers interviewed are happy with the connections they see students making based on the thematic units.

High expectations for language development and content knowledge with active support

While it did not come up in the first interviews, visuals supported high expectations for behaviors, individual development, language development, and academic achievement. The colleges teachers and para-educators had attended were posted with their logos outside every elementary door. In the halls outside the upper grades college pennants and college information visuals were prominently displayed. The second round of interviews confirmed that the school promotes college as the norm. According to one teacher, the question is not, “Are you going to college?” but, “What college are you going to?” In addition to the displays, there are college days, when staff members wear their school insignia and the school organizes discussions about going to four-year colleges, community colleges, and technical colleges. According to different interviewees, Bryant Webster began promoting college as the norm years before the DPS emphasis on college.

Rules for behavior and working with partners were consistent and consistently displayed in classrooms and halls. This year, the school has adopted “BRAVO” as its motto. BRAVO stands
for: Be respectful. Responsible. Active Learners. Value Safety. Organization. BRAVO is illustrated in the school by pictures of Bryant Webster students modeling these behaviors. This use of student pictures was also evident in the classroom of one of the teachers interviewed, who had photographed students in the class acting as scientists. Both uses of photos of students from the school were explained by teachers as using “pictures of our own kids doing what is expected of them.” Teachers said the pictures motivate the students. One added that they used these pictures and carefully prepared, i.e. very neatly hand printed, teacher-made materials because there were “no Latino kids in science posters,” and the students need models.

Another use of models is to illustrate good work by Bryant Webster students. Examples of exemplary student work are visible in the halls and classrooms. Teachers explained that the displays are changed regularly so that many students’ work can be visible.

In support of the consistent visual representations of high expectations for students, teachers and administrators make active use of data, both summative and formative, to guide instruction for each child. As noted above, grade level teachers look at the data for all children in the grade, and they look at measures and work samples in both Spanish and English and across content areas. As one teacher put it: “We need to make sure we are testing math, not language.” Understanding cross language performance in the content areas is considered essential to ensure that each child is progressing in both language and content. When the data show areas of need, individual modifications and adaptations to the curriculum and materials are made. For example, if a child is having difficulty with a math concept in English or Spanish, the teachers will collaborate to provide more explanation and practice in the home language. If a child is advancing in both native language literacy and content knowledge, that child is moved into more literacy work in the second language, rather than waiting until formal testing or the end of the year.

Shared responsibility for all students; familial community for students

The school staff members strive to serve as a familial community for students. The teachers and administrators are dedicated to meeting each child’s needs: “We know the kids.” “Every student in this building doesn’t have just one teacher. Every kid has all the teachers looking at them, teaching them.” Teachers and administrators support academically oriented outreach activities for parents, in order to help parents support their children’s schooling. Teachers also volunteer (and receive a small payment, $20/1.5 hours) to guide multiple after-school activities for the students, including mariachi, sports, tutoring, and clubs.

There was substantial visual evidence that Mexican heritage is celebrated at Bryant Webster, including Aztec/Mayan, Mexican, and Mexican American images in the halls, images of Latino artists, authors, and athletes, and many images of the school’s children. Signage was in Spanish and English. Student-produced materials in Spanish and English were displayed prominently in halls and classrooms as well.

Bryant Webster is an older school with a tall entrance at the top of stairs. Once inside, the main hall is busy, but welcoming, with easy chairs on either side of a table with information for
visitors. Above this grouping, there is a bulletin board with parent information in English and Spanish. Bilingual parent information is also displayed in other parts of the building. A large banner opposite the front entrance identifies Bryant Webster as an Epic award-winning school. The visual data support a coherent and consistent approach characterized by high expectations, support, and celebration of Bryant Webster’s Mexican heritage bilingual students.

**Teachers prepared in language development theory, research, and strategies**

The language development approach used at Bryant Webster builds on children’s linguistic backgrounds, addressing each child’s strengths, needs, and levels of proficiency. The approach is implemented by teachers, who use ongoing authentic assessment to guide language instruction and each child’s particular language environment, i.e., the classroom in which the student receives instruction in different content areas or skills, i.e., reading. As one teacher said, teachers and administrators approach instruction of the DPS curriculum with “a language lens.” The school uses a flexible, responsive, and expanding bilingual model rather than a traditional dual language or two-way immersion program. Language instruction is tailored to each individual child’s language proficiency. Children are moved to new language environments when they are ready, not at the end of term or on a set schedule, meaning that as a child improves in writing in his second language, he is given more exposure to literacy in that language. When a child’s proficiency in the second language is low, the child is exposed oral communication and vocabulary building in the second language, but not writing until the foundation in oral language and vocabulary are strong.

Teachers and administrators characterize the school’s approach to dual language as non-traditional. Based on research and the guidance of grant-funded consultants, teachers adapt and modify instruction purposefully for the population with which they are working. As one teacher suggests: “We are not just implementing a model, but modifying it for Bryant Webster’s population.” The language program is guided by “What will make the most sense for our kids.”

“We have the two different language groups, but even out of our English dominant speakers, we can’t say native English or native Spanish. We’ve got dominant English or dominant Spanish. We have so many students who come from bilingual homes, and either based on the parent survey when they register, where they may go into the English environment or the Spanish environment, but we have really found simultaneous bilinguals and so they could really go to either one, it depends then, with the parents to see what environment they’re going to do better in. So there’s the dominant English, dominant Spanish, and there’s another group who are dominant English speakers who are…sometimes they don’t come to us with great language skills. They’re coming to us as dominant English speakers but they test just as poorly on language tests as our dominant Spanish do. And so, it’s really looking at our population …we couldn’t have popped them into a 90% environment (in the second language)…No way.” Bryant Webster uses a 70/30 model, in which students begin doing 70% of their work in their home
language, and 30% in the second language. As students gain proficiency in the second language, they move to a 50-50 model, in which they continue.

The level of adaptation and modification with a language lens, all of which is consistent with both language acquisition research findings and best practice in language instruction, requires ongoing attention to teacher learning. Bryant Webster staff has engaged in professional development and grant writing to bring in consultants. Both theory and research guide the staff’s use of only authentic Spanish language materials, not translations. Theory and research also guide their focus on dual literacy, in which basic skills are acquired in the home language, in a context of strong support for both English and Spanish. As one administrator explains: “We really let them [teachers] individualize the program to make sure that we’re not putting a kid in the language environment where they’re not going to be able to move in the content.”

Visual evidence in support of this finding included language and content objectives and modified, dry erase boards for their easy posting as well as an extraordinary amount of text-heavy teacher prepared materials. These materials were dominated by academic language and often had supporting visuals. The consistent use of these kinds of materials communicates an emphasis on written academic language, which was, in turn, supported by many books available in almost all classrooms. In addition, many rooms had word walls with sections for content specific vocabulary. Often these walls were organized in such a way that the words could be changed easily. The flexibility of the word walls and the boards for posting objectives suggests active use of these tools.

According to the interviewees, most teachers at Bryant Webster are bilingual to at least some extent, and all have been trained in second language acquisition theory and strategies. Teachers in ELA-S classes are required to model both speaking and writing in English. Speaking the language of instruction is not enough; Bryant Webster teachers are expected to understand language instruction and language learning. Consequently, grants are written to fund professional development of teachers in the theory, research, and techniques of dual language.

**Bryant Webster is a learning organization**

In summary, Bryant Webster’s approach to working with all of its students, all of whom are learners of a second, or additional, language, is coherent and consistent. The approach is characterized by high expectations, strategic and well-informed scaffolding, and a “language lens.” Instruction is individualized by teachers who work collaboratively and who all know the school’s students. This collaborative work is characterized by ongoing learning among staff members, which supports the learning of Bryant Webster’s students.