

The next DCPS Chancellor must be a champion of multilingual education

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The DC Language Immersion Project works to engage families, support educators, research best practices and advocate for a systemic approach to close the opportunity gap through multilingual education.

In December of 2016, we testified in front of the Education Committee of the DC Council on the skills the next DC Public Schools Chancellor must have to address the District's most pressing issue—the achievement gap. Read our testimony [Narrowing the Opportunity Gap Through Dual Language Education](#) or watch it [here](#).

The latest PARCC scores show the achievement gap is still unacceptably wide. Therefore, once again, here are our hopes for the next DCPS Chancellor, as they align with the three main priorities areas set out in the Chancellor Search Community Engagement Report issued in October 2016.

Reduce the achievement gap

The focus on reducing the achievement gap must rely on proven initiatives, backed up by solid data and longitudinal research and should be strategically and systemically integrated into the District's education system.

According to longitudinal studies across the country, [students in dual language programs achieve at higher rates than their peers in non dual language programs](#). DC-specific data seems to indicate that this is true also in the District.

Additionally, closing the achievement gap through multilingual education would [directly improve access to college and jobs, as linguistic and cultural competence become a requirement for many jobs, especially in DC](#).

We hope the next Chancellor will integrate language and culture as a critical component in DCPS' access and equity agenda, and will recognize ["language education as a persistent national need similar to education in math or English"](#), and ["ensure that a useful level of proficiency is within every student's reach."](#)

Increase opportunities for all students

Increased opportunity for all students, including equitable access to programmatic options, is crucial in the District's fight towards equity. DC Immersion is pleased that [DCPS' 2017-2022 Strategic Plan includes the expansion of multilingual programs](#). However, more needs to be done to increase [equity of access](#) to specialized programs such as dual language programs.

Currently, [only 20% of DC's English Learners are in dual language programs](#), despite research being unanimous on these programs being [most effective in increasing achievement for DC's growing immigrant population](#).

At the same time, the most [socioeconomically disadvantaged African American children are excluded from the dual language conversation](#), despite researchers saying that [dual language programs benefit disadvantaged, black students too](#).

Additionally, [if school integration is key to opportunity for all students, then dual language programs should be used as a mean to this end](#), by leveraging DC's diversity and by using demand for these programs as a tool to translate the socioeconomic diversity that exists in our neighborhoods to our neighborhood schools.

We hope the next Chancellor will increase opportunity for all students by providing greater access to and equity in dual language education.

Increase parent and community engagement and communication

As an organization that promotes community engagement and that relies heavily on data and research, DC Immersion believes "greater transparency and more effective communication" are paramount. In the area of multilingual education, DCPS should:

- encourage research aimed at better understanding [parental demand for programs such as dual language immersion](#);
- accelerate the collection and reporting of data that can effectively inform the discussion around education, such as the reporting of data by strand in schools that have a dual language and non dual language programs;
- make better use of the data it already has, whether from previous engagement, testing or other, and should shape priorities on the basis of that data, particularly in areas where parents have clearly indicated what they consider valuable.

If DCPS is serious about parental engagement, it should actively support [legislation like that of California](#) where schools must provide a dual language program where families of 20 or more students in any grade (or 30 families across all grades) request it, regardless of language spoken at home. The clear rationale in California is economic opportunity. And that rationale is the same for DC.

We hope the next Chancellor will meet parental demand by supporting legislation that gives real power to families in shaping immediate strategic priorities for their children, and will rapidly move to ensure that the information that District residents have already provided be made transparent and be utilized to help shape strategic priorities.

Many DCPS teachers, staff and officials, including the interim Chancellor Amanda Alexander, understand the value of dual language programs as a competency that students need to be successful in this world. We hope that the next Chancellor will harness the skills and passion of so many to implement a visionary initiative based on empirical evidence – the building of a comprehensive dual language education system in the District of Columbia.