

Tulsa SEED Study

STUDY OF SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY & UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA-TULSA

The Early Educational Experiences of Spanish-Speaking Dual Language Learners in Tulsa: Findings from the Tulsa SEED Study

The Tulsa School Experiences and Early Development (SEED) Study followed children growing up in economically-disadvantaged families from when they enrolled in public early education settings in Tulsa through 4th grade in 2022-2023. The sample includes a large group of Spanish-speaking dual language learners (DLLs) who attended Head Start or Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) pre-k, allowing for a series of research studies aimed at understanding how early childhood programs and schools can best support DLL students and their families.

What have we learned?

1 Public early childhood programs and elementary schools in Tulsa support DLL students and their families.

- DLLs who attended Head Start and those who attended TPS pre-k differed on several characteristics (e.g., attention skills at preschool entry, family structure), but not on academic nor self-regulatory skills at the start of kindergarten, suggesting that both programs were meeting the learning needs of the students enrolled.¹
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, families of first graders designated as English Learners (ELs) experienced disproportionately high levels of food insecurity and low levels of SNAP receipt; however, there were no differences between EL and non-EL families in access to school-provided food aid.²

2 Spanish-speaking DLLs in Tulsa entered preschool with diverse language skills across Spanish and English.

- At the start of preschool, just a third of DLLs were Spanish dominant: 22% were English dominant and 44% had balanced levels of Spanish and English expressive vocabulary.³
- Over half of DLLs were classified as ELs in preschool, but associations between EL classification and English and Spanish language and literacy skills were sparse.⁴

3 Bilingual supports that incorporate Spanish into the English classroom environment can promote DLLs' English literacy, Spanish language, and math skills.

- Preschool teachers' support for children's home language was associated with greater math problem-solving and Spanish expressive vocabulary skills, but the strength of associations varied by the proportion of students in the classroom who were also DLLs.⁵
- In kindergarten and first grade, DLL students started the school year with stronger English literacy skills when they had teachers who used Spanish the previous school year.³

4 Teacher capacity to connect with DLL students' linguistic backgrounds can support skill development.

- Effects of bilingual support on DLLs' English literacy skills were partially explained by closer relationships between DLL students and their teachers who used Spanish.³
- Spanish-speaking DLLs who had a bilingual Spanish-speaking teacher early in elementary school had greater English literacy, attention, and memory skills in 3rd grade compared to same-school peers who did not.⁶

About the Tulsa SEED DLL Sample

Dual language learner status in the Tulsa SEED Study follows conventions used in Head Start and other early childhood education programs and is defined by whether the child lives in a household where another language is spoken, according to parent report. Analyses focused on Spanish-speaking DLL students since nearly all (96%) of DLLs in the Tulsa SEED Study were from Spanish-speaking families. By design of the Tulsa SEED Study, all students were from families with economic disadvantage: the average household income was \$24,166, which is less than the federal poverty level for a family of five in 2018 (\$29,420; ASPE, 2018). Most (71%) mothers were married and 46% had a high school diploma/GED. As of the preschool year, most parents reported that their child spoke equal English and Spanish at home (60%); 16% spoke mostly English and 24% spoke mostly Spanish.

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WHAT IS TULSA SEED?

The Tulsa SEED Study is led by Principal Investigators Drs. Anna Johnson and Deborah Phillips at Georgetown University, Dr. Diane Horm at the University of Oklahoma – Tulsa, and Dr. Gigi Luk at McGill University. The full SEED study team includes Dr. Sherri Castle, Dr. Anne Martin, April Dericks, Anne Partika, Anna Wright, Dr. Jane Hutchison, and Dr. Owen Schochet. Tulsa SEED is made possible through funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the University Strategic Organization Initiative at the University of Oklahoma, the Spencer Foundation, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information, visit <https://www.cdsplab.org/>.

