



DUALLY CLASSIFIED STUDENTS

Dually classified learners are students that are *both* classified as dual language learners (DLLs) and with having a disability. DLLs, also known as English language learners or emergent bilinguals, are students that speak a native language other than English and are in the process of developing English as a second or multiple language. Dually classified students receive dual service for supporting their English development and for their identified disability. Approximately 14.7% of DLLs in public schools are dually classified with a disability¹.

Key myths exist regarding dually classified students, including the following:

- Students cannot receive both English development support services and special education services at the same time.
- Special education services are so individualized they encompass the supports DLLs need.
- DLLs that are not performing academically at par with their classmates should be considered for special education services.
- DLLs are under-identified in special education.
- Even if a dual language learner is accidentally misclassified with a disability, they will only benefit from the extra supports.

What we know about dually classified students:

- Having “no dual services” policies in districts and schools is illegal². Dually classified students are entitled to receive services for English language development and special education services if needed.
- Special education does not encompass both language and special education supports. In fact, for many dually classified students, their special education services eclipse their English development services when they are entitled to receive both services.³
- DLLs that are struggling academically should not be compared to their classmates, but rather to their typical peers. In this case, their typical peers would be other DLLs at an equivalent English proficiency level.
- Identifying DLLs for a possible disability is a slippery slope. If they are incorrectly identified with a disability they face the possibility of more restrictive learning environments and therefore more segregated from their peers and have less access to the general education curriculum. On the other hand, if a dual language learner does indeed have a disability, but identification is stalled due to their dual language learner status, they miss out on the benefits of early identification interventions.

¹ U.S. Department of Education (2018) Fast facts: English language learners. Available via National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=96>.

² U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education. (2015). English learner (EL) dear colleague. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/edu/documents/elsguide.php>

³ Zehler, A. M., Fleischman, H. L., Hopstock, P. J., Stephenson, T. G., Pendzick, M. L., & Sapru, S. (2003). Descriptive study of services to LEP students and LEP students with disabilities. *Washington, DC: Department of Education*.



- DLLs may appear to be under-identified at the national level, but there are many ways to slice a cake! Different units of analysis are beginning to unravel more nuanced and complicated understandings of disproportionality⁴. For example, over-representation may occur at state-levels, in locales (suburban vs. rural), according to language programs students have had access to⁵ (dual language vs. English only), and implementation of culturally responsive tiered intervention systems⁶.
- DLLs tend to be under-identified with disabilities in the primary grades and over-identified in the middle grades⁷.
- Over-representation tends to occur in high-incidence disability categories such as learning disabilities and speech and language impairment rather than medically-diagnosed low-incidence disabilities⁸.

KEY TAKEAWAY: We know that dually classified students need both language learning supports and special education supports, however these services are often nonexistent or uncoordinated. Further, identifying DLLs with disabilities is a slippery slope. If correctly identified, early intervention services can support dually classified students. If incorrectly identified, special education services can result in unintended inequities.

References

⁴ Sullivan, A. L., & Artiles, A. J. (2011). Theorizing racial inequity in special education: Applying structural inequity theory to disproportionality. *Urban Education, 46*(6), 1526-1552.

⁵ Artiles, A. J., Rueda, R., Salazar, J. J., & Higuera, I. (2005). Within-group diversity in minority disproportionate representation: English language learners in urban school districts. *Exceptional Children, 71*(3), 283-300.

⁶ Orosco, M. J., & Klingner, J. (2010). One school's implementation of RTI with English language learners: "Referring into RTI". *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 43*(3), 269-288.

⁷ Samson, J. F., & Lesaux, N. K. (2009). Language-minority learners in special education: Rates and predictors of identification for services. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 42*(2), 148-162.

⁸ Rivera, M. O., Moughamian, A. C., Lesaux, N. K., & Francis, D. J. (2009). Language and Reading Interventions for English Language Learners and English Language Learners with Disabilities. *Center on Instruction*.