



FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Foreign Language instruction and active use of foreign languages has been demonstrated to confer many educational benefits. This is particularly evident among disadvantaged students, where addressing persistent academic achievement gaps are a national policy priority. Dual Language Immersion, where students learn academic subjects in English and another language, offers a positive and powerful approach to closing achievement gaps for African-Americans and students of low socioeconomic status. Over the past decade, the State of North Carolina has implemented Dual Language Immersions in more than a dozen languages and more than 60 schools. Evaluations of this statewide initiative show that dual language programs strongly counteract the negative impact of low socioeconomic status on school performance: African-American students of low socioeconomic status who participate in dual language programs score much higher in North Carolina's statewide End of Grade Reading Test, in all grades, than such students not taking dual language immersion.¹

North Carolina's data specifically show that:

- 3rd and 4th grade African American students in immersion score between ½ and 1 full year ahead of other African American students, in English reading;
- 5th through 8th graders score between ¾ and 2 years ahead of their peers in English reading.
- When compared to the overall statewide scores, African American children in immersion close the achievement gap (compared to the overall performance statewide) by the 8th grade.

In addition to the achievement gap benefits of language instruction, all students gain.

- School attendance improves;
- Engagement with learning in all subjects increases;
- Levels and rate of cognitive development increases.
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To sum up, foreign language learning, and in particular, dual language immersion, are a powerful tool in addressing achievement gaps in American education.

¹ Thomas, W.P., Collier, V.P., & Collier, K. (2011). *English learners in North Carolina, 2010*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.