Arlington Public Schools

EVERY STUDENT COUNTS
EXCELLENCE FOR ALL

APS Strategic Plan
2024-2030



Office of English Learners (OEL)

Dual Language Immersion Work Session

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November 17, 2026

Presentation Objective and Agenda



Student Academic Growth and Success

Objective

Clarify how one-way and two-way Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs develop bilingualism and biliteracy while increasing English learners' (ELs') academic achievement.

Agenda

- DLI in APS
- Overview of Language Development Programs & Research
- Comparing One-Way and Two-Way DLI Models
- EL Performance Across Programs in APS
- Implications for EL Instruction and DLI Expansion

The Roots of DLI in the United States

Student Academic Growth and Success

Coral Way Elementary, formed in 1963, was the first DLI program in the United States.

The program was developed to meet the needs of ELs—children from families fleeing the Cuban Revolution.

The school maintained a ratio of 50% Spanish speakers to 50% English.

The school paved the way for the 1967 Bilingual Education Act, the foundation of EL instruction in the United States.



Clarifying Terminology Used in This Presentation



Student Academic Growth and Success

1. Bilingual Programs

Programs that provide instruction in both English and Spanish

2. English-Focused Programs

Programs that prioritize developing proficiency in English, regardless of the language of instruction

3. Target Populations

Spanish-speaking ELs and students who are fluent English speakers

4. Grade Span Discussed

Language development programs at the elementary level

APS's Two-Way DLI Program



Student Academic Growth and Success

Escuela Key
K–5 · First APS program (1986)

Claremont
K–5 · Claremont Immersion

Gunston
Middle school · 6–8

Wakefield
High school · 9–12

K–5 Language Allocation

K–2: 80/20*
Grade 3: 70/30
Grades 4–5: 50/50

*** %Spanish/%English**

Balanced Enrollment

Option-school lottery with separate pools for Spanish and English speakers

Recent Board Action

80:20 model approved March 2022; phased in SY2023–2024 to SY2025-2026

The Goals of DLI Education

Student Academic Growth and Success

The Three Pillars of Dual Language Education

Three pillars. One vision.



BILINGUALISM & BILITERACY

Students become fluent in English and another language, developing strong communication skills in both.



HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Students develop high levels of literacy and academic skills in both languages, in all content areas.



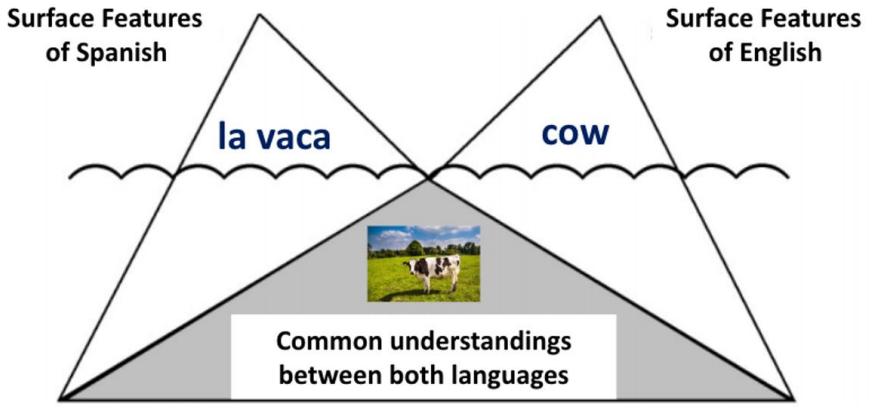
SOCIO-EMOTIONAL & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Students build confidence, identity, and a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own and others' cultures.

Dual-Iceberg Model of Bilingual Proficiency

Student Academic Growth and Success

Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP): what a child learns in one language is available in both



A child who understands “la vaca” only needs the English word “cow.” The concept is already built.

Skill transfer

Academic and cognitive skills draw from one shared foundation. Concepts learned in Spanish transfer to English once the English words are acquired.

Additive bilingualism

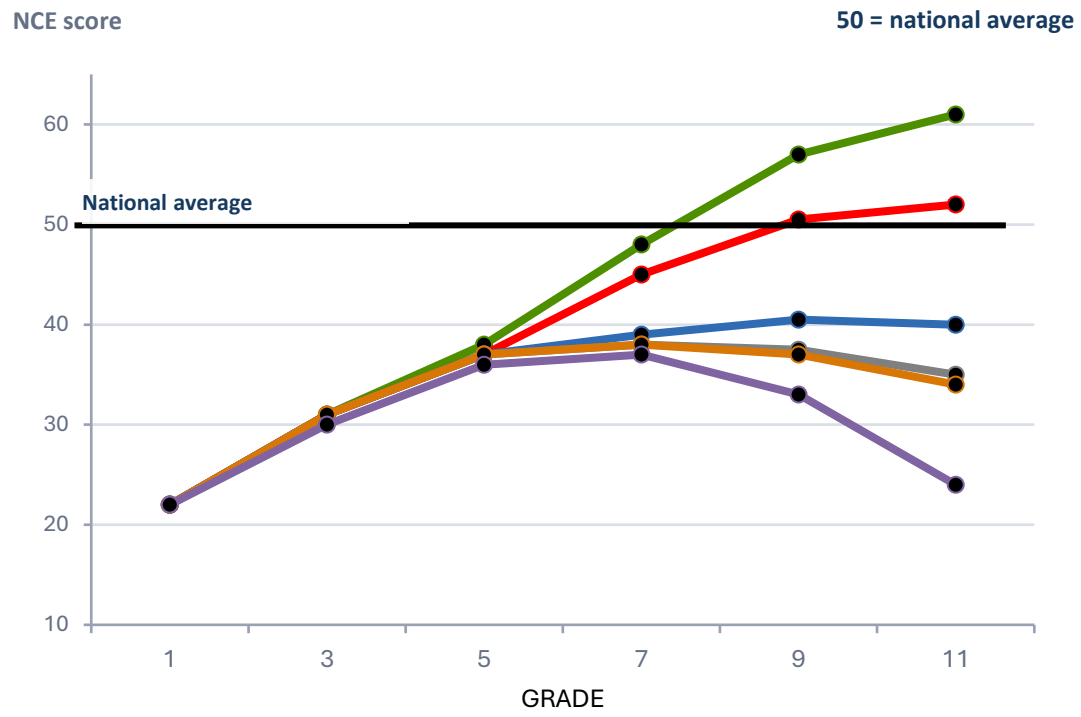
Strengthening a child’s home language does not hold back English. It feeds the shared base and supports higher-level academic growth in both languages.

Source: Cummins, J. (1981), Common Underlying Proficiency and the dual-iceberg model of bilingual proficiency.

Outcomes by Language Development Model

Student Academic Growth and Success

EL standardized English reading achievement, Grades 1–11 | Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs)



Approximate trajectories redrawn from the source; Grade 11 endpoint values preserved.

Sustained bilingual models show the strongest long-term outcomes.

In these longitudinal studies, **two-way and one-way dual language** were the only models that reached or exceeded the national average by grade 11.

PROGRAM MODEL	GRADE 11 NCE
Two-way dual language + content ESL	61
One-way dual language + content ESL	52
Transitional bilingual + content ESL	40
Transitional bilingual + traditional ESL	35
Content-based ESL; no home-language instruction	34
ESL pull-out; no home-language instruction	24

Source: Thomas & Collier longitudinal studies (2001–2012), as reproduced in VDOE (2020), Figure 3. Simplified/adapted visualization.

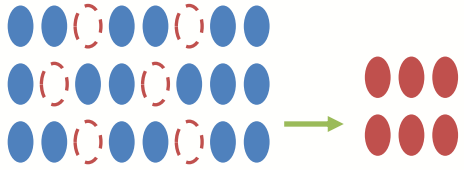
English-Focused Language Development Models

Student Academic Growth and Success

ELs English speakers

PULL-OUT ESL

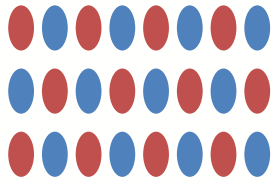
ELs leave the general setting for language instruction.



General class ESL setting

CONTENT-BASED ESL

ELs receive instruction through content in an integrated setting.



TRANSITIONAL BILINGUAL

ELs receive instruction initially in Spanish then transition to English.

Initially → Over time

Spanish instruction → English instruction

Grades K–5



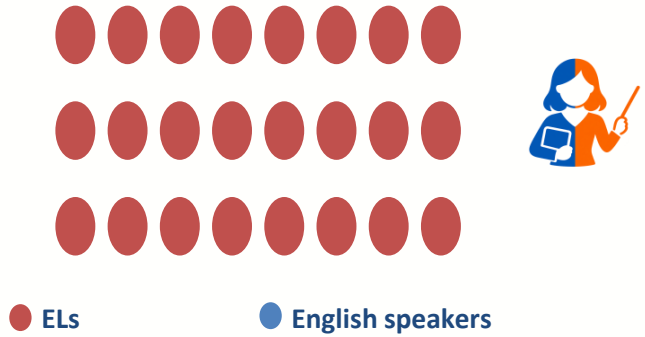
[See: Elementary School Language Development Program Models]

Biliteracy-Focused Language Development Models

Student Academic Growth and Success

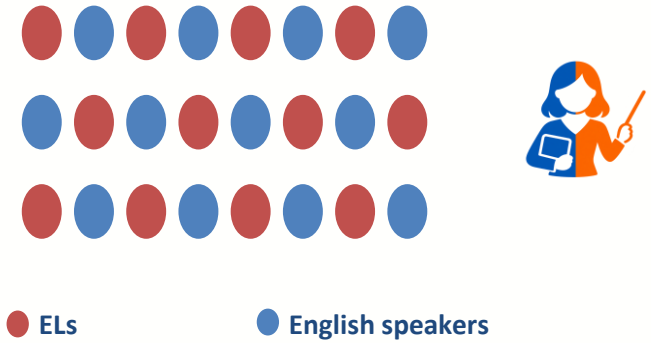
ONE-WAY DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION

Spanish-speaking ELs receive instruction in English and Spanish with an end goal of biliteracy.



TWO-WAY DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION

Spanish-speaking ELs and fluent English speakers receive instruction in English and Spanish with an end goal of biliteracy.



See: Elementary School Language Development Program Models

Advantages of One-Way and Two-Way DLI



Student Academic Growth and Success

One-Way DLI	Two-Way DLI
EL-Centered Model	Peer Language Models
Strong Outcomes for ELs	Strongest Research Outcomes
Rigorous Instruction in Spanish	Integration
Leveraging Existing Population	Status for Spanish
	Broad Support

Common Challenges in One-Way and Two-Way DLI



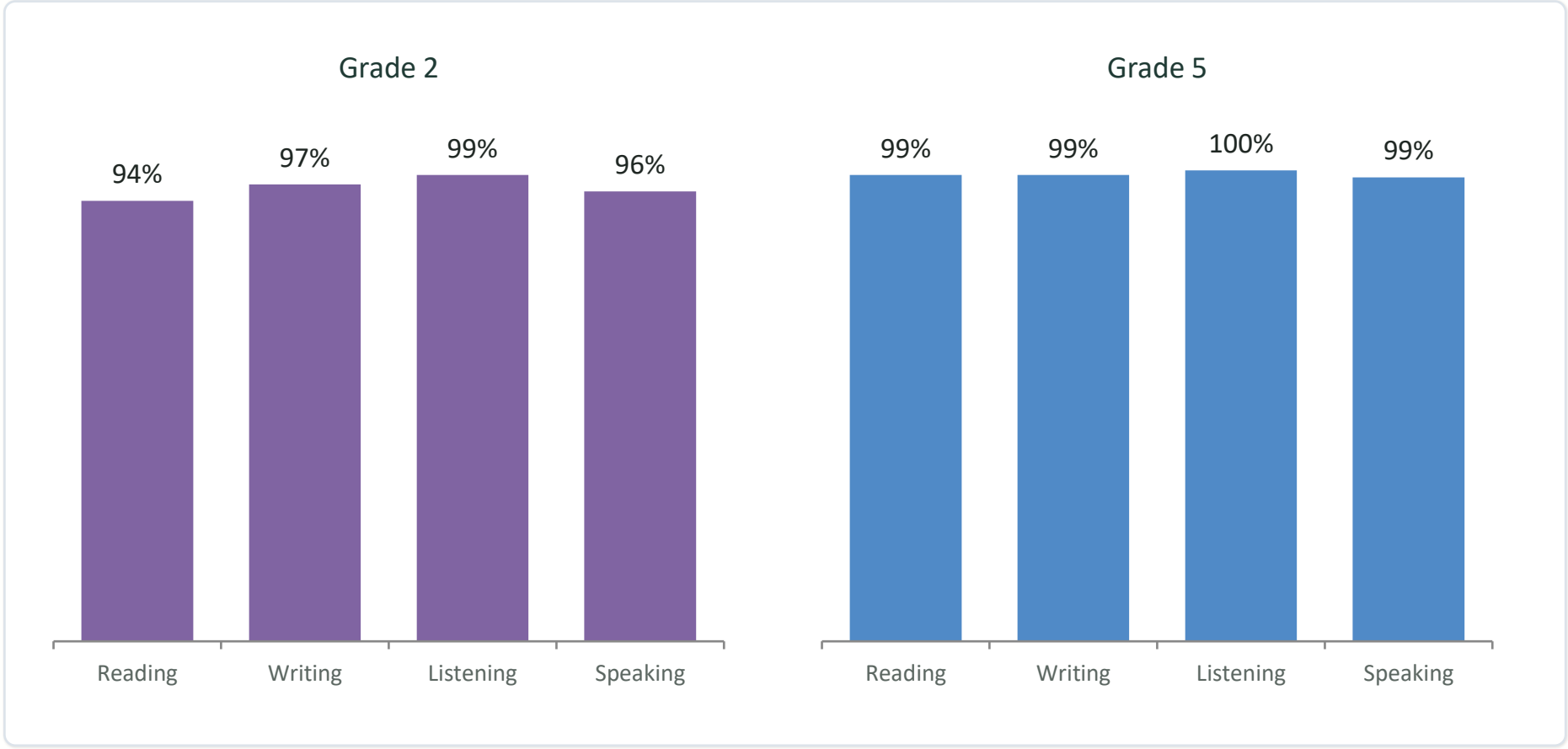
Student Academic Growth and Success

	One-Way DLI	Two-Way DLI
Language Instruction	Teachers must deliberately build academic and social English with fewer English-speaking peer models.	Teachers differentiate for two groups learning in opposite directions, requiring specialized preparation and ongoing learning.
Rights & Equity	EL separation must not exceed educational need. EL students should integrate with English-speaking peers during specials, recess, lunch, and special activities.	Lotteries, bureaucracy, and program locations may inadvertently discourage EL participation.
Access	The program structure ensures that a larger number of ELs gain access to DLI instruction.	The required 50/50 population balance limits the number of ELs who may access DLI.
Enrollment	Requires a large population of Spanish-speaking ELs at every grade level.	Uneven enrollment may limit peer modeling on either side.

Spanish Proficiency for DLI Programs in 2nd and 5th Grade

Student Academic Growth and Success

Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP) Spanish proficiency test, SY 2025–2026, % of students proficient



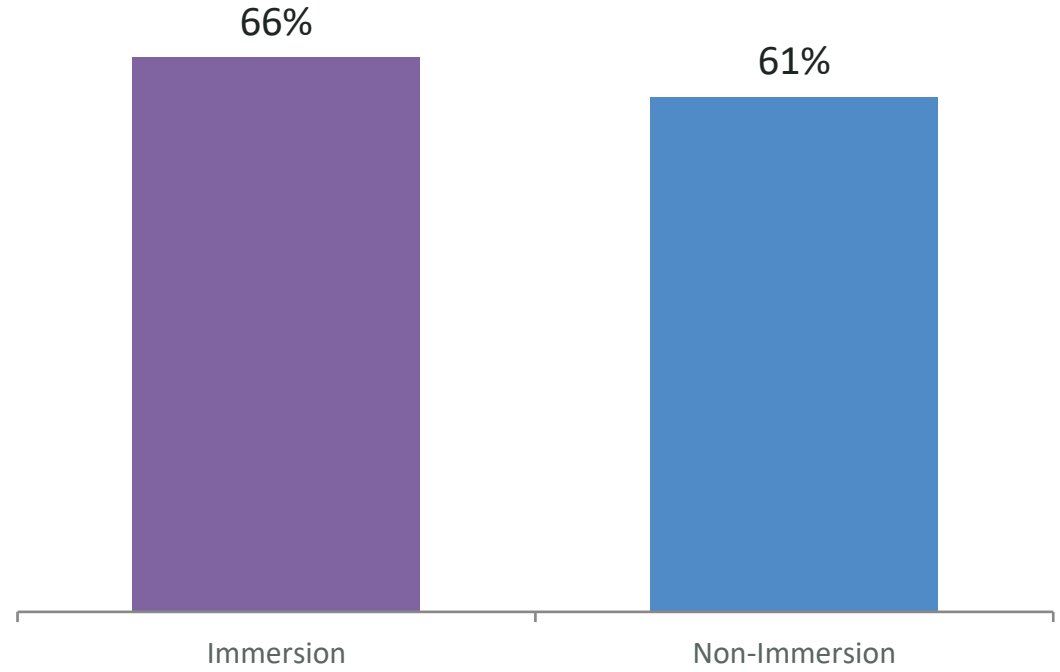
94%-100% proficient in all four domains in both 2nd and 5th grade

Source: STAMP 4S, Claremont and Escuela Key combined (average of the two schools).

Spanish-Speaking EL Performance on WIDA ACCESS*

Student Academic Growth and Success

WIDA ACCESS English proficiency assessment, SY 2025–2026, % meeting their annual progress target



Immersion
20%-50% English instruction

Non-Immersion
100% English instruction

More English growth with less English time: 66% met their target vs. 61% in the rest of APS.

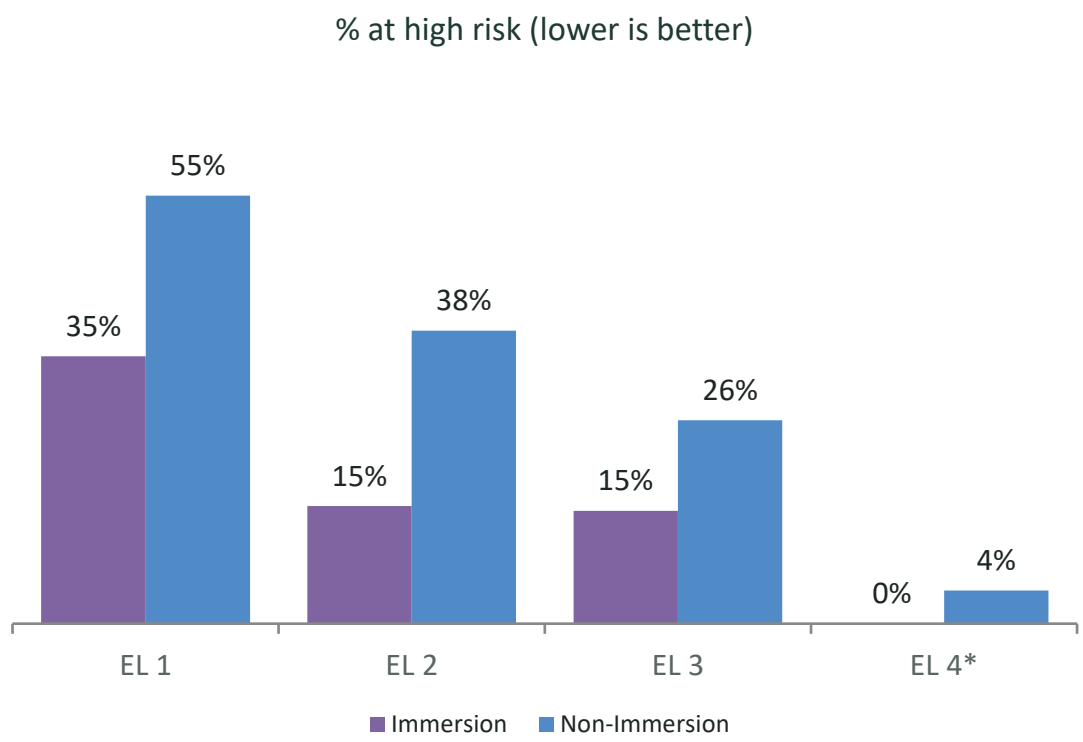
Source: WIDA ACCESS SY 25-26 (Hispanic designation). Rest of APS excludes Claremont and Escuela Key.

*WIDA: World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment; ACCESS: Academic Success

Percentage of ELs Scoring High-Risk on VALLS*

Student Academic Growth and Success

VALLS, ELs by English Language Proficiency (ELP) level, SY 2025–2026



35%

of EL 1 Immersion students are at high risk, compared with 55% at Non-Immersion schools

Lower high-risk rates at every EL level: Immersion keeps ELs from falling behind.

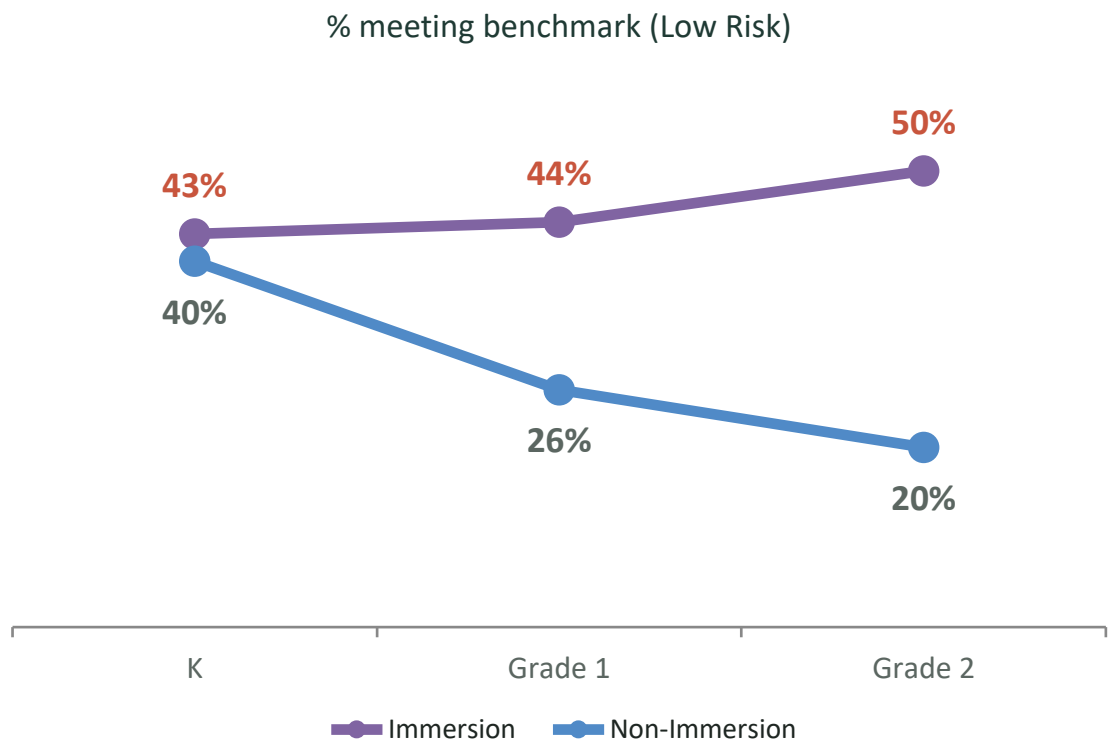
Source: VALLSS EOY SY 25-26 by ELP level. Immersion: Claremont + Key, K-2. Other APS: average of 23 schools, K-3. *EL 4 Immersion n = 8.

*VALLS: Virginia Language and Literacy Screening System

Percentage of Spanish-Speaking Students Scoring Low-Risk on VALLs

Student Academic Growth and Success

VALLSS, Spanish-Speaking Students, SY 2025–2026



1 in 2

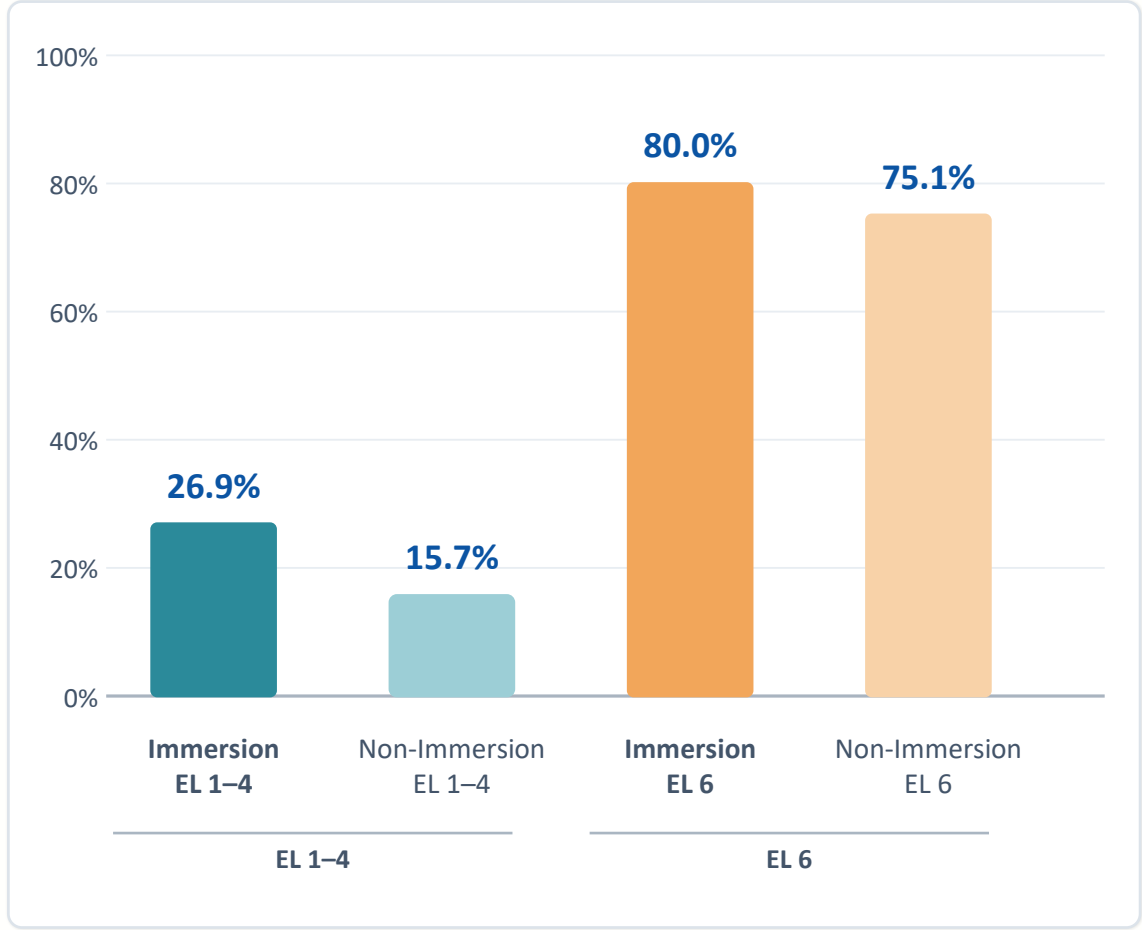
Spanish-speaking Immersion students meet the English reading benchmark by 2nd grade, compared with 1 in 5 in the rest of APS.

Ahead in every grade, and the gap widens: +3 points in K to +30 points in 2nd grade.

Source: VALLSS end of year SY 25-26. Rest of APS excludes Claremont and Escuela Key.

2025–2026 Spanish-Speaking EL Reading SOL* Performance

Student Academic Growth and Success



26.9%

Immersion EL 1–4 Pass Rate

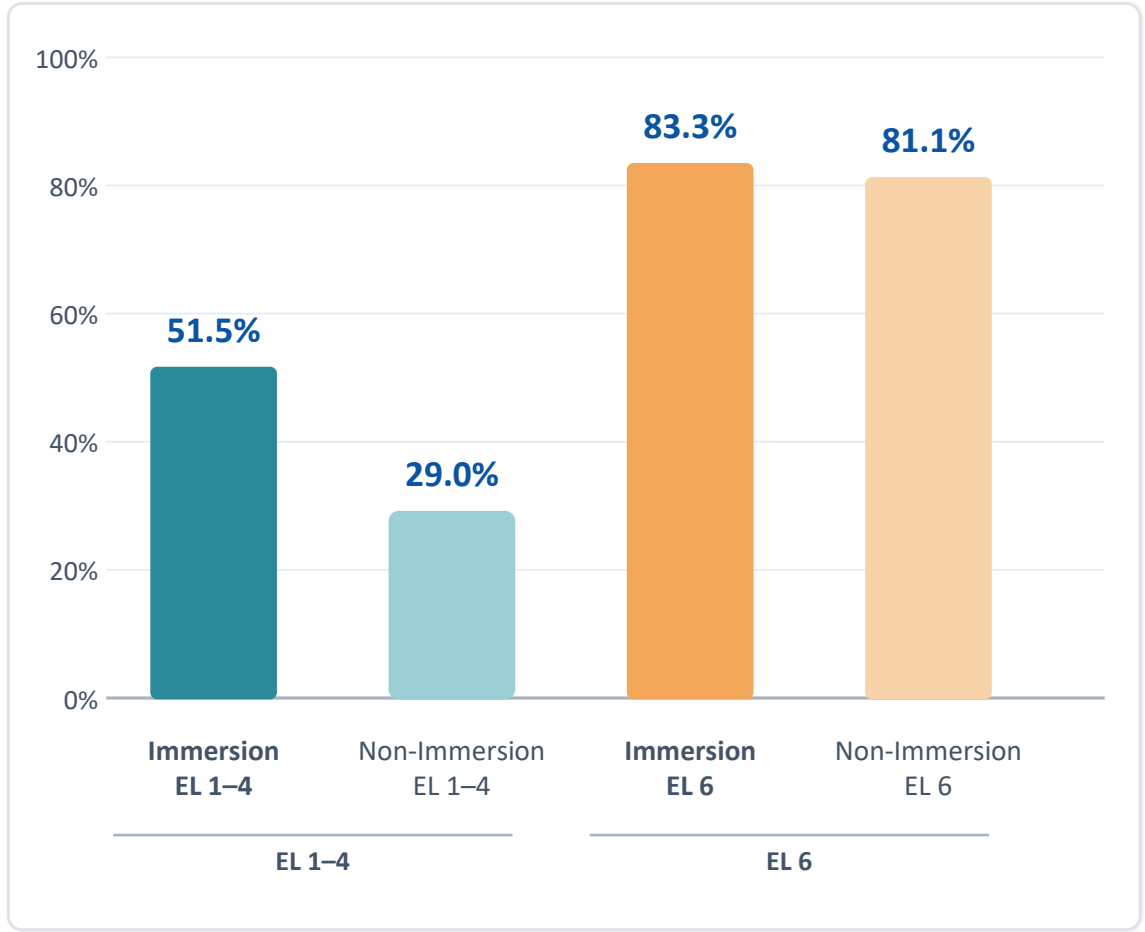
15.7%

Non-Immersion EL 1-4 Pass Rate

*SOL: Standards of Learning

2025–2026 Spanish-Speaking EL Math SOL Performance

Student Academic Growth and Success



51.5%

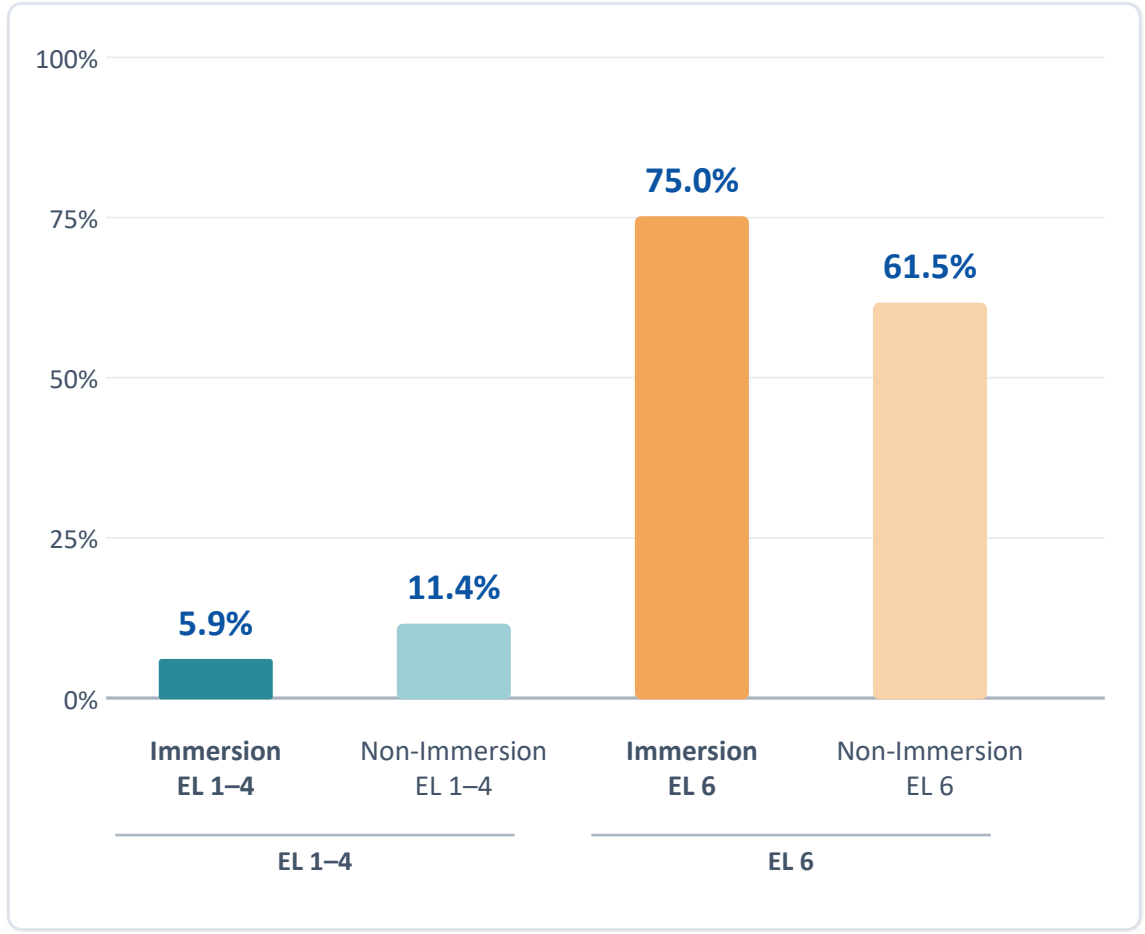
Immersion EL 1–4 Pass Rate

29.0%

Non-Immersion EL 1-4 Pass Rate

2025–2026 Spanish Speaking EL Science SOL Performance

Student Academic Growth and Success



5.9%

Immersion EL 1–4 Pass Rate

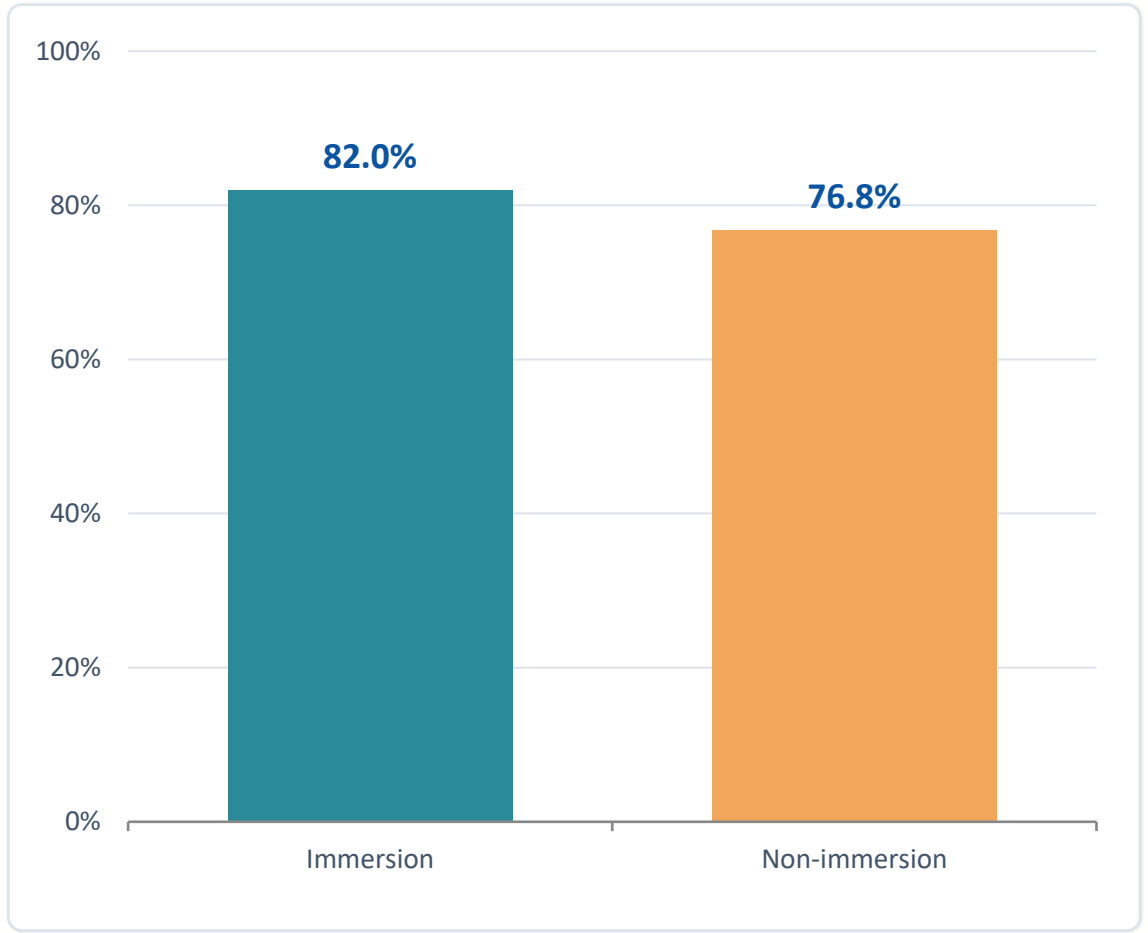
11.4%

Non-Immersion EL 1–4 Pass Rate

Source: Science SOL.

2025–2026 Reading SOL Performance

Student Academic Growth and Success



+5.2

percentage-point pass-rate advantage for immersion schools

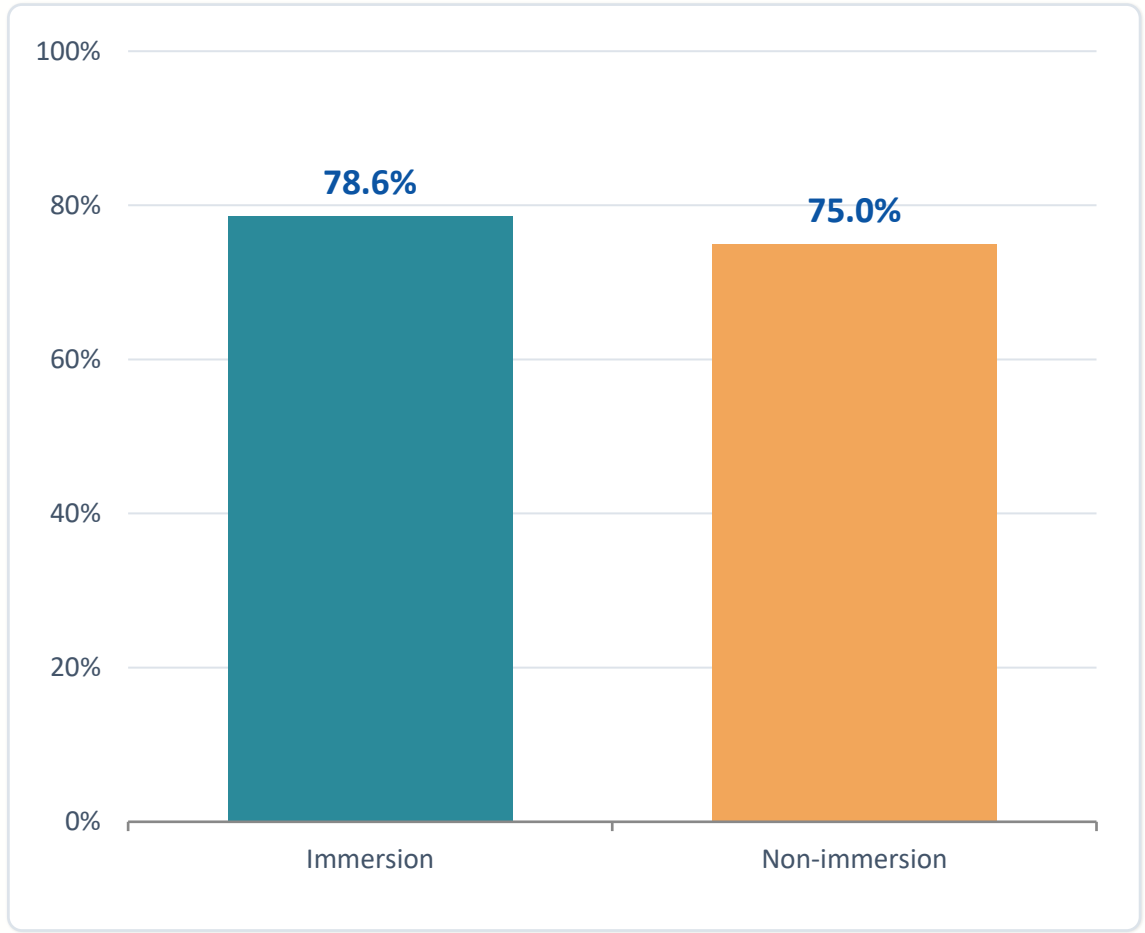
Immersion
418 of 510 students passed

Non-Immersion
4,531 of 5,897 students passed

Source: APS Reading SOL results, 2025–2026. Pass rate = students passed ÷ students tested, by school group.

2025–2026 Science SOL Performance

Student Academic Growth and Success



+3.6

percentage-point pass-rate advantage for immersion schools

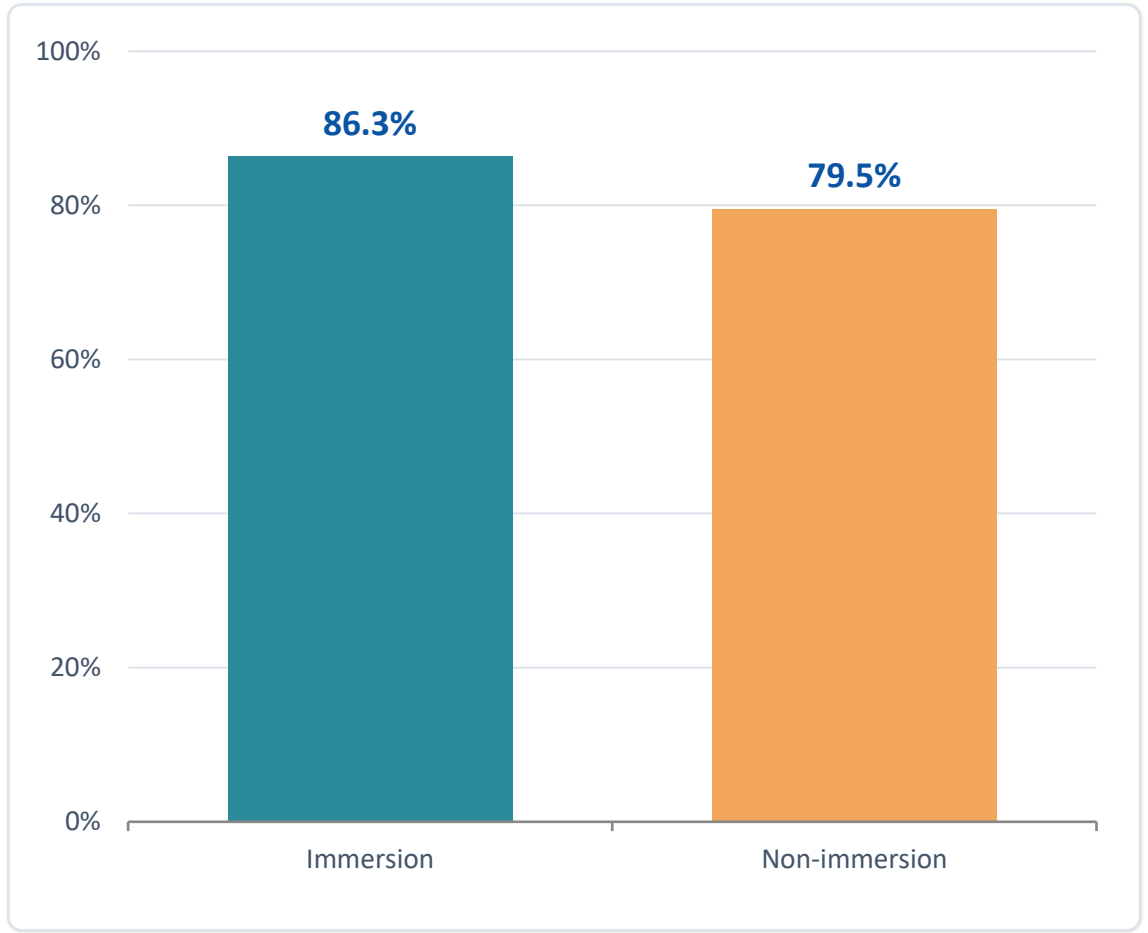
Immersion
136 of 173 students passed

Non-Immersion
1,462 of 1,950 students passed

Source: APS Reading SOL results, 2025–2026. Pass rate = students passed ÷ students tested, by school group.

2025–2026 Math SOL Performance

Student Academic Growth and Success



+6.8

percentage-point pass-rate advantage for immersion schools

Immersion
441 of 511 students passed

Non-Immersion
4,742 of 5,964 students passed

Source: APS Reading SOL results, 2025–2026. Pass rate = students passed ÷ students tested, by school group.

Implications for DLI Expansion



Student Academic Growth and Success

Leverage DLI's strong EL achievement to close gaps.

Increase access for Spanish-speaking ELs in a school with a large Spanish-speaking population.

Build a stronger feed into middle and high school Immersion.

Sources: VDOE (2020), Sections 2 and 3; Steele et al. (2024)

Location Matters in DLI Programming



Student Academic Growth and Success

- In two-way programs, achievement gains are most significant for Spanish-speaking ELs.
- Gains are strongest where the Spanish-speaking EL population is at least 40%.

Steele et al. (2024)

- Without intentional planning, two-way programs may not reach the communities that benefit the most.

Holtz (2026)

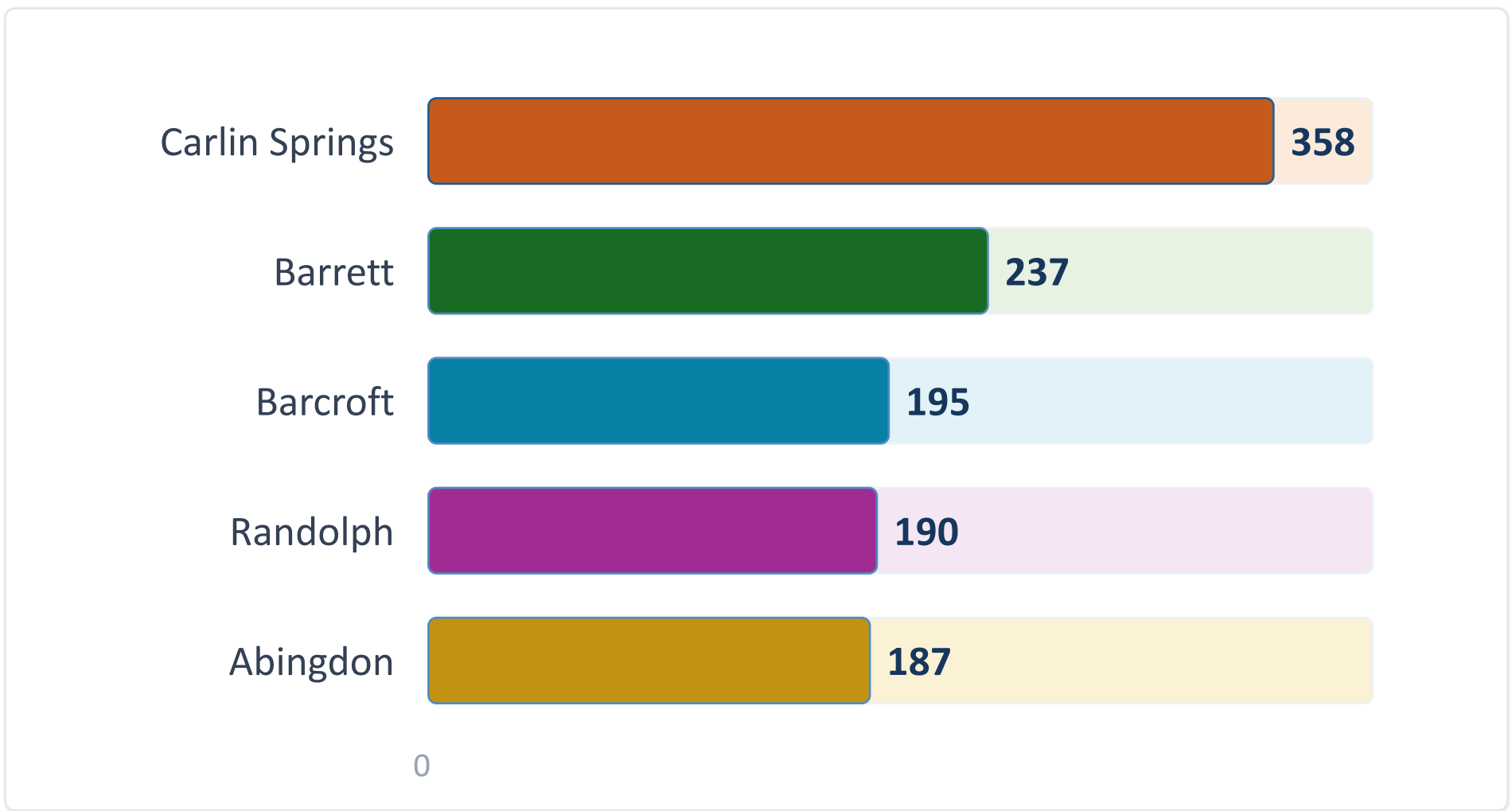
Implications for Increasing Access

Grow the immersion program in an attendance zone with a large population of Spanish speakers

Sources: Steele et al. (2024), The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy. Holtz (2026), AERA Open, 12.

Schools With the Largest Number of Spanish Speakers

Student Academic Growth and Success



Factors That Facilitate Expansion



Student Academic Growth and Success

Leadership

APS has principals with DLI knowledge and a DLI Coordinator who champions the program.

Student Population

APS has several schools with large Spanish-speaking EL populations that could accommodate a DLI strand.

Program Model

APS's established two-way DLI model provides a foundation for replication or adaptation to a one-way model.

Spanish Materials

Instructional resources have already been implemented for all DLI schools.

Considerations for Expansion



Student Academic Growth and Success

1

Engagement

Gather input from stakeholders, including staff, families, and community members.

2

Plan

Analyze costs, select program model and site, hire and train staff, and acquire materials.

3

Launch

Add one grade per year, beginning with kindergarten.

4

Refine

Evaluate progress and adjust plans, as needed.

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