In the sudden shift away from the traditional learning environment last spring due to COVID-19-related school closures, many schools were ill prepared to connect with their students through online instruction. This shift proved especially challenging for Two-Way Bilingual Immersion and Dual Language (TWBI/DLI) programs. As schools begin to plan for reopening in the fall, educators are examining the efficacy of the online instructional practices used in the spring, and in many cases are altering their course of action. School leaders and teachers know that they will have to employ much more powerful and effective instructional strategies and build stronger communication links with their families and students in order to retain the integrity of instruction in two languages as outlined by TWBI/DLI program practices.

This brief is a compilation of information from various forums held in June 2020 with experienced TWBI/DLI administrators, principals and teachers. It is not a “one-size-fits all” document. Rather, this document lists considerations that require careful planning and attention for TWBI/DLI programs committed to moving forward successfully during this pandemic.

A disclaimer before you start reading, we are clearly not addressing all the logistics
and local issues facing schools and districts at this time: staffing, distribution of technology, preparation of facilities for students and staff, etc. We certainly cannot answer the question that is at the forefront of all educators at this time - how to keep students and their teachers safe from this outbreak. Rather, this brief is focused on the areas that can be addressed specifically for TWBI/DLI programs: forging strong school/family partnerships, planning for online instruction before school begins, strengthening the collegial partnerships between teacher teams who deliver instruction in both languages, and working with new students to introduce them to their new teachers and the new target language.

1. Forming Parent/School Partnerships from the Outset of School

In this time of COVID-19, schools in the United States with specialized programs such as TWBI/DLI must pay close attention to their relationships with the families who selected this educational option for their children. This fall, incoming TWBI/DLI students at the preschool, transitional kindergarten (CA), and kindergarten levels will face even greater challenges than in a “normal” return to school. Schools will have to carefully and proactively initiate the families not only to the new TWBI/DLI program, but also to the online or hybrid instructional configurations that the schools will be implementing as they navigate through whatever realities COVID-19 brings during the first months of school.

This is the time for TWBI/DLI programs to plan for parent partnerships in a way that has never been done before. We must remember the adage “you only get one chance to make a good first impression.” Research supports this adage, which states that within seven seconds of meeting you a person will make several judgments about who you are and whether they can trust you. Families need to be able to trust that teachers and administrators have their child’s best interests in mind when making decisions relating to their goals for the child’s academic, social and linguistic experiences in school.
Zaretta Hammond, author of *Cultural Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, has a series of YouTube presentations where she taps into Vygotsky’s *Zone of Proximal Development* and Luis Moll’s *Social Development Theory* to remind us that when schooling moves closer to home, we must remember that parents are a child’s first teachers:

**YouTube Video, Taking the Distance Out of the Learning**, 
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urLvddEFc

She reminds us that this is a critical time for educators to join forces with families and tap into the family's *Funds of Knowledge*. Learning activities at school that are practical, comprehensible, and connect into the social and cultural reality of a child's culture and family, sets up the children for powerful learning opportunities.

A well designed **orientation meeting before the start of classes** is the first step to building a powerful and practical connection between the schools and families. These meetings may take place with small groups over multiple days or by scheduling virtual sessions with the students and their families. These meetings may quell some of the anxiety and fears that families commonly experience when sending their children to school for formal instruction in a second language, anxiety that is most surely amplified during this time. Connecting with both the native speaking families of the target language and the English speaking families will be the key to keeping the program intact.

New family orientation meetings also allow children the opportunity to be introduced to their new teachers and school – either online or in person in socially-distanced small group meetings – so that students are able to begin the process of relationship
building. During this initial meeting, teachers may address the students in Spanish by sharing key phrases of the day, for example, such as “Buenos días, me llamo....“ and one or two phrases that will be part of the daily routine to open access and interest to students who speak the target language and introduce to the target language to the English speakers for the very time.

Parents may also need to share their unique family situations – work schedules, monitoring capabilities, and parental roles – with the school. By closely partnering with families, educators can keep their finger on the pulse of the social-emotional well-being of their students during the first weeks of school. The initial steps a school takes in forming a connection between the students and their families can prove critical to sustaining the successful schooling process in both languages during these COVID-19 times.

The bottom line: the relationship between families and their school is paramount to the success of a school. But this is especially true when the instructional system is no longer “school as we once knew it.” This situation demands a much more focused effort to support families as they work with their children at home. One cannot lose sight that the families in TWBI/DLI programs will be engaged in a second language learning effort with their children. Everyone must understand and plan for the fact that the initial days of school in a second language may prove difficult and challenging to both students and teachers. Parents will need to be reassured that they will be able to seek advice and support from their teacher. The initial steps that school educators take in forming a strong alliance with the students and their families will prove critical to sustaining the schooling process in both languages during these COVID-19 times.
2. Before Classes Begin

TWBI/DLI programs must plan for the “worst start of school scenario” before classes begin in the fall, fully cognizant that schools may be relegated to operating in a distance-learning situation from the onset of the school year. Online instruction is far from ideal, but not planning for it puts the school’s TWBI/DLI program in a very precarious state, affecting the students, families, and teaching staff.

This is exactly what TWBI/DLI programs faced last spring in many districts when students were unable to engage in the instructional program online because of a host of issues that included lack of equipment, connectivity issues, no adult help at home, difficulty logging onto the instructional platform, etc. Although most students experienced “interrupted schooling”, students who lacked these resources and tools at home had their language learning opportunities and academic growth dramatically affected and may have lost weeks and weeks of schooling.

Last spring, teachers who moved into remote learning had clearly established relationships and partnerships with their students and their families. They found their virtual instructional interactions to be challenging but viable and could reach out and investigate the issues facing the families that were not connecting with them. Most of their families partnered with their teachers to ensure that students were in fact connecting. In the fall, teachers will be starting out with an entirely new cohort of students and families, and those relationships and partnerships have yet to be established and this is where the work begins.
3. Virtual Parent Orientation Meetings

This is the time for each program to rethink and schedule Back to School virtual meetings with the families in their program before the first day of classes. These meetings organized and planned by each grade-level team, will allow teachers to meet their new parents and students and begin to forge very important partnerships with each other. The size of these meetings will be important as well and teachers should consider eight-ten students with their families at each session. This allows for more interaction and discussion with each family. By creating agendas where each teacher can share schedules of live sessions or their “synchronous” instructional time, their expectations for their student’s engagement as they work online, their assignments, etc. helps both parents and students have an understanding for how the first months of the school year will progress. Advising parents on how to minimize distractions so that students can focus on their online “Virtual School” will get everyone in the mindset that school is coming and they must be ready. (Note: A sample agenda for TWBI/DLI Program Virtual Parent Meetings is in our next edition of Tips and Consejos at www.ATDLE.org)

Parents will need an introduction to the technology platform that a school will be using with their children. Understanding the instructional platforms that teachers are asking students to use enable parents to better assist their children as they work to access their assignments, readings /literature, project descriptors, practice pages, etc. planned by their teachers. Once all parties have been readied with the equipment, have adequate connectivity, and are able to manage the platform, parents and students will understand how to access school through their devices.
Doing this work in advance, before the start of classes, will help mitigate the technology issues that may need attention and make online instruction a more viable instructional medium for all students. Explaining and practicing these details during the initial meetings with the families will help teachers keep the students online.

Master TWBI/DLI Kindergarten teachers, from the June forums, suggested preparing and sending a *Bienvenidos a la Escuela* (in the target language) packet home to introduce the Preschool, TK, and Kinder students and parents to the introductory skill work that can be completed at home with the help of a parent: a self-portrait, name writing, collection of items to be shared “in class,” etc. These packets do not replace live sessions with teachers and students, however. Explaining these assignments to both parents and students, what is now called “asynchronous” assignments, to the families will help everyone understand the importance of completing this work.

### 4. Teaching Online

TWBI/DLI programs are designed to be *communicatively based instructional models*. A communicatively based model for second language learning is built on the pedagogy that students want and need to have positive interactions with their teachers to form a strong bond that motivates students to learn his/her teacher’s new language. Language learning and usage is highly relational. Online instruction makes it very challenging to create these relationships and for this reason, setting up instructional activities and lessons that are of high interest, highly motivating, engaging, and consistent for students is essential. It will keep the students’ attention
on both the teacher and the language he/she speaks. TWBI/DLI teachers who plan and utilize units of study that tap into common prior knowledge and are of high interest to the children find that they can motivate students to stay connected to the learning while building a relationship with their “teacher who only speaks Spanish (or the target language).” Creating a mindset with students that they are about to embark in a “new adventure in learning” has proven to be highly effective in keeping students motivated to attempt and develop their skills in their new language.

In the fall, teachers should advise parents of TWBI/DLI students at the Preschool, TK and Kindergarten levels who must prepare their children for second language learning, that they should let their child know that their teacher is in fact bilingual and will understand them in any language they speak. Many children will feel relieved that they will be able to communicate with their teacher whenever they work together. Parents might also assist by telling their children that they may use the language they know until they learn their new language! This lowers a child’s level of anxiety in the first days of their schooling. Clearly explaining to the families and modeling to the students, that as their teacher, you will be using the target language exclusively with them, eventually leads the students to associate the target language with you as their new teacher. As students forge stronger relationships with their teachers, they are motivated to continue to work through the initial stages of language to communicate with you. This effort to communicate is what TWBI/DLI educators describe as “building the need” to use the new language which only happens when and if the teachers use the target language exclusively with their TK and Kinder students.
TWBI/DLI programs must never lose sight that a percentage of the parents speak **only** the target language, and this can be a great opportunity for native speaking parents to help their children with their schoolwork in the target language. Learning about the families’ schedules and working to mitigate their issues, will help the teacher build trust with families and secure a place in the learning environment of their children.

Setting schedules of live sessions are critical to helping students prepare for their designated time in Spanish (or the target language) and their designated time in English. Students need to see and hear their teachers speak the target language especially as teachers introduce the new language to the students. It is nearly impossible to teach a new language via packets of work or pre-taped sessions. **Live** instructional sessions with students on a daily basis will help students familiarize themselves and get comfortable listening to their teacher in the target language. Whole group sessions followed by small group instructional time where the teachers can speak directly to individual students also helps reticent students attempt to use the language while working on their academic skills and language development.

At the primary level, TWBI/DLI Kindergarten teachers suggested that teachers prepare stories/literature in the target language that may be familiar to the students so that teachers can help bridge students into the new language starting the first week of sessions: *The Three Bears, Bono el Mono, No, No David*, are just a few titles that might be used as an introductory unit. The use of charts, pictures,
puppets, and other visuals also support student’s receptive language development as they enter the initial levels of language development. Experienced TWBI/DLI teachers believe that creating daily opening exercises virtually will be critical to engaging with their students. Their “work on the carpet” during their regular classroom time becomes their “opening instructional routines” when they have to teach virtually. Daily oral practice of counting, sound systems, calendar, weather, alphabet, songs, poetry, word study in the target language or related to their literature, etc. is incorporated as part of the process for getting students into the rhythm of their online lessons and the new language.

If packets of work or assignments are sent home for students to do, the work becomes the You Do in the cycle of I Do, We Do, You Do instructional planning. These assignments need to be carefully tied to the instruction that took place during the live sessions with the students. Sending directions home in both languages so that parents receive a clear explanation of the activities and special assignments, is key to engaging families in working with their children.

TWBI/DLI teachers are some of the most creative and motivating teachers in the profession. Many TWBI/DLI teachers in our forums shared how they scheduled special days or events that students would look forward to so that students would continue to connect with their teachers online. One teacher, for example, shared that she created time on Fridays where she would have students engage in her Special Day /Días Especiales. She previewed special events and special guests at the beginning of each week and shared reminders throughout the week. She tapped into online resources: guest readers in the target language, children’s music and dance activities, and found online resources, including:

a. 1, 2, 3 Andres (www.123andres.com)
b. José Luis Orozco (www.joseluís.com)
c. Maestra Yolanda Lucero on YouTube, etc.
Teachers also shared that there were a number of YouTube dance and singing clips in the target language that helped keep the students engaged and connected to the language. Another primary teacher allowed her students to bring a stuffed animal to their Escuelita de Zoom/Zoom School so that when she wanted to hear them practicing orally, they had their stuffed animal to talk to. These ideas and others emanate from the creativity and commitment that our TWBI/DLI teachers have always demonstrated to make both the target language and learning come alive for their students.

6. Forging and Strengthening Collegial Partnerships

The TWBI/DLI 90/10 program was designed to be two-teacher models. In a 90/10 model, students work with both a target language teacher and an English language teacher in grades TK-2nd grades. In 50/50 programs, the very nature of the design, calls for two teachers. For the schools that have never set up the appropriate two-teacher delivery system within their program, remote learning situations are a perfect time to establish or re-establish teams of teachers who will work together to collaborate, plan instruction, and serve as the language model for each other’s students.

In the forums held with TWBI/DLI kindergarten teachers in June 2020, many teachers shared that their efficacy in working with their students online was based squarely on the strength of their teaching team and their partner teachers. The teachers who planned their program together both the target language and English time, felt that they were successful in sustaining strong and viable
connections with their students during their instructional time with their students. Students who had their designated time with the “target language” teacher and designated time with their English time teacher continued to grow in the development of both languages.

On the other hand, several TWBI/DLI Kinder teachers who taught both the target language and English, encountered a resistance to the target language from their students. They shared that their students connected in the language they were most comfortable in and disconnected whenever the teacher moved into the target language. This was especially true for English speakers in many of the online lessons at the primary level. Working with a partner teacher at this time supports both the students and the teachers who have a partner with whom to plan, discuss and problem solve as situations arise.

7. Working with Hybrid Instructional Models

Most school districts in the U.S. have been considering the conditions necessary to for students to return to school and have contact with their teachers at least three times a week. The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommended that “all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.” Schools, it says, “should weigh the benefits of strict adherence to a six-feet spacing rule between students with the potential downside if remote learning is the only alternative.” But as districts are finding out, face-to-face instruction is increasingly complicated with many moving parts. And most importantly, securing the safety of students and staff is not easily mitigated. At this time, there are a number of “hybrid models” that are
being designed and discussed by educators. No one can predict how the opening of school will pan out. The schools, therefore, need to be prepared for all scenarios and plan ahead.

Informing parents up front that the schools are planning for the eventuality that face-to-face schooling and classroom instruction might be interrupted in a day’s notice should a COVID-19 case be identified, ensures that families have had this possibility clearly communicated. This gives all families time to create a Plan B if possible and better equip them to handle the virtual learning situations necessary to help their child continue learning.

If, by chance, TWBI/DLI teachers are able to meet their students in their classrooms for the first weeks of schools, they should focus on practicing routines and structures that may quickly morph into distance learning. The morning routine will need to be practiced carefully, especially at the primary grade levels, in that teachers may have to convert the daily routine into an online practice within a quick turnaround. Teachers will also need to take the time to teach students the use of their technology: iPads, Chromebooks, other devices, or laptops. Most importantly, students will need to practice how to connect online so that teachers are secure in knowing that if and when online instruction takes place, their students are ready for instruction.

8. **Shared Leadership**

As the opening of school quickly approaches, TWBI/DLI administrators and coaches will need to lead and organize the planning effort to prepare their the entire staff for the eventuality of online instruction. Gathering the teachers, scheduling planning time before school begins, and investing in a focused effort to
build “esprit de corps” will assist principals and coaches create viable plans for the opening of school. This challenging time calls for a problem-solution meetings as a school team to face the issues students and families have as they enter this far from normal school year. A school leader cannot do this alone – gather the troops!

9. Keep Your Eye on the Prize... it will get you through...

This fall, school leaders TWBI/DLI programs should prepare a public statement that clearly outlines the District’s resolve to continuing the TWBI/DLI in its best form. This message should be communicated in writing in the school newsletters, email notifications, websites, FB pages, etc., in order to quell any fears parents may have that their children will lose their program or that the school is veering from their commitment to fully implementing at TWBI/DLI program at this time. This is also the time to call upon key members of the school community to assist the leaders in reassuring the community that the TWBI/DLI program can/will continue to move forward.

10. Stay the Course!

The Bottom Line: TWBI/DLI programs need not forsake their efforts to conduct instruction in both the target language and English during this pandemic where the instructional delivery system has been altered. When online instruction is carefully designed for both languages and scheduled properly, it can be very effective for students. The percentages of time in each language may have to be altered temporarily, but target language instruction should not be abandoned or the TWBI/DLI Program may be set back so seriously, that districts will consider abandoning it all together.
Simply stated: early communication with families matters; sharing schedules of live sessions with families early before the start of school matters; teaching families how to connect to the instructional platforms matters; setting work expectations with students matters; creating connections with teachers in the target language matters. And very importantly, a consistent message from the school leadership and teachers about the school’s commitment to the continued implementation of the TWBI/DLI program will be key to staving off the doubts and questions that families grapple with that could result in the loss of families and students from the program.

The opening of school is a mere three to six weeks away. The planning time is now and educators must treat this planning time as an emergency. The TWBI/DLI teaching teams and administration need to employ their best thinking and planning skills in full support of the students and families. TWBI/DLI schools will be able to weather this modified instructional structure, but it will take strong collegial partnerships, careful and continuous planning, and strong alliances with families to keep your TWBI/DLI programs intact as you weather the fall semester.

¡Adelante! And May the Force Be With You!