



TWBI/DLI Parent Orientation Meetings Before the Start of School

By: Rosa G. Molina, Executive Director, ATDLE
Contributions from Maria Alzugaray, ATDLE Advisory Board,
Kate Ford, Santa Barbara USD

This fall presents new challenges for all schools in the United States and an added challenge to Two-Way Bilingual Immersion and Dual Language Immersion (TWBI/DLI) programs. Many districts are reaching out to our organization for resources and advice as they orient their families to start of school, the new teachers, and the schedules for distance learning. We created a sample agenda for the upcoming parent/student orientation meetings in hopes that it will offer both direction and insights on how to share critical information for families while introducing the students to their new TWBI/DLI teachers. We know all programs are grappling with how to plan and deliver this very important meeting and we hope you find this sample agenda informative for the work you are facing.

Timeframe: Schedule and conduct the orientation meetings at least a week prior to the opening of school.

Who conducts the meetings: This meeting is organized and delivered by the TWBI/DLI Grade Level Team. These meetings will need to be organized as two-teacher (Spanish and English time teachers) meetings with no more than 8 families in a virtual setting



Multiple Time Frames: Consider scheduling these meetings over the course of three days in different time frames to make sure all families are able to get online with their teachers.

Types of Meetings: The parent meeting outlined below would be conducted in the format of a *Back to School Night*, to re-introduce families to the TWBI/DLI delivery system, your instructional program, and to other parents. During this meeting parents should receive the procedural information to assist them as they prepare their child/children for the start of school (virtually). If this parent meeting is scheduled without students present, know that an introductory meeting for students and their teachers will still need to be scheduled before the start of school.

Remember, if this serves as an orientation to your TWBI/DLI classroom without the students present, the homeroom teacher is able address the parents in both languages. If the school decides on both parents and students being present, decide on which part of the agenda the homeroom teacher will be able to deliver in the target language and which part will be delivered in English by the English partner teacher. Stay in the language of instruction for your homeroom class when addressing the families.

Sample Meeting Agenda

Medium: Virtual meeting set up as a Zoom Meeting, Microsoft 365 or other platforms.

Prepare a PowerPoint for Parents with images from the presentation and the instructional tools that your teachers will be using during their virtual instructional sessions with the students. This will prove very valuable to the parents. The “PowerPoint” may serve as a guide or resource that the families might reference as the need arises.

1. Bienvenidos/Welcome

2. English time teacher introduces self and the Spanish time teacher.

3. Spanish time teacher begins with “Yo me llamo Maestra____, ¿como te llamas tu?” “Yo me llamo... (starting with Spanish speakers to model the response...)” until he/she hears from all of the students.

4. The TWBI/DLI teachers should share their backgrounds, their years of experience as a TWBI/DLI/Bil teacher, their journey with bilingualism. and why they think this work is important to the lives of their students. They may want to share pictures of their own families and fun facts about their life outside of school.

5. Parent Questions: Set up the process for answering questions from your parents as you start your meeting.

- a. Answer the questions that are related to the topic at hand or have parents place their questions in the “chat”.
- b. Schedule individual meetings if the parent concerns/questions require a more extensive response or expansive explanation. Do not make the rest of the families wait as you engage one on one with a family and their individual situation.
- c. Set the agenda carefully with the parents as you start your meeting: *“We fully understand that there may be many issues and scenarios facing you, your child and your unique family situation at this time. We would be glad to speak to you individually about your child’s needs and schedule an appointment with you. Please know that I plan to give you my contact information before we end this session but know that I “must stay on topic” because our time together is very brief and our timing is urgent as we work to plan a successful start of classes for your child.” Share this in Spanish or the target language as well.*

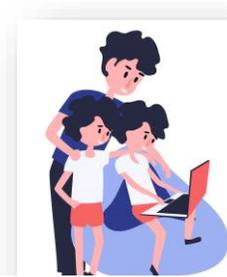
6. Share the Daily/Weekly Schedule – Outline the dates/times/calendar for “live sessions” with the students (Synchronous Instruction) and independent practice work time where students can practice on specific programs online (Asynchronous Instruction)

7. Clearly explain your expectations for a quiet workspace for students but be empathetic and fully support parents who may need assistance in how to determine their child’s workspace at home.



8. Share your expectations for the use of technology by the students

- a. Take stock of the equipment students will be using at home
Note: Some schools are making sure everyone in the class has the same technology so that the teacher is familiar with it and can guide the process for connecting with the students should he/she need to.
- b. Check on each family's connectivity and internet issues and be prepared with a solution to help them mitigate their concerns: *"We are working with Verizon and they assured us that...."*
- c. Share the process for the distribution of the materials from school describing the procedures and dates.
 - i. Materials might include textbooks, individual white boards/pens or clipboards, paper, response cards, index cards, headsets, etc. Some schools are distributing materials in backpacks or special boxes so that students perceive it as their very important *Escuelita de Zoom/Zoom School* materials.)



9. Describe and Demonstrate the Parent Communication Portals

- a. Decide: Class Dojo, SeeSaw, Clever, or Microsoft 365? Which platform will you utilize for your instruction and what will your communication link be for the families? Introduce it to your families and demonstrate its use.
- b. Collect contact Information: Email list? Phone list? How will families contact you?
- c. Describe the appointment process: office hours, time with the principal and the teacher, contact numbers, etc.
- d. Explain that parent anxiety about the program, questions and issues should never be discussed in front of the students so that parents do not unwittingly, undercut their child's motivation to enter/engage into the new language
- e. Urge all families to *Keep the Faith* in the TWBI/DLI program. Separation anxiety should be greatly reduced in a virtual setting (one can only hope) but COVID-19 has placed everyone into a new reality. Remind your families of this constantly, there will probably be many *"we will have to wait and see, but we will adjust accordingly"* responses to the families as teachers have to respond to questions and scenarios that they are not able to answer. Remind families that this is a new medium of instruction for everyone, but that you, as professional educators, will work closely with their children, with the family and problem-solve with your colleagues, to create the best learning conditions possible.
- f. Support your parents as they work to understand directions for projects or big assignments requiring parental assistance. We suggest that you create a parent portal with information solely for the parents. Some teachers call it: *For Your Eyes Only/Para Los Ojos de los Padres*.
- g. Encourage all families to share their excitement for *La Escuelita de Zoom...Zoom School* and the opportunity that their children will have in learning a new language. Help parents understand that their enthusiasm toward school and this new language learning opportunity is reflected in their children, so staying positive despite the challenges will keep their children moving forward.

10. Share your instructional plan for synchronous and asynchronous instruction

- a. Curriculum and instructional materials for each subject area
- b. Language of Instruction for each subject area
- c. Timing for the English exchange time with your partner teacher
- d. Describe the format and frequency of the live sessions, small group instructional time, and independent work sessions
- e. Share the accountability system
- f. Describe how you will be reviewing student work and grading it.

Other Points to Consider:

•Be careful not to “break code” in front of your new students! Students need to associate you, their new teacher, with the new language the minute you are introduced to them. Be secure in knowing that your initial efforts in developing your relationship with your students in the new language will ultimately pay off. Remember: in the beginning stages of language learning, students need to develop a “need” to use the language...communicating with you, their teacher, and their Spanish speaking peers, will build that “need”.

•Consider planning an enriched language time with your students and tap into author, Dr. **Alma Flor Ada, who** teaches teachers how to work with their students to play with language, tap into the beauty of the Spanish Language, and involve them in vocabulary development and “word consciousness”.

•Finally, we highly suggest again, that you take a few minutes to listen to *Zaretta Hammond’s YouTube* conversation with a team of SFUSD educators **before your actual meetings**: *Taking the Distance from Distance Learning*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urLvddEdvFc>. Start at the 10-minute mark and reflect on her advice and message.

Hammond’s message is particularly relevant to the implementation of the TWBI/DLI program’s 3rd goal that focuses on the development of cultural proficiency and cross-cultural understanding. It is critical, therefore, that in the virtual settings of present day instruction, that TWBI/DLI teachers start their units of study connecting instruction to the rich cultural background of your students’ backgrounds and families.



In Laura Lee’s article, *The Value of Culturally Responsive Teaching in Distance Learning*, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/value-culturally-responsive-teaching-distance-learning>, Lee summarizes Hammond’s message by offering three suggestions for implementing *Culturally Responsive Teaching* in the virtual instructional mode that everyone is engaged in:

1. **Use students' background knowledge:** The knowledge students have from their families, communities, and lived experiences informs the ways they process and retain new information, and Hammond points out that educators can guide students to connect what they're learning in classes to that background knowledge. Hammond encourages teachers to survey students to find out their interests and then use their interests as the foundation on which to "build more knowledge". Students can take a walk with their parents to find "community curiosities" that spark their interest, for example, or create a list of shows or documentaries that focus on their interests. Guiding students is about more than "curating resources", Hammond points out. She urges teachers to provide a framework that shows students how to explore a subject. For example, ask students: "What was your biggest surprise from this book/show", a teacher might ask. Asking students to reflect on and share what they observed or learned in a video or audio note can also reinforce the knowledge gained.
2. **Build routines for the brain:** Establishing questions for inquiry is "essential to processing and hardwiring information in the brain," Major writes. Using a regular set of prompts in every send-home assignment builds students' capacity to "begin to think that way even when you're not in the classroom to reinforce that way of thinking." Hammond called this being students' "personal trainer of their cognitive development."
3. Hammond suggests **asking questions that encourage students to draw connections** between bits of information and relate parts to the whole. For example, a basic question such as "What's the relationship or connection between these things?" gives students a consistent lens for examining new information. While the concepts are simple, the repetition of these questions will help students "internalize these prompts until they become almost instinctual."
4. **Boost vocabulary:** Creating active student engagement in vocabulary building is an important equity strategy, Major writes. By helping "students engage in wordplay, word consciousness, and word knowledge," educators boost students' understanding of words in a way that is more robust and engaging than a worksheet, she says. Word games and searches "are small, familiar but high-leverage activities because they're fun but also require a high cognitive load."

Finally, as Doug Fisher reminds us all, "effective teaching is effective teaching no matter where it occurs". Your work this fall will require team planning as you and your partner teacher work to forge strong ties with your families while designing a clear and succinct instructional plan in both languages. Create highly relevant and engaging lessons. Implement a progress monitoring system that charts the progress of your students in both languages. Remember, collecting this information is critical to informing your practice and to your planning.



However, we are in a time like none other. We are experiencing great uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. So, whether in distance learning or a hybrid model this fall, a successful beginning with your parents and students will take much more than the traditional elements of good teaching. John Lewis said, "We may not have chosen the time, but the time has chosen us." This year will be defined by your unwavering commitment to your students' journey to bi-literacy, to honoring their language and their culture, to ensuring access and ease of technology, and to creating environments of care and concern. Our schools will be the places where everyone... educators, parents, and students... will find consistency, engagement, and grace as together we seek greatness.

¡Adelante y buena suerte!