

# Reflecting on DLeNM's Dual Language Program Retreats— Preparing for Success

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Promising practices...

Quality, consensus, and commitment are characteristics that any dual language program nationwide hopes would describe its efforts at program implementation. Whether new to dual language education or veterans with multiple years offering dual language services, it is essential to create opportunities to reflect, plan, and develop a school community that healthily embraces continuous improvement. Over the years, the Dual Language Education of New Mexico (DLeNM) leadership and professional development staff have organized and facilitated retreats for a number of districts and school sites across the country. As part of this experience, various patterns for success have been identified and can be viewed through a systemic lens.

The first of these is **leadership**. Prior to the retreat, leaders who have engaged in critical conversations about program implementation and have sought out and honored their staff's points of view have already initiated necessary paradigm shifts. They have leveraged consensus around the need and purpose for the intended external support. Additionally, it is essential that instructional leaders be fully present, actively participate in retreat activities, and model the stance of learning and professional growth that will support and sustain both the program and a healthy school community. Leaders who are unafraid to share their vulnerability, their willingness to learn, and their expertise and wisdom will further conversation and reflection. Finally, leadership that supports other team members in initiating dialogue or facilitating activities is necessary to support capacity building and mutual commitment to the retreat's activities and short-term planning.

An awareness of **stakeholders** and stakeholder interests prior to the retreat is also helpful. Participating groups that have considered which entities have either a direct or indirect impact on the new or existing program will assist participants in lending a keen eye to systemic influences that previously may not have been recognized. For example, it may be that key district level personnel or the leadership team at a

school site are not fully aware of the research behind dual language education or the laws that govern the support and services for emerging bilingual students. This lack of information typically results in less-than-informed decision making and the spread of distorted assumptions.



*Dual language team members from Chicago Public Schools discuss the various stakeholder groups in their communities during a La Siembra Program Planning Retreat in December.*

A third area of importance is the broad notion of **communication**, whether it be internal or

external. In general, participants having clear systems of communication within their school and/or district tend to immediately consider ways to roll out new processes, inform colleagues, leverage and gather momentum with new ideas, inform stakeholders, and identify and proactively respond to gaps. They do this while maintaining an overall communication loop that supports continuous improvement and promotes schoolwide efforts. Participants who readily communicate do not hesitate to collaborate, plan, and identify roles and responsibilities necessary to ensure success.

There is an ongoing need to reflect, evaluate, and continually improve the efficacy and responsiveness of a school's dual language program. In support of this need, DLeNM has created a menu of retreats intended to support stakeholders in novice and veteran programs with a systematic process of identifying needs and effecting positive change through consensus building and action planning.

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**La Siembra** is a retreat designed to facilitate planning, preparation, and design of **new** dual language programs. The retreat consists of two days of intensive training and planning for key stakeholder groups from schools that are planning to start a dual language program in the next two years. The work of the groups is organized around the *Dual Language Program Planner: A Guide for Designing and Implementing Dual Language Programs* (Howard, Olague, & Rogers, 2003). With the guidance of this document and the informed support of our facilitators, each school team will leave with a clear idea of what is needed to provide a high quality dual language program at their school.

**El Enriquecer** is a retreat for **existing** programs to self-evaluate, identify areas of improvement, and develop action plans to strengthen and improve program implementation. The retreat consists of two days of intensive training and planning for school teams based on the *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007). The goal is for teams to leave with a clear idea of where their program is with respect to best practices and the next steps to improve program

quality. Participants will have the opportunity to study concrete examples and tools for immediate use at the school site. Building on each school's experiences and those from other sites, team members develop a good understanding of critical next steps that will build upon and sustain the program's momentum.

How can participants ensure that these retreats are successful and provide a return on investment? As schools and districts consider utilizing planning retreats to either kick-off or revitalize dual language programs, consideration of the following items will help to ensure the most productive use of time.

1. Identify a team of participants (administrators, coaches, teachers, etc.) to earnestly participate in action planning intended to assist in effecting positive change.
2. Ensure that the retreat leadership team also includes key individuals whose decision making and/or access to funding has an impact on the intended program and its needs (e.g., human resources, librarian, counselor, Title I director, assessment director, curriculum director, etc.).

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## Escuela Primaria Columbus

por Viridiana Sánchez, Administrador practicante, y Ricardo Gutiérrez, Maestro—Escuela Primaria Columbus

El programa de lenguaje dual en la escuela primaria de Columbus es esencial para fortalecer el primer idioma de los estudiantes y, a la vez, aprender un segundo idioma. Según los valores de nuestra comunidad escolar, es el mejor programa para nuestro alumnado. El retiro llamado El enriquecer, de Dual Language Education of New Mexico, DLeNM, ofrecido a nuestro distrito escolar por Adrián Sandoval y Michael Rodríguez fue de un impacto positivo y de gran relevancia por la razón de que nos permitió analizar y comentar sobre nuestro programa.

Cada grado en nuestra escuela tiene sus propios retos para implementar el programa de lenguaje dual. Gracias al retiro ya mencionado, nuestro equipo de trabajo pudo intercambiar ideas sobre cómo cambiar o modificar estos retos en logros que ayudarán a los alumnos a aprender el contenido a nivel apropiado e incrementar la adquisición de una segunda lengua a todos los niveles. Comentamos sobre diferentes estrategias de enseñanza que estamos implementando en

nuestra escuela y cómo se relacionan directamente a nuestro programa de lenguaje dual y a nuestra población estudiantil. Tales estrategias de enseñanza que implementamos cotidianamente en nuestros grados han permitido que el programa de lenguaje dual crezca en sus logros.

Considerando nuestro Plan de articulación curricular (CAP, por sus siglas en inglés), este retiro permitió ver a todos los niveles de enseñanza del programa. Examinamos cada materia, el número de minutos y el idioma de enseñanza en cada grado respectivo. En fin, nos dio una perspectiva diferente de cómo diseñar en papel y qué cosas priorizar con respecto a la enseñanza de las áreas de contenido y el lenguaje relacionado.

Debo repetir que el retiro fue de importancia extrema y nos ratificó que estamos implementando nuestro programa de lenguaje dual (50/50) correctamente y que está diseñado para un éxito seguro.





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3. Complete and submit the application by the deadline so our team can best prepare to meet your unique needs.
4. Ensure all members are prepared to work.
5. Arrive with a clear understanding of how your school's schedule works and how much time is dedicated to both core and specialty areas.
6. Hold each other accountable to take risks over the two days and keep assumptions and egos suspended.
7. Recognize that the retreat is just two days. The momentum and identified work built around action plans must be revisited throughout the school year—and over years to come—in an effort to build capacity and sustain the program.
8. Keep in mind that the action planning process is not only intended to address issues, but also to create opportunities to build capacity.
9. Focus on problem solving: *What can be accomplished and how?*
10. Hold presenters accountable for clarity and enjoy the process and your commitment to this work.

Program retreats should be scheduled at least three months in advance for adequate planning and preparation. For more information, please contact Michael Rodríguez, Director of Operations, at 505.243.0648 or [michael@dlenm.org](mailto:michael@dlenm.org).

As we all work together toward the ultimate goals of bilingualism and biliteracy for students across the country, it important that we do so with a common understanding of what defines quality dual language programs. Whether you are working through a one-way or two-way dual immersion model, knowing the latest research and practices is critical to your program's success. DLeNM is committed to ensuring that schools have the tools to create and sustain a solid instructional foundation which values and honors the individuality and strengths of communities. Indeed, the reflection and planning that occurs during these retreats and the continuance of such practices is what will help sustain this level of success.

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