

Houston Independent School District, Houston, Texas

K-8 STUDENTS IN DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM BUILD LITERACY IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH WITH RAZ-PLUS

District Data 280 Schools
 207,772 Students
 Grades PreK-12
<http://www.houstonisd.org>

Student Demographics

62%	Hispanic
23%	African American
9%	White
4%	Asian
1%	Two or more
75%	Economically disadvantaged
32%	Limited English proficient (LEP)

BACKGROUND

Houston Independent School District (HISD) is the largest district in Texas and the seventh largest in the United States. Nearly one-third of its students are English language learners (ELLs).

In 2014, HISD revamped its Dual Language Program Guidelines to reflect the latest research in bilingualism and biliteracy. The program with the new guidelines is now offered in 47 schools. HISD's Dual Language Program is an additive bilingual program for Spanish-speaking students and a foreign language immersion program for English-speaking students. In two-way classrooms, native Spanish speakers and native English speakers are taught together in an effort to develop full bilingualism and biliteracy for both groups.



CHALLENGES

“We want to provide equitable instructional resources in English and Spanish for our Dual Language campuses. Many times, we see robust programs in English, but it’s hard to find their counterparts in Spanish. We also want to give students another way to access books and reading resources from home,” said Xochitl M. Lege, Dual Language manager in HISD’s Multilingual Programs Department. “We chose Raz-Plus because it provides robust materials and resources in both languages in an equitable way. With a library of leveled books at levels A through Z, we knew we’d be able to serve a range of grade levels. It’s also user-friendly and easy to access from school or home.”

Implementation

HISD began using **Raz-Plus** in the Dual Language Program in 2015 to deliver a personalized blended learning approach to literacy. It is now available to all K–8 bilingual and Dual Language teachers in the district.

Raz-Plus provides effective teacher-led instruction, developmentally-appropriate reading practice, formative assessment, and data-driven reporting to improve the reading skills of every student, at every level. Resources are available in printable, projectable, and digital formats, and are easily customized for whole-class, small-group, or one-to-one instruction.



Supporting a balanced literacy approach

“The same year our district launched the Dual Language Program, it started an initiative called ‘Literacy by 3.’ We knew Raz-Plus would be a good match for that as well,” said Lege.

HISD’s “Literacy by 3” program is a districtwide, balanced approach to elementary school literacy. It includes phonics instruction, guided reading, independent reading, and read-alouds with a goal to have all students reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade.

“With Raz-Plus, teachers have plenty of resources to choose from in English and Spanish.”

“Raz-Plus supports each of those components — and in both languages,” said Lege. “At our Dual Language campuses, we mostly have 50/50 programs, meaning that half of the instruction is in English and half is in Spanish. So, we require that teachers have two literacy blocks, with one in each language. With Raz-Plus, teachers have plenty of resources to choose from in either language.”

Improving students’ reading skills

Raz-Plus promotes dual language learning with leveled resources, tools, and instructional materials that promote biliteracy, bilingual comprehension, vocabulary development, and key 21st century skills. It provides standards-aligned reading instruction with more than 50,000 resources. It also personalizes reading practice with more than 3,000 developmentally appropriate leveled books and additional reading resources. Teachers can instantly assign a specific resource to the whole class, small groups, or individual students.

“We write our own curriculum in HISD, and we’ve embedded Raz-Plus throughout our curriculum,” said Lege. “We use it for guided reading, independent reading at workstations, read-alouds, and reading at home. It’s also the go-to resource for our coaches when they’re coaching teachers at our Dual Language campuses.”

Increasing content area knowledge

In addition to teaching literacy skills, teachers utilize Raz-Plus resources to enhance students' content area knowledge.

“One of the requirements in the Dual Language Program is that workstations have to be integrated, meaning that they have to target both literacy and content,” said Lege. “Raz-Plus has been very useful in that sense because we can find books about science, social studies, and math for students to read during workstation time, so it aligns really well with the practices we’re implementing.”

Improving listening and speaking skills

Raz-Plus also allows students to listen to books and record themselves reading aloud to ensure fluency.

“The audio and the visual features make the books easy for students to understand, even in their second language,” said Lege. “We’re also hoping that Raz-Plus will help us next year with the new Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System for English learners. As part of the listening and speaking portions of the TELPAS, students have to listen to audio and speak into a microphone.”

We have two schools that used Raz-Plus this year to give students the opportunity to listen to books and record themselves reading aloud, and that actually helped them with this assessment. We plan to promote these features even more in 2019-20 because we think it will help students prepare for this new test.”

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Expanding learning outside the classroom

With Learning A-Z's online student portal and mobile app, students have 24/7 access to the entire library of English and Spanish books and resources in Raz-Plus, including authentic Spanish books that provide authentic experiences with culturally relevant texts. Students also have access to audio books, interactive tools, and built-in awards and incentives.

“Students can also independently access books at their level from home.”

“Many parents say that on the commute from school to home, their children are reading their assigned books on their cell phones. Students can also independently access books at their level from home, so it’s a good resource for families,” said Lege.

Supporting teachers with resources

Raz-Plus offers a variety of teacher resources such as lesson plans, activity sheets, and formative assessments. Data-driven reporting helps teachers monitor individual and class-wide activity and performance, and determine future instruction.

“Teachers say that the authentic Spanish leveled books are very good.”

“One thing we hear over and over from teachers is how much they love the amount of resources that are available to them in both languages in Raz-Plus. They never have to scramble to find something. They also say that the authentic Spanish leveled books are very good and the translated books are, too,” said Lege.

Providing professional learning and support

Learning A-Z offers a variety of professional learning services such as self-paced eLearning courses, live and recorded webinars, and on-site professional development to help teachers integrate Raz-Plus into their curriculum and use the resources to achieve their instructional goals.

“The support and training provided by Learning A-Z is wonderful. They have been very flexible in customizing the trainings to meet the needs of our program,” said Lege. “We have trainings every year for new teachers at our Dual Language schools, and many veteran teachers attend as well.

They like to share their knowledge about how they use Raz-Plus to track data and differentiate instruction for individuals and groups. Twice a year, we also offer a Dual Language resource overview professional development session for teachers, and Learning A-Z is always there.”



RESULTS

“Raz-Plus has been a great resource for our schools. Our Dual Language students get to access and practice reading in their second language in a non-threatening way at school and at home. They don’t even realize they’re working on their fluency or vocabulary because it’s just fun going through the program,” said Lege.

“At the district level, Raz-Plus provides a way to ensure equity in terms of the resources we offer in both English and Spanish. Overall, reading and literacy are very strong at our Dual Language campuses,” she said. “Our teachers assess student performance with running records, and the data show that students are achieving growth in both languages. We have seen the largest growth among the campuses and classrooms that have the strongest implementations.

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“Teachers from other campuses that aren’t part of the Dual Language Program have asked for Raz-Plus licenses because they’ve heard how good this program is, and we have been very glad to expand the number of licenses offered from our department to all bilingual teachers in the district since last year,” said Lege.