

## **ABSTRACT**

GUNTER, ANN MARIE GLASSBURN. Institutional Decision-Making: An Exploratory Case Study of Three Districts in North Carolina that Decided to Add Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) Programs. (Under the direction of Dr. Bonnie C. Fusarelli).

This exploratory case study of three sites in North Carolina examined the reasons why each district decided to add a dual language/immersion (DL/I) program during the economic recession from 2007 – 2010 when other variations were also occurring, such as changes in student enrollment, fluctuations in funding, and increases in school choice pressures. Weiss' (1995) 4 I's decision-making framework was used as a conceptual lens to scrutinize how the individual decision-making components of ideology, information and interests combined to create the institutional decision-making approach used.

Qualitative data was collected using a statewide survey of districts with existing DL/I programs, semi-structured interviews of educational administrators who were identified in the surveys as leading the work to start the DL/I program in their districts, and a document analysis. The examination of this data revealed that the main reason districts decided to add a DL/I program was to better meet students' needs in a variety of ways: best practices for English learners, better cross-cultural understanding, equitable access to DL/I programs, higher academic achievement, preparation of students with marketable skills for a globalized economy, redistribution of student enrollment across school sites, and transformation of instruction.

Institutional decision-making was driven from different perspectives at each site, with the I of interest, or politics, playing a primary or secondary role in all three cases. While finances were a challenge, the internal and external pressures of school choice options were

more important than the issues brought about by funding cuts from the recession.

The findings indicate that DL/I programs could be a viable option for all districts to reap benefits like closing the achievement gap and providing school choice options, as well as addressing equity and social justice issues. Further research could examine the relationship between local school boards and their educational administrators, the implementation of DL/I programs K – 12 across generations of students and transitions in leadership, the impact of school choice options beyond initial enrollment, and the outcomes for DL/I students such as graduation rates and college and career readiness.

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Institutional Decision-Making: An Exploratory Case Study of Three Districts in North Carolina that Decided to Add Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) Programs

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to all of the educators who have committed themselves to public education as the foundation of our society, especially those who have inspired me personally and professionally.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Ann Marie Glassburn Gunter was born and raised in Indiana and has always attended public schools. Inspired by her paternal grandmother and a love of learning languages, she knew from an early age that she wanted to be an educator. She earned a BA in English and French Education, along with a Gifted and Talented Endorsement, from Purdue University in 1995, and began her career in Wisconsin, first serving as a district coordinator for a K-12 gifted and talented program and then as an English and French teacher in a rural high school. During this time, she was also working part-time on her English as a Second Language (ESL) certificate and an MS in Educational Administration at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. In order to finish her degree program at the same time as her husband concluded his doctoral work in horticulture, she left the classroom to be a full-time graduate student and worked as a graduate assistant in various roles at the postsecondary level. She graduated with her MS in 2000 and then moved to a small town in southern Indiana.

Ann Marie served as a middle and high school teacher of French and English at Loogootee Community School Corporation, as well as an academic club sponsor and basketball coach. Because she had the MS degree, she could offer several courses as dual credit through Vincennes University's Project Excel program, including French IV and Public Speaking. She also taught evening and summer courses as an adjunct instructor with Vincennes University, and served in leadership roles with online teaching initiatives and career academy projects at her school.

When her husband joined the Horticulture Department faculty at North Carolina State University in 2007, Ann Marie decided to pursue an administrative role where she could work closely with teachers and others to impact students, and she was hired as the K-12

World Languages Consultant at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. After several years in this role, she could clearly see that a broader background in educational research and policy would be beneficial, so she embarked on the path to earning this PhD degree in 2009. Ann Marie is eager to see how holding this degree might help her further her goals to empower educators and champion education as a public good for all students.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge several people for their unwavering support of me during my doctoral program. My friends from across the country, especially those I know through our work together as educators in Wisconsin, Indiana and North Carolina or on the executive board of the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL), are much appreciated for their unflagging support and kind words of encouragement throughout this process. My family has always pushed me to take on new challenges, and I am particularly grateful for the support of my parents, my sister and brother-in-law, and my husband during the long hours of completing my coursework and finishing my dissertation for this degree.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Education in the United States is administered by each state and its local entities. When the Constitution for this country was ratified, it made no mention of a federal role for education. The only link to education in this document is the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which states, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people” (U.S. Const. amend. X). Though the federal government has been increasing its influence on public education over the past 50 years through the passage, implementation, and reauthorizations of legislation like the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), those initiatives have focused on accountability measures aimed at ensuring access and opportunity for all children, which leans towards education as a civil right with the onus still on states to govern education (Cross, 2014).

The funding of public education reflects how involved federal, state, and local governments are in educating children from the elementary to the secondary level. Federal funding has increased over the past decade, but it is limited to 10% - 15% of a school district’s total budget. The rest of the funding comes from the state and local level, though the percentage varies by state and depends on the state constitution and the governance structures in place at each level (Ladd & Fiske, 2008; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2014).

In North Carolina, the state constitution includes education in Section 15 of Article I as part of the Declaration of Rights with this statement: The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right (N.C.

Const. art. I, § 15). Laws about education are enacted by the elected members of the General Assembly and made into policy by the governor-appointed members of the State Board of Education (SBE). Legislation and SBE policies are implemented by the Department of Public Instruction and pertain to accountability, curriculum, instruction, licensing, personnel and testing. The majority of funding comes from the state level, specifically the legislature, with just a small amount originating at the local level. The state of North Carolina provides approximately 60% - 70% of the funding for schools, including almost all of the teaching positions, which leaves 15% - 30% from the local level (Ladd & Fiske, 2008; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2014). North Carolina is a local control state so each district's local board of education (BOE) is responsible for managing the schools in its jurisdiction, enforcing the laws, and sending a budget to the county commissioners (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2014).

North Carolina is somewhat unique in how substantially education is funded by the state, since it is more common for state and local entities to contribute almost equally to the amount spent on education (Ladd & Fiske, 2008; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2014). This had been the case in the past for North Carolina, but, since the 1930s and the Great Depression, the state became responsible for financially supporting public schools. This also led to an increased amount of oversight and decision-making exercised at the state level, but North Carolina remains a local control state. State statute §115C-47.12 stipulates that the local BOE retains the power and has the duty to ensure that the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCoS), our state standards, are being taught to all students, K-12 (N.C. Gen. Stat. § 115-C-47; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2014).

## Background

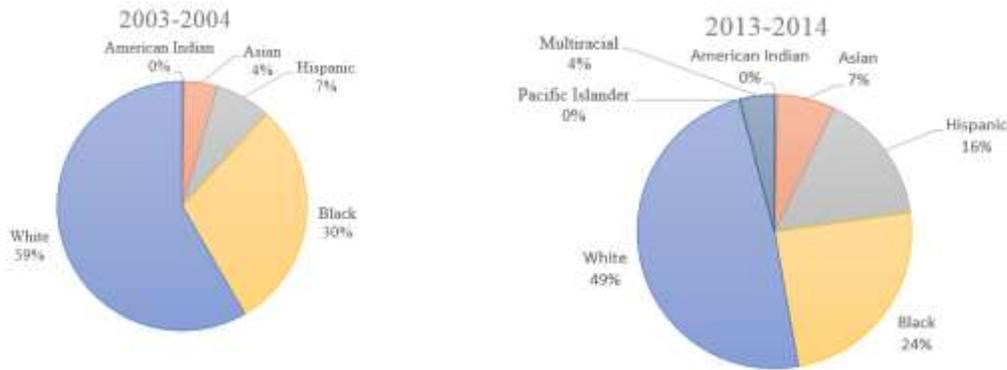
The state of North Carolina has seen demographic changes over the past several decades that impact local decisions. According to James Johnson at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill Kenan-Flagler Business School, the southeastern part of the United States and North Carolina in particular have seen an influx of people from other states and from abroad (J. Johnson, presentation to 2014-2015 Educational Policy Fellowship Fall Retreat presentation, September 22, 2014). Table 1 shows this demographic shift for North Carolina’s public school system in a recent decade. By the 2013-2014 school year, the state had seen an increase of over 124,000 K-12 students, which was 9% more than were enrolled in 2003-2004. The mix of students was also different. While there had been little change in the percentage of American Indian or Asian students, there had been an increase in Hispanic students, and a decrease in the percentage of Black and White students that constitute the student body of North Carolina (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2015).

**Table 1.** Demographic Changes from 2003-04 to 2013-14

North Carolina	2003-04 Total	2013-14 Total	Total Increase	% Change from SY 2003 – 2004 to SY 2013 - 2014					
				Overall	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Black	White
K-12 Public School Enrollment	1,318,529	1,442,742	124,213	+ 9%	0%	+ 1%	+ 8%	- 5%	- 7%

Migration and its resulting population increases have centered around urban and suburban areas and along the Interstate 40, 77, and 85 corridors that run through the state. Local education agencies (LEAs) or districts in these areas are now home to more students overall but also a more ethnically, and by extension culturally and linguistically, diverse student body (J. Johnson, presentation to 2014-2015 Educational Policy Fellowship Fall Retreat presentation, September 22, 2014). For example, the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), which is currently the largest district in North Carolina, has experienced a

population explosion with an increase of over 44,000 students or 41% between the 2003-2004 school year and the 2013-2014 school year, as it grew from 109,000 to over 153,000 students.



**Figure 1.** WCPSS Student Body Composition in 2003-04 and in 2013-14

To put this in perspective, Figure 1 shows the composition of the WCPSS student body in 2003-2004 on the left and the same information ten years later on the right for 2013-2014, with adjustments made to the size of the chart to reflect the population increase as well as the percentage growth. Two categories were also added to the data analysis in 2013-2014. Pacific Islander, which is separate from American Indian, has its own category, but, with less than 200 students classifying themselves in this group, they represent a very small percentage of the total population with just 0.11% or, when rounded, 0%. Two or More Races or Multiracial is, perhaps, a more accurate way for students to identify themselves. The percentage of American Indian students remained the same, but the number of Asian and Multiracial students increased 3% and 4%, respectively. At the same time, the proportion of Hispanic students jumped from 7% to 16%, and Black and White student populations shrunk as a portion of the total student body. These shifts in sub-populations are similar to the statewide data but the magnitude of this growth puts a wide range of demands on the

infrastructure of the district, both physically and academically. The resulting local BOE discussions and decisions revolved around building and opening new facilities, assigning and re-assigning students to schools, and creating programs that are attractive educational and school choice options to different populations (Parcel & Taylor, 2015; Public Schools of North Carolina, 2015).

Many small communities and rural areas of the state have seen a decrease in population numbers but are experiencing a similar change in the mixture of cultures within the county and school district (J. Johnson, presentation to 2014-2015 Educational Policy Fellowship Fall Retreat presentation, September 22, 2014). In Mount Airy City Schools (MACS), 25% of the student population in 2003-2004 included American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, and Black students, but, 10 years later, that percentage was 32% as shown in Figure 2. The largest shift was a 10% increase in the Hispanic student population. Again, there are similarities to the statewide data, but the impact is quite different when a district has decreased its overall enrollment by approximately 10%, downsizing from almost 1,900 students to just under 1,700 (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2015).



**Figure 2.** MACS Student Body Composition in 2003-04 and in 2013-14

There are a number of ways districts might decide to address these demographic shifts to best serve student needs while also adjusting logistically and financially to

fluctuations in student enrollment numbers. Local Boards of Education (BOEs) must work closely with educators and their communities as they think about how to educate a changing student population and equip children for a 21<sup>st</sup> century society where they interact globally (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2014). In the examples above, both districts decided to add dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs to their academic offerings (NC Dual Language/Immersion Programs Directory).

DL/I is a program in which students learn academic content, specifically the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*, in two languages: English and another language, which is referred to as the target language. North Carolina districts choose from four models of DL/I programs depending on the native or first languages of the student population being served. The DL/I program typically launches with a kindergarten cohort and grows by adding a new grade level to the program each year as the first cohort advances. DL/I programs determine how instructional time is scheduled for the two languages, which often means having some subjects (ex. math and social studies) in the target language and others in English (ex. science, physical education, and music) or pairing teachers so that one teaches in the target language and the other in English. The goal is for all students to become bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2008; NC Dual Language/Immersion Programs).

Research shows that students in DL/I programs develop high levels of proficiency in both languages, score at or above grade level on academic achievement tests like North Carolina's End of Grade (EOG) exams, and exhibit positive cross-cultural attitudes. Students in a DL/I program who are English language learners (ELLs) exit English as a Second Language (ESL) support services earlier than their peers in a transitional bilingual program

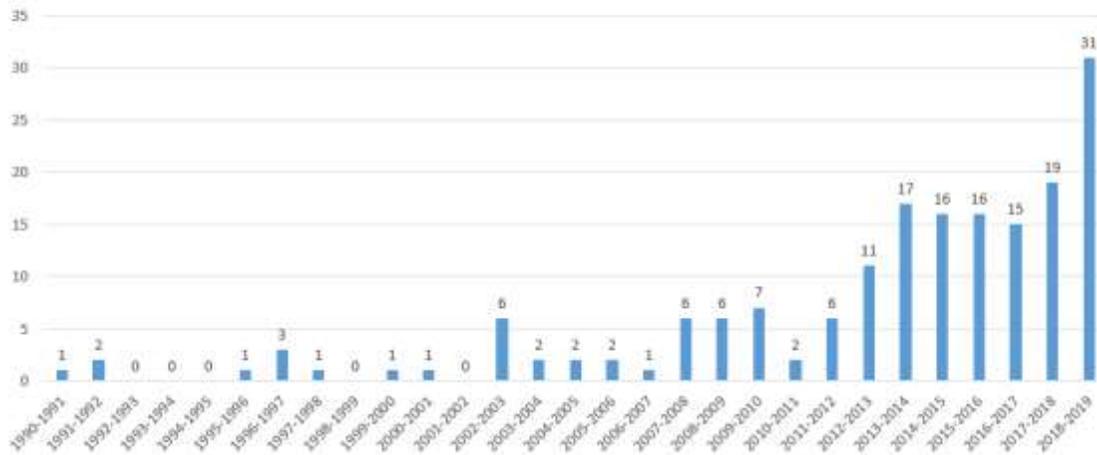
within a traditional monolingual academic program, and students in DL/I programs who have been identified for special education services also achieve at higher levels than their monolingual peers. Even students from historically underperforming sub-populations such as lower socioeconomic backgrounds do better academically as measured by statewide exams like EOGs, so DL/I programs are sometimes seen as a reform effort that can close the achievement gap (NC Dual Language/Immersion Programs; Thomas & Collier, 2012).

DL/I programs in North Carolina have been growing for almost 30 years, but they have been substantially increasing since the 2007 – 2008 school year, which coincides with the start of the last economic recession. The first DL/I program was established in the 1990-1991 school year in Guilford County Schools at Jones Elementary School. The next year two programs were initiated within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and that LEA continued to launch new DL/I programs in a staggered fashion through the 2002 – 2003 school year. Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools and Durham Public Schools also started DL/I programs in 2002 – 2003, followed by Greene County Schools the next year. By the end of 2003 – 2004, there were 18 DL/I programs and a decade later, in 2013 – 2014, the number of DL/I programs had reached 78. There are now over 170 DL/I programs across the state and the number is still increasing every year, either as new programs starting with a kindergarten cohort or programs expanding into secondary level schools when an elementary or middle school cohort advances into the next grade span.

Figure 3 below shows the growth of these programs as they were launched in different academic years from 1990 – 1991 until the present, and Figure 4 displays the cumulative total of DL/I programs in North Carolina over the last several decades. It is a rare event for a DL/I program to be discontinued, though it does happen. In such cases, two or

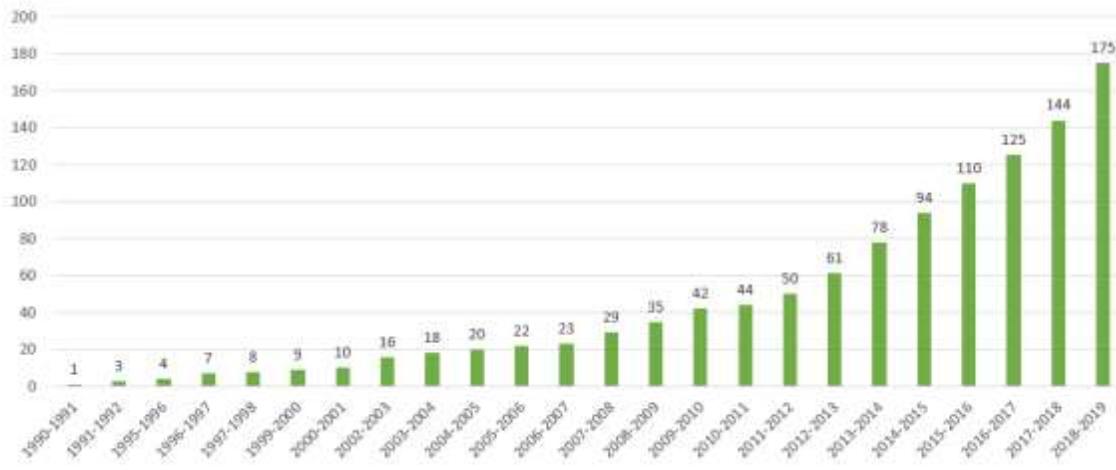
more DL/I programs are sometimes being combined so that a single DL/I program can be offered in one location, albeit with a larger concentration of students. There are 115 LEAs, and, at the time of this study's data collection, 30 of them had at least 1 DL/I program, as did several charter schools and a few independent schools. Currently, those numbers have reached 42 LEAs, five charter schools and six independent or private schools (NC Dual Language/Immersion Programs Directory).

### North Carolina DL/I Program Growth: 1990 - 2019



**Figure 3.** Number of New DL/I Programs Each School Year

## North Carolina DL/I Total Programs: 1990 - 2019



**Figure 4.** Number of DL/I Total Programs by School Year

### Statement of the Problem

The decision to launch a DL/I program rests with the local BOE and the educators who will be involved in establishing the new program. Before concerns about hiring teachers or adjusting curriculum for two languages are a topic of discussion, the local leadership must convince their decision-makers or policymakers that there are good reasons for starting a DL/I program. Since a district and its schools are focused on learning, academic reasons might be cited, such as the Thomas and Collier research (2012) showing the positive impact of DL/I programs on overall academic achievement or the progress made towards closing achievement gaps. Logistical issues might also come into play. A DL/I program could attract students to a school that's being reconfigured because of district demographic and facility changes. Starting a DL/I program might be based on financial gain if it was seen as a school choice option that would draw students from charter or independent school competition in the area and result in additional funding. There might be cultural issues, such as supporting English learners as they transition to greater proficiency in English or helping

new arrivals to the community find a welcoming environment (Thomas & Collier, 2012). Finally, a district might have societal reasons for starting a DL/I program like providing an education that ensures their students can compete with their peers in the workforce and interact effectively in a globalized world (Global Education Initiative in NC).

There may be one essential reason or a list of reasons that a district decided to launch a DL/I program, but the other consideration when it comes to decision-making is timing. DL/I programs have been growing steadily over the last 25 years in North Carolina (NCDL/I Programs wiki) but a local BOE may or may not be aware of that trend. Education funding has risen and fallen, but it has never been abundant (Ladd & Fiske, 2008; Public School Forum of North Carolina). During the last economic recession or school years from 2007 – 2010, state level educational funding was reduced by the legislature and sometimes resulted in districts returning dollars they had been allotted when the monies were recalled because of cuts. In a constricting financial environment, it is interesting that local BOEs voted to add a DL/I program, either as a new endeavor or a continuation of an elementary or middle school program already in progress. Table 2 shows that, during this time period, there was actually a dramatic increase in DL/I programs, with over five programs being added each year.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons why districts decided to add DL/I programs, specifically during a recession, by using a multiple-case study. The study questions also examined how districts are or were planning to assess or evaluate the outcomes of their decision based on their initial rationale(s) for implementing a DL/I program. The study identified the leaders who spearheaded the decision, including local BOE members, educational leaders, and community members, and had them share what they

did to persuade others, such as parents and local officials, to embrace and support the decision to start a DL/I program.

The study was framed with the following research question:

Why did the districts decide to add a DL/I program to one (or more) of their schools?

Launching a DL/I program is a somewhat unique way to change education for students. It is likely that the decision-makers involved in this shift only studied a foreign or second language as a separate subject, not as a vehicle for learning academic content. Most of them are not bilingual or biliterate to a level of proficiency that would allow them to use another language besides their first language in their personal or professional lives. And yet, they made a decision to put the children in their districts on the path to having two languages, which results in a very different public school academic experience. This decision's immediate, short-term and long-term outcomes need to be investigated.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study will use the definition of the terms below throughout the research collection, data analysis, and reporting phases:

- *4 I's Framework* – A decision-making framework described by Weiss (1995) that assesses outcomes based on the influence that individuals' ideologies, information, and interests have on the decision within the institution
- *Board of Education (BOE)* – A local group of individuals from within a school district's boundaries, usually elected but sometimes appointed, who represent the community and have the responsibility to make local decisions concerning the governance and operations of the schools

- *Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) Program* – An umbrella term for an educational approach in which students learn the state standards or academic content in English and another language, which is referred to as the target language
- *English Learners (ELs)* – A group of students who speak a language other than English at home and, as part of their educational experience, are receiving support services from English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to build their proficiency in English
- *North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCoS)* – The collection of state standards comprised of the *K – 12 English Language Arts Standards*, the *K-12 Mathematics Standard Course of Study* and the *North Carolina Essential Standards* in arts education, career and technical education, English as a second language, guidance, healthful living, information and technology skills, science, social studies, and world languages that are approved and implemented in all K-12 public schools in North Carolina
- *State Board of Education (SBE)* - A group of individuals from across the state who are appointed by the governor or serve based on their elected position to represent the various regions of the state and have the responsibility to make educational policy based on legislation, oversee the K-12 public school system, and make decisions concerning the governance and operations of the districts and schools

### **Significance of the Study**

There are many pressures on schools to produce graduates who are ready for the workforce and postsecondary education in the globalized world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Decades of reform efforts have emphasized initiatives aimed at special populations of students or

specific programs in a piecemeal fashion. The federal Title I programs support literacy development in schools serving large groups of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The various reauthorizations of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* have led to accountability measures that must be enforced at the state and local level. The technological interconnectedness of our world has been the basis for a surge in programs touting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) learning and career fields. However, little research has been done about how local decision-makers learn about and implement programs that focus on the needs of all students from a holistic perspective.

This study is significant because it explores the reasons behind a local decision to make a curricular change and how that change was proposed, considered and implemented. This study is somewhat unique in that it seeks to explain the local decision-making process as it relates to curriculum policy and local leadership, rather than some of the other topics such as board and superintendent relations or ethics policies that are more routinely analyzed. This study could benefit the local BOEs and their districts across North Carolina that are dedicated to local control and the autonomy necessary to assess the educational needs of the children in their district and act as a group to make decisions and implement changes that address fluctuations in student enrollment, funding, and future goals for all learners.

### **Overview of Approach**

This multi-case study employed an online survey, semi structured interviews and document analysis to explore the reasons three North Carolina school districts decided to launch a DL/I program during one of the school years when we were experiencing an economic recession, 2007 - 2010. The online survey (Appendix C) was sent to all 30 districts that had a DL/I program in January 2017, and 2-3 interview candidates were

identified from the survey results submitted by the districts that began a DL/I program during the specified period. The interviews were conducted using the protocol shown in Appendix F, and all interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using open coding. The document analysis encompassed materials made available to the public, such as local BOE agendas and minutes, as well as work sessions, studies and other information published in the LEA about the DL/I program. These three sources helped to triangulate the data and the findings.

The conceptual lens of the study was Weiss' (1995) 4 I's Framework so that the decision-making process could be analyzed. The 4 I's Framework relies on the interplay of each individual's decision-making processes and how the three components of individual decision-making or "3 I's" of ideologies, information, and interests, impact the position the person takes overall and in relation to the structure or pressures of the fourth "I" at the group level, the institution (pp. 573 – 574). The codes and themes that emerged from the interviews and document analysis were linked back to the 4 I's Framework in order to determine the primary and secondary drivers or "I's" that guided the local decision to launch a DL/I program.

### **Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 has been an overview of the study. It began with an introduction to the policies and demographic changes that are shaping education in North Carolina today, and it explored the concept of DL/I programs as a response to those changes and the future needs of K-12 students. Chapter 2 contains the literature review of the policies that shape educational governance and decision-making in North Carolina, the research on how DL/I impacts student learning and closes achievement gaps, and the various pressures that organizations

like BOEs must manage as they adjust to shifting parameters and stretched resources.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for the study and the data collection and analysis that took place in completing the study. Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the data, including an overview of the survey, the selection process for the case studies and the findings from the interviews and document analyses. Chapter 5 has a discussion of the findings and conclusions of this study, along with the implications for future research. The appendices provide the literature references and the materials used to collect data for the study, including the email announcements and invitations, consent forms, and questions from the survey and interview protocols.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons districts used to convince decision-makers to add a dual language/immersion (DL/I) program during an economic recession. The literature review aims to examine the situation of local BOEs and lead to an analysis of the decision-making processes and priorities that they used to fulfill their mission of serving the best interests of K-12 students in the public schools in their communities.

The first section of the literature review will begin with an overview of district-level leadership history, policies, and practices, which will be followed by an analysis of contemporary BOE roles, principles and challenges. Decision-making as a concept will be analyzed with an examination of how district leaders build a knowledge base for decisions, use data and research, and interact with the community, especially in the current environment of school choice initiatives.

The second section of the literature review will include studies about BOE decisions from similar questions as North Carolina's districts face. Changing demographics in the state of Michigan, and the consequences and decision-making for facilities management across its districts, will be scrutinized (Norton, 2007), and an analysis of a BOE reversing a decision they had made will be considered (Heinze & Zdroik, 2018). A study from a suburban district near Detroit will be analyzed for how the BOE approaches making decisions for sustaining or eliminating an arts education program (Major, 2013), followed by several studies on magnet school decisions that assess the parents' perspective in school choice decisions (Haynes, Phillips, & Goldring, 2010; Smrekar & Honey, 2015) and the success of federal funding in supporting magnet school goals (Kitmitto, Levin, Betts, Bos, & Eaton,

2016). The implementation of a universal prekindergarten program via statewide grant funding (Casto & Sipple, 2011) and the impact of the Thomas and Collier research (2012, 2017) on the proliferation of DL/I programs will be summarized, and Weiss' (1995) 4 I's Framework will be discussed in relation to BOE decision-making that leads to adding a curricular program.

### **Traditional Educational Leadership for School Districts**

School boards across America sit at the crossroads between compliance with federal and state education laws and policies, and the application of those mandates at the local level. Hanging in the balance is the education of each child in the communities the boards serve, along with Lasswell's (1950) inescapable political reality that their decisions come down to the question of 'who gets what, when and how' with every deliberation and vote cast by individual board members. All of this is premised on a local school governance structure from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that champions the idea of "citizen-policy makers" who, in contrast to their peers elected to state and national positions, remain in the cities and towns where they live with their constituents as they craft educational policy (Asen, Gurke, Connors, Solomon, & Gumm, 2012; Tyack, 1974).

At one time in the educational history of this country, there were literally hundreds of thousands of one-room schools located throughout rural areas, along with many more slightly larger collections of classrooms in urban areas that had evolved from village schools. Massive consolidation has brought that number down to just under 15,000 school districts nationally, of which North Carolina has 115 organized mostly by county. Almost all districts or LEAs are still administered primarily by locally elected school boards (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2015; Tyack, 1974).

BOEs generally have five to nine members, though the number can vary from three to thirteen depending on the size of the population, the geographic area being represented, or the compromises made during consolidation. The majority of BOEs consist of five or seven members. BOE members are elected to serve either a defined region or in an “at-large” capacity, and terms are usually staggered so that only a minority of positions are on the ballot during any given election cycle. Historically, BOE positions have been non-partisan or unaffiliated with any political party, though that has been changing. In North Carolina, where the majority of LEAs elect BOE members, over 80% reported that their candidates run as unaffiliated but just under 20% did run for election by political party (Kolb & Strauss, 1999; North Carolina School Boards Association, Election Information).

State laws for BOE candidates are minimal. Contenders must be registered voters and residents of the geographic area they seek to represent. This makes the de facto age requirement 18 years old. Most states also have a few other stipulations that apply to candidates for election, particularly having to do with disclosures related to campaign and personal finances. Only three states have educational requirements for BOE candidates, which can be summarized as basic literacy skills, and roughly the same number restrict candidates from running for office based on felony convictions or, in the case of North Carolina, those guilty of “immoral or disreputable conduct” (Kolb & Strauss, 1999, p. 11).

Following the successful election of new BOE members, an oath of office is taken, and members are offered voluntary training and memberships in school board associations. The oath is usually the same, short pledge that all elected officials recite, and it typically involves promises to uphold the state and federal constitution and laws. Most states support affiliations with state and national associations dedicated to BOEs, including standard but

elective training for freshman BOE members (Kolb & Strauss, 1999). Our state has the North Carolina School Boards Association, which offers a variety of resources related to training of BOE members on their role and responsibilities linked to legislation, budgeting, advocacy or lobbying, legal issues, risk management, and policy crafting or concerns (North Carolina School Boards Association).

No other requirements must be met, including any formal education or training, and little compensation is available, though many districts do offer a token stipend or include BOE members in benefits like health insurance. In North Carolina, almost all districts provide payments to BOE members, usually in the form of monthly or per meeting stipends, that are part of the annual budget approved locally by the county commissioners. The average is around \$250 for members and a slightly higher amount for the chair of the BOE, though the range is quite broad from a low of \$35 per meeting to over \$1,700 monthly (North Carolina School Boards Association, 2014). Several scholars have remarked upon the fact that education is the only field led by board members who do not receive substantial monetary recompense or have recognized expertise or experience in the field. This is a stark contrast to the business world where the chair and board members must have academic preparation, and often skill sets in leadership or management, to be credible to stockholders or other stakeholders (Kolb & Strauss, 1999).

Due to the 10<sup>th</sup> amendment in the U.S. Constitution, and its interpretation by the states, local BOEs wield considerable power politically and financially. School boards have been and continue to be the authorities on how hierarchical power and various functions, from physical structures to fiscal choices, are determined in a district. Oversight of local BOEs is, in most cases, limited to disseminating professional and curriculum standards, as

well as legal statutes linked to access and equity. This loosely structured control customarily flows from the legislature through a state level board and education agency, with the ultimate goal of local control in the form of district and school interpretation and implementation. Since voters still subscribe to the ideal of locally-based decision-making, and most BOEs are theoretically non-partisan, this arrangement is held up even in modern times as the nearly perfect model of participatory democracy (Kolb & Strauss, 1999).

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational Leadership for School Districts**

BOE members are obliged to deliberate and act in the best interests of the public, though they are tasked with tremendous responsibilities that encompass the work of being representatives, policymakers, and micromanagers – a situation that has led to much confusion about what school board members can and cannot do in their governance roles. On the surface, they represent the voters who elected them, but, according to an analysis done by the Institute for Educational Leadership, BOE members tend to be demographically uniform. The majority of BOE members are white males who come from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds. Only on large urban BOEs is there more balanced representation that includes female and non-white members (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2008, p. 77).

The role and behavior of BOEs as representatives have been termed dichotomously as either elite or arena in nature. Elite or trustee BOEs view themselves as representatives *of* the public that has elected them to do the work that must be done for the district. They see themselves as being entrusted by their constituents to make decisions based on their own backgrounds, values, and agendas, without involving the public for further input. Arena or delegate BOEs see themselves as representatives *for* the public and strive to get additional input and constructive feedback for their decision-making, up to and including open debate.

They believe their decisions need to reflect what constituents want, regardless of what their personal stance on the issue is when the votes are cast in the BOE meeting room (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2008, p. 128).

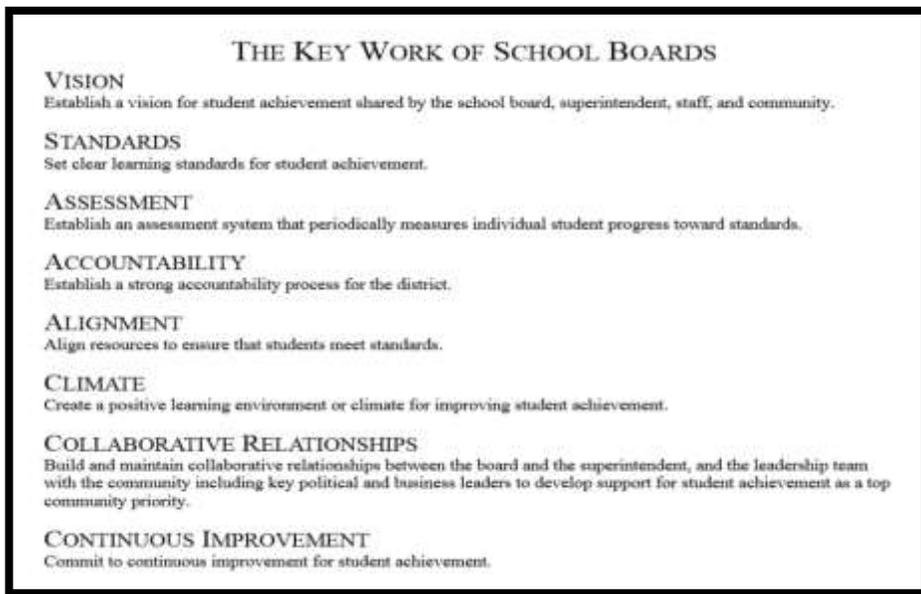
Dichotomies like this can also be the two ends of a continuum as a BOE tackles different issues that require them to glide between their roles as representatives and policymakers. At times, BOE members have been accused of using their district service as a stepping stone to other elected positions at the state or federal level. This would call into question who their constituents truly are, and it invites speculation as to how well BOE members represent various perspectives from within the community. Given the expanding influence from the state and national levels, especially seen in increased percentages of funding, some BOEs come under suspicion of being more interested in implementing others' policies rather than creating their own to fit local needs. This is curious in light of Hochschild's 2005 assessment, as quoted in Cooper, Cibulka, and Fusarelli (2008), "...that boards spend less than one-tenth of their time developing and overseeing policy" (p. 77).

This leaves the micromanaging role of BOEs. A considerable amount of literature has been produced about BOEs that infringe on or even interfere with the day-to-day work of the superintendent and other administrators. This body of research spotlights the supposedly contentious relationships of BOEs with the superintendents and other staff members, but does little else (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2008; Kolb & Strauss, 1999; Tyack, 1974).

Being a 21<sup>st</sup> century BOE requires each member to participate in a delicate balancing act. They are, individually and collectively, poised between the responsibilities of being the public face of the district and wielding significant professional and financial power. BOEs are "important and complex governmental bodies" (Cooper, Cibulka, & Fusarelli, 2008, p.

84) that, more and more, utilize a leadership model predicated on a 1994 publication from Iowa’s school board association and state board that has been further developed and expanded from its outline of accountability, advocacy, structure, and vision as the main functions for a BOE (p. 132).

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) extended the Iowa work by outlining two essentials for every BOE agenda and crafting a framework to support them. The Key Work of School Boards, pictured below in Figure 5, delineates eight areas that help a BOE keep their focus on the two essentials: student achievement and community engagement to promote student achievement (North Carolina School Boards Association, pp. 2 – 3).



**Figure 5.** The Key Work of School Boards

In 2007, the North Carolina School Boards Association (NCSBA) moved forward with utilizing The Key Work of School Boards as a foundation for the NC Professional Governance Standards for our state’s BOEs. These standards encompass seven types of

leadership (noted below) for BOEs and each one includes bulleted lists that link back to all eight areas of The Key Work of School Boards.

1. Strategic Leadership
2. Instructional Leadership
3. Cultural Leadership
4. Human Resources Leadership
5. Community Leadership
6. Political Leadership
7. Ethical Leadership

The goal is to strengthen the role of the local BOEs throughout the state and focus their decision-making on students and their learning and achievement as they work collaboratively with their communities (North Carolina School Boards Association, pp. 5 – 15).

### **Knowledgeable Decision-Making**

Decision-making of any kind presupposes a knowledge base that can grow. Since BOEs are not comprised of members who bring expertise to the job, in contrast to the business world where it is a pre-requisite, the knowledge necessary must be gained in other ways. Board packets are usually a staple of monthly meetings and packed with reports, research, and data that members are expected to have read prior to the start of the meeting. During the meeting, the BOE receives presentations, hears concerns from their peers and community members, and asks questions as part of their deliberations. After the meeting concludes, they follow-up with constituents, obtain additional information, and respond to queries from various stakeholders. All of this highlights the fact that the BOE members are inundated with information that must be incorporated into their knowledge base through

learning so that they can make good decisions for their district's students (Newton & Sackney, 2005).

Newton and Hackney (2005) combined research from governance, educational psychology, and organizational learning to conceptualize two elements and three dimensions of learning for BOEs and other small groups. The first element is labeled political/structural and involves the integration of five political areas or roles that sometimes overlap on a BOE: member, administrator, information, teamwork, and evaluation. The second element is social and mainly centers on the quality of communication between and amongst BOE members (p. 436). The affective dimension highlights that emotion gives weight to certain aspects of knowledge during decision-making, and the axiological dimension does the same thing for values and beliefs of BOE members (p. 437). The cognitive dimension was split into two types of knowledge. Tacit knowledge was described as “intuitive, interpretive, and ambiguous” while explicit knowledge was defined as “formal, systematic, and scientific” (p. 438). Knowledge transformation or organizational learning was then delineated into four types for the purposes of the study being organized:

- Articulation (tacit to explicit knowledge transformation),
- Combination (explicit to explicit knowledge transformation),
- Internalization (explicit to tacit knowledge transformation), and
- Socialization (tacit to tacit knowledge transformation).

Newton and Hackney (2005) studied three local BOEs and asked their members to reflect on the knowledge transformation or organizational learning that had occurred as part of their decision-making as a group on a critical issue. This began with an individual survey on the

elements and dimensions identified, followed by an analysis of taped board meetings and a focus group interview with each board about a critical issue (p. 440-441).

The findings from this study spoke to the individual and group learning that takes place for BOEs. The survey found that BOE members did not have to have roles in the political/structural element distinguished or separated from one another to be effective decision-makers. The survey, along with the meeting analyses, also revealed that the group members relied on “an interdependence with, rather than independence from, each other’s knowledge” (Newton & Sackney, 2005, p. 445). The two types of knowledge, tacit and explicit, were embedded throughout their decision-making work, and organizational learning was happening in their environments in a way that brought together the “cultural, cognitive, social, affective, axiological, and political” (p. 454) components of learning to impact decision-making.

### **Data-Driven & Research-Based Decision-Making**

Data and research are two kinds of knowledge that BOEs have to learn about as they prepare to make decisions and later evaluate the consequences of those decisions. Not only are data and research vital to every field, their use has become required in education as part of federal funding through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, as well as other initiatives at the national and state levels. However, given the sheer volume of data and the amount of research that could be read and incorporated into the policymaking of local BOEs, it is important to sift through what is meant by data-driven and research-based decision-making (Farley-Ripple, 2012; Fusarelli, 2008; Murray, 2014).

Murray (2014) cautions that data used in educational decisions should be broader in scope than student achievement data. While such data is readily available and fairly easily accessed by many stakeholders, it is just one measure of student achievement. Standardized test results are often the data the public sees posted on school websites or summarized to compare schools across a district or districts throughout a state. Bernhardt's (2004) data intersection approach to pooling three other types of data (demographic, perception, and school process) with student achievement data is championed. Decision-makers are urged to study each type of data separately and then appraise what different combinations reveal about the culture, instruction, and learning that is happening within the district.

The use of educational research in decision-making also needs to be more wide-ranging than it often is in current practice. There are several barriers to BOEs using research in their work, starting with a disconnect between the academic realm of empirical studies published in journals and the practical realities of governing a district and finding the time to access and understand research. Research studies seldom have actionable conclusions, unless a snippet of the findings have been co-opted by vendors as part of a marketing strategy to present their products as research-based. Explicit knowledge from research is often undermined by tacit knowledge, anecdotes, or the pre-existing beliefs of policymakers. The key to getting research to BOE members for use in decision-making is to present it in short, synthesized chunks that are straightforward in nature, like an executive summary or 1-page synopsis so that it's user-friendly (Asen, Gurke, Conners, Solomon, & Gumm, 2012; Farley-Ripple, 2012; Fusarelli, 2008).

Decisions need to be informed by data and research, rather than driven exclusively by either, and that requires training for groups like BOEs. To understand and apply data and

research, professional development and other types of learning opportunities, such as BOE work sessions, need to be part of the overall strategy. Organizational learning can only happen if time is allotted to groups or district-level teams involving BOE members so that they can process, comprehend, and apply knowledge gleaned from research and data to their decisions (Farley-Ripple, 2012; Fusarelli, 2008; Murray, 2014).

### **Collaborative Decision-Making**

Collaborative relationships are one of the eight areas noted for BOEs to focus on in the Key Work of School Boards framework discussed above. Collaboration for decision-making is typically carried out in committees with community members, educators, representatives of local governments, and BOE members. These groups take many structural forms and their composition and management can impact the quality of recommendations they bring forth to the decisions that are being made (Brazer, Rich, & Ross, 2010).

In a study involving districts in California and Virginia, researchers examined three different types of committees formed by superintendents under the auspices of the local BOEs. Each group was responding to an accountability pressure that was linked to an achievement gap and was initiated by a particular event, either within the district or with outside partners. The committees were formed with a specific focus that would lead to a strategic decision such as a district mandate, common assessment materials, or policy recommendation adopted by the BOE (Brazer, Rich, & Ross, 2010, p. 203).

Each of the three committees completed their tasks with varying degrees of buy-in from their members linked to the structure and formation parameters of the groups. The committee whose work led to a district mandate for English language learners was based on a project being led by a nearby university leadership center. It required a minimum number of

members specified by role and could be extended up to a certain number by local decision. The superintendent heading the committee decided to add his central office administrators, which was detrimental in the end as the committee was viewed as too educationally elite with little input from parents or other community members. The committee that created the common assessment materials for writing was a grassroots effort spearheaded by the superintendent, but it fell victim to too little structure when the call for volunteers yielded a group that was not balanced. No principals participated, several facilitators rotated through during the months of the committee's work, and the representation of schools via teachers and parents was not consistent across the district, which set up implementation issues with the resulting materials. The committee that brought forth the recommendation on the retention policy struck the right chord with guidelines for participation, a timeline, and a set of tools to use in action research (Brazer, Rich, & Ross, 2010, p. 203 - 211).

Decision-making authority rests with the BOE, but it extends outward through superintendents and the community with the use of committees for collaboration. Leadership styles, facilitation skills, and engagement practices all influence the success of committee work. Such outreach efforts can garner more support for the district educational achievement goals for students if handled well (Brazer, Rich, & Ross, 2010, p. 212 - 215).

### **Making Decisions about Facilities as Demographics Shift**

Like North Carolina, Michigan has also faced significant changes in demographics, which led to a number of local BOEs making decisions on facilities as reported in a 2007 study by Norton. The BOEs in the study were ones that had decided to pursue school improvement projects like making technological infrastructure upgrades, renovating an existing school, or building a new school based on shifting student enrollment numbers. The

analysis looked at decision-making in general and then delved into the outreach process BOEs used to engage the educational community as well as the larger community surrounding them geographically and governmentally in the decision-making process.

In the Norton (2007) study, two sets of surveys were disseminated. The first set of surveys were sent to superintendents to find out if a facilities decision had recently been undertaken by their BOEs, and, if so, they responded to additional questions on the survey about that decision and the components of it. The more detailed questions included queries about sources of funding, alternatives to renovating or new construction, factors that were discussed by the BOE and impacted their decision, elicitation of input from community members and the local government, and so on (pp. 480 – 481). The second set of surveys was similar, but they were sent to public officials in the cities and towns serving LEAs and then matched to responses from the first set of surveys. This second set of surveys was intended to gauge the perceptions of community involvement in the BOE decision to make a facilities improvement (p. 480).

The findings regarding BOE decisions in general highlighted several significant factors. BOE decisions were heavily impacted by the need to be competitive with nearby districts for student enrollment. Outreach efforts to gain public input were also important, though more so for the initial decision about whether or not to pursue a school improvement project than for the final decision about the type of project. The survey results also noted that most BOEs used the services of an outside consultant (ex. architect) in their decision-making, and that they sometimes asked for feedback from local government officials (Norton, 2007, p. 484).

The study also noted some findings relevant to the facilities decision being made. Superintendents reported that BOEs looked most closely at the community's preference for renovating an existing school or building a new school at a different site. A few logistical concerns also played into their decision-making about facilities, such as land availability and cost, building and construction codes, space available for non-academic use like athletic fields, and the need to consolidate services (Norton, 2007, p. 486).

The second survey yielded some interesting results. The local officials indicated that they were very aware of renovation and construction projects that their local BOEs were involved in making decisions about, but they were less familiar with projects like technology upgrades. Their results supported the first survey's information that they, along with the community as a whole, had been asked for input on facilities projects. The local officials felt that they had more influence on the decision than superintendents perceived them to have (Norton, 2007, pp. 490 – 491).

This study had several limitations. First, since it was based on surveys, there was no opportunity to capture the details of the decisions being reported. Though there were some comment boxes on both surveys, they were not often used. Another limitation was that only superintendents and local officials were included in this study, but not the BOE members themselves. It would have been interesting to see how a third survey with BOE members reporting on their decision-making process compared to the perceptions of their process being gathered from others. Finally, since the study looked only at facilities issues, there was very little exploration of other aspects of education, like curricular programming for students or performance space that the whole community might use in a renovated or new facility (Norton, 2007, pp. 493 - 494).

## **Changing Decisions based on Access and Equity**

Heinze and Zdroik (2018) did a case study in the Midwest that looked at how a district, and specifically the BOE of the district, decided to reverse a previous decision about a pay-to-play or pay-to-participate athletics policy and the process that was involved in that action. The researchers conducted a series of interviews with the BOE members and various district administrators, as well as neighboring districts' athletic directors, to discover how the decision was made to eliminate the policy even though it had just recently been implemented for financial reasons at the beginning of the recession in 2008.

The findings showed that community culture and educator leadership with the BOE were the strongest factors in changing the decision to have pay-to-play. Though the BOE had gathered feedback from the community in a number of ways, including public forums and working groups, when they made the original decision, they remained open to changing the policy by labeling it a pilot program. At the time of the decision in 2008, districts across this state were facing budget issues due to the recession and drops in state funding. Several nearby districts were also adding student fees to participate in sports programs as a way to offset costs and bring in funds. The case study district had followed suit, albeit with some caveats based on the community's concerns. For example, payment plans could be put into place at request and there were scholarships from the athletic booster club available for students who were receiving free and reduced lunch (Heinze & Zdroik, 2018, pp. 61 – 62).

The coding and analyses of the study focused on the beliefs, identity and values that the BOE and the community as a whole embraced. There was a strong commitment to education and a common belief that extracurricular activities are a vital component of education. There was also dedication to the goal of making activities like athletics accessible

to all students (Heinze & Zdroik, 2018, p. 60). This community culture was paired with guidance from the superintendent, who, at the time of the decision reversal, was retiring. He indicated in his exit interviews that he regretted the pay-to-play policy and, by doing so, reinstated it as an issue for the BOE to address. Though there had not been a decrease in athletics participation or any other particularly negative impacts, the BOE voted to end the pilot program and the pay-to-play policy. The study noted that the BOE members “experienced a sense of redemption in the resulting cultural realignment” because they saw their role as one of serving families in a way that was consistent with their unique community culture (Heinze & Zdroik, 2018, p. 63).

There were several limitations to this study, including the fact that it is a single case study; however, Heinze and Zdroik (2018) noted that sometimes smaller or rural districts are more open to such an analysis compared to larger organizations. This study also highlights the influence that education leaders can have on BOE decision-making. Even though administrators like the superintendent do not vote in BOE decisions, they can help to guide the BOE members in thinking critically about what’s best for the students and the community, whether that’s seen through the lens of information and data, or from the perspective of community ideals and beliefs, or both (pp. 64 – 65).

### **Sustaining Decisions about Curricular Programs: To Keep or To Cut?**

A case study conducted by Major (2013) was an analysis of how a suburban LEA in Michigan maintained a curricular program over a number of years, even when budget cuts and other reductions were happening. The researcher used a series of interviews with BOE members, administrators, teachers and community members, as well as a document analysis

and observations, to draw conclusions about the decision-making processes and strategies employed to sustain the district's music programs across its schools.

The first finding of the study centered on the philosophy or vision of the district regarding curriculum. The main goal, as reflected in the LEA's mission statement, was to help students reach their full potential and be 'well-rounded' individuals (Major, 2013, p. 10). There was a shared belief that music was valued as part of that goal. This belief was buoyed by the strong music programs that teachers had built, the student enrollment numbers in music classes, and the support afforded the music programs by building and central office administrators. The community backing of the music programs had a significant impact on decision-making, and one BOE member commented during his interview that eliminating the music programs was "off the table when it came to discussing cuts" (p. 12).

The second finding was focused on the delicate equilibrium of funding and politics. The district considered the music program to be part of the image or reputation it was building that would make it stand out in comparison to other LEAs. Distinctive aspects of the music program, such as the elementary strings or orchestras, were seen as attractors to families who would move into the district and increase enrollment. The well-articulated K-12 music program also prevented students from leaving because parents could rely on a sustained program. More students mean more funding, so the music program was always part of the BOE budget (Major, 2013, pp. 12 – 13).

The third and final finding was that tough financial decisions were handled creatively by the BOE and administrators. The leadership did not want to do what other LEAs did because they wanted their district to be distinguished and seen as different. One of the fiscal strategies was to invest in advertising about their district's programs in various forms of

media. They also partnered with independent schools so that district teachers from the music program and other areas (ex. art, physical education, world languages) could provide instruction to private school students in subjects that were not covered by their tuition. The private school students were included in district enrollment numbers, which brought in more per-pupil funding. In very tight financial situations, the strategy was to revamp or trim a program rather than cut it. For example, when it became difficult to fund a K – 5 school and its programs, the BOE worked with administrators to offer a “new” K – 8 program with an international theme that consolidated students into one building and made more efficient use of human and facility resources (Major, 2013, pp. 13 – 16).

The overarching lesson about BOE decision-making was that the BOE members worked collaboratively with administrators, teachers, parents, and the community to provide the best education possible for students in a fiscally sound and future-oriented way. The maintenance of the music program was possible because of their shared values, balanced approach, and clever solutions to funding issues. Part of this comprehensive approach involved the training that new BOE members received, which was designed to help them focus on the goals and mission of the district that had been established and were important to the community’s stakeholders (Major, 2013, p. 19).

### **School Choice: A New Dimension to School District Decisions**

The school choice movement has added a new component to BOE decisions that has continued to grow into the present time, starting with alternative schools and magnet schools several decades ago and more recently with charter schools and voucher systems. Fuller (2011) outlined this push for local market innovations in education that were supposed to make organizations like districts be more accountable to stakeholders and compete to provide

the best education possible for students so that parents had more educational options. He cited several political and ideological reasons for the rise in popularity of school choice, along with financial drivers. These organizational changes have been couched as school reforms, especially in the era of accountability and the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* using No Child Left Behind and, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act, and they have had bipartisan political support even in a time when faith in government was declining. These interventions in the traditional public school enterprise were cast as local innovations that would be based on community and stakeholder needs, and that wouldn't require much funding to implement since physical spaces could be reallocated and human capital could be reassigned or retrained (pp. 85 – 88).

The school choice movement predates the 1980s with intradistrict options like magnet schools, which were initially championed as a path to racial integration for districts that were struggling with other remedies to battle segregation like busing and reassignment. Magnet schools also had a creative side with districts, and sometimes building administrators and even teachers, given the freedom to select themes to organize new magnet programs around that would be attractive to parents for the focus of their children's education. The arts, classical education, technology, and many other curriculum configurations could be made available in the marketplace. When the competition of charter schools, that can ostensibly offer similar themes in their programming, and the pressure of voucher systems opened up additional options, magnet schools took on a whole new advantage in the school choice movement and for BOE decision-making (Fleming, 2012, p. 1; Fusarelli, 2003, pp. 6 – 7; Lewis, pp. 20 – 23).

Some would argue, as Smrekar and Honey (2015) did in their article about magnet schools, that the most important decisions in the school choice movement are made by parents. As the customers, parents or guardians are selecting from amongst choices made available through the decisions of BOEs and their districts' educators. This study examined parents' choices as patterns and considered the reasons parents choose magnet schools, or not, in addition to the impact that locations and themes of magnet schools had on the decisions. The authors conducted a number of telephone interviews with educational leaders from four school districts across the country that varied in size and student population but were representative of urban magnet schools, including the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina. They also analyzed the districts' magnet school policies related to goals and siting, and they used geographic information system (GIS) tools to do a comparison of choice patterns, student diversity, and magnet school sites (pp. 128 – 129).

The research literature on parent choice priorities for magnet schools held true in the Smrekar and Honey (2015) study. The top priority for parents was academics, which was often determined by publicly posted achievement test scores, followed by safety that was linked to the neighborhood where the magnet school had been located by the district. Family values and then transportation issues were also noted as reasons, though they were distant runners-up and were sometimes part of a complex combination with academics and safety that extended to school environment and discipline (p. 131).

Since one of the goals of magnet schools is diversity in the student population, the researchers also probed for patterns correlated to race, income, and level of education, and confirmed what other studies have shown with the reasons besides academics. Parents preferred magnet schools where the majority of students were identified as the same race as

the parent in order to avoid racial isolation of their children, which was consistent across all races. Family income and parents' level of education were factors in choosing magnet schools, but usually in relation to the networks of information that parents were able to access to learn about magnet school options. The more income a family has, the more resources they have financially and socially, which correlated with choosing magnet schools (Smrekar & Honey, 2015, pp. 133 – 135).

The location of and themes in magnet schools also played a role in parents' choices and were presented in the Smrekar and Honey (2015) study findings as lessons learned as revealed by the district leaders who were interviewed. The first lesson was that performance and perception are critical. If a magnet school is going to fulfill its goal of drawing in a diverse student population, the parents choosing the program have to see ample evidence that there is sustained academic success and the reputation of the program is solidly positive. The second lesson focused on committed school leaders at the building level, particularly in the principal role, so that a dynamic set of teachers and other staff members could be recruited and maintained in the magnet program. The third lesson was that the magnet school theme is important, but there are many popular options that are appealing, including, in this order, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), the arts, the Montessori method or philosophy, and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. The fourth lesson for successful magnet school options was dedication to sustainability where the need for a K – 12 articulated sequence was noted so that students could continue in magnet schools at the secondary level with a similar or complementary theme (pp. 138 – 140).

The final finding in this study connected to the GIS analysis that was done. Districts typically located magnet school programs at school sites that were available, such as vacant

school buildings or underutilized space in a school that had suffered from a student exodus due to unemployment, poverty, or criminal activity in the neighborhood in the attendance zone of the site. While this might be a financially advantageous decision by the BOE or the district leadership, it did not support the goal of integration or the parent choice focus on safety. The researchers summarized this finding by saying, “magnet school racial and socioeconomic composition (diversity) most often reflects the racial imbalance and socioeconomic segregation of neighborhoods in which these schools are located” (Smrekar & Honey, 2015, p. 141).

The Smrekar and Honey study (2015) was limited to a few urban districts and focused mostly on native English-speaking groups of parents, but a study done by Haynes, Phillips, and Goldring (2010) looked closely at traditionally underrepresented groups making magnet school choices. The United States continues to see an influx of people from all over the world, and the population of Latino families is growing at a much faster rate than other subgroups, especially across the southeastern part of the United States. This is reflected in changes in North Carolina’s student enrollment discussed earlier and impacts services like English as a Second Language (ESL) services in schools. It also brings in another parent group to district school choice decisions (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2014).

Latino parents’ school choice decisions have mostly been focused on charter schools, but this study sought out the characteristics of their magnet school choice patterns and found some surprising results. As before, academics and safety were top priorities when Latino parents were selecting a magnet school for their children, just like their Black and White counterparts. However, with Latino parents, income and level of education did not correlate. The researchers found that Latino parents were mostly middle class with education

attainment levels ranging from less than a high school education to post-graduate study. Parents' English language skills were the mitigating factor, and the telephone interviews revealed that parents with post-secondary training or college degrees were not usually employed in their field due to a lower level of English proficiency than their peers. This linguistic gap also showed up in the social networking aspect of parental school choice. If a Latino family had at least one parent who was a second-generation immigrant that had better English language skills and, perhaps, had been educated in American schools, then it was more likely that they would access information about school choices in a magnet program and select that for their children (Haynes, Phillips, and Goldring, 2010, pp. 770 – 776).

### **Supporting and Expanding School Choice**

School choice decisions by parents seem tied to how well information is communicated by the educational organization, whether that's districts with a magnet school or interdistrict transfer options, charter schools, or private schools if a voucher system is available. Since funding is linked to student enrollment, the competition can become intense (Feinburg & Lubienski, 2008; Fleming, 2012, pp. 16 – 17; Lewis, 2013).

This is also true in grants and other types of funding sources, some of which have been established with the goal of proliferating magnet schools within traditional districts, such as the Magnet School Assistance Program (MSAP) launched at the federal level in the mid-1980s, while others have been state initiatives aimed at scaling up promising reforms that positively impact student achievement, like universal prekindergarten in New York or dual language/immersion programs in various states including North Carolina (Casto & Sipple, 2011; Global Education Initiative in NC, 2013; Kitmitto, Levin, Betts, Bos, & Eaton, 2016; Thomas & Collier, 2012).

A meta-analysis shared in 2016 looked at 21 MSAP grant awardees to assess how well these magnet schools had realized greater student diversity for schools and improved academic achievement for students, two of the main goals for magnet schools. Slight changes in diversity were revealed for the magnet schools in the study, but they were limited to either better racial or better socioeconomic integration, though not both at the same site. Academic achievement was mostly unchanged compared to the overall district results where the magnet schools were located, with somewhat higher performance on English language arts measures for students in magnet schools. The authors admitted that more study is needed on a larger number of magnet schools across time and within some of the specific community contexts where magnet schools are popular with parents as a school choice option (Kitmitto, Levin, Betts, Bos, & Eaton, 2016, pp. 1 – 4).

The school choice movement has expanded beyond the most urban and populous districts with magnet schools and charter schools in suburban and rural areas. The pressure has also increased for states to support such initiatives by providing incentives for local schools within districts to become more competitive and include new and different programming opportunities for students that capture parents' interest for where they send their children for an education. The state of New York provides a good example of this with the implementation of its universal prekindergarten (UPK) program. UPK began in the 1960s as a program for children from low-income families. In the late 1990s, the state legislature passed a bill that would, over time, extend UPK to all families. In the 2006 – 2007 school year, just as the economic recession was beginning, all districts were eligible to apply for a UPK grant; however, they were a few caveats. Districts that accepted the monies were required to have a partner in the form of a community-based organization, called a

CBO, as a subcontractor for a minimum of 10% of the state grant funds, and there were a lot of decisions to be made about the location, instructional time, and CBO involvement for these UPK programs (Casto & Sipple, 2011, pp. 136 – 137).

Casto and Sipple (2011) did a case study on the decisions made by local educators in five rural districts that launched new UPK programs with the state funding. They were interested in the partnering arrangements made with CBOs in their communities, as well as who made the decisions and what their motivations were. In their coding of the data, which encompassed interviews with district and building administrators, they marked which actors, local community members or professional colleagues, influenced decisions, as well as three different elements or pillars related to decision-making for organizations like schools:

- Regulative – laws, rules, or policies that are part of the regulatory nature of external funding;
- Normative – expectations, hierarchy, protocols and values that constitute the formal way an organization functions; and
- Cultural-cognitive – perceptions, understandings, and shared realities of an organization and its stakeholders.

The districts in the study done in 2008 and 2009 all had approximately the same amount of experience with prekindergarten programming and were typically categorized as high need or low-wealth. They were also very small, rural LEAs, usually with a single school for each grade span. From a data collection standpoint, this meant that the administrators interviewed were knowledgeable about the whole UPK implementation journey (pp. 139 – 142).

The findings showed that the initial decisions about UPK were made by the BOE because funding for the district was involved, and the budget is one of their main

responsibilities. The BOEs relied on the district administrators, primarily the superintendents, to explain the benefits and challenges of UPK grants and how the funding structure would impact the local community and the students. Once the state funding was accepted and made part of the budget, each BOE depended on principals and others, like the CBO partners and the parents in the school community, to create a UPK program that worked for stakeholders. The BOEs usually requested periodic updates on the UPK program and were supportive of the decisions made by district administrators before, during and after implementation (Casto & Sipple, 2011, p. 147).

The findings also pointed to the strong influence that local community members had on UPK decisions made by educational administrators, whether they were driven by regulative, normative or cultural-cognitive elements. Parents figured heavily into the decision-making, especially with questions about the program's instructional time: full-day, half-day, or some combination of those options. These decisions were informed by the regulative aspects of the grant, since the number of students and the funding associated with them would vary based on the instructional time offerings. The normative element also was important because parents and educators alike saw prekindergarten programming as a best practice that would benefit children. The cultural-cognitive aspect was less prominent in the interviews about the UPK decisions, but several of the districts shared that there was trust that had been built up over time in how the school, its teachers, and the CBO partners were dedicated to serving the children in the community (Casto & Sipple, 2011, pp. 145 - 146).

The educational administrators did draw on external professional resources, such as colleagues from other districts and schools, or the research regarding UPK programming to make decisions, but they did so in very generalized ways. The normative element included

compiling research on early childhood education that they felt was most applicable to their district and communities and calling on their professional peers in other districts and schools for input. They were also careful with the regulations of the grant and how well the CBO partners could fulfill the requirements, such as having credentialed teachers on staff. From a cultural-cognitive perspective, the community and the BOE appeared to have faith in what the educational administrators presented to them about UPK programming (Casto & Sipple, 2011, pp. 149 - 150).

### **Dual Language/Immersion as a School Choice Option**

While preschool programs and school choice curricular themes like the arts and STEM are somewhat familiar to everyone, dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs are often not. In DL/I programs, the decision has been made to teach academic content in two languages, usually starting with a cohort of kindergarten students the first year and adding a grade level per year as the first cohort advances through the elementary grades and eventually matriculates into the secondary level. The state standards are taught in two languages, English and a target language, which is often Spanish or Mandarin Chinese in North Carolina and many other states, though it can be any language that a district or school chooses based on community needs or preferences. A model is determined based on the first languages of the students being served in the DL/I program. A dual language or two-way model means there is an almost equal number of native English-speaking students and native speakers of the target language, and an immersion or one-way model refers to a DL/I program where the majority of students, if not all, are native English speakers. Thus, the term dual language/immersion encompasses all DL/I models. In the early grades, instructional time is almost entirely in the target language and percentages like 90/10 and

80/20 are used to describe the amount of instruction in the target language and in English. English language arts instruction typically begins in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and the instructional time continues to shift until it reaches 50/50 in most DL/I programs. Students become bilingual, biliterate and bicultural, and research has shown that they demonstrate positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2008, pp. 309 – 312; Thomas & Collier, 2017, pp. 15 – 16).

For decision-makers like BOE members and district administrators, it is highly unlikely that any of them were ever students in a DL/I program, whereas they probably do have educational experience with arts disciplines, particularly music and visual arts, and individual classes from STEM fields. Their language learning has likely been at the high school or college level and limited to the target language being taught as a separate subject, rather than through academic content. Their ability to use a second language in their adult lives, either in the workplace or in the community, is usually non-existent or limited to cursory greetings, and yet they select a very different linguistic outcome for students when they choose to launch a DL/I program in a school. Reasons such as preparing students for a globalized marketplace or creating global citizens are sometimes cited, as are cognitive advantages to being bilingual. But, as the research shows, parents make school choice decisions based on academic performance of a program, and that is where DL/I is a proven success (Smrekar & Honey, 2015; Thomas & Collier, 2012; Thomas & Collier, 2017).

The Thomas and Collier (2012) studies have demonstrated that all students in DL/I programs have higher academic achievement as measured by statewide examinations like North Carolina's End-of-Grade (EOG) exams, regardless of socioeconomic background. Research also shows that DL/I programs help close the achievement gap for students in sub-

populations that have historically been underachieving on summative tests, and even students with special education needs perform better than their peers who are not in DL/I programs. Other quantitative analyses demonstrate that schools with DL/I programs have English learners that exit support services earlier than their peers in transitional bilingual programs that are subtractive in nature, where the goal is to build English proficiency without regard for maintaining or supporting the first or home language of the student (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2012).

Thomas and Collier selected seven districts in North Carolina for a longitudinal study that began in the 2007 – 2008 school year, which coincided with the start of the economic recession. They analyzed both demographic and achievement data for students in 11 different DL/I programs that had matured to at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level when students first take EOG tests assessing reading and mathematics, and they compared it to the statistics for the students' monolingual peers in the same schools and districts. Most of the DL/I programs in the study were operating as two-way models, but there were three DL/I programs using the immersion model and two of those had reached the secondary level at the time of the study. Also, four of the 11 DL/I programs were part of their districts' magnet school options, including Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' World Language themed schools and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County's global initiative, while the other seven were simply offered as a school choice within a neighborhood school or the attendance zone designated by the families' home address (2012, pp. 69 – 71).

The results of the Thomas and Collier (2012) study are so dramatic that the chapter in the book describing them is titled, *Astounding Effectiveness – The North Carolina Story*. In reading, the analyses showed that students in DL/I programs, regardless of their

socioeconomic or linguistic backgrounds, scored higher on EOG tests, which are only given in English, than their monolingual peers. By the time they reached middle school, the majority of DL/I students were one grade level and sometimes more ahead of students whose parents had not chosen DL/I programs, and the same types and magnitude of outcomes were also documented in DL/I students' mathematics scores on EOG tests (pp. 72 – 77).

These findings held true for all student sub-groups, and the researchers concluded that being in a DL/I program benefitted every child and led to the closing of the achievement gap that is often observed in, for example, the achievement test scores of English learners and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Thomas and Collier (2012) noted that these results were statistically significant from a research standpoint, and, perhaps more importantly, practically significant for DL/I students who have advantages that will “counteract the negative impact of low socioeconomic status on school achievement” (p. 75) and serve them well “whatever their circumstances and their educational needs” (p. 76).

The Thomas and Collier (2017) research results make it easier to understand how BOEs, district administrators, parents, and other stakeholders would be willing to commit to the implementation of a DL/I program in their midst. The political persuasion needed might not be such a difficult task, especially when other consequences of such high achievement scores are brought to the forefront and customized for different groups. Parents could see advantages for their children like qualifying for gifted programs and winning scholarships for enrichment opportunities or postsecondary study. Schools and districts would look at how increasing test scores, and eventually graduation rates, could impact their standing compared to other programs, schools, districts and school choice options. Community members might see all of these advantages, in addition to other benefits linked to economic viability for their

geographic area stemming from the reputation of the educational opportunities available (p. 18).

States such as Delaware, North Carolina, and Utah have capitalized on the Thomas and Collier (2012) work to support statewide DL/I initiatives. Utah, followed by Delaware, had political and financial support from their governors and state legislatures to implement DL/I programs across their states. Likewise, North Carolina had the political push to support DL/I, which was outlined in the State Board of Education's Global Education Task Force Report published in January 2013. However, DL/I programs were already on the rise in our state and had been for almost 15 years at that point, so this dissertation study looks at how specific districts decided to start a DL/I program and be part of the vanguard of the movement during the economic recession that would see an explosion of DL/I programs in the following years (Global Education Initiative in NC, 2013; Thomas and Collier, 2017, p. 19).

### **Chapter Summary**

This literature review has shown that local BOEs need to function as a coordinated unit because decision-making for a district involves a shared vision and flexible ways to continue to build knowledge about education. It also requires an understanding of data and research and methods to utilize both effectively. Decision-making necessitates an appreciation of the benefits that come from collaborating with stakeholders and relying on the input of educators. Successful BOEs learn together as they form and reform as a group after each election, work for their constituents and determine how their students will be educated in the best manner possible, especially in the era of school choice where districts must compete for students.

Weiss' (1995) 4 I's Framework allowed the decision-making process around launching a DL/I program to be analyzed in a novel way. The role of the BOE, district educators, parents, and other stakeholders, as well as the pressures of school choice, could all be assessed using this framework to gauge the use of ideologies, information, and interests to inform how the fourth "I" of institution realized the implementation of a DL/I program in a district's schools. Weiss specifically developed the 4 I's Framework to serve as a conceptual lens for decision-making in educational organizations. The interaction of ideologies, or the beliefs and philosophies that people hold who are involved in decision-making, are constantly pulling in components of information that can range from data and research to anecdotal stories and lived experiences. Those "I's" also get incorporated with interests, whether that's a personal or selfish interest in being rewarded in some way or an interest in having a school or district be recognized for its service to students and the community. These three individual "I's" form the group "I" of institution which speaks to the organization's way of weighing ideologies, information, and interests in the process and empowering voices in decision-making (pp. 573 – 574).

My dissertation used the Weiss 4 I Framework to help understand the decision-making that led to new DL/I programs being established during an economic recession. The Heinze and Zdroik (2018) study was also done during this timeframe, but it dealt with eliminating a policy. The Major (2013) article looked at defending and maintaining a music program over time, and the Thomas and Collier longitudinal data (2012) championed the academic outcomes of DL/I programs. But none of these studies looked at how BOEs decided to launch a program that has never existed in a district before. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative approach I used to research how districts that added a DL/I program during an

economic recession described their reasons for taking that action and how they intend to ensure DL/I becomes institutionalized as a K-12 program.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons districts in North Carolina decided to launch a dual language/immersion (DL/I) program, in which students learn content in English and another language, as well as explore the local leadership, policy initiatives, and curricular goals that supported the decision. DL/I programs are proliferating in North Carolina and have increased from just over a dozen in the 2003 – 2004 school year to over 100 a decade later, with the majority of programs offered by public schools. This growth continued during the economic downturn that began in 2007 and persists to the current school year (NC Dual Language/Immersion Programs Directory).

This chapter outlines the qualitative research approach and design that was used for the study and describes the sample and site selection, data collection methods, and analysis. It also discusses reliability and validity or trustworthiness issues common to qualitative research, and this study in particular, and summarizes the limitations of this work. This study used the organizational decision-making framework described by Weiss (1995) as a conceptual lens to code and evaluate the decisions made to initiate a DL/I program at each of the selected sites.

### **Research Question**

The research question that frames the study is:

Why did the districts decide to add a DL/I program to one (or more) of their schools?

### **Selection of Qualitative Research Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because it examined a human process in educational policy, decision-making related to curricular programs, and its

impact on students and their community. There are many types of quantitative research involving statistical analyses that have already been done with students in DL/I programs (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2012), so a nuanced approach using a qualitative study was chosen to provide a more holistic view of the decision-making for DL/I programs (Creswell, 2014, pp.12-13; Stake, 1995, p. xii).

The growth of qualitative approaches over the last 25 years, and their use in educational research, illustrates the importance of seeing the human side of decisions made by people like policymakers, educators, parents and other adults in children's lives who determine that types of programs that will best serve their educational needs (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995, p. 1). Various types of qualitative approaches were considered for this study. An ethnography study would have had to have been done just before, during and after the decision to add a DL/I program was made, and that time has passed. A phenomenological study would be better suited to gathering the experiences of the children or the decision-makers over a long period of time, as would a narrative research study, since both types of studies are longitudinal and diverse in the aspects of people's lives that they document. A grounded theory study, with its roots in sociology, would be useful, but is too wide-ranging for an analysis of decision-making and its impact (Creswell, 2014, pp. 13-14).

Schramm's 1971 definition and purpose of a case study is to "illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result" (Yin, 2014, p. 15). That is the purpose of this study with DL/I programs. The format of my research question with "why" is most pertinent to a case study approach and allowed me to assess the instigation and implementation of decisions being made by individuals and groups in this study (Yin, 2014, pp. 9-10). Stake's (1995) definition of a case as "a specific, a

complex, functioning thing” that is in and of itself a “bounded system” further supported my ability to focus on each case as “an object rather than a process” (p. 2).

A case study approach allowed me to discover the scope of the phenomenon or the decision to add a DL/I program within the school’s or district’s unique context of community needs and desires (Yin, 2014). I wanted to comprehend the reasons the decision was made with the competing pressures that are ever-present for policymakers, which range from financial to cultural, as well as the maverick nature of this decision given that most of the adults in this situation are not bilingual themselves nor did they experience a program like DL/I in their own schooling. I also wanted to illuminate how the decision’s consequences are estimated to impact the students and the community, now and into the future. Stake’s explanation of an instrumental case study helped me understand how this type of research can move beyond a single individual’s perspective, such as an administrator who was interviewed, and ensure that a broader understanding of the phenomenon of deciding to add a DL/I program is realized (1995, p. 3).

### **Rationale for Exploratory Case Study**

A multiple case study with a cross case analysis involving three districts was a suitable approach for several reasons. The research question asked why the decision was made to add a DL/I program, and the study went into how the impact of that decision was being measured from the start. The interview questions were designed to allow leaders at the local level to describe the decision-making process, along with their underlying rationale for proposing and then moving forward with the implementation of a DL/I program. Their reasons were often complex and drew on a number of motivations and goals, which would be hard to capture in a quantitative study or other types of qualitative analyses. In order to

gauge that complexity, Weiss' (1995) 4 I's decision-making framework was used as a conceptual lens. The choice of three cases, as opposed to two or five, spoke to the literal replication logic for multiple-case studies. In addition, it's critical to maximize learning from case study research by documenting similar findings or new information not readily evident in a single case (Stake, 1995, p. 4; Yin, 2014).

Yin (2014) defines a case study as being comprised of two parts: the scope and the features. The scope of a case study denotes a deep probe into a phenomenon as it functions within its own setting but also where the lines that distinguish the phenomenon, or case, from its setting, or context, may be a bit blurred. In this study, the phenomenon of a decision being made to start a DL/I program is striking given the context of an economic recession and the demographic shifts that are occurring in the school and community where the DL/I program grew. The features of a case study encompass the many variables that needed to be explored in this study and the various types of evidence that were gathered to triangulate the data. Stake (1995) notes the importance of both balance and variety in a case study, which speaks to how the scope and features must be considered so that the case study design is comprehensive and provides parameters for research throughout the planning, execution and analysis of the study (Stake, 1995, p. 6; Yin, 2014, pp. 16-17).

There are also concerns about case study research, which can be made into strengths of a well-organized case study. Yin (2014, pp. 19-21) cautions that a case study can be seen as less rigorous than other types of empirical inquiry, but only when a study has not been structured in a methodical way or has been conducted haphazardly. The opposite concern is that case study research will be extended over too long of a time and gather so much data that

the study is overwhelming to analyze or publish. Both of these concerns can be addressed by a good research design that adheres to best practices of case study research.

Case study research can also be mistaken for case study activities or materials that are used to prepare teachers for scenarios they may encounter in the classroom or in the course of their work with colleagues, administrators or parents. This is a true concern in educational research, since the participants of studies are often teachers or other educators who may be considering how they would use the information being gathered in a case study activity for professional development purposes with less experienced educators. However, the purpose of case study research is to present a rich description of the phenomenon in its context, not to hone in on or emphasize particular aspects for teaching purposes, and the researcher must be careful to present findings that are substantiated from the evidence as a whole (Yin, 2014).

Generalizability is a persistent question with all research, as is comparability. Case study research, whether a single case study or multiple case studies, cannot be generalized or used to predict outcomes in other situations any more than a single experiment can be used in such a manner. “Case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (Yin, 2014, p. 21).

Stake already understood this well when he said in 1995, “the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization,” (p. 8). By examining a case or multiple cases, and the intricacies that flow from the knowledge about it or them, researchers like myself can become familiar with each case and its uniqueness. That information then informs how the cases are different from each other, and what new learning they have to offer the field on an issue or topic (Stake, 1995, p. 8).

This study looked at why decisions were made for DL/I programs, and the findings and conclusions would not be able to predict how policymakers in other districts and schools might make similar decisions. My case study informs others on what transpired in the decision-making process and it could be replicable, which is also true of experiments. Case study research is sometimes posed as disadvantaged in modern times when the emphasis seems to be on quantitative data or experimental studies with randomization and differentiated treatments. However, the strength of a case study is that it can go beyond simple numbers or statistical analyses to offer a broader perspective and reveal insights into behaviors or why the people involved decided on a particular option.

### **Research Design**

This study was an exploratory case study of three school districts in North Carolina that decided to launch a DL/I program during the last economic recession from 2007 - 2010. It began with a short, open-ended, online survey of all of the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) or traditional public school districts that had a DL/I program in the 2016 – 2017 school year. This type of survey is considered by Yin (2014, pp. 112-113) to be a type of interview, although its role and results are to be corroborating evidence which is then combined with other types of data collected. Stake (1995) emphasized the need to have a set of questions to use early in a case study in order to guarantee that a rich description of each site could be written and to facilitate cross-site analysis during the reporting phase (p. 25).

The questions in the survey, shown in Appendix C, asked for a respondent, likely the LEA-designated DL/I coordinator, from each DL/I program to verify information such as location of the program and year started. It also asked for a ranking of general reasons for starting the DL/I program and an explanation of the primary reason. Finally, the online

survey asked the respondent to identify the names of three to five individuals, such as local school board members or educators, who led the decision-making journey to launch the program. The survey was available to potential respondents for almost three weeks in January 2017, and then the responses were downloaded for analysis.

The survey results were used to select three districts that met the criteria of having decided to initiate a DL/I program in the district or launch a new DL/I program for the LEA during the 2007 – 2008, 2008 – 2009, or 2009 – 2010 school years, during the economic recession. The demographic changes in enrollment, both statewide and in districts with DL/I programs, as described in Chapter 1, were further assessed to determine which LEAs would be good candidates for case studies. Enrollment increases above the state average of 9% were most prevalent in districts with DL/I programs, as opposed to decreases or steady enrollments, which would have implications for logistical issues like changes in funding, staff allocation, and physical organization. The survey data was also used to describe each case study district. A more detailed explanation of the scrutiny of the survey responses follows in Chapter 4.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two to three identified individuals in each case study district until the point of saturation was reached. This resulted in a total of seven interviews, two from two of the case studies and three from the other case study, and the interview participants' roles and other information is summarized in the table below. Interviews were done face-to-face in locations chosen by the participants where they felt comfortable, like their offices or meeting rooms in their school or central office building, and the interviews were recorded. Interviews were also done by phone, which still allowed the participants to be in a familiar setting but also maximized their use of time and was less

disruptive to their work day. Appendix F shows the interview protocol with the main questions, which were broad enough to encourage participants to reflect on why the decision was made to start a DL/I program and how implementation has progressed to date. The questions could be paraphrased or extended to dig more deeply into a response, and they could be asked in almost any order to maintain the flexibility of the interview. Interview participants were always offered the opportunity to view the questions in advance, and almost all of them decided to do so. The goal was for each interview to be approximately 30 – 40 minutes long, though some went longer and a few were also a bit shorter. Having a structured plan for the interviews, which included this concise list of questions, helped safeguard the fidelity of the research design so that each participant’s interpretation of the experience of deciding on a DL/I program could be captured for the study (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009, pp. 314-318; Stake, 1995, pp. 64 – 65; Yin, 2014, pp. 110-112).

**Table 2. Interview Participants**

<b>Case Study District</b>	<b>Job Title of Participant</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>
1	Principal	23 in district, 28 total
1	Director of Curriculum	9 in district, 30+ total
1	Assistant Superintendent of Support Services	9 in district, 20+ total
2	Director of Federal Programs	10 in district, 20+ total
2	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction	10 in district, 25+ total
3	Director of Curriculum	8+ in district, 20+ total
3	Assistant Superintendent	10+ in district, 25+ total

An archival data or document analysis of publicly available materials was done. The local board of education (BOE)’s materials that pertained to the decision to add the DL/I

program were analyzed, along with the other topics that were being discussed and decided upon around the same time. Board agendas, minutes and publications were collected, including presentations made to the board and additional work sessions being conducted during this time frame, whether they were internal BOE groups or involved a wider group of stakeholders. Though all of these materials were available to the public, which made access to them easier, the researcher heeded Yin’s (2014, p. 109) warning that archival documents have been generated for both a different audience and a different goal than research. However, according to Stake (1995, p. 68), such documents and their analyses also provide insights into the actions and activities of each case study site that could not be directly observed by the researcher (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009, pp. 229 – 232).

Here is a summary table showing how the research design with its three types of data collection triangulate to provide answers to the research question.

**Table 3. Research Design**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Document Analysis</b>
Why did the districts decide to add a DL/I program to one (or more) of their schools?	X	X	X

**Data Collection Procedures**

All data was collected and stored electronically in a safe and ethical manner on a secure external hard drive so that it could be transformed into text for the analysis phase. The online survey was done using Qualtrics, software available to all researchers, including graduate students, through the university. Each district selected for the study was given a pseudonym that was used throughout the data analysis process and in the narrative report that is written. The data from the survey was downloaded in a spreadsheet. A single document was created from the survey results that linked the actual names of the districts and interview

participants with their pseudonyms, but this document was not online or accessible to anyone except the researcher.

Interviews were recorded on a device that creates audio files which can be saved and shared electronically. The audio files were named using the district's pseudonym, the participant decision-maker's title (ex. BoardMember1, Superintendent, Principal), and the date the interview was conducted. Interviews were transcribed by a professional with experience in this type of work and then refined by the researcher with details and notes captured during the interviews on the interview protocol document immediately afterwards as the researcher debriefed and reflected. A log was created with a series of folders for the document analysis to track the source and type of materials collected for each case study district. The date of the document's publication was noted in the file name, and documents were collected across a 5 – 10 year time frame encompassing the DL/I decision. This was done to confirm that all of the pertinent information about DL/I discussions was captured in the document analysis, along with other topics about curricular decisions.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis began when archival records published by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) were compiled by the Public School Forum of North Carolina into the annual *Policymaker's Education Primer*. The demographic comparisons done on the districts with DL/I programs showed changes in student population or Average Daily Membership (ADM) over a decade, from the 2003 – 2004 school year to 2013 – 2014. Some of the districts with DL/I programs had a dramatic increase or a striking decrease in the number of students, both in actual numbers and in percentages, which led to further scrutiny on other changes in demographics, charter school pressure, independent and

homeschool enrollment, and so on. This initial analysis is shared in the form of district and program profiles for those districts selected as a case to study.

Interviews were recorded and then transcribed so that they could be coded and analyzed, as were the documents collected as part of the archival data. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) note that “coding is analysis” (p. 72) which should be done in two parts. First Cycle coding was done using in vivo coding and evaluation coding, with the evaluation coding linked to Weiss’ (1995) 4 I’s Framework which is being used as a conceptual lens for this study. Second Cycle coding allowed a reassessment of the First Cycle coding process. The evaluation codes for the 4 I’s Framework were scrutinized so that patterns across the three cases and various participants could be discovered.

In vivo coding is common in qualitative research and recommended for novice researchers. It is also helpful in ensuring that the participants are empowered because it relies on the language they have used in interviews and other data sources to develop the codes. Evaluation coding is most applicable to policy studies involving multiple cases like this one. Evaluation coding also includes the use of subcodes noted after the primary code and a colon, which is a way to incorporate the in vivo codes and check for patterns across cases (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

Open coding using the constant comparative method was an ongoing process after each interview and other data collection processes, and then the codes were compared to the 4 I’s Framework. A code book was created using the NVivo software, rather than hand coding, for the purposes of efficiency and thoroughness. This allowed codes to be revised or refined as needed throughout the data collection phase of the study (Looney, 2017; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, pp. 81-82).

## Research Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important components of the design and execution of a research study. Logical tests involving four concepts form the basis of reliability and validity tests, which include credibility, confirmability, data dependability, and trustworthiness. In an exploratory case study, construct validity, external validity, and reliability must be assured. Internal validity does not apply to exploratory case studies like mine since no causal links are being sought, only patterns or consistencies within and across cases (Stake, 1995, p. 44; Yin, 2014, p. 45-47).

Yin (2014) outlines the necessary case study tactics for the four tests in a table similar to the one below (p. 45):

**Table 4.** Tests for Case Studies

TESTS	CASE STUDY TACTIC	PHASE OF RESEARCH FOR TACTIC
Construct validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use multiple sources of evidence</li><li>• Establish chain of evidence</li><li>• Have key informants review draft case study report</li></ul>	Data collection Data collection Composition
Internal validity – Not applicable to exploratory case studies		
External validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use replication logic in multiple-case studies</li></ul>	Research design
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use case study protocol</li><li>• Develop case study database</li></ul>	Data collection Data collection

To ensure construct validity for this study, I used multiple sources of evidence, including the results of an online survey, individual interviews, and a document analysis. This allowed me to triangulate the data from multiple sources and corroborate my findings across cases. I kept careful records so that a chain of evidence could be established. Any reader of my final report would be able to see how the findings are linked to the evidence, research question, and methodological approach. I also had a key informant review the draft of my dissertation, including my case study reports, and provide feedback. The key

informant was my advisor, Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli, who has provided guidance from the beginning, and is in a position to give constructive feedback about all aspects of this study. She has an extensive background in qualitative research, and she was my instructor for the first qualitative research class I took in my doctoral program (Stake, 1995, pp. 112-115; Yin, 2014, pp. 118-128).

External validity was supported by being able to demonstrate replication logic in a study with multiple cases. The basic research design is described in a way that it could be replicated with additional districts, in other states, or across schools that have implemented a curricular program like a DL/I program. The research question is founded on why, which is critical for case studies and their replication, and the links within the chain of evidence tied together the different components of this research design in a way that it could be repeated in contexts that varied politically, socially, historically or in other ways compared to this study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

Reliability was addressed through the use of a case study protocol. The case study protocol was outlined in my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and was synthesized from this dissertation chapter so that I, as the researcher, had a concise document with an overview of the case study. The data collection procedures, the survey announcements, the interview invitations, and the questions used to collect data are shown in the appendices in the order they were used. This case study protocol also served as a guide on how to structure the case study report (Stake, 1995, pp. 91-99; Yin, 2014, pp. 84-94).

Reliability was also supported through the development of a case study database. As data was collected for this study, I organized it electronically in a series of folders on my computer. This permitted any component of the data to be accessible as needed, including

the spreadsheets with data from the online survey, the transcripts from the interviews, the log of the materials collected from the document analysis, my notes, and so on (Stake, 1995, pp. 51-56; Yin, 2014, pp. 123-127).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The two main limitations of this study were size and time. By virtue of case study design and availability of DL/I programs that were launched during the recession, I had to confine this study to three cases or districts. The two to three interviews per case and the document analysis done at each site were augmented by the online survey data collected. Three sites were a sufficient number to support a multiple-case study for literal replication purposes and still have a substantial but manageable amount of data to analyze. The time period for this study was several months in the spring and early summer of 2017. This was a short period of time, but it took into account the need to be conscious of the amount of time donated by the survey respondents and the interviewees and the necessity of finishing the study in a timely manner (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

### **Ethical Issues**

The university's Institutional Review Board (IRB)'s guidelines were adhered to throughout this study. The risks inherent in any case study research were delineated from the start and explained in the materials that accompanied the online survey and the interviews so that informed consent could be obtained from participants. The data collected was stored and labeled in the manner outlined above so that participants' individual anonymity was maintained to the greatest extent possible.

I was transparent in my work as I conducted the research and gathered the data. As a K-12 educator for over 20 years, my experience with schools and districts has shaped my

beliefs about educating students so that all can be successful in life. This perspective drives me to champion initiatives, like DL/I programs, that embrace a whole child approach.

However, given my role as researcher, I focused on being a facilitator who was reporting findings, regardless of their nature or the conclusions needed in the analysis. I knew I might find that the reasons voiced for starting a DL/I program were antithetical to my previous work or understanding, but I reported the data and findings honestly to inform my own perspective and the field of education in general.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 has provided an overview of the purpose of this study and positioned it within the qualitative research continuum. An explanation of the research design and question for my exploratory case study of three sites has been outlined, including a summary of the data collection and analysis that took place. Validity and reliability, along with limitations and ethical issues, have been addressed for this study.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### **Introduction**

The findings of this study revealed that districts decided to add a dual language/immersion (DL/I) program to one or more of their schools in order to better serve their students. The reasons given, and the path followed to get approval and to implement a DL/I program varied in each case study, but the goal of improving education for students was the primary purpose.

This chapter describes the data that inspired this study and how the research question was narrowed down to focus on districts that made decisions during the economic recession to add DL/I programs. It begins with a synopsis of enrollment changes over a 10-year period in public school districts with DL/I programs and continues with the survey that was used to launch this study and select three North Carolina public school districts as case studies. This chapter also contains the school profiles done for each DL/I program and its district, which include a rich description of the school district, the community and the parameters that guided how the decision to add a DL/I program was initiated, explored, approved and implemented. The chapter ends with a cross case analysis and an examination of the interaction of Weiss' (1995) three I's (interests, information, ideology) to define the fourth I, institutional decision-making for school reform.

### **Enrollment Shifts**

The demographic changes that the state of North Carolina has seen in student enrollment over the 10-year period between School Year (SY) 2003 – 2004 and SY 2013 – 14 were discussed in Chapter 1, but, when that data was examined from the perspective of districts with dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs, it sparked additional questions,

including the research question for this study: Why did the districts decide to add a DL/I program to one (or more) of their schools? Table 1 showed the statewide totals related to enrollment, both actual numbers and percentage changes, based on the publicly shared data in the *North Carolina Policymaker's Education Primer* (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2014). Overall, there was a 9% increase in the number of students enrolled in traditional K – 12 public school districts or Local Education Agencies (LEAs) during this 10-year time period.

By 2014 - 2015, over 20% or 27 out of 115 K – 12 public school districts offered at least one DL/I program, and their district-level changes in enrollment varied from an increase of over 50% to a decrease of about 25%, when compared to the state average of 9%. Table 5 shows details for these 27 districts using the following arrangements and color coding:

- Above the state average line or in green for an increase in enrollment equal to or greater than 9% as listed in the column that is the furthest to the right,
- Below the state average line or in yellow for an increase less than 9%, and
- At the bottom of the table or in red for a decrease in enrollment when compared to the state average.

Two of the districts had no change in enrollment when percentages were calculated, so they are shown with no color coding, and the names of the districts have been alphabetized and then changed to letters, A – AA, to protect their identities for this study.

**Table 5. Enrollment Changes for LEAs with a DL/I Program**

	School Year of 1st DL/I Program*	2003-04 ADM	2013-14 ADM	Change in Number of Students Served	% Change in 10 years
LEA W	2012-2013	26,741	41,065	14,324	54 %
LEA X	2012-2013	109,031	152,645	43,614	40 %
LEA C	2013-2014	21,782	29,987	8,205	38 %
LEA P	2007-2008	24,930	33,583	8,653	35 %
LEA N	2014-2015	6,391	8,224	1,833	29 %
LEA E	1991-1992	114,101	142,068	27,967	25 %
LEA L	2013-2014	16,888	20,191	3,303	20 %
LEA T	2012-2013	21,737	25,210	3,473	16 %
LEA S	2010-2011	22,267	25,429	3,162	14 %
LEA D	2002-2003	10,644	12,120	1,476	14 %
LEA F	2004-2005	7,291	8,209	918	13 %
LEA AA	2007-2008	47,342	53,225	5,883	12 %
LEA M	2012-2013	12,246	13,609	1,363	11 %
LEA O	2009-2010	19,050	20,940	1,890	10 %
LEA R	2013-2014	11,778	12,895	1,117	9 %
LEA K	1990-1991	65,884	71,665	5,781	9 %
<b>State Average</b>					<b>9 %</b>
LEA H	2002-2003	30,694	33,078	2,384	8 %
LEA A	2008-2009	21,538	22,524	986	5 %
LEA B	2011-2012	24,828	25,610	782	3 %
LEA Z	2013-2014	12,461	12,455	-6	0 %
LEA U	2007-2008	18,102	18,066	-36	0 %
LEA J	2003-2004	3,190	3,128	-62	-2 %
LEA Q	2008-2009	6,556	6,385	-171	-3 %
LEA G	2007-2008	52,859	51,440	-1,419	-3 %
LEA V	2014-2015	14,693	13,138	-1,555	-11 %
LEA I	2014-2015	7,621	6,112	-1,509	-20 %
LEA Y	2014-2015	3,120	2,364	-756	-24 %

\* The school year of the first DL/I program for each district has been included, though there were also districts that decided to add second, third, and even fourth DL/I programs during the recession from 2007 – 2010.

Of these 27 districts with DL/I programs, 70% had an increase in student enrollment that would have had ramifications for funding and logistics like staff recruitment and facilities management. Likewise, districts that saw their enrollment fall, especially by 10% or more, would have experienced a reduction in funding, at least over time, that could have dramatically impacted human capital and space allocation. This analysis of student

enrollment changes led me to think about how I could choose a focus for this study when there were so many angles to possibly pursue.

In discussions with my advisor, we considered options like selecting case studies from amongst the districts with:

- the highest or most significant increases or decreases in growth,
- the greatest number of English Learners (ELs) to serve,
- a target language other than Spanish, or
- the most intense charter school or independent school pressure(s).

Any of these choices would have made interesting studies, along with other possibilities that should be considered for future studies. In the end, we came back to the critical issue of school funding, and we found it intriguing that these changes, both in enrollment and in programming, were during the time of the last economic recession when school funding was being cut and sometimes rescinded, so that time period became the focus.

### **Statewide Survey**

The survey questions shown in Appendix C were deployed using Qualtrics software in January 2017 to the 33 LEAs that had at least one DL/I program at that time, which now included six more districts that had launched a DL/I program after SY 2014 – 2015 and were not encompassed in the above enrollment shift analysis. The decision was made to not include charter or independent schools with DL/I programs in the survey because of the different decision-making and funding structures involved in their operations.

Survey invitations were sent via email using the announcements in Appendix A to each district's DL/I coordinator(s) on Wednesday, January 4, 2017. This date was immediately after the districts returned from holiday break. The survey was originally open

through Friday, January 13, but was extended to Friday, January 20, due to inclement weather across the state during that time that had necessitated a number of school closings and delays. I decided to leave the survey open through the weekend, and all surveys were submitted January 4 – 21, 2017.

The response rate was 52% as 17 unique LEAs submitted completed surveys. There were two other districts that submitted incomplete surveys with information that could not be analyzed. One district submitted twice from different administrators, so their responses were combined into a single submission. Also, one district contacted me in late February about missing the deadline to submit a survey, but the survey was not reopened due to the amount of time that had passed and the analysis that was already finished for the selection of case study districts.

The survey questions began by confirming information such as the school within the district where the DL/I program is located, the year the first cohort of students arrived and the number of DL/I programs currently being offered. Respondents were asked to identify the reasons for starting each DL/I program from a list of 11 alphabetized options, as noted in the table below, that were drawn from the research in the literature review on leadership, decision-making, school choice, and academic gains from DL/I programs. The list also included an “Other” option where responses could be specified. Then respondents had to choose the primary reason for starting each DL/I program and explain in an open-ended text box why that was the primary reason. Finally, respondents were asked to provide the names and contact details for at least three, but as many as five, individuals who were involved in leading the decision to add a DL/I program in the district, which could be educators at any level (including the survey respondent), policymakers, or community members.

The survey responses were analyzed comprehensively and organized by the number of DL/I programs districts have so that reasons for starting the first DL/I program could be compared to reasons for starting a second, third, or even fourth program. Of the 17 districts responding, six or 35% had only one DL/I program, and the same number had two programs, two reporting LEAs had three DL/I programs, and three districts completing the survey had four or more DL/I programs, which is representative of the variation across the state.

**Table 6. Reasons for Starting a DL/I Program as Listed in the Survey**

Addressing a community need as expressed by business leader(s), community organization(s) or other stakeholders
Bringing something new and/or different to the school, district or community
Building on the success of another DL/I program
Competing for students amongst other education choices available in your area
Continuing another DL/I program from an elementary or middle school
Drawing students to a magnet or other specialized program in the school
Educating students who are English Learners (ELs)
Giving students marketable skills like being bilingual to better compete for jobs
Responding to a call from parents and/or parent groups
Seeking academic gains for students in DL/I programs as shown in research
Wanting to prepare students for a globalized and culturally-diverse world

The most often cited reason for starting a DL/I program was bringing something new and/or different to the school, district or community. That reason was one of the top choices regardless of the number of DL/I programs a district had launched. When it was selected as the primary reason for starting a DL/I program, innovation, inclusion of languages in the curriculum, school choice options, and DL/I research accompanied the explanation, such as in this response:

When the new superintendent came onboard, he was charged by the [local board of education] with creating some new and innovative programs in our very traditional district. He consulted senior staff, who recommended, among other programs, a DL/I program at the [majority English Learner] elementary school. It is also important to note that during this same timeframe, Dr. Lindholm-Leary gave a presentation on

DL/I programs, which was attended by the superintendent and some senior staff members. According to one senior staff member, the information presented by Dr. Lindholm-Leary was so compelling that it “cinched the deal” in terms of support from district leadership. The World Language Coordinator was charged with conducting a feasibility study. The results of the study, along with research about DL/I program effectiveness, were presented to the [local] Board’s Educational Programs and Services Committee. The DL/I program was approved.

The most popular reasons for starting first and second DL/I programs, as indicated by 59% and 45% of responding districts, respectively, also included giving students marketable skills like being bilingual to better compete for jobs, seeking academic gains for students in DL/I programs as shown in research, and wanting to prepare students for a globalized and culturally-diverse world. Being bilingual for marketability purposes was also cited as a reason for starting third and fourth DL/I programs, as was wanting students to be prepared for a diverse world. Once again, when one of these reasons was selected as the primary reason, the need for innovation, particularly as led or envisioned by the superintendent, along with more language instruction, were described by respondents.

School choice options were prevalent reasons for adding a DL/I program across the board. Over half of the districts picked either internal and/or external school choice responses. Competing for students amongst other education choices available in your area solicited explanations about charter school pressures and the desire to diversify schools. Drawing students to a magnet or other specialized program in the school was mentioned frequently, with reasons such as increasing diversity in the student population, building

enrollment in a school with a new magnet theme, and drawing residential families back to a particular zone or area within the district.

Educating students who are English Learners (ELs) was a priority included in about a quarter to almost half of the districts, depending on how many DL/I programs they had started. For first DL/I programs, four districts chose this response and one noted it as the primary reason combined with school choice with this statement, “Our EL population increased drastically, and this program not only fit this need, but it also provided a draw for families to return to public education.” For districts where a second or third DL/I program had been implemented, educating ELs was selected over 40% of the time and often for the primary reason with details given about serving the linguistic needs of ELs or helping Spanish-speaking students learn English, as well as locating the DL/I programs to compete against multiple charter schools.

Stakeholder concerns being the driving force behind starting a DL/I program were mentioned throughout the survey, but only as supporting reasons. Launching a DL/I program to address a community need as expressed by business leader(s), community organization(s) or other stakeholders garnered more responses than a call from parents and/or parent groups, yet neither option was critical enough to be a primary reason for any district’s decision. Some of that reasoning might have been captured in the school choice options for families or the marketable skills selections for employers in the community that were described above.

For districts with two or more DL/I programs, adding more DL/I programs was a priority based on the need to build on the success of another DL/I program, to continue DL/I for student cohorts into the next grade span, and to expand student access across the district to DL/I options. These reasons were often chosen as the primary reason but only by one or

two districts in each category of the survey. When explanations were given for expanding access to DL/I, the district's leadership or strategic plan to serve specific populations was cited. One district wanted to ensure that more ELs could be accommodated and another district sought to include students in a different attendance zone with additional schools or feeder patterns leading to the same secondary institutions. There was also interest in ensuring that language instruction would continue for students from an elementary DL/I program when they moved to middle school. And, in one instance, a survey respondent described seizing the moment to combine a number of these reasons to persuade the local board to approve the fourth DL/I program in the district after a Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) program, where language is taught as a separate subject, had been ended:

[X Elementary] was opening as a new school in 2013-14. This was shortly after the district eliminated the district wide FLES due to the recession and budget issues. There had been talk among board/administrators of expanding DL/I programs, and I saw the opening of a new school as the perfect opportunity to do this. I explained to the board, which had been very supportive of language programs despite cutting the FLES program, why DL/I was cheaper and gave better results than a FLES program and how we could begin a successful program along with opening a new school. The board accepted this and approved this as part of the new school's theme. It is not a magnet school, but families in the zone for this school (which has 5-6 elementary school choices) can choose to go to [X Elementary] for the DL/I program.

## Selecting Case Studies

The results of the statewide survey provided an overview of the many and varied reasons that districts decide to add DL/I programs. More analysis could be done on these results from different angles, but the next step for this study was selecting three case study districts that had decided to add a DL/I program during the economic recession in 2007 – 2010, which was the focus of my work in February 2017.

There were seven districts or LEAs out of the 17 that had responded to the survey that confirmed they had made the decision to add a DL/I program sometime between 2007 and 2010. Of those, five of the districts had started their first DL/I program, one began a second DL/I program, and the other launched a third DL/I program in the time frame. The survey contained responses indicating the academic year the DL/I program was implemented with the initial kindergarten class, so SY 2007 – 2008 through SY 2011 – 2012 was where I drew from for potential case studies since the decision-making process and approvals take anywhere from several months to a year or more, especially when recruiting students for the first DL/I cohort is considered.

The seven districts that were identified with these criteria were representative of the state geographically and demographically. They were located in communities from across the state, stretching from the coast, through the central part of the state, and up into the mountains. None of them were extreme examples or outliers. Five of the districts had experienced enrollment growth higher than the state average of 9% during SY 2003-2004 and SY 2013-2014 but lower than 20%. The two below the state growth average were at 3% and 0%, respectively. They were all medium-sized districts comprised of rural areas, suburban communities, and/or small cities, so they did not include either the largest or the

smallest school districts. All except one of the identified DL/I programs uses Spanish as the target language in the DL/I program, which was to be expected since the majority of DL/I programs in North Carolina choose Spanish. I eliminated the DL/I program that had Chinese as the target language in order to maintain uniformity in the case studies and avoid any conflicts of interest during the next phase of the study. The DL/I coordinator who completed the survey and was named as one of the people in the district that was instrumental in deciding to add the Chinese DL/I program is a colleague of mine that I have worked closely and presented with at conferences over the past 10 years.

Six districts or DL/I programs remained as possibilities, and I emailed the interview invitation in Appendix D, along with the interview consent form in Appendix E, to the nine people indicated as leaders in the decision to add the DL/I programs in three of the LEAs. These three districts were in somewhat close proximity to each other, which might make them more comparable for a case study. However, one of the invited LEAs had considerable difficulty obtaining approval for this phase of the study, and I discovered that the main leader involved in starting the DL/I program was on extended personal leave at that time. I selected a different district from the original six and sent invitations and consent forms to their three people.

The three case study districts were given the pseudonyms Dane County Schools, Howard County Schools, and Shoals County Schools. The enrollment shifts and demographic changes they had experienced were similar and comparable to the state averages as seen in this table.

**Table 7.** Demographic Changes from 2003-04 to 2013-14 in Case Study LEAs

LEA Name	2003-04 Total	2013-14 Total	Total Increase	% Change from SY 2003 – 2004 to SY 2013 - 2014					
				Overall	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Black	White
Dane	10,644	12,166	1,522	+ 14%	0%	+ 5%	+ 7%	- 8%	- 10%
Howard	19,050	20,936	1,886	+ 10%	0%	0%	+ 5%	- 4%	- 4%
Shoals	21,737	25,161	3,424	+ 16%	0%	0%	+ 7%	- 10%	- 4%
North Carolina	1,318,529	1,442,742	124,213	+ 9%	0%	+ 1%	+ 8%	- 5%	- 7%

The invited interview participants were educational administrators and had been when the decision was made to add the DL/I program. Several were principals at the schools that housed the DL/I programs, while others were central office administrators responsible for directing curriculum, specific grade span(s) or federal initiatives such as Title III that works most closely with ESL and other programs for ELs. A few were assistant superintendents with oversight of particular aspects of the curriculum, facilities or attendance zones. Everyone who consented to an interview was still in the district and typically in the same role they had served in during the time of the decision to add the DL/I program. A couple of them had changed titles as a result of district restructuring or additional responsibilities being added to their role, and one had transitioned from being a principal where there was an established DL/I program to a central office administrator.

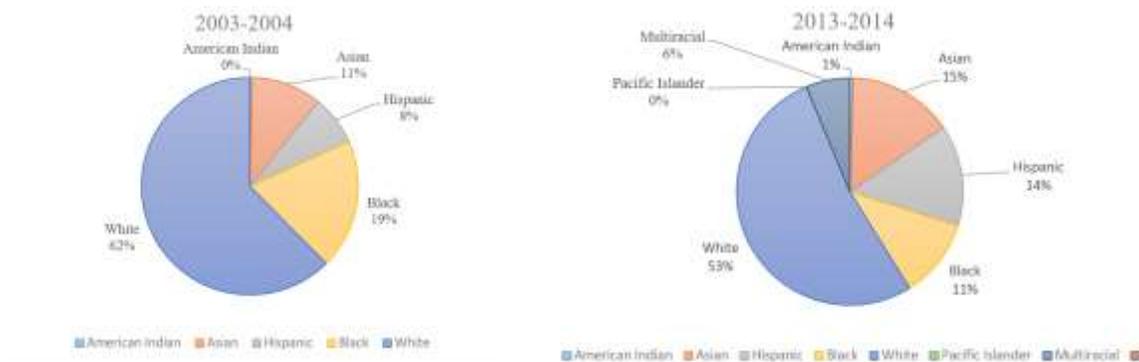
As the interview participants accepted their invitations and submitted signed consent forms, I scheduled interviews that took place from March through May of 2017, and I downloaded the local school board minutes and other materials for the document analysis during the summer of 2017. Most of the interview participants requested and received the interview questions shown in Appendix F in advance of the interview. Based on the participants' preference, I conducted four face-to-face interviews and three phone interviews. All interviews were transcribed and coded, as were the documents that had been downloaded,

which was completed in the early fall of 2017, so that the following school profiles could be created.

### **Case Study #1 – Dane County Schools**

Dane County Schools considers itself to be a small school district though it has over 12,000 students in 20 schools and continues to grow at a steady pace. It currently has 11 elementary schools, four middle schools, four high schools, and a hospital – based school. Joel Elementary School (ES) was the DL/I program added during the recession, and it was the third Spanish DL/I program. Dane County Schools also has a Chinese DL/I program, and it, along with the first two Spanish DL/I programs, were launched in SY 2002 – 2003 with the support of a grant that focused on better meeting the needs of English Learners (ELs).

Dane County Schools' student body composition shifted between SY 2003 – 2004 and SY 2013 – 2014 as shown in the figure below. Overall, the district grew slightly with an additional 1,500 students, but two sub-groups represented in the figures, Asian and Hispanic students, saw the largest gains, both in actual numbers with the sub-groups adding approximately 700 – 1,000 students, respectively, and in percentages of the student population. One unique component of this growth is the establishment of a refugee community with families from Myanmar or Burma in Southeast Asia who speak Karen, a tonal language like Chinese.



**Figure 6.** Dane County Schools Student Body Composition in 2003-04 and in 2013-14

The original group of DL/I programs in Dane County Schools was designed to serve the ELs from Chinese-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities within the district. Each school that housed a DL/I program had established several DL/I strands within the school where students were learning the state standards in the target language and in English, starting in kindergarten in SY 2002 – 2003 and building by successive grade levels as the first cohort of students advanced. The schools also had several traditional strands where students were taught only in English.

The two-way model of DL/I, sometimes called dual language, is focused on structuring classrooms so that they have a balance of native speakers of the target language and native speakers of English. The Spanish DL/I programs at Charles ES and Lauper ES had been successful with this model, but the growing number of Spanish-speaking families throughout the district who wanted their children in Spanish DL/I programs created large waitlists for the limited number of student slots available in the two or three DL/I strands at each of those schools.

The Chinese DL/I program at Gibson ES had not grown in the same way. Many of the students from Chinese-speaking families already spoke English too, so they were not ELs. The DL/I classrooms at Gibson ES were comprised of mostly native speakers of

English who wanted to learn Chinese through immersion, either because of their interest in the language in general or their connection to it through family heritage. The Chinese DL/I program was struggling to fill all of its available DL/I slots.

Dane County Schools was committed to serving ELs with DL/I programs, so their organizational decision-making seems to be based on Weiss' (1995) Ideology orientation. As a district, they embarked upon a journey to determine how they could serve more students who were ELs through DL/I programs, and this led to the addition of the third Spanish DL/I program at Joel ES, which was the first magnet program in the LEA. Joel ES is also entirely a DL/I school with no traditional strands, and it combined some of the strands of Spanish DL/I from other schools to become a whole school DL/I program, one of only a few in the state.

For this case study, I interviewed the Joel ES principal; the district's director of curriculum, who had been the principal at Gibson ES during the time of the Joel ES transformation; and the assistant superintendent of support services, who has duties that encompass facilities management, human resources, and transportation. All three repeatedly noted ideological reasons to launch the Spanish DL/I program at Joel ES. They discussed how the district's original intent with DL/I programs, regardless of language, was to support ELs in language acquisition. Initially, the LEA had received federal grants to implement DL/I for ELs as a practice superior to transitional ESL services, and, over time, the evidence showed that ELs in a DL/I program were outperforming their peers in a traditional setting.

The other ideological issue that was prominent was equitable access to the Spanish DL/I programming for ELs across the district. Both the principal and the assistant superintendent described the increased enrollment in the LEA and how that impacted

pathways to DL/I programs housed in specific attendance zones. The principal commented that the, “district started the dual language program as a result of the number of Spanish speakers that exploded in one region of the school district.” She went on to share that one issue resulting from the growth of the student population was that the Spanish DL/I programs located in neighborhood schools were not an option for 600 Spanish-speaking children that could benefit from an instructional approach that would serve their needs so well. The curriculum director echoed this concern and talked about the pedagogical advantages inherent in DL/I programming for ELs, as well as DL/I being the best model to support the students in attaining higher levels of English proficiency at a faster rate.

The assistant superintendent outlined how the magnet school idea became the solution to the purpose and equity arguments in favor of creating a whole school Spanish DL/I program. He was facing a redistricting year, and all that entails with facilities management and transportation, and he knew, with the burgeoning enrollment and a new elementary building opening, a lot of students would be moved to different school sites. He saw the opportunity to combine the redistricting and DL/I discussions that were happening, and he got approval to form a team of principals and central office administrators to create a plan to present to the BOE. He stated that “we basically locked ourselves up in the boardroom for about three days and started with high level discussions about our overall purpose of having dual language in our district” to serve the needs of ELs. Then, the team that had been convened “broke out into sub teams and together brainstormed all the possible options that we could think about in terms of how to run dual language and what it could be and what it should be.” This team prepared a report with three recommendations to the BOE about DL/I programs in the district:

1. Create a Spanish DL/I magnet school that would accommodate more ELs;
2. Balance the number of tracks or strands of Spanish DL/I versus traditional instruction at Charles and Lauper elementary schools; and
3. Phase out the Chinese DL/I program at Gibson ES due to low student enrollment numbers of Chinese-speaking ELs.

The principal noted that the magnet school solution presented to the BOE by this team was seen as valuable because it provided greater access to the Spanish DL/I program for ELs and also expanded this opportunity to all elementary students in the district. A lottery system was eventually established so that the balance of native Spanish and native English speakers in the program could be maintained in a fair and equitable way. Also, the report presented to the BOE did not designate the new elementary building as the magnet school site. This was done intentionally, according to the principal, so that the existing 10 elementary schools could be involved in the philosophical discussion about where it would be best to house the new magnet program.

The goal was for all stakeholders to have the opportunity to read the team's report and provide input and feedback to the BOE on the three recommendations and the implementation plans that would unfold over time. In addition to the ideals of serving ELs and providing equitable access to Spanish DL/I programs to all children, Dane County Schools values transparency and an open exchange of ideas with their stakeholders. When I asked the assistant superintendent how the unveiling of the team report went at the public BOE meeting, he summed it up with one word: Armageddon. Though my coding clearly showed that Weiss' (1995) Ideology was the strongest factor in this district's decision, Interests was not far behind and covers the public's reaction to starting a new DL/I program.

The district's communities had previously shown that they valued DL/I for its benefits to ELs and other children. In fact, one of the driving forces behind the growth in DL/I strands at Charles ES and Lauper ES was a desire from parents to have more children be involved in the program. There had even been requests made to the BOE to have at least one DL/I strand at every elementary school, however logistically complicated that might be according to the assistant superintendent and the team he assembled. By creating a magnet school DL/I program, students from all over the district could be funneled into one school where the entire school was eager to participate in DL/I, which would also help balance the strands at the other elementary schools offering DL/I. But before that plan could become a reality, other concerns had to be weighed.

All three educators interviewed discussed demand from families for more DL/I opportunities, but there was concern over how that change would happen by establishing a magnet school program. The document analysis of BOE minutes and other materials shows a number of meetings where comments from parents, teachers, and other stakeholders were offered for and against the new magnet school, and other DL/I options that might be part of the ongoing discussions, but that was before the report was released to the public. The assistant superintendent commented that he felt like DL/I was on the BOE agenda almost constantly for over a year, at least in some form. When the report was released, there were a series of three BOE meetings that were dominated by DL/I discussions, including one special meeting just to focus on that topic.

The special meeting was a thorough review of the pros and cons of DL/I programs for the district. The principal shared that this broader community forum had representatives from the nearby university and various parent constituencies. The academic benefits to

students, especially ELs, were described, and various models of DL/I were examined, including full immersion that serves primarily native English-speaking children. The BOE and the administrators presented the fiscally sound aspects of launching a DL/I magnet school, such as how it would centralize resources for Spanish DL/I programs and better support professional development for teachers. There were added costs with transportation since it would be a magnet open to the district through a lottery, but that was mitigated by the announcement of the location, Joel ES, which was not the new elementary building. The location of Joel ES near a major highway precludes much of a student walk zone, so even most neighborhood attendees must be bused to the site. This school is also centrally located in the district. Since the magnet school was not going to be housed in the school that was to be opened soon, the bonus of having a brand new school in a regular attendance zone was touted.

This information did little to allay the fears and concerns of some of the groups. The curriculum coordinator recalled that, “there were folks who felt like [Joel ES] was an inappropriate choice because we were displacing families who were not of great means, and who were not as vocal, did not have an opportunity to speak for themselves and did not have the educational background to understand what was happening to them.” This included families from the refugee community of Karen speakers who were concentrated in the established Joel ES attendance zone, as well as Spanish-speaking families. As the principal put it, “most of our Spanish-speaking students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. And in our community, you either have, and you have a lot, and you're probably white and an English speaker. Or you have and have very little. There are very few students who are in

the middle.” There were also concerns about the school reassignment maps and their deployment, along with the airing of opinions about the efficacy of DL/I programs.

In the end, the new Spanish DL/I magnet school was approved at Joel ES. The BOE had gone through the process it felt was right, and everyone had had an opportunity to be heard. Though there had been a lot of controversy, the district, and especially the principal of the new Joel ES magnet program, were careful to include communities and stakeholders at every step as they progressed towards the opening of the school. It should also be noted that the recommendation to phase out the Chinese DL/I program at Gibson ES was abandoned based on the feedback process with the DL/I report, and it remains in place today as a full immersion program.

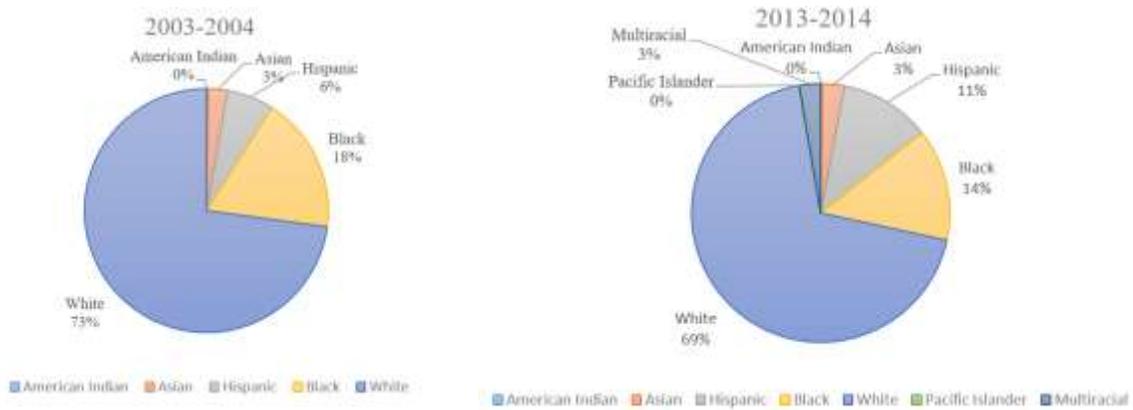
The recession did not have any reported impact on the decision to launch the DL/I program at Joel ES as the district’s first magnet school. The document analysis showed a considerable amount of discussion about the reduction in funds from the state during that time period, but the remedies selected by the district didn’t involve changing anything about the DL/I programming. Solutions ranged from allocating local funds to cover the shortfall to offsetting losses with federal and grant funding for specific expenditures like technology. There were some changes in curricular programs, but they were mostly at the middle school level and involved adjusting offerings in arts education and world languages being taught as a separate subject. A few of the alterations reduced the number of grade levels at elementary schools that were receiving Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) instruction, and some concerns were raised at BOE meetings about the Title III funding of English as a Second Language (ESL) positions. However, the principal noted that the BOE viewed Spanish DL/I as a cost savings because it streamlined efforts to support ELs and combined

some of the DL/I options into one school, reducing duplication of efforts at other sites. The curriculum director shared that the recession brought some budget constraints but stated that “this is a fairly wealthy district and [has] a higher tax base to support schools, so we had local monies that we could still re-appropriate to ensure that we were able” to start the new DL/I program at Joel ES.

### **Case Study #2 – Howard County Schools**

Howard County Schools is a medium-sized school district with over 20,000 students in 36 schools. It currently has 17 elementary schools, seven middle schools, and five comprehensive high schools, plus three early colleges and a specialized career and technical academy as high school options. In addition, there are two International Baccalaureate (IB) World middle schools and one K – 12 alternative school. Morrison Elementary School (ES) has the DL/I program added during the recession, and it was the first DL/I program in the district. As it has grown, the initial cohort of DL/I students has moved on to Manzarek Middle School and eventually will graduate in the Class of 2022 from Krieger High School, if the students decide to continue with DL/I programming at the secondary level. Due to the demand for DL/I options at the elementary level, another DL/I program was added at Densmore ES recently.

Howard County Schools’ student body composition shifted between SY 2003 – 2004 and SY 2013 – 2014 as shown in Figure 7. Overall, the district grew by 10% in that time by adding almost 1,900 students. The Hispanic sub-group nearly doubled in size as part of that change, but educating students who are ELs was only one of the many reasons that this LEA noted in the survey for adding a DL/I program during the recession.



**Figure 7.** Howard County Schools Student Body Composition in 2003-04 and in 2013-14

The primary reason for starting a Spanish DL/I program at Morrison ES in SY 2009 – 2010 was to compete for students amongst other education choices available in the area. Charter school pressure was particularly an issue, and the second Spanish DL/I program at Densmore ES was started in SY 2017 – 2018 because the waitlist and transfer logistics for Morrison ES had become so challenging to families. The district wanted another DL/I program located in a different geographic area of the district so that more students could be accommodated in DL/I programs and not be drawn out to a charter school nearby or to neighboring districts. DL/I is the only school choice option for elementary school students, and it continues into the secondary level where the middle schools add to the options by offering a specialized curriculum program, International Baccalaureate (IB). At the high school level, there is a menu of school choice options, including DL/I, early colleges and a career academy.

Howard County Schools is dedicated to keeping its students in the district schools, rather than have them be drawn out to charter schools and neighboring districts, by providing school choices to families and students, so their organizational decision-making appears to focus on Weiss' (1995) Interests orientation. However, as the research notes about Interests,

there are often many interests that are being addressed. In the survey, the DL/I coordinator reported that, in addition to competing for students by starting a DL/I program, which could be categorized as a self-interest on the part of the district to increase enrollment and funding, or participation from the community, the district had five other reasons for starting a DL/I program. There were several philosophical interests that related to students' future success and could be classed as coming from the Ideology orientation of decision-making, like wanting to prepare students for a globalized and culturally-diverse world and giving students marketable skills like being bilingual to better compete for jobs. The DL/I coordinator also cited the goals of obtaining academic gains for students in DL/I programs as shown in the research, perhaps coming from an Information orientation and fulfilling achievement interests of several stakeholder groups, and bringing something new and/or different to the school, district and community, which would satisfy recognition or even branding interests to promote the area as unique.

As a district, Howard County Schools started their first DL/I program at Morrison ES as a way to create school choice options for their community. In the intervening years, the DL/I program has expanded to other schools in the district, and other school choice options have been offered at all levels. However, the DL/I programming choice was the first for a variety of reasons.

For the case study, I interviewed the federal programs director and the assistant superintendent responsible for curriculum and instruction. Both echoed the same reasons and processes for launching the DL/I program. The main goal was to keep students in the district by bringing them back to enroll at Morrison ES. Just before the DL/I program began, the school's enrollment had dropped to under 600 students. This was specifically attributed to

“white flight,” a term used by both administrators, with students choosing either nearby charter schools or schools in neighboring LEAs. After implementing the DL/I program for several years, the enrollment at Morrison ES had ballooned to over 900 students.

The assistant superintendent noted in her interview that white flight was a problem across the district in many schools, but it was most significant at Morrison ES. The attendance zone for the school encompasses very high socioeconomic neighborhoods, described as the country club area, as well as lower socioeconomic areas where there are government-subsidized housing projects. Morrison ES is also a Title I school, and, at the time of the decision to start a DL/I program, around 80% of its students qualified for free or reduced lunch prices.

The federal programs director commented that Morrison ES was, and still is, the school with the highest population of Spanish-speaking students and families. While this made Spanish the logical choice for a two-way DL/I program, the interest from the parents was split into two categories based on language background. The English-speaking parents, particularly some who might have chosen to enroll their students elsewhere, saw learning Spanish as an opportunity for their children to be bilingual and biliterate, which would pay dividends in their future career opportunities and ensure that they were prepared to be competitive in a globalized world. The Spanish-speaking parents were harder to convince because they wanted their children to learn English. The assistant superintendent shared that, “we struggled initially to get [Spanish-speaking parents] to understand how this was a value add for their students as well. I think once they saw the value of their own students continuing to speak their language, and not only to speak their language but to learn to read

and write in their native language, which they couldn't all do, then they saw the benefits" of having their children in the DL/I program.

The genesis for the DL/I program in Howard County Schools stemmed from the federal programs director attending a Title I conference where educators from one of the first Spanish DL/I programs in North Carolina, Spring Mountain ES, did a presentation. The director was intrigued, and, when she returned, she asked about the possibility of having a DL/I program to combat the decreasing enrollment issues the LEA was facing. Several other leaders in the district thought the idea was worth investigating, and "started sending [her] on exploratory visits to other dual immersion programs in North Carolina that existed already," such as the two-way programs in Charlotte and other areas of the state that were more demographically similar to Howard County Schools and Morrison ES. She and several other administrators, including the assistant superintendent, "went around for about a school year visiting just about every other program that existed already" . . . and "then we decided to start [the one at Morrison ES] in 2009-2010, and we just went for it."

The school site visits also included an analysis of the research, results and instructional time in a DL/I program. The assistant superintendent noted that the "research shows that dual immersion is really good for all students because of the way the brain works and the way that learning a second language at a very early age kind of rewires the brain." She was especially interested in positively impacting the ELs at Morrison ES and she stated that we "know that if they can learn in their native language at an early age, then we take that language barrier away for them, which is sometimes a learning issue." For instructional time, the federal programs director explained that the Thomas and Collier research available at the time, as well as other studies, "showed using 90/10 was the best that you could do and

so that's the model" they chose, even though the vendor they selected usually structured programs at 50/50, with instructional time equally split between English and the target language.

The Morrison ES DL/I program launched with two kindergarten sections, but quickly grew. The federal programs director recalled that they had to expand to three and then four kindergarten sections because of the demand for the program and the desire to avoid waitlists. Each DL/I class at the elementary level is now capped at 100 students, so there are four sections of kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and so on up through fifth grade. Once students reach middle school, they can continue with DL/I and have a combined block of language arts and social studies classes in Spanish, as well as science offerings in the target language. In high school, where the first cohort of DL/I students arrived in the fall of 2018, the hope is that students will be ready for high level language classes, such as the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) or the International Baccalaureate (IB) exams, by their sophomore year or shortly thereafter.

Enrollment demand has been so high that other DL/I programs have been started in, or planned for, Howard County Schools. On the other side of the district, where the overall socioeconomic level is higher, a Spanish DL/I program was started at Densmore ES in 2017 – 2018. Students at Densmore will continue to a different middle and high school than the cohorts at Morrison ES, which means that there will be two feeder patterns in the district for K-12 DL/I programming. This certainly increases the funding based on ADM at these schools, and it may well be impacting the district's growth in general. The assistant superintendent noted that enrollment in a DL/I program is available to any student in the district, and that slots often fill up quickly during the open enrollment period. Many of the

students at Morrison ES are from its attendance zone, but approximately 25% come from other areas within the district and a small fraction are students from adjacent districts. She also commented on the fact that there is no equivalent growth in the communities served by Morrison ES. The housing market is flat, whereas other areas of the district, such as the communities surrounding Densmore ES, have seen growth through new construction.

The economic recession did not seem to be a factor in the decision to start a DL/I program in this district, though financial strains were found in the document analyses. The federal programs director, when asked specifically about the influence of the recession, said it wasn't something that they or she was paying attention to when making the DL/I decision. She discussed some costs with starting the DL/I program, particularly related to textbook funding and staff placement, but they were offset, and perhaps overcome, by the ADM funding that resulted from the increases in student enrollment. In the document analyses, which included the regular BOE minutes and the minutes from monthly meetings of the Committee of the Whole (COW) that was comprised of the same group of people, there were a number of funding issues being discussed but the DL/I program did not appear in the minutes of either group in relation to costs.

During the 2009 – 2010 school year, the Morrison ES DL/I program began, which was the same year that significant funding issues and cuts were on the BOE agendas and discussed quite openly. The North Carolina Court of Appeals rendered a decision that required traditional LEAs, like Howard County Schools, to pay a percentage of their funds to the charter schools in their area. This sum was calculated to be \$630,000 and presented at the May 2010 BOE meeting; there was no discussion and the payment was approved. The next month, the 2010 – 2011 budget was presented with an anticipated additional 3%

reduction from local county funds, that would be addressed by a combination of reductions to central office staff and the monetary supplements to all LEA employees. The BOE was also looking at relying on attrition and administrative furloughs, as well as decreasing the months of contracted employment.

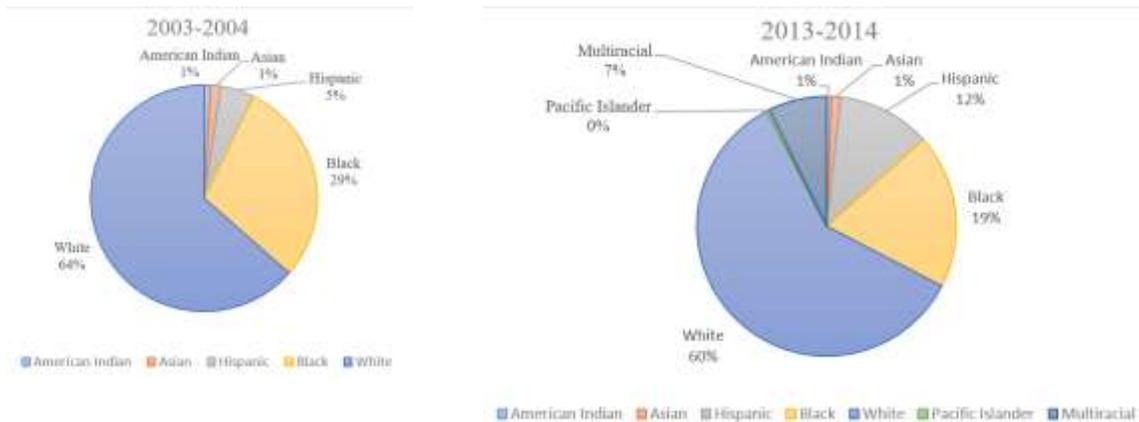
In addition, news was shared that the federal funding from Title I would be reduced by \$1.9 million dollars because of the end of the economic stimulus funding, which would result in only the elementary schools and the alternative school receiving Title I funding. Middle and high schools would lose Title I funding streams. There was also a concern about the burden of paying for AP and IB exams, which had cost over \$56,000 in the most recent school year. An administrator canvassed colleagues in nearby districts and discovered that most other LEAs did not reimburse students at all for the costs of the exams, and only one large district did so for students who qualified for free and reduced lunch prices. The BOE also shared ways they were saving money to absorb these funding changes, including shutting down all buildings during a period from late June through late July and moving to a 4-day work week in the central office during the summer. When the LEA had enacted those constraints the previous year, there had been a \$36,000 savings or 9% reduction in utility expenses. The BOE had been optimistic that this decrease would be closer to \$50,000, which could possibly be reached in the future with stricter guidelines to all employees about adhering to the 4-day policy and not using central office space during the three days when everyone was supposed to be away from the workspace.

### **Case Study #3 – Shoals County Schools**

Shoals County Schools is a district of over 25,000 students in 38 schools. It currently has 20 elementary schools, eight middle schools, seven comprehensive high schools and one

early college. It also includes an early childhood center and a secondary school alternative program. During the recession, the decision was made to start three Spanish DL/I programs simultaneously at Neil Elementary School (ES), Michaels ES, and Mars ES, and the primary reason was to give students marketable skills like being bilingual to better compete for jobs.

Shoals County Schools’ student body composition shifted between SY 2003 – 2004 and SY 2013 – 2014 as shown in Figure 8. Overall, the district grew by 16% or over 3,000 students in 10 years. Like the other case study districts, the sub-group with the greatest increase was Hispanic students, which more than doubled in size. It’s also important to note that this district had the largest decrease of a sub-group in this study, though a portion of that 10% and some of the other sub-group’s decline, may be reflected in the Multiracial category 10 years later as improved accuracy in data collection and reporting.



**Figure 8.** Shoals County Schools Student Body Composition in 2003-04 and in 2013-14

Shoals County Schools also encompasses a large number of military families. Children in these families have sometimes already been educated abroad, and in schools where content instruction was not in English. They have often lived in places around the world where second language instruction begins at the elementary level for all students, and many of their parents have experienced firsthand the necessity of being bilingual. The

expectations of these parents about language instruction are quite different than some of their peers, and this has had an impact on the district as a whole.

Shoals County Schools has made a commitment to be more global and one significant component of that mindset has included adding language instruction in the form of DL/I programs. Their organizational decision-making seems to have been guided by what Weiss (1995) would define as an Information orientation. As a district, they have made a concerted effort to ensure that their students will be global citizens.

For this case study, I interviewed the curriculum director, whose role has expanded over time and now includes global education in her title, and the assistant superintendent, who has since retired. Both of these educators agreed that the emphasis on global education, with their district's involvement as one of a small group of LEAs in the original vendor-sponsored Global Schools Network, was the basis for what would become their DL/I programming. Shoals County Schools made a commitment to its communities that they would educate students for the future, and they made that goal part of their strategic plan and then explored the research, their own data, and logistical information, like magnet schools, to implement it effectively over time.

One particularly striking factor in the interviews was the influence of the military families in this district. Not only have military children sometimes been educated in foreign countries, but even most domestic military bases are located near schools and districts that offer early language learning, either substantial Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) programs or DL/I options. The data that Shoals County Schools had about military families showed that DL/I programs were, to a large degree, an expectation or even a need that military dependents had based on their parents wanting them to continue in a DL/I

program when they were relocated or deployed from a new base. The assistant superintendent noted that she still receives inquiries from military families being resettled to their area about the availability of DL/I programs in the district.

When global education in North Carolina started to evolve from the Global Schools Network towards the statewide initiatives we have now with the State Board of Education's Global-Ready School and Global-Ready District designations (Global Education Initiative in NC, 2013), Shoals County Schools began a period of intense reflection and analysis to examine where they were with all world language programs. The assistant superintendent recalled that when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorization of the federal *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) came into practice, the impact had been for the state to defund untested subject areas, like arts education and world languages. She commented that "many of us in the field at the time had forgotten that our youngest children are sponges when it comes to learning another language." She also noted that the district saw the necessity of bringing back elementary school language instruction and extending the world language options at the secondary level if they intended to validate their commitment to global education. The assistant superintendent shared that there was a realization amongst educators in the LEA that children are "growing up in a world where people are bilingual and trilingual" and attaining those skills had to start earlier in their schools. She also noted that this lack of language programming was cast as a "gap in services in elementary education" which the district had a responsibility to address as soon as possible.

At the same time as this educational examination was happening, the document analysis reveals that the district was already anticipating demographic and population shifts. In February of 2008, a presentation was made to the BOE that outlined the growth that was

happening currently and that was projected for the near future and then beyond. This was coupled with the practical concerns of aging facilities and the uneven distribution of students across schools in various attendance zones. The curriculum director talked about the “dwindling population in one section of a town” contrasted with the need to “equalize numbers in some of our other schools [to address] overcrowding.”

The solution that was selected was to create themed elementary schools across the district as magnet school options. The assistant superintendent summarized the research done by the LEA by describing how setting up magnet programs with different themes would transform a traditional elementary curriculum into one that used a unique instructional lens to guide learning. The elementary principals and their staffs worked with their various stakeholders to generate a list of themes they were interested in pursuing. Then the district collected this information and realized that three of the elementaries had decided on global themes. Fortunately, when the LEA analyzed the demographics of these three schools, all of them were prime locations for a DL/I program. Mars ES and Michaels ES had the highest percentage of military families, and Michaels ES also had the largest population of ELs. Neil ES was well suited given the need to balance and diversify its student enrollment, both socioeconomically and racially, as well as improve its achievement test scores.

In order to continue the research and preparations for converting these three schools to magnet program sites with Spanish DL/I programs, the principals toured a variety of existing DL/I programs. They traveled to Jasper County Schools, which is the neighboring district and already had several DL/I programs. In addition to being very convenient for visits, the Jasper County programs were being managed by the same vendor that Shoals County Schools was working with and this LEA also drew students from the nearby military

installations. The principals also ventured out to other DL/I programs that were in the state with demographic similarities to their schools.

Starting three new DL/I programs simultaneously sounds like a tremendous undertaking logistically and financially. However, almost all of the elementaries were transitioning to a theme of some kind, so there was good support for planning across the district, according to the curriculum director. There was also a commitment from the stakeholders at each school because of the way the themes had been selected. Economically, the assistant superintendent described the recession as a driving force in their determination to make this happen for their students:

It's one of those things. [Shoals County Schools] decided that we were going to figure out a way because there was a will [to launch the new programs] during, quite honestly, the heat of that economic recession. And the best that I remember, whereas that was a concern, I think the work for us was [to ask]: Was it tied to our district strategic plan and could we get the right people at the table at the right time so that we can look at all of our funding streams? [We considered] everything from ADM positions that were allotted from the state to Title I, Title II . . . we carefully studied all of our funding streams and how we were using ADM positions and to the purposes that a dual language/immersion program really does address. [And] not only the teaching of the language, but the literacy. We were able, I think, to use that time of recession to really study our available resources, and we had to figure out a way to make it work and we were able to do that.

This persistence has paid off. After the three Spanish DL/I programs were launched, the enthusiasm from stakeholders increased, and the curriculum director reported that the

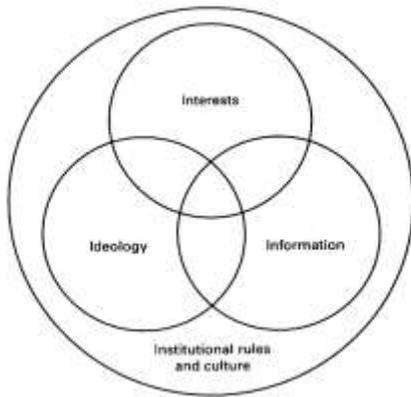
DL/I programs are so popular that there are waiting lists to get into them. Two more Spanish DL/I programs were started in later years to try to accommodate this need and distribute magnet school options into more feeder patterns across the district. There is also a desire on the part of parents to make sure that DL/I programs continue and progress into the secondary schools. The interviews and document analysis of the BOE meetings revealed that there is a plan for a magnet middle school, complete with designated busing routes, that will offer DL/I continuation in language and social studies, and also provide a third language option, Chinese. The district has also continued its commitment to global education, and several of its schools have earned the SBE's Global-Ready School designation (Global Education Initiative in NC, 2013).

### **Cross-Case Analyses**

It is interesting that Weiss' (1995) three I's of individual decision-making were each identified as the primary orientation for one of the case studies in this research. The coding of the interviews was done independently of the interviews from the same district, and I followed the process outlined in Chapter 3 to ensure that I was not biased in my coding process and its analysis. The patterns that emerged were described above, and the cross-case analysis focuses on the fourth I of Institution and how the other three I's reveal the drivers behind the institutional process that each district uses to make decisions about school reform.

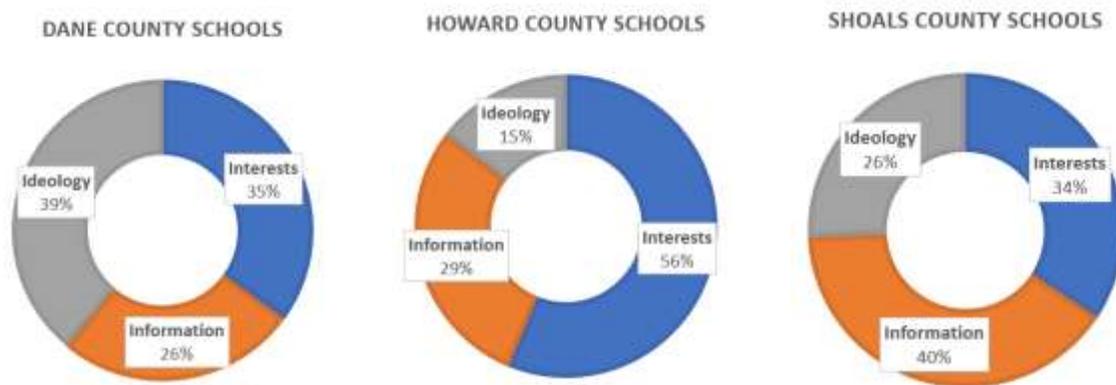
Weiss (1995) states that "every individual decision is the product of the interplay among ideology, interests and information" (p. 577), which points out the need to consider not just the primary orientation for decision-making but also the secondary one and the interaction between the three components in the framework. In the original article, the three individual I's are presented as a Venn diagram within a circle showing that they comprise the

institutional rules and culture, as shown in the figure below (Weiss, 1995, p. 575). However, a Venn diagram is drawn to look balanced, and the overlaps between the three components are shown as equal, though they almost never are in reality.



**Figure 9.** Interaction of Ideology, Interests, Information, and Institution

In my case studies, the primary and secondary I’s were the most prominent, and sometimes by a wide margin over the tertiary I. The pie chart figure below shows the percentages calculated for each I based on the coding frequency using different colors: Interests in blue, Information in orange, and Ideology in gray. The table of sample quotes from the study follows to further explain the individual I’s or Weiss’ (1995) categories.



**Figure 10.** Primary and Secondary Drivers in Decisions

**Table 8.** Sample Quotes for Ideology, Information, and Interests

Ideology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Our primary purpose [for DL/I programs] was supporting English language learners.</li><li>• Our [DL/I] program was started to close the achievement gap for LEP students.</li><li>• I believe very firmly in strategic instructional programming.</li></ul>
Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In looking at the research, we know that [DL/I] is really good for all students because of the way the brain works and the way that learning a second language at a very early age really kind of rewires the brain.</li><li>• Across the board we were able to use that time of recession to really study our available resources.</li><li>• At that time that we looked at the DL/I programs, we had also gone through as a school district and done a research project on theming all of our elementary schools.</li></ul>
Interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The school district during that time period from 2007 to 2010 decided that they wanted to offer more opportunity for students to enroll in [DL/I] programs.</li><li>• We have a lot of families that choose to come to [the school with the DL/I program] who very easily could send their children anywhere they wanted to go as far as private schools or charter schools.</li><li>• I think the biggest thing that helped us through the stakeholder interest drive is we figured out very early on that [DL/I] was going to have to be one of our choice programs.</li></ul>

For Dane County Schools, Ideology and Interests were noted most often in the coding of the interviews, and they made up 74% of the decision-making orientation. This was somewhat balanced in that these two drivers were just a little over 33% each, 39% and 35% respectively. In Howard County Schools, Interests were mentioned a majority of the time, 56%, as the motivation for the decision to add a DL/I program, followed by Information at 29% for a total of 85%. Shoals County Schools predicated their decisions on Information and Interests, in that order with 40% and 34% correspondingly, for an overall of 74%.

While each district was unique in its primary orientation, one rather striking observation emerged. Interests were always either the primary or secondary motivation for

the decision to add a DL/I program. Weiss (1995) wrote that “interests are defined primarily in terms of self interest . . . [and] almost all political scientists take for granted that self-interest is the core of politics, including organizational politics” (p. 574). This finding echoed throughout the case studies. Howard County Schools’ interests were focused on self-preservation in their competition to win back students to Morrison ES from within the district and to fight against charter school pressures and the threat of neighboring districts draining away student enrollment. Dane County Schools’ interests centered on staying true to their goal of serving the needs of ELs in DL/I programs and launching the first magnet school program in the district. Shoals County Schools had interests in branding themselves as global with their DL/I programs and debuting a magnet school initiative across their elementary schools to provide school choice options for parents. The administrators interviewed for this study agreed that these various interests had been met and, from that perspective, the DL/I programs were a success politically.

There was also a level of satisfaction expressed by the administrators I interviewed in all three case study districts about the decision to add a DL/I program. The assistant superintendent with Dane County Schools was asked at the end of his interview if there was anything else he wanted to share, to which he replied, “as difficult and painful as it was, I would do it again.” His LEA had sought the most input through public forums, and he and the others I interviewed from that district talked about the controversy and the strong opinions that had been expressed in those forums, as well as through other channels. When I asked him why he would go through that process again, he reminisced about being at the BOE meeting on the night when the Joel ES principal came forward to report about the opening of the first magnet school with its DL/I program. He said that she was “beaming

with enthusiasm and excitement and sharing all the fabulous things” that were happening at the school, and he just felt like it had been worth it for the sake of the students and how they would benefit. The Shoals County Schools assistant superintendent said something similar to the same question at the end of the interview. She paused and then stated that adding the DL/I program “was so completely the right decision” for the students and the schools, and she reiterated the need for early language learning and the commitment to prepare students for a globalized world by arming them with bilingualism and biliteracy. For Howard County Schools, the federal programs director harkened back to the political realm of interests when she said that starting the DL/I program was “one of the most popular things the school system has ever done.”

Another curious pattern for the 4 I’s framework in this study was the role of ideology in deciding to add a DL/I program. With the exception of Dane County Schools, it was the least prominent I and only accounted for a small portion of the reported reasoning. Weiss reports that “organization theory has long taken for granted that values are one of the bases for decisions . . . [and that many studies] highlight the role of individuals’ values and beliefs” in the decision-making process (1995, p. 575). While a philosophical foundation, or ideology orientation, was embedded in these case studies, it was not described by the interviewees as having the same significance as interests and information. Even in Dane County Schools where ideology was at the forefront, it barely eclipsed interests and it was at times controversial in the political realm of public meetings. When the assistant superintendent described the reaction to the formal report presented to the BOE as “Armageddon,” it had more to do with the pushback from the public about the recommendation to phase out the Chinese DL/I program than the belief that the district

should serve more ELs in Spanish DL/I programs by establishing the magnet program at Joel ES. The document analysis showed a number of parents speaking at the BOE meetings in support of the Chinese DL/I program, as well as the need to keep it and expand it to the secondary level as a way to ensure students and families had the opportunity to choose a language that was seen as so critical to a globalized world.

In delving beyond the 4 I's framework into the impact of the economic recession on decision-making, it was clear in all three case studies that financial concerns did not deter the districts from starting DL/I programs. Money issues were either addressed using a frugal or even shrewd approach or they were not a factor, as in the case of Dane County Schools that termed itself a wealthier district that could rely on local funds for initiatives like DL/I programming if needed. Howard County Schools tightened spending controls across the district, made cuts in supplements to all employees, and redistributed federal funding streams like Title I. The document analysis also showed that the Howard County BOE scrutinized spending and local contracts with an eye to cost savings over time. The utility spending during the summer months was one example, and they also had the phone company analyze all of the land lines in the district and eliminated dozens that were no longer in regular use. Shoals County Schools sifted through their funding and seemed to view finding the funds for the DL/I program as a contest that they won by realigning the existing funding with their strategic plan. In the end, it wasn't that money didn't matter during a recession, because it did, but it was obvious that the districts were prioritizing the decision to add a DL/I program through their funding and budget work.

Another commonality in the three case studies was the use of media to share the decision to add a DL/I program. When I asked during the interviews about mass media used

before and during the decision to add the DL/I program, the administrators admitted that there wasn't a lot done beyond the ongoing coverage of BOE meetings, and that was typically limited to local newspaper reports that provided the usual short summaries of all BOE agenda topics. There were few if any attempts to engage in a media or public relations campaign on behalf of the DL/I initiative. The reports to the three BOEs about the work done by administrators to investigate DL/I programming were met with gratitude and appreciation for thoroughness, according to the document analysis. Even in Dane County where there was controversy related to the DL/I exploration, the media coverage was focused on other aspects of the changes suggested, like the recommendation to phase out the Chinese DL/I program or the novelty of starting a magnet program.

After the decision was made to add a DL/I program, the media coverage increased, but it was mainly to recruit students for the first cohort or two. Dane County and Howard County reported working with local radio stations and their talk shows to share the news of the DL/I program, which also gave them a platform to expound on the benefits of DL/I programs in general. All three districts utilized school and district websites, newsletters, and social media, especially Facebook, to promote student enrollment in school choice options, which included the DL/I programs. The principals and their schools involved in hosting the DL/I programs were given much of the credit in the interviews for spreading the news to families through various avenues of communication. Several years after the launch of these DL/I programs, the local and regional media, including television, ran stories about the success of the now-established DL/I programs or, in the case of Shoals County Schools, the recognitions the schools and the district had earned through, for example, the state's Global-Ready designations that included the DL/I programs. Overall, the administrators interviewed

reported that the media activity was positive but very limited surrounding the addition of the DL/I programs to the district's curriculum offerings.

There was a contrast across the three case studies in the amount and type of stakeholder input into the decision to add a DL/I program. This ranged from a very structured and traditional approach in Dane County, to a more grassroots effort in Shoals, and then on to an informal and almost isolated process in Howard County Schools. In Dane County, the assistant superintendent recalled that DL/I was a consistent BOE agenda item for months. The district team charged with creating the report and recommendations presented to the BOE about DL/I programs followed established parameters for this type of group, which has been done many times in this LEA for a number of issues. Once the report was released to the public, a special BOE meeting was scheduled, along with community forums and other paths for parents and constituents to be heard. In Shoals, the stakeholders with the most input were at the school level when the elementary principals, their staffs, and their local stakeholders like parents and guardians were tasked with choosing the theme for their magnet offering. In Howard County Schools, the decision to add a DL/I program was researched and determined mostly by the district administrators, and then it was presented to the public.

One additional commonality that could be discussed across these case studies is how each district dealt with overcoming resistance, though it was not resistance to adding the DL/I program per se that was the issue. In Dane County Schools, the challenge was choosing the school building for the first magnet program, which happened to be the location of the new DL/I program. The district mitigated this by having an open discussion of all existing elementary schools, plus the newly constructed building, and eventually choosing the one

location without a walk zone that was centrally located so that all students in the DL/I program would be bussed from across the district. For Howard County Schools, resistance came from Spanish-speaking parents who were concerned that a DL/I program would not address their children's need to learn English. However, once time was spent sharing how students in DL/I programs would be equally proficient in English and the target language, as well as the value of their children maintaining their home language and gaining literacy in both languages, the parents were willing to enroll their children in the DL/I program. In Onslow County Schools, part of the push for DL/I programs included balancing the enrollment across the district's elementary schools. Due to substantial decreases in student populations in several elementary buildings, the specter of closing those schools and having to bus youngsters to other locations some miles away was a real fear for several communities. Once the elementary school themes or magnet school approach was implemented, the intradistrict competition allowed families to make their own choices about relocating their children, or not, and the resistance to change dissipated as the communities saw their schools filling up with students who were drawn in to the different themes.

These different comparisons and contrasts speak to the institutional I of the organization as a whole, and how it is structured as a culture with rules about how decisions are made and how the system operates (Weiss, 1995, p. 576).

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 has provided a comprehensive narrative on the findings of this study. It began with an overview of the demographic shifts and enrollment changes in districts across North Carolina during the time period that included the recession. The survey and interview

results were shared in relation to the research question through the three case studies, and a cross-case analysis was conducted using the lens of the conceptual framework selected.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to analyze the decision-making process used by three school districts to launch a dual language/immersion (DL/I) program during the last economic recession. Using Weiss' (1995) conceptual lens of the four Is, the importance and interplay of ideologies, information, and interests were assessed to describe the institutional approach that the local boards of education (BOEs) employed to approve a new DL/I program in their districts.

This study was intended to provide insight into the decisions made by these BOEs, their reasons and motivations, and link this information to other research from the field of K-12 education. This chapter summarizes the findings of the study and how institutional decision-making operates. It also makes connections to previous research and discusses the limitations of the study. It concludes by outlining the policy and practice implications from this study and thinking forward to future research.

### **Institutional Decision-Making**

The consistent answer to the research question of why districts decided to add a DL/I program was that it was the best decision for the students they serve. The survey used to select the three case study districts showed that districts were focused on preparing their students for a globalized world and addressing their learning needs in a comprehensive way. They wanted to ensure that students would have marketable skills like being bilingual and biliterate so that they could better compete for jobs. They also wanted students to be academically advantaged and ready to succeed in a culturally-diverse world. To accomplish these goals, the interviews revealed that districts were eager to try novel approaches, both in

curricular offerings and budgeting, and, in the process, brand their communities and schools in a way that would draw families to their DL/I programs.

Weiss' (1995) 4 I's of school reform was an interesting lens to view how ideologies, information, and interests worked together to form the different institutional decision-making approaches used by the districts. The I of interests, which links directly to the politics of decision-making, was prominent in all of the case studies, which somewhat contradicts the traditional educational leadership research that predicates ideologies and information over interests (Asen, Gurke, Conners, Solomon & Gumm, 2012; Farley-Ripple, 2012; Newton & Sackney, 2005). While values and beliefs still figured into the decision-making, the BOEs and the educational administrators working for them had a variety of different interests to satisfy that usually took precedence. Competition for students, and the race to show that new ideas could solve the educational dilemmas facing the district, were the main motivators in decision-making in this study. The districts cited their desire to offer DL/I programs so that students could gain advantages academically and linguistically as revealed in achievement test data, which, in turn, could help the districts draw students into its magnet schools or back into its attendance zones as part of the battle against outside school choice options like charter schools.

Each case study district had its own approach, and it appeared that the BOE and the community had established a decision-making culture that worked for them. Dane County Schools had the most traditional and structured approach with its formal process of committees or teams that created reports for the BOE to get public feedback. Shoals County Schools was semi-structured and relied on internal stakeholders like building administrators and staff to determine the direction that was right for them, and Howard County Schools was

rather informal and depended on a few educators to advise on a direction that would support community interests. In the end, the goal was to have well-educated students in good schools that supported students as they grew towards graduation. And the economic recession, though a challenge to their work, did not derail them from reaching that goal.

### **Connections to Previous Research**

The *Key Work of School Boards* (North Carolina School Boards Association) that has been utilized by North Carolina's BOEs since 2007 helps put the focus on the two essentials of student achievement and community engagement to promote student achievement, which was evident in the findings of this study. The case studies' interviews mentioned collaborative relationships between the schools and the communities they serve. The districts and their BOEs practiced various kinds of leadership from this framework in how they approached launching a DL/I program that would be beneficial for their students. Shoals County Schools was very strategic and linked their actions to their overall vision using the information they had from assessments of their students, schools, and families. Dane County Schools honed in on instructional practices for students that would help some of their most vulnerable populations, like English learners, continuously improve their performance. Howard County Schools was very political in their approach, but they also focused on the climate needed to support student achievement (North Carolina School Boards Association).

In the Norton (2007) study findings, there was an emphasis on being competitive with other districts, especially during a time of shifts in student enrollments. Howard County Schools led the way in this regard by using a DL/I program to reverse plummeting enrollment at Morrison Elementary brought about by white flight to charter schools and

neighboring districts. Shoals County Schools used themed magnet schools to redistribute their increasing student enrollment within the district and counteract the pull of adjacent districts, especially with their military families. And Dane County Schools, already facing student reassignment and the opening of a new facility, used the new DL/I program to begin a magnet school initiative that would better serve the needs of their English Learners and consolidate services across the district.

The Heinze and Zdroik (2018) work also speaks to the changes in Dane County Schools revealed in the study. The community and its culture were key, and Dane County was committed to making DL/I programming accessible to all, while also listening to the various constituencies across its geographical expanse. Both districts were aware of the cultural nuances within the community, and they were keen to serve the needs of students, even if that was more expensive for the district in the end, whether that was through athletics participation or DL/I program enrollment.

The case study done by Major (2013) aligns to the work in Shoals County Schools to find a way to sustain a curricular program despite budget reductions. The goal of preserving a K-12 music program (Major, 2013) was similar to the commitment to be global and produce global citizens through DL/I programs. Clever financing and creative restructuring of schools allowed these districts to persist with their goals despite dwindling finances.

There are also connections to the school choice research. Smrekar and Honey (2015) showed that when parents are choosing magnet schools for their children, the emphasis is on academic performance and, to some degree, the themes offered. This held true for all three of these case studies. DL/I programs, and the research about them in North Carolina, equated to student success, and that was why they were magnet school themes in Dane and Shoals

County Schools. The academic achievement was so substantial that three DL/I programs launched simultaneously in Shoals, and the first magnet school that was a whole school DL/I program began in Dane. Though not technically a magnet program, Morrison Elementary in Howard County Schools also drew on this research to attract parents' attention to DL/I as a way to rebuild a school population. These DL/I programs quickly had waiting lists, which led to more schools offering DL/I as a theme in the case study districts.

While the Smrekar and Honey (2015) study focused mostly on English-speaking parents choosing magnet schools, the Haynes, Phillips, and Goldring (2010) work looked at Spanish-speaking parents, and their findings were also supported in my research. In Dane County Schools and Howard County Schools, minority language parents sometimes had to be convinced that DL/I programs were the right choice for their children because they were worried about English language acquisition. Dane County Schools utilized a network of community forums and bilingual parents with children already in Spanish DL/I programs to reach out to others across their community. Howard County Schools invested time in explaining to parent groups how being literate in two languages would be an advantage for their children and for their families. These social outreach efforts worked, just as Haynes, Phillips, and Goldring (2010) noted, and they have helped spawn the need for secondary immersion continuation programs.

An inherent trust in district and school educators was also apparent in this study, just like the Casto and Sipple (2011) work. The size and location of the case study districts were similar to the ones in the universal prekindergarten (UPK) programs being expanded in New York, and the way administrators shared the research and impact of this curricular change on students paralleled the processes used to describe launching DL/I programs. Central office

administrators were responsible for visiting other DL/I programs, compiling and analyzing student achievement data, and organizing an overall plan to manage the change process. Building principals were tasked with obtaining buy-in from their staff and parent groups, advertising and recruiting, and hiring and training people for the shift to offering DL/I. Across the three case studies, there was a commitment to serving students in the best way possible, and the communities appreciated the dedication that the educators had to ensuring that this would have a positive and lasting impact on students, as seen in the Thomas and Collier (2012, 2017) research that has been done in our state.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations and delimitations to this qualitative study. By definition, each case study is a unique situation and precludes generalizability. Also, since this was a dissertation study, the time period was a limitation, because there were just a few months that could be spent on collecting the data.

The delimitations include the sample size of three districts and several other decisions that were made in order to narrow the focus of the study. Though the number of districts with DL/I programs in North Carolina numbers in the dozens, and is growing at a steady pace, this study still has just three out of a total of 115 districts, or 116 if the Innovative School District is included though it was not yet in existence at the time of the study. The sample might be biased because only traditional public school districts were surveyed, instead of including public charter schools or independent schools, and the decision was made to focus on DL/I programs that use Spanish as the target language, as opposed to Mandarin Chinese or one of the other DL/I target languages. The response rate to the online survey that was used to select districts as case studies was over 50% but less than 100%, and

the number of semi-structured interviews conducted at each site was only two or three. In addition, the selection narrowly focused on new DL/I programs that were decided upon during the most recent economic recession.

Despite the limitations and delimitations, this study contributes to our understanding of previously unknown motivations or drivers for a district in deciding to start a DL/I program, as well as the role that school choice plays in strategically positioning a district or its schools to compete for student enrollment internally and externally.

### **Implications for Policy & Practice**

Based on this study and my experience, there are several implications for policy and practice in the K-12 education field. DL/I programs are a viable solution to many questions facing districts. The administrators interviewed in the case study districts cited higher academic achievement of students from the Thomas and Collier (2012) research for a variety of student groups, including English Learners and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, as one of the things that drew them to champion starting a DL/I program. The test results of the first cohorts in the case studies showed these gains for students and bore out the claim that DL/I programs can close the achievement gap, essentially replicating the Thomas and Collier work and lending greater credence to the power of DL/I programs. Given the charge of the Global Education Initiative in North Carolina (2013) to have statewide access to K-12 DL/I programs for all students, it seems reasonable to conclude that almost all districts could launch at least one DL/I program as a strand in an elementary school and then scale up the initiative to the secondary level to capture academic gains for students that historically struggle to meet achievement goals. The districts in this study ranged from small to medium sized and drew from urban, suburban and rural communities

within their boundaries, which further supports the proposition that DL/I programs could be offered anywhere in the state, and, if effectively implemented, would yield academic gains for students.

The results of this study also show that issues of equity and social justice can be addressed with DL/I programs. Dane and Howard County Schools felt strongly about offering DL/I programs to native Spanish-speaking students in order for them to become literate in their first language as well as in English. They sometimes had to convince parents that DL/I programs, or an additive bilingualism model where the home or minority language is maintained, were better than a subtractive bilingualism model like traditional English as a Second Language programs where the majority language replaces the first language, rendering students monolingual in English. Having command of both languages empowers the students, their families and the community, and it provides economic advantages and marketable skills to all in a globalized marketplace. The study results also showed that districts saw DL/I as an opportunity to build cross-cultural understanding and a greater tolerance for differences of various kinds: linguistic, racial, socioeconomic, etc. This makes DL/I programs a potentially powerful solution to a host of societal issues that are part of the school environment, such as bullying and discrimination.

This study also presents the possibility that the DL/I program could be a springboard for the community as a whole to bring bilingualism to the monolingual adults in their midst, starting with the teachers and administrators in the school with the DL/I program and radiating out to other schools and stakeholders. Opportunities ranging from informal enrichment programs to continuing education or credit courses offered through higher education, face-to-face and/or online, could be made available. Anecdotally, a few DL/I

programs have reported pairing DL/I students with older or younger peers learning the language as a separate subject, which was empowering for the DL/I students. Such outreach efforts could be expanded so that the community as a whole could embrace language learning in general, and the DL/I language(s) in their school(s) specifically, as a unifying activity that could dramatically change the connections among neighbors from different backgrounds: culturally, linguistically, racially, socioeconomically, and so on.

DL/I programs were also couched as an innovative approach to bring to a community as a school choice option. The three case study districts were leveraging DL/I offerings to initiate magnet programs, compete with charter schools, and balance or increase student enrollment at schools. In the research literature, DL/I was not listed as one of the most popular magnet themes, but this study indicates that it should be (Smrekar & Honey, 2015). The growth in DL/I programs across the state and the country illustrate the interest parents have in choosing bilingualism and biliteracy for their children, and the districts in this study, especially Shoals County Schools, identified language programming as a parental expectation. Even though educational administrators and decision-makers adding a DL/I program are usually only monolingual themselves, they often see the value of offering DL/I programs as a way to brand their school or district as unique and distinguish themselves from other school choices.

There are also few financial concerns that accompany DL/I programs, which makes them attractive in any school budget discussion, even during a recession. The districts noted some additional costs to implementing DL/I programs, but those were often offset by increases in enrollment and the resulting rises in funding. The interviewees also revealed that they focused on meeting student needs and found ways to cut costs in other areas that

didn't impact students, which is always the goal of education – to better serve students' needs.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study, especially the cross-case analysis, points to several future research directions. First, the decision-making processes used by BOEs and educators is more student-focused than the literature indicates (Asen, Gurke, Conners, Solomon & Gumm, 2012; Major, 2013; Murray, 2014; Norton, 2007). The main message from the three case studies was that policymakers and educators worked together, albeit in different ways, to achieve what was best for their students. While much of the current research on BOEs focuses on the sometimes contentious relationships between board members and administrators, the evidence in these interviews and document analyses did not show this antagonism. The educators I talked to discussed the concern that everyone had for providing the best education possible to students. They also reported on how interested board members were in the explorations that were done to ensure a DL/I program was a good fit for their communities based on current and future needs, along with the opportunities such a program might bring to the students themselves. The document analyses in the districts revealed a celebration of student successes at monthly BOE meetings, and, when budgets had to be cut, a very protective stance towards classroom instruction and student services was noted. Reductions were focused on cutting costs related to the adults, like the change in summer work hours at the central office or the decreases in pay born equally by all employees, in order to preserve or even expand curricular programs for students, like DL/I. Though these mundane deliberations don't make catchy headlines or startling sound bites, they do seem to be the most common work that BOEs do with administrators. It would be interesting to see

research that looks at the longevity of curricular programs and their implementation, K-12, across generations of students, especially as BOE members and educators come and go in typical transition cycles. This kind of research would also be able to dig more deeply into how a community sees itself as an educational entity given the structure of education and its home in locally controlled politics.

Second, the school choice movement is changing the way traditional public schools offer educational opportunities, and the results go far beyond achievement test scores. There is considerable research on how parents choose magnet schools and charter schools, and there have been many studies looking at the impact on reading and math scores (Fleming, 2012; Hayes, Phillips & Goldring, 2010; Kitmitto, Levin, Betts, Bos & Eaton, 2016; Smrekar & Honey, 2015). In this study, the districts were very interested in competing internally with magnet school options and externally with charter schools by providing DL/I programs, and they noted some of the same gains in test results and student diversity as the national research on school choice cited above. However, future research could delve deeper into other effects of school choice, such as how the themes chosen for a magnet or charter school influence students' lives beyond attracting them to the programs initially. Many of these themes are linked to developing students as better citizens and scholars who have been provided character education or greater depth in the arts or STEM subjects, yet there is little to no research on the long term gains of these approaches. DL/I as a program or school choice option may be an opportunity to look more closely at this since proficiency in a language, and its use in careers, is already a focus of research and job reports. But there also needs to be research done on the other themes and how they benefit students across their lifespan.

Third and finally, more research needs to be done on DL/I programs specifically, and K-12 education in general, about how students fare in other measurable aspects of their academic careers. While analyzing test scores is common and quite easy compared to evaluating other aspects of student achievement and progress, it would be good to probe beyond these simple, annual measures. The rate at which students complete college preparatory coursework or participate in enrichment programs and extracurricular offerings at the secondary level are important aspects of cognitive and social development, yet they do not attract the same level of research attention. Even statistics as public as graduation from high school and matriculation into post-secondary programs or training do not merit the same amount of coverage in research, especially in long-term studies that could be used to bolster K-12 education, but they should.

## **Conclusion**

Deciding to start a DL/I program during an economic recession is a bold move by local policymakers and educators. Using the lens of Weiss' (1995) four I's of school reform, this exploratory case study demonstrated the complex nature of decision-making and the focus on student needs surrounding this decision in three different contexts. Student learning and achievement were paramount, as was the desire of each district to be seen as offering a unique option to parents and families within their communities.

As DL/I programs continue to grow across North Carolina, there are policies and practices that support this kind of initiative, though, to date, no additional funding. Commitment 2.1 in the State Board of Education's Global Education Task Force Report says that our state should "institute a plan for statewide access to dual language/immersion opportunities beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school" (Global

Education Initiative in NC, 2013, p. 6). The districts and educators in this study, as well as their counterparts in more than 40 LEAs and five charter schools could school us on how they made DL/I programming a reality for their students. But is offering a DL/I program in every district an attainable goal? The director in Howard County Schools certainly thought so! When I asked her if there was anything else she wanted to share in her interview, she said that DL/I programming is “something every district should be doing.” She went on to say that she thinks “people get really scared about getting [a DL/I program] started...but they shouldn’t worry so much” because there is plenty of help from districts like hers, and they only need to ask in order to get the advice and support they need.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A - Survey Announcements

To: [insert email address]  
Subject: Research Survey for NC DL/I Programs

Dear [insert name]:

My name is Ann Marie Gunter and I am contacting you today about participating in a research study on dual language/immersion or DL/I programs in our state. In addition to serving as the World Language Consultant on the DL/I Team at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, I am also a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University and, for my dissertation research, I am investigating how districts and schools decide to start DL/I programs.

All DL/I Coordinators in North Carolina are being invited to complete a short, online survey, which will only take 10 - 15 minutes. The survey is designed to explore the reason(s) why a DL/I program was started and who led the work to convince decision-makers to launch the initiative.

If you would like to contribute to our field by participating in this study, please go to <http://bit.ly/NCDLIsurvey> to read the consent form and complete the survey by Friday, January 13. If you would prefer to participate by phone or if you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [aggunter@ncsu.edu](mailto:aggunter@ncsu.edu) or on my cell phone at 919-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you in advance for considering this opportunity to increase our knowledge of how DL/I programs are implemented.

Regards,  
Ann Marie

To: [insert email address]  
Subject: Research Survey Extended to 1/20 for NC DL/I Programs

Dear [insert name]:

My name is Ann Marie Gunter and I am contacting you today about participating in a research study on dual language/immersion or DL/I programs in our state. In addition to serving as the World Language Consultant on the DL/I Team at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, I am also a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University and, for my dissertation research, I am investigating how districts and schools decide to start DL/I programs.

All DL/I Coordinators in North Carolina are being invited to complete a short, online survey, which will only take 10 - 15 minutes. The survey is designed to explore the reason(s) why a

DL/I program was started and who led the work to convince decision-makers to launch the initiative.

Due to the inclement weather last week, this survey's closing date is being extended. If you would like to contribute to our field by participating in this study, please go to <http://bit.ly/NCDLIsurvey> to read the consent form and complete the survey by Friday, January 20. If you would prefer to participate by phone or if you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [aggunter@ncsu.edu](mailto:aggunter@ncsu.edu) or on my cell phone at 919-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you in advance for considering this opportunity to increase our knowledge of how DL/I programs are implemented.

Regards,  
Ann Marie

## **Appendix B – Survey Consent Form**

Please read the information below and indicate if you would like to participate in this research study.

Title of Study:

Choosing the Road Less Traveled: Deciding to Add a Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) Program

Principal Investigator: Ann Marie Gunter, Ph.D. Candidate (aggunter@ncsu.edu; 919-XXX-XXXX)

Faculty Advisor: Bonnie Fusarelli, Ph.D. (bonnie\_fusarelli@ncsu.edu; 919-515-6359)

### **Research Overview & Purpose**

In general, research studies are designed to add new knowledge to our professional understanding by systematically examining and/or evaluating a topic. The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons why districts decide to add dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs. The study begins with this survey of the Local Education Agencies (LEAs), charter schools, and independent schools in North Carolina to identify their reasons(s) for launching a DL/I program and also the leaders who spearheaded the decision.

Three DL/I programs will be selected for a multiple-case study, which will involve interviews with the identified leaders and an archival document analysis of publicly available materials.

### **Study Participation & Benefits**

You are being asked to participate in this research study by completing the survey for your DL/I program(s), which takes approximately 10 - 15 minutes. You may voluntarily consent to join the study and submit the survey, or you may refuse to join. If you do consent to join the study, you can withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. By participating in this study, you are contributing to our field and helping to build an understanding of why DL/I programs are begun. There are no direct benefits or costs to participants in this study, but the knowledge that is gleaned from the study may help educators and others who are working to implement DL/I programs in North Carolina and possibly across the country. There will not be any follow-up to this survey unless your DL/I program is selected as one of the case studies. If that happens, individuals identified for interviews will be contacted and asked to consent to participate.

If you have questions at any time, you may contact the principal investigator or faculty advisor.

### **Risks & Privacy Protections**

This study has almost no risks involved with participation because the purpose is to analyze decisions that were made in the past and have already been implemented in schools. The privacy of individuals who agree to participate in the study will be protected through the use of pseudonyms for districts and schools, and no participant names will be used in any presentations, reports or other publications about this study.

### **Agreement to Participate**

Thank you for considering the opportunity to participate in this research study. Please indicate whether you would like to complete the survey for your DL/I program(s).

I have read the information above and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

- Yes
- No

## Appendix C – Survey Questions

1. Which district are you responding for in this survey?

[Drop down menu of 33 districts with DL/I programs was provided here but had to be removed for publication purposes]

2. What is your role with the dual language/immersion (DL/I) program(s) in your district?

- District Coordinator
- School or Program Coordinator
- Principal or Assistant Principal
- Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent or Area Superintendent
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How many DL/I programs in your district will you be responding for in this survey?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

Please describe your DL/I program by answering these questions. For the demographic questions, you can access the state's DL/I Program Directory if it would be helpful. (Link was provided)

4. What is the name of the school where the DL/I program is housed? (If the DL/I program also has a specific name, feel free to include that information here.)

5. In which school year did the DL/I program start?

- 1990 - 1991
- 1991 - 1992
- 1992 - 1993
- 1993 - 1994
- 1994 - 1995
- 1995 - 1996
- 1996 - 1997
- 1997 - 1998
- 1998 - 1999
- 1999 - 2000
- 2000 - 2001
- 2001 - 2002
- 2002 - 2003
- 2003 - 2004
- 2004 - 2005
- 2005 - 2006
- 2006 - 2007
- 2007 - 2008

- 2008 - 2009
- 2009 - 2010
- 2010 - 2011
- 2011 - 2012
- 2012 - 2013
- 2013 - 2014
- 2014 - 2015
- 2015 - 2016
- 2016 - 2017

6. In your opinion, what were the reason(s) your district or school decided to begin this DL/I program? [Please check all that apply.]

- Addressing a community need as expressed by business leader(s), community organization(s) or other stakeholders
- Bringing something new and/or different to the school, district or community
- Building on the success of another DL/I program
- Competing for students amongst other education choices available in your area
- Continuing another DL/I program from an elementary or middle school
- Drawing students to a magnet or other specialized program in the school
- Educating students who are English Learners (ELs)
- Giving students marketable skills like being bilingual to better compete for jobs
- Responding to a call from parents and/or parent groups
- Seeking academic gains for students in DL/I programs as shown in research
- Wanting to prepare students for a globalized and culturally-diverse world
- Other, please specify:

7. In thinking about your answer above, what do you believe was the primary reason that led your district or school to begin this DL/I program?

- Addressing a community need as expressed by business leader(s), community organization(s) or other stakeholders
- Bringing something new and/or different to the school, district or community
- Building on the success of another DL/I program
- Competing for students amongst other education choices available in your area
- Continuing another DL/I program from an elementary or middle school
- Drawing students to a magnet or other specialized program in the school
- Educating students who are English Learners (ELs)
- Giving students marketable skills like being bilingual to better compete for jobs
- Responding to a call from parents and/or parent groups
- Seeking academic gains for students in DL/I programs as shown in research
- Wanting to prepare students for a globalized and culturally-diverse world
- Other, please specify:

8. Why do you believe this was the primary reason for starting the DL/I program? Feel free to describe discussions held at school or local board meetings, information that appeared in newsletters or the media, details shared at events or activities, presentations you saw or heard about, etc

9. Who led the decision to start the DL/I program(s) in your district?

If your district is selected as one of the case studies for this research, up to 3 individuals will be invited to participate in interviews about how the decision was made to start the DL/I program(s).

Please think about who was involved in leading this decision to be made in your district, such as:

- administrators (building or central office level),
- other educators (teacher, department head/chair, specialist, etc.),
- policymakers (chair or member of local school board, county commissioner, city council person, etc.),
- community members (business person, citizen, parent, etc.).

Use the boxes below to identify 3 - 5 people who helped lead this decision. Feel free to include yourself in any of the boxes. Once the districts are selected for the case studies, the researcher will contact the identified individuals to ask for their consent to participate in an interview.

9a. In your opinion, who was the main individual who led the decision to start the DL/I program(s) in your district? Please indicate the person's name, role and contact information using the form below.

Name (first and last)

Current role with DL/I program (if applicable)

Work email address

Work phone number

9b. Who was another individual who helped lead the decision to start the DL/I program(s) in your district? Please indicate the person's name, role and contact information using the form below.

(Same as above with name, current role, and work contact information)

9c. Who was another individual who helped lead the decision to start the DL/I program(s) in your district? Please indicate the person's name, role and contact information using the form below.

(Same as above with name, current role, and work contact information)

9d. Was there another individual who helped lead the decision to start the DL/I program(s) in your district?

If so, please indicate the person's name, role and contact information using the form below.

(Same as above with name, current role, and work contact information)

9e. Was there another individual who helped lead the decision to start the DL/I program(s) in your district?

If so, please indicate the person's name, role and contact information using the form below.

(Same as above with name, current role, and work contact information)

## **Appendix D – Interview Invitation**

To: [insert email address]

Subject: Interview Invitation to Research Study on NC DL/I Programs

Dear [insert name]:

My name is Ann Marie Gunter and I am contacting you today about participating in a research study on dual language/immersion or DL/I programs in our state. In addition to serving as the World Language Consultant on the DL/I Team at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, I am also a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State University and, for my dissertation research, I am investigating how districts and schools decide to start DL/I programs.

You were identified in a recent survey completed by DL/I Coordinators as a person who led the work to convince decision-makers to launch a DL/I program at [insert name of school with DL/I program]. As a result, I would like to interview you to learn more about how the decision was made to begin the DL/I program and what you did to support this initiative.

The interview would take approximately 45 - 60 minutes and can be done either face-to-face at a location such as the school or online using Skype or webinar software with a webcam. Though I do need to record the audio portion of the interview as part of my study, I will protect your privacy as a participant by using a pseudonym for your DL/I program and identifying you only by your role in your organization (ex. board member, superintendent, parent, etc.).

If you would like to contribute to our field by participating in this study, please read the attached consent form and reply to me about this invitation at [aggunter@ncsu.edu](mailto:aggunter@ncsu.edu) so that we can arrange an interview time and place that works for your schedule. You are also welcome to contact me via phone at 919-368-4390 if you would prefer to set up an interview that way or discuss any questions you have before deciding to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for considering this opportunity to increase our knowledge of how DL/I programs are launched.

Regards,  
Ann Marie

## **Appendix E – Interview Consent Form**

Please read the information below and indicate if you would like to participate in this research study.

Title of Study: Choosing the Road Less Traveled: Deciding to Add a Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) Program during a Recession

Principal Investigator: Ann Marie Gunter, Ph.D. Candidate (aggunter@ncsu.edu; 919-368-4390)

Faculty Advisor: Bonnie Fusarelli, Ph.D. (bonnie\_fusarelli@ncsu.edu; 919-515-6359)

### **Research Overview & Purpose**

In general, research studies are designed to add new knowledge to our professional understanding by systematically examining and/or evaluating a topic. The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons why districts decide to add dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs, specifically during a recession. The study began with a survey of the Local Education Agencies (LEAs), charter schools, and independent schools in North Carolina to identify their reasons(s) for launching a DL/I program and also the leaders who spearheaded the decision. Three DL/I programs were selected for a multiple-case study, which will involve interviews like this one with the identified leaders and an archival document analysis of publicly available materials.

### **Study Participation & Benefits**

You are being asked to participate in an interview for this research study, which will take approximately 45 - 60 minutes. You may voluntarily consent to join the study and participate in the interview, or you may refuse to join. If you do consent to join the study, you can withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. By participating in this study, you are contributing to our field and helping to build an understanding of why DL/I programs are begun. There are no direct benefits or costs to participants in this study, but the knowledge that is gleaned from the study may help educators and others who are working to implement DL/I programs in North Carolina and possibly across the country. There will not be any follow-up to this interview. If you have questions at any time, you may contact the principal investigator or faculty advisor.

### **Risks & Privacy Protections**

This study has almost no risks involved with participation because the purpose is to analyze decisions that were made in the past and have already been implemented in schools. The privacy of individuals who agree to participate in the study will be protected through the use of pseudonyms for districts and schools, and no participant names will be used in any presentations, reports or other publications about this study.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The transcripts will use the pseudonyms for districts and schools and the interview participant's role in the educational organization, such as board member, superintendent, principal, parent, etc.

### **Agreement to Participate**

Thank you for considering the opportunity to participate in this research study. Please sign and date this form if you would like to participate in the interview.

I have read the information above and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study in a face-to-face or online interview.

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F – Interview Questions

1. Why did your district decide to add a dual language/immersion program?
2. Describe one or more factors that most influenced your decision to initiate a dual language/immersion program during the economic recession that took place from 2007 - 2010?
3. When the decision was being discussed, how did your district choose the structure of the DL/I program (location, model, administration, instructional time schedule, etc.) to implement?
4. What impact did your student composition have on your decision to add a dual language/immersion program? (ex. fluctuations in student enrollment, changes in educational options in the attendance area, number of students receiving services such as English as a Second Language (ESL), percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunches, students in schools classified as low performing, etc.)
5. How was the idea to launch a DL/I program shared with the community (school and town/city/county) before the decision was made?
  - a. How was the idea to launch a DL/I program shared with the community while the decision was being made?  
and
  - b. How was the idea to launch or implement a DL/I program shared with the community after the decision was made?
6. What type of media coverage was done surrounding the decision to start the DL/I program? This could be school, community, regional, statewide, national, etc. coverage through various mediums (newsletters, blogs, newspaper, magazine, radio, TV, online, etc.).
7. How has the decision to initiate the dual language/immersion program impacted your district's students and other stakeholders?
8. How does or will the district measure the impact of the DL/I program based on the rationale for implementing the program initially?
9. Based on the discussions and decisions you've been involved with, what do you think the future holds for your dual language/immersion program:
  - a. 5 years from now?
  - b. 10 years from now? or
  - c. 20 years from now?
10. Why do you think you were identified as a leader in the decision to start a dual language/immersion program in your district?
11. What else would you like to share about the decision to start a dual language/immersion program that we haven't already discussed?