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**One-quarter of
California's
students are in the
process of learning
English. How best**

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

Ensuring that all California students learn both English and academic content is a huge challenge, and people have differing opinions about how to meet it.

The challenge is that almost a million and a half children attend public schools knowing little or no English. About 70% of them are in elementary grades, and over a million live in Spanish-speaking households.

The differences of opinion revolve around what teaching methods are most effective for English language learners. While much research informs this topic, its conclusiveness continues to be questioned. The discussion is also affected by political considerations and by an absence of clarity about what "bilingual education" is and how – given limited resources – school districts should provide

As the decade ends, schools face a formidable task, especially against the backdrop of a push for raising standards, new measures of student achievement, and unpredictable changes in law and policy.

English Learners Have Increased, and Most Speak Spanish

In the 1996-97 school year, almost a quarter of the kindergarten through twelfth grade students in this state could not function academically in English. These students have traditionally been described as Limited English Proficient (LEP); a more recent term is English Language Learner (ELL).

The number of students who need to learn English has more than doubled in the past ten years (see Figure 1). Not all of them are immigrants; some were born as American citizens to parents who are not fluent in English. Although nearly 40% are in Los Angeles County, the impact of the increase in non-English speaking pupils affects schools just about everywhere in the state.

Two-thirds of the current English language learners are in grades K through six – one out of three current kindergartners and first graders. The other third are in grades seven through twelve, a much smaller percentage of secondary school enrollment. The educational needs of these older students are quite different from young children who must learn to read as well as learn a new language.

Students who become able to do schoolwork in English are redesignated as Fully English Proficient (FEP). In California, the combination of LEP and FEP students accounts for almost 37% of total student enrollment.

Spanish is the first language of over 80% of the students who are learning English. With one exception, the eight next most frequently spoken languages are Asian, each at 1-3% of the total. The California Department of Education (CDE) recognizes 54 languages in data from its annual census and groups together another 100 languages and dialects.

The family – its educational level, commitment to education, and language ability – has a strong effect on how well these students will function in school, as do the community's demographics and economics. The vast majority of English language learners are from families in poverty, and many are transient, with frequent interruptions in their schooling. The students' age and previous education, the attitude of the school, its resources, and the capabilities of the teachers are also critical to determining student performance in school.

The opportunity for achievement, and for failure, co-exist in today's schools for the

to teach them academic content as well as the new language is a complex challenge for schools.

students who face a new culture as well as a new language.

Schools Must Meet Federal and State Requirements

Federal laws and court decisions stemming from the 1964 Civil Rights Act require public schools to provide special services for English language learners. The 1974 Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* confirmed that schools must take "affirmative steps" to ensure equal educational opportunities to students who did not speak English. In many instances, this was interpreted as meaning some primary language instruction.

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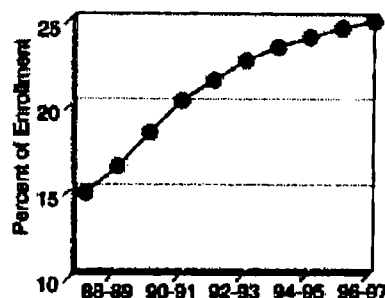
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MORE AND MORE STUDENTS NEED TO LEARN ENGLISH



The number of students with limited proficiency in English has more than doubled in the past ten years, to nearly one-fourth of California's 5.6 million public school students.

Data: California Department of Education

EdSource 5/98

California's response, the Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act of 1976, expired in 1987. It has not yet been replaced, despite periodic attempts to do so. The federal regulations and state guidelines have continued, however, and school districts have responded in different ways.

In April 1998, the State Board of Education adopted new bilingual policies that give school districts substantial flexibility to establish the own programs, within the federal guidelines. Districts may use "prima language instruction or any other specific methodology" as long as the show positive student results after a "reasonable period." In May 1998, new legislation awaited Governor

Wilson's signature. If signed, it would give school districts discretion to choose their instructional program but would hold them accountable for students' progress in mastering English and academic subjects.

If approved by the voters, a June 1998 ballot measure, Proposition 227, would standardize the way non-English speaking students are taught. It would restrict instruction to a "sheltered English" approach and would limit students' time in such a classroom to one year in most cases. The eventual impact on California classrooms of the new policies and/or the ballot measure is an open question.

What is "Bilingual Education"?

Technically, "bilingual education" means instruction in two languages. As commonly used, however, it refers to a range of instruction provided to students who need to learn English. Services vary from specially tailored classes in English to a little help in the student's primary language, to most academic instruction in that primary language.

How English Language Learners Are Currently Taught

The great variety of programs for teaching California students who do not know English well can be divided into four general categories, though what happens in classrooms is sometimes a mix of strategies.

1. Primary language instruction. Students are taught academic subjects mostly in their first language, with textbooks and classroom materials in that language and in English. Contrary to popular perception, fewer than 30% of all English language learners are in these "bilingual" classes. The overwhelming majority of them are Spanish-speaking, according to the CDE data.

2. Specially designed English instruction with primary language support.

Instruction for these students is mostly in English, but some of it is in the students native language. The special assistance from bilingual teachers or aides can be within a classroom or in pull-out classes during the school day or week. About 22% of ELL students are served by these programs, which include Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), in which the teaching methods and materials are tailored to help students develop skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing English while learning academic content.

3. *"Sheltered immersion" – special instruction in English.* Nearly one-third of the students who need to learn English are in regular English-language classes with instruction geared to their proficiency. About 11% have English Language Development (ELD, formerly English as a Second Language) and about 20% have both ELD and SDAIE. Primary language support is not included.

4. *No special services.* About 16% of the LEP students do not participate in any special programs. They are "fully immersed" in English-language classrooms (sometimes called "sink or swim"). Slightly over 1% have been withdrawn from special language assistance by parental request.

Some students are in special language assistance programs briefly, while others continue in them for as long as five years, though with increasing emphasis on instruction in English.

California has not monitored the academic progress statewide of English language learners. As a consequence, a statewide evaluation of the efforts to teach students with limited English proficiency has been somewhere between difficult and impossible.

The Teacher Is a Crucial Component

According to data from the CDE, in 1996-97 about 85,000 of the teachers who have a California teaching credential or are studying for one were trained in methods for instructing non-English speaking students. They had the help of over 30,000 instructional assistants.

Just under 15,000 of the 85,000 teachers have a special bilingual credential, and 9,000 teachers are in training for one. The ratio of bilingual teachers to students is one Spanish-speaking teacher for every 85 Spanish-speaking students (one per 49 including teachers in training). For Vietnamese-speaking students, it is one teacher per 889 students and for Russian, one per 6,700. An estimated 7,700 of the 30,000 instructional assistants are bilingual.

In 1996-97, over a third of the teachers working with ELL students were on emergency waivers, meaning that they had not completed work for the appropriate credential. The number of teachers with multicultural, multilingual training has been increasing recently, in part through Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) and related B-CLAD (for Bilingual) certification programs.

Whether or not teachers need the special CLAD or B-CLAD training is the subject of lively discussion, but no one doubts the important role of a skilled and caring teacher in helping these students succeed.

The Costs Are Unclear

Over \$836 million in federal support is targeted in 1997-98 to California for educationally and economically disadvantaged students, including those who do not know English, \$107.5 million for migrant education, and \$32.5 million for "emergency immigrant education." The money is distributed to districts according to formulas that reflect their socioeconomic makeup. How much of that support is spent directly on students who are learning English is not currently reported.

The state's Economic Impact Aid allocation for 1997-98 is \$385 million for students who are economically or educationally disadvantaged. It is distributed according to a formula that counts certain students but is not linked to the cost of

services for them. The California Department of Finance has estimated that as much as 70% of the state money is used for programs for students who are learning English. Some districts find money from other special purpose programs, and they may use discretionary funds from state or local sources. Districts do not currently have to identify their expenditures for English language learners.

What About Research?

Although much has been learned about successful programs for students who are learning English, disagreements among educators, researchers, parents, and other non-educators persist. Critics say that students are not learning English fast or well enough. Others believe it takes time to become sufficiently proficient in a language to comprehend rigorous content matter and therefore succeed in academic subjects. Still others say the problem in many schools is the lack of human and financial resources or the commitment needed to replicate the good programs. No single way appears to work equally well for all students in all circumstances.

Some consensus (but not unanimity) exists on a few topics:

- Young students can move easily between two languages; they learn faster (especially reading) when they have a strong base in their primary language. Being taught in their native language for four or five years often puts these students behind their peers in reading and writing English. A 1997 National Research Council (NRC) report states that the most effective programs, no matter what their labels, include some native language instruction, an early phase-in of instruction in English, and teachers who are trained to work with students learning English.
- Because of the large number of languages in California schools, primary language support to all English language learners is impractical and often impossible. Instruction for these students has to be in English.
- The high dropout rate among Hispanic students is not linked to bilingual education programs; many dropouts grew up speaking English.
- Children of higher income, educated parents learn English and academic subjects faster, no matter what their language abilities when they begin school.
- The NRC report concludes that bilingualism – literacy in two languages – has a slight positive, and no negative, effect on “the overall linguistic, cognitive or social development of children” when socioeconomic factors are taken into consideration.

As a March 1997 article in Education Week noted, the question to ask is not whether “bilingual education” works, or works better than alternatives. The better option is to explore what specific instructional strategies help English language learners most, under what conditions, for which children, and what is next best if the ideal conditions for replication do not exist.

The State and Schools Face Major Policy Decisions

An important issue in the discussion of how best to teach students who need to learn English is accountability: how to measure their progress fairly, as well as when and to what extent they should be expected to meet grade-level academic standards. The hope is that a statewide focus on what students know and are able to do would shift the debate from pedagogy to results.

TO LEARN MORE

A vast amount of information is available about bilingual education. For a sample contact

After years of no data on student achievement, California expects to have baseline results in June 1998 from a new standardized statewide test for all second through eleventh graders. Students

For more information:

Organizations:

CDE Bilingual Education Network (BIEN)
www.cde.ca.gov/cib/bsncl/bien/bien.htm

California Association for Bilingual Education
(CABE), 660 S. Figueroa, #1040, Los Angeles
90017-3464, 213/532-3850

National Association for Bilingual Education
(NAEB), 1220 L Street NW, #605, Washington,
DC 20005, www.naeb.org

National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education
www.ncbe.gwu.edu

Articles and Reports:

Education Week, 6935 Arlington Road,
Suite 100, Bethesda, MD 20814-5233
301/780-3200, www.edweek.org

WestEd, 730 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA
94107, 415/565-3000, www.wested.org/policy

More data is provided by the Demographics Unit
of the California Department of Education,
www.cde.ca.gov. Information about school districts
and individual schools is at www.eddata.k12.ca.us.
To learn more about specific programs, contact your
local school or school district office.

who do not know English may be tested in their native language if such a test exists. However, over the protests of many school districts and court challenges, the law requires ELL students take the English-language test even if they are unable to read the test questions. The purpose of the requirement was to assure that statewide test results reflect a complete picture of the performance of all of California's students, no matter what their backgrounds. Results by school and district must be posted on the Internet by July 1998.

Most experts say that multiple measures will have to be used to accurately assess ELL students – and most students. Student achievement data is also expected, over time, to provide some information about the most effective approaches to educating English language learners. However, getting both critics and supporters of an existing program to agree on what constitutes fair and objective measures of school and program

effectiveness can be extremely difficult.

Whatever programs are planned, schools must build their capacity to implement them.

Irrespective of California policy, the federal requirements remain. The challenge for the teaching profession is immense. Critical to that is expanding the pool of teachers who are themselves bilingual, in other languages as well as in Spanish. This task is more difficult than ever because of growing school enrollments and additional K-3 classrooms created by the class size reduction program, which have caused a serious shortage of teachers. Primary language instruction aside, concern persists about how many teachers have mastered the techniques that best help English language learners.

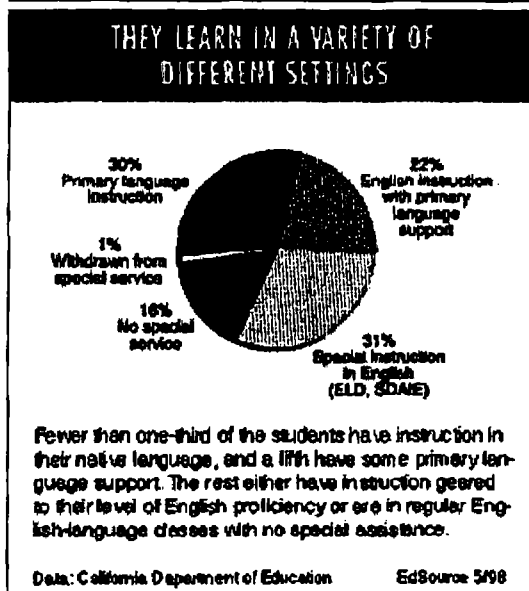
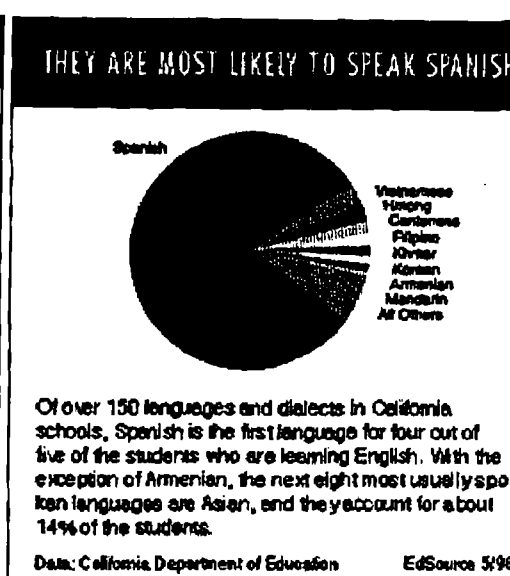
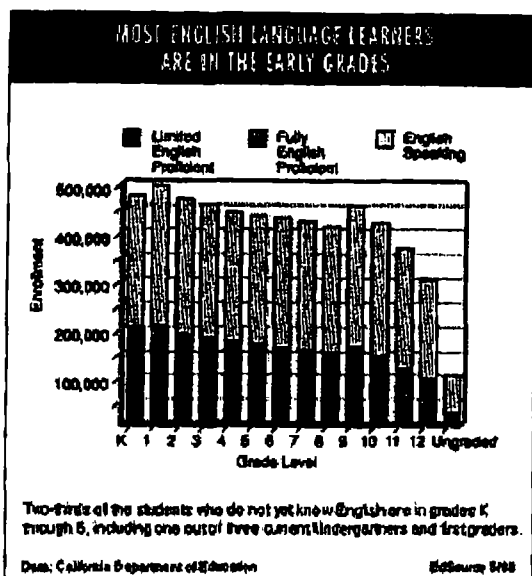
Finally, Californians must decide who should be in charge of selecting the programs that schools will use to teach students who need to learn English.

- How does local flexibility interact with state and federal law as well as court precedent?
- What regulations, if any, should accompany funding?
- To what extent should these regulations specify the methods that teachers may or must use?

The challenge of effectively educating children who do not come to school speaking English often seems overwhelming, particularly in California. It is also vital. This state's ability to meet the challenge is being watched by the rest of the nation.

Federal requirements, state laws and policies, and local school board decisions will all be part of charting the course California takes. The future of "bilingual education" will directly affect one out of four public school students and have a significant impact on almost every school in the state. Eventually, it will also help determine the economic vitality of the state and the future quality of life for every Californian.

WHO ARE THE CALIFORNIA STUDENTS WHO NEED TO LEARN ENGLISH?



THEY ATTEND SCHOOL THROUGHOUT CALIFORNIA

Top Ten Counties	% LEP, 1995-97
Imperial	47.7
Los Angeles	36.0
Monterey	33.9
Merced	32.8
Colusa	32.3
San Francisco	31.7
Orange	30.3
Madera	28.1
Fresno	27.3
Sania Cruz	27.0

Data: California Department of Education EdSource 5/98

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Modern Schools, Better Learning

The Campaign to Rebuild America's Schools

SCHOOL MODERNIZATION FACTS CALIFORNIA

Total number of schools ¹	7,984
Total Enrollment ²	5,961,000
State Funding for K-12 facilities, 1993-94	\$52,000,000 or \$ 10 per student
Total State and Local District School Construction Spending, 1995-96 ³	\$1,157,262,000

Current Conditions

- **87 percent** of schools report a need to upgrade or repair building to good overall condition
- **71 percent** of schools report at least one inadequate building feature (e.g. roof, plumbing, electrical, windows, HVAC)
- **87 percent** of schools report at least one unsatisfactory environmental factor (e.g. air quality, ventilation, acoustics heating, lighting)
- **21 students** per computer
- In 1997-98, California paid **\$583,760,000** in interest on school debt.⁴

Projected Needs

- Range of amounts needed to upgrade or repair a school to good overall condition: **\$600 to \$30,000,000**
- Enrollment in California over the last decade **increased 29.1 percent**. From 1998 to 2008 projected state enrollment in elementary and secondary schools is expected to **increase by 893,000 students (+15 percent)** necessitating **35,720 additional classrooms**.⁵
- California projects a **\$20.1 billion** five-year cost for school modernization, including \$11 billion for modernization and technology upgrades of old facilities. California will need \$4 billion just to build new facilities to accommodate dramatic enrollment increases. (Source: School Facilities Planning Division, California Department of Education)

Federal Modernization Proposals

Several critical bills have been introduced in the 106th Congress to help states meet school modernization needs. These bills would provide tax credits for the interest costs of school modernization bonds.

- California would receive a **\$2.9 billion** allocation under S. 223, the Public School Modernization Act.⁶
- California would receive a **\$3.0 billion** allocation under H.R. 1660, the Public School Modernization Act.⁶
- California would receive a **\$2.93 billion** allocation under H.R. 1760, the America's Better Classrooms Act.⁷

California Senators who have cosponsored S. 223: **Boxer (D); Feinstein (D)**

California Representatives who have cosponsored H.R. 1660: **Becerra (D); Brown (D); Dixon (D); Farr (D); Filner (D); Lee (D); Lofgren (D); Martinez (D); Matsui (D); Millender-McDonald (D); Pelosi (D); Roybal-Allard (D); Sanchez (D); Sherman (D); Stark (D); Waters (D); Waxman (D); Woolsey (D)**

California Representatives who have cosponsored H.R. 1760: **Horn (R); Lee (D)**

NOTE: All data unless otherwise noted taken from *School Facilities, Profiles of School Condition by State*, published by U.S. General Accounting Office, June 1996—most recent data available

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Surveys

² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Surveys

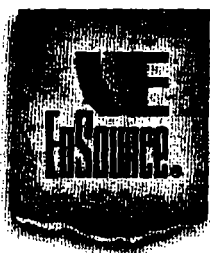
³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Annual Survey of Government Finances. Figure represents total state and local district spending. (1993-94 figure above represents state-level spending only).

⁴ Includes expenditures for land, existing buildings, improvements of grounds, construction of buildings, additions to buildings, remodeling of buildings, or initial, additional, and replacement equipment. 1997-98 *Estimates of School Statistics*, National Education Association

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data Surveys and *Projections of Education Statistics to 2008*. Classroom calculation assumes 25 students per classroom.

⁶ Estimate prepared by U.S. Department of Education

⁷ Estimate prepared by Congressional Research Service


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Election Brief: Proposition 227

"English for the Children"

On June 2 California voters will decide whether or not to control "bilingual education" by restricting the length of time and the methods by which public school students are taught English.

If approved by a majority of voters, Proposition 227 will take effect in "all school terms" beginning after August 1, 1998. It could be changed only by a subsequent election or a compatible law passed by two-thirds of the Assembly and Senate and approved by the Governor.

Federal law and years of court decisions require public schools to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children, including over one and a third million here who do not yet know English. The authors of the Proposition claim that too many students are taking too long to learn English, making it difficult for them to function in an English-speaking

world.

DEFINITIONS IN PROPOSITION 227

English language learners. Students who do not know English. For many years they have been called Limited English Proficient (LEP).

English language classroom. A class in which instruction is entirely or "overwhelmingly" conducted in English.

English language mainstream classroom. A class with students whose native language is English or who have become "reasonably" fluent in it.

Sheltered English immersion. A class taught almost entirely in English with "the curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language."

Bilingual education/native language instruction. A class or a process in which "much or all" instruction, textbooks, and other materials are in the student's first language.

While agreeing about the critical importance of knowing English, opponents of Proposition 227 insist that decisions about how to teach these students should be tailored to their widely varying circumstances rather than imposed as a common statewide requirement for all schools.

Reactions to Proposition 227 reveal uncertainty about what "bilingual education" is and the extent of its use in California classrooms. A yes or no vote may reflect social perceptions and preferences more than an understanding of the complex issue of what would be most helpful for the state's students, with their diverse cultures and languages.

On June 2, 1998,
Californians will

Provisions of the Proposition

The official title of this ballot measure is "English Language Education for Immigrant Children." The provisions cover the method of instruction for

be voting on several ballot measures that could significantly affect the state's public schools.

For more detailed information about California's 1996-97 budget for schools and other new legislation, see the EdSource report School Finance 1996-97. Publications that may also be of interest are:

- California's K-12 School Finance System
- Understanding School Budgets...As Simple As 1,2,3
- A Glossary of School Finance Terms
- A Primer on Proposition 98

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non-English speaking students, waivers for exceptions requested by parents, community-based English tutoring, and the legal recourse for parents if the conditions of the Proposition are not met.

1. Education in the English Language

Proposition 227 states its point succinctly: "All children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English."

- The classroom shall be "sheltered English immersion" (see Figure 1) during a "temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed one year."
- Students of different ages and from different language groups, but with similar degrees of English fluency, may be combined into one class during this transition.
- Students who acquire "a good working knowledge of English" must then move into English language mainstream classrooms.
- On the financial side, "current supplemental funding" for English learners would be maintained "as much as possible."

2. Waivers at the Request of Parents

- Parents may apply for a waiver that will permit their student to be in an alternative classroom, such as a bilingual program or one that teaches English through "other generally recognized educational methodologies permitted by law." The latter phrase is a reference to the current court interpretation of the federal requirement for the education of students who do not know English. The parent must come to the school to request the waiver and must give annual written consent.
- The school must offer the alternative class or program if requested by the parents of 20 or more students in a grade. With fewer than 20, the school "must allow the students to transfer to a public school in which such a class is offered."
- Waivers to transfer from an English-only class to a bilingual one may be granted in three circumstances. The first is when a student demonstrates a good working knowledge of English by scoring above the state average for the grade level or above 5th grade on a standardized test. The second is for a student over ten years old who, according to the school staff, would learn English more rapidly in the alternative program. And the third is for children with special needs (physical, emotional, psychological, educational) who have spent at least thirty days in an English-only classroom but are not functioning well, according to school personnel. After they have been fully informed, the parents could refuse to agree to the waiver and keep the student in the original class.

3. "Community-Based English Tutoring"

- The Legislature would have to commit \$50 million for each of ten years to pay for free or subsidized English-language instruction for parents and/or community members. They in turn would "pledge" to tutor their own or other children who are learning English.
- The Superintendent of Public Instruction would administer the distribution of this money to schools or community organizations, and local school boards would disburse the funds according to guidelines

from the State Board of Education.

4. "Legal Standing and Parental Enforcement"

- Referring to the right of all children in California to an "English language public education," the Proposition says that parents may sue for fees and actual damages (but not punitive or consequential damages) if a student has been "denied the option of an English language instructional curriculum in public school."
- Parents also may sue an individual school board member, other elected official, administrator, or teacher who "willfully and repeatedly" refuses to carry out the terms of the Proposition for placing a student in a classroom taught in English.

The Current Setting in California Schools

The magnitude of the challenge schools face is growing every year. Fewer than two-thirds of California students have English as their original language. Nearly 70% of children who need to learn English are in the early grades, K through 6 (see Figure 2). Almost one-third of the state's total elementary enrollment has limited proficiency in English.

Spanish is the language that the overwhelming majority – 80% – of these children speak at home. The distant second language, just over 3%, is Vietnamese. With the exception of Armenian, the other top 8 languages are Asian, at 1–2% each.

Fewer than one-third of the English language learners are actually being taught in their primary language (what most people think of as "bilingual education"). About a third get instruction that is specially designed for English language learners, and another quarter have some support in their primary language. About 16% of the students do not have any special help in learning English, and just over 1% have been withdrawn from special language assistance at the request of their parents.

One reason for the limited language assistance is the scarcity of teachers. About 85,000 are qualified, by credential or in training, to give "instructional services" to students learning English. Of those, only 15,000 have a bilingual credential that certifies they are able to teach in two languages (with another 9,000 in training). However, the number of trained teachers is increasing, mainly through the acquisition of certificates called CLAD (Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development) and B-CLAD (knowledge of a foreign language added).

California used to have a law, patterned after federal law and court cases, that required school districts to provide students with special help, preferably in their primary language. That law expired ("sunsetting") in 1987, but the California Department of Education continued to expect schools to comply with the regulations, in part because of federal civil rights obligations. The result is a tangle of individualized programs, requests for waivers, and non-comparable (some would argue inequitable) services around the state. Even the definitions in Proposition 227 refer to classrooms that may look quite different district to district. Legislative attempts to replace the old law with a new one have regularly failed.

In an unexpected vote in mid-March triggered by a California Superior Court ruling, the State Board of Education gave school districts the explicit authority to decide how to serve their non-English speaking students, including in English or in their primary language "when necessary." In other words, districts no longer have to request waivers from state regulations and guidelines for bilingual education. The adoption of new Board policies in the spring and the potential for new legislation would keep this issue on the

front burner even without the upcoming June election.

Meanwhile, years of research have, if anything, added to the confusion about what kind of classroom works best for students who are learning English. Some students speak, read, use, and think in English fairly quickly, while others take a long time to acquire basic proficiency. For younger students, even a little bit of reinforcement in their primary language seems to help in the beginning, while older ones may take longer to master the language but quickly make the transfer of their previous academic training to English. Researchers do agree that student outcomes are determined by a complex combination of circumstances, some of them beyond the control of an individual teacher or school.

Reactions to Proposition 227

Both sides in this emotional debate are tossing out "facts" that cannot always be substantiated. Charges of immigrant-bashing and rigid educational bureaucracy confound the issue of how to ensure that all California's students learn English well enough to learn academic subjects.

Proponents of the Measure

Software entrepreneur and former gubernatorial candidate Ron K. Unz of Palo Alto is the prime author and funder of Proposition 227. A self-described Libertarian-Republican, he opposed Proposition 187 to ban illegal immigrants from schools and supported anti-affirmative action Proposition 209. He is convinced that his plan will speed up learning for students who need to know English. He became equally convinced of the necessity for a statewide ballot measure when some Democratic legislators blocked a 1997 bill to grant school districts greater flexibility in how they served English language learners in exchange for improved accountability.

Allied with Unz in the campaign is a Latina candidate for Superintendent of Public Instruction, Gloria Matta Tuchman, who has long been teaching first graders in Santa Ana in a sheltered English immersion class. Based on her experience, she believes that other methods, particularly "bilingual education," do not work. The pair has the endorsement of acclaimed math teacher Jaime Escalante and, in a surprise move during their fall 1997 statewide convention, the California Republican party.

Asserting that California public schools have a "moral obligation and a constitutional duty" to help all children become literate in English, supporters of the Proposition assert that schools currently do a poor job of educating immigrant children. The Proposition contends that financial resources have been wasted on "experimental language programs" that have resulted in two decades of failure, proven by high dropout rates and "low English literacy levels of many immigrant children." Intense exposure to English as soon as possible is, for proponents, the key to future success in school and a productive life.

The waiver provision in Proposition 227 is intended to accommodate those parents who either want their children to learn in their native language as well as in English or who prefer traditional bilingual education over the immersion approach. The Proposition is targeted to the rapid and effective learning of English, not to saving costs.

Opponents' Response

The ballot arguments in opposition to Proposition 227 are signed by the presidents of the Association of California School Administrators, the California Federation of Teachers, the California School Boards Association, and the California Teachers Association. They are part of a coalition called Citizens for an Educated America that includes other

education groups (for example, the California School Employees Association and California Association of Bilingual Educators). Other opponents include many legislators; the ACLU; the California State PTA, AAUW, and League of Women Voters; and ethnic associations such as the Latino Civil Rights Network, the Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund, and the Asian-Pacific American Legal Center.

Some teachers have been particularly vocal, in local forums and in letters to editors, about their dismay over the Proposition as they envision thousands of children suddenly losing special support in their efforts to learn English. They also voice concern about the effect on thousands of teachers whose credential is in bilingual education.

Once the initiative qualified for the June ballot, the early criticism was not about the efficacy or shortcomings of "bilingual education" or other curricular approaches to teaching English. Instead, opponents focus on the top-down mandate that undermines local school discretion to match programs to student needs, particularly given the new State Board of Education ruling that favors local control. The one-size-fits-all approach never works in California, they say, especially under circumstances of such great diversity. Why dismantle even the most effective local programs? In addition, opponents argue that experience shows it takes much longer than one year, perhaps three to five, to bring students to academic literacy, depending on their age and degree of literacy in their native language. The Proposition calls for a "good working knowledge" of English but does not define it.

The provision that is most upsetting to educators is the exposure to legal suits from unhappy parents. At the extreme, they fear that teachers will be forbidden to say anything in a student's primary language.

QUESTIONS VOTERS CAN THINK ABOUT AND WHERE TO LEARN MORE

The Importance of having all children be fluent and literate in English as quickly, efficiently, and cost-effectively as possible is a widely agreed-upon goal. The issue is how to do it.

As the election approaches, voters can consider:

- What problems Proposition 227 addresses
- Whether or not a state mandate is the best way to solve them
- Whether or not there is a viable alternative
- How to resolve the conflict between desires for local control and support for the principles of Proposition 227

Proponents and opponents of Proposition 227 provide explanations and details of their positions at www.oregonia.org/pro and www.noanrurz.org/con.

An upcoming 1998 EdSource report describes the growth and magnitude of California's non-English speaking student population, the variety of ways they are taught English, who their teachers are, and what research says about learning languages. It is available from the office or via

The Immediate Impact and Longer-Term Questions

Passage of Proposition 227 would require, before school begins in September, reorganization of classrooms except where sheltered English immersion classes already exist. An unpredictable number of parents could petition for bilingual classes for their children or for maintaining the other special help programs. A few classrooms could be freed up if special bilingual programs are discontinued, a potential cost saver, but expenses could rise if students are returned to English-only classes after a year and need extra help.

As often happens with a complex ballot measure, the language of Proposition 227 is unclear in places and the longer term consequences unknown. For example:

- Are the Proposition's assumptions and provisions, which focus on the ability of

the order form at www.edsources.org.

young children to learn a language quickly, equally

appropriate for the 30% of English language learners who are in grades seven through twelve?

- What would be the impact on the effort to reduce K-3 class sizes, the grades where the bulk of non-English speaking children are enrolled?
- Is a lawsuit by a parent the only enforcement method?
- Would bilingual classes become a mandate (in contrast to current policy) in those districts where parents request it?
- And who would make the critical decisions about when a student may stay longer than one year in a sheltered English immersion class, how to evaluate or measure student progress, and how to maintain current funding levels?

The question of what works best has no clear answer, depending as it does on so many variables. These include the education level, socioeconomic status, and language ability of families, the demographics of the surrounding community, the age and early education of the students, and the attitude and resources of the school. A central factor is surely the skills and experience of the teachers and aides who strive to teach their students the academic content they need while bringing them up to speed in their new language.

But, the authors of Proposition 227 charge, no matter what the complicating factors, the current system is leaving too many students behind. Is this ballot measure the key to a turnaround that will ensure success for more of California's students?

T O P

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