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The California Language Program:

Post –Proposition 227

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Introduction A Historical Perspective of the Spain and California Educational Partnership

In 1986, Spain and California entered into an historic agreement based which sought to promote mutually beneficial educational goals for the children and the teachers of our respective lands. Spain clearly recognized the opportunity to assist the State of California in meeting the needs of the hundreds of thousands of students in our public schools whose primary language is Spanish and whose educational program requires instruction by fully qualified professional teachers with expertise in English language acquisition as well as primary instruction in Spanish. Without that assistance, California alone could not provide the teachers required to accomplish this task. At the same time, both Spain and California recognized the benefits for teachers and administrators of professional enrichment through interaction at various levels of the education community. By sharing best practices and cutting-edge instructional strategies, educators from Spain and California could reap the harvest of enrichment and growth. These underlying beliefs laid the foundation for the initial partnership between Spain and California, sustain that relationship through the present, and will carry it through into the next millennium.

In the ensuing thirteen years, through the support of the Spanish Embassy in Washington, D.C., the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture, and the California Department of Education, the educational partnership has grown and prospered. In May of 1998, the California Department of Education surveyed local school districts participating in the California/Spain Visiting Teachers Program, one of several programs included in the 1996 iteration of the Memorandum of Understanding which has brought hundreds of highly skilled Spanish teachers to California's classrooms. The survey showed overwhelming support for the program and for the excellent teachers from Spain providing primary language instruction to many of the state's 1.4 million Spanish-speaking students. The most common statements from school administrators were the following:

our classrooms have been staffed by experienced, bilingual teachers instead of English only substitutes.

the teachers have provided the example of hard working, dedicated, well-trained professionals.

the teachers provide tremendous enrichment to our programs.

the Spanish teachers bring enthusiasm for the positive impacts that education can make on students.

Spanish and American teachers have new cultural perspectives.

the students have access to a high quality Spanish speaking model.

With a high level of successful implementation over a decade, the program continued to flourish and improve. No one could have foreseen the coming political changes to the California landscape and the potential dangers to the vibrant Spain/California programs which loomed straight ahead. Although the passage of Proposition 227 minimized the need for the number of credentialed bilingual teachers to serve the one and a half million English Language Learners in California, the size and quality of the Visiting Teachers Program has not diminished even though some adjustments have been made. And the mandate for the California Department of Education to more closely monitor the effects of the legal changes on the educational lives of children was emphatically underscored.

The Changing California Environment For English Language Learners

In June of 1998, the California electorate voted overwhelmingly to approve a statewide initiative known as Proposition 227: English For The Children. With its passage Proposition 227 effectively eliminated bilingual education in California's public schools except when and where it was specifically requested by a critical mass of parents. In it's first year of implementation, Proposition 227, also known as the Unz Initiative, reduced the percentage of English Language Learners receiving primary language instruction under revised Education Code requirements to 10% of the population which had received bilingual instruction the previous year. Within a matter of three months, the educational scene had been altered for these youngsters beyond comprehension.

Although the changes which occurred were quite dramatic, they seemed to be spread rather unevenly across the geographic and demographic landscape. Several large school districts which were offering primary language instruction to their English Language Learner population as part of a court-ordered settlement continued to do so regardless of the requirements of Proposition 227. Other districts discovered that many more parents opted to have their children in bilingual programs when given the option to do so. And as predicted, those districts which never supported primary language instruction immediately eliminated all options except English submersion.

Even within this highly polarized environment, many schools and districts sought both legal and administrative avenues by which to provide primary language instruction or other modes of linguistic support services for English Language Learners. One such program was the Dual or Two-Way Language Immersion Programs. Several of these highly successful programs were granted administrative waivers by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction thus allowing them to continue to operate within the post-Proposition 227 environment. They have been developed over time using the communication-based design recommended by the California Department of Education through its language frameworks.

Characteristics Of An Effective Program

It is important to note that an effective language acquisition program is characterized by teaching and learning in the language rather than about the language and studying language within its cultural context. As mentioned previously in the description of a typical Two-Way Language Immersion Program, a communication-based program is more likely to be effective in the development of a second language.

Communication-based instruction is that kind of teaching that helps students to develop the skills necessary to produce and receive understandable messages. In a communication-based language program, teachers focus attention on providing information or content and on helping students comprehend and react appropriately to oral and written message. Communication-based language programs are appropriate for all age levels and for all levels of language competency regardless of whether students are first graders responding physically to simple instructions, third graders learning geography concepts in a second language, ninth graders keeping a diary in another language, or advanced students reading works chosen from the literature of the target culture and language. In a

communication-based program, the emphasis is on an authentic exchange of meaning in the second language. Most class time is used to engage in or practice communications.

In communication-based instruction, the language of instruction is the language to be learned. Classroom business and procedures are also conducted in the target language. Students soon realize that exchanging information, requests, commands and discussing social conventions and so forth done in another language are similarly done in their own language. The classroom is viewed as representing an authentic community where interchanges about significant issues and ideas occur in the target language.

Students are encouraged to express themselves in the language even though mistakes may be made during initial attempts. Experimentation is a natural part of language acquisition. The teacher's role during such moments is that of a coach, modeling and carefully guiding the students. Constant correction is detrimental, especially when the errors do not interfere with students getting their point across clearly. Students must be encouraged to use the language in a nonthreatening, supportive environment.

During intermediate and advanced instruction, grammar instruction and analysis may be helpful to certain students. However, it is not advisable for students to study the structure of language to learn to communicate, most especially in the earlier stages of instruction.

Communication-based instruction is designed to correspond with the way in which young children acquire their first language in the home. Development of receptive skills (listening and reading) should precede language production practice (speaking and writing) in an alternating or cyclical pattern. In a communication-based instructional program, students constantly extent themselves beyond their most effective proficiency range.

This important characteristic of successful language acquisition programs is supported by the California Department of Education through its language frameworks first developed in 1992. Since then, many mature language acquisition programs has been based on this design. One such exemplar is the dual immersion language programs.

Best Practices: The Two-Way Language Immersion Program

The Two-Way Language Immersion Program provides an immersion model for English-speaking students and a bilingual model for Spanish-speaking students. It is an additive bilingual program that promotes literacy in both Spanish and English.

Emphasis on Spanish instruction in the early grades allows English-speakers ample exposure to the target language, Spanish. Spanish-speakers have the opportunity to expand their vocabulary and build a strong base in their first language, enabling them to be more successful as they begin to acquire English, and later as they transfer skills into English.

Spanish and English instruction are kept separate instructionally at all times, allowing for maximized concentration on both languages. Heterogeneous groupings during the Spanish and English portions of the day provide students with opportunities to assist and learn from one another, allowing second language acquisition to occur naturally.

The social interaction between students is lively and enthusiastic. They learn from one another, developing high levels of confidence and self-esteem through their study of two languages. Learning comes alive as the beauty of both languages is explored through literature, song, and direct instruction.

Students are expected to:

Develop fluency and literacy in two languages: Spanish and English,

Achieve proficiency in all academic subjects, meeting or exceeding state guidelines, and

Cultivate an understanding and appreciation of other cultures and develop positive attitudes toward fellow students, their families and their communities.

Two-Way Language Immersion is an academically based program in which the target language, Spanish. is used as the vehicle of instruction, not the focus. Monthly thematic units in the elementary grades integrate the curriculum, make the target language more meaningful to the student, and provide the student with sufficient opportunities to practice, apply, and extend academic and social vocabulary.

All instructional units are introduced through literature. Classroom teachers use a reciprocal-interactive approach, allowing students to actively participate in their second language development processes. Other teaching techniques which engender further language acquisition and development include cooperative learning, natural approach to second language acquisition, sheltered instruction, and activity-based small group instruction.

In a typical Two-Way Language Immersion program, students in kindergarten and first grade receive instruction in Spanish in all content areas, with 30 minutes of English oral language development at least four times a week and English As A Second Language (ESL) instruction as needed. Content instruction continues in Spanish through the fifth grade while English instruction gradually increases with the formal introduction of English reading and language arts in the third grade. By the sixth grade, students are receiving instruction in Spanish for half a day and in English for half a day. Generally, social studies, literature, language arts and mathematics are taught in Spanish while science, literature, language arts, and physical education are taught in English.

All Two Way Language Immersion instructors are credentialed bilingual teachers with natural fluency in Spanish. Resource teachers and instructional aides are made available to provide support as needed. Teachers exchange classes with one another at the kindergarten through second grade levels during the English portion of the day. This enables students to associate Spanish with one teacher and English with another teacher.

Continuous professional development opportunities are provided for all staff by outside trainers, district staff development personnel, and internal school-site experts.

Parent participation is an important component of any functioning Two-Way Language Immersion program. Workshops are often held to help parents become knowledgeable about the second language acquisition process and to teach them strategies of support for their child's second language development process. Language classes may also be made available for parents --Spanish classes for English-speaking parents and English classes for Spanish-speaking parents. Parents assist in planning cultural events and other activities which reinforce the social language development of all students in the program.

Both research and experience clearly demonstrate that a second language is learned in a manner that approximates how the first language was acquired, by using the language to meet social and academic needs. Thus, second language programs should be designed on a communication-based approach, one which constantly relies on the language as the medium for the exchange of meaningful information and the communication of ideas. These state requirements are met in the implementation of a Two Way Language Immersion Program.

ATTACHMENT:

PROPOSITION 227 TASK FORCE REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROPOSITION 227

TASK FORCE REPORT

May 6, 1999

Executive Summary

The 35-member Proposition 227 Task Force was convened on September 3, 1998, to develop recommendations that give guidance to school districts to provide the highest quality programs to English Learners within the parameters required by Proposition 227.

The Task Force members addressed two key challenges: (1) Bringing English learners to advanced language proficiency; and (2) having them thrive in mainstream classrooms. Reasonable fluency in English is insufficient to achieve high content standards in reading, math, social studies and science. School districts must face both challenges head on, particularly if they are going to impact current low test scores and the dropout rate among older English learners. The role of schools is not merely to teach children English; it is to develop their talents and to prepare them to achieve high academic standards in all subjects. Schools have not done their jobs if English learners only develop oral language skills. The schools' goal must be to develop the fuller set of literacy skills needed to meet the minimum requirements for high school graduation.

Who Are the English Learners?

There is tremendous diversity among English learners.

Children from over eighty different languages and cultures enter California schools each year.

They possess a wide range of English proficiency, from none to advanced.

In 1998, there were 1,406,166 English Learners in California schools.

In the past decade, the K-12 English Learner population has more than doubled.

Over ninety percent speak one of five languages: Spanish, Vietnamese, Hmong, Pilipino and Cantonese.

Eighty-one percent are Spanish speakers.

What Does It Mean To Know A Language?

For English Learners, knowing a language means having the ability to use language both for interpersonal and academic tasks. Beginning English learners at any grade level are acquiring auditory comprehension, beginning speech production in English, responding to yes *and* no *questions, building English vocabulary*

and syntax from nothing, and developing English reading and writing skills, no small task. At all levels of English language proficiency, they are constantly catching up to the language and knowledge base of their native English speaking peers who are not standing still, but who continue to move forward in their own language development and academic expansion.

All students are expected to write research reports and compositions of at least 500 to 700 words in the fifth grade, and read one million words annually on their own by the eighth grade in order to achieve the California Language Arts Content Standards. Studies indicate it takes English learners much longer than a year to achieve high proficiency levels in English. In fact, it takes several years on average for English learners to learn sufficient English for academic success.

Teaching this new language to English Learners is not a linear, straightforward process. The dialogue is not so much how long it takes to become reasonably fluent in English. It is about the enormous work of finding ways to not only have all English learners acquire "a good working knowledge of English" (Education Code 305), but to also develop their full capacity to successfully thrive in mainstream classrooms and to ultimately contribute to American society.

What Is the Responsibility of the School to English Learners?

In speaking to the U. S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce, United States Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley said, "Today, immigrants and their children are revitalizing our cities, energizing our culture, and building up our economy. We have a responsibility to make them welcome here and to help them be part of the American success story."

In helping students actualize the American dream, California's public schools and the education community at large have important roles in assisting English learners and their families acquire fluency in English. In educating students to achieve their dual goal of acquiring the English language and then using the language to become literate to understand instruction, and learn from texts, schools must make the teaching of English a top priority. It is an immense challenge for a student to start with little or no English language skills, and expect to achieve at levels comparable to native English speakers without significant support. There is no doubt that the students deserve the opportunity to contribute fully to the society.

The Task Force Report is only a beginning. There is much to be learned and understood about the most effective and efficient ways to teach English as directed by Proposition 227. The Task Force concluded that schools with any type of instructional program for English learners with less than or with reasonable proficiency in English need to provide students with:

(1) Qualified teachers,

(2) English Language Development Standards and valid assessments,

(3) Access to the core curriculum,

(4) Ongoing opportunities to develop a comprehensive set of literacy skills, and

(5) Current materials.

The Task Force developed eleven principles and thirty-five detailed recommendations. It also provided a series of appendices dealing with the primary objective of supporting all educators and parents with the goal that English learners learn English and achieve in mainstream classrooms.

Conclusions

There are many ways in which schools can address the needs of English learners. It is evident that students who arrive in this country with little or no English proficiency as well as those born here to non-English speaking families, must learn English and achieve high standards. The task is not simple. Instructional interventions that directly address the language acquisition needs in listening, speaking, reading and writing must be addressed daily in all classrooms with English learners. The California Department of Education must take the leadership role of ensuring the English Language Standards and language assessments are implemented across the state by providing technical assistance to school districts serving English Learners.

State Superintendent's

Proposition 227 Task Force

Sample Principles & Recommendations

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(3) Access to the core curriculum

(4) Ongoing opportunities to develop a comprehensive set of literacy skills,

(5) Current materials.

Principle:

Rapid and effective acquisition of academic English within the structured English Immersion Process will be a focus and priority for all students who have less than reasonable proficiency in English.

The Task Force recommends that:

Teachers who teach English Learners must use instructional strategies that focus on the types of language proficiency skills to be developed.

Principle:

Programs of instruction for English Learners with reasonable fluency in English in mainstream classrooms and/or alternative courses of study make full utilization of the student's language, literacy skills and sociocultural experiences as resources for learning advanced reading and writing skills in English and acquiring content knowledge.

***The Task Force recommends** that:*

Teachers provide students regular opportunities to participate in a variety of language and literacy activities.
Teachers receive coaching and use a wide variety of instructional strategies for teaching mainstreamed students who have reasonable proficiency in English.

Principle:

All schools provide effective, up to date materials, technology and equipment for English Learners.

The Task Force recommends that:

Schools and districts equip teachers and students with the best available instructional materials and software to support instruction.

The governor and the legislature budget new monies for materials for grades K-12 targeted for English learners.

The California State Board of Education adopt an English Language Development/English as a Second Language (ELD/ESL) framework to define the sequential content and curriculum for second language learning.

Principle:

Parents who develop language fluency and strong literacy skills, and become involved in schools, help improve their child's learning.