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Texas: Languages Other Than English (Briefing Report)

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The development of communication skills, as exemplified in the interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes, remains the goal for programs in Languages Other Than English (LOTE). Program emphasis is on the development of the linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and in the knowledge of culture and language. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for LOTE are described within the five areas of communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities, and reflect performance expectations for various lengths of learning sequences.

In addition to adoption of the TEKS, several initiatives have been undertaken. These are:

- *A Texas Framework for Languages Other Than English*, a curriculum framework developed to help teachers in schools implement the TEKS,
- *Professional Development for Language Teachers*, a document that identifies appropriate staff development models for inservice LOTE teachers implementing the TEKS,
- *Preparing Language Teachers to Implement the TEKS for Languages Other Than English*, a document that delineates high standards for preservice LOTE teachers and programs that prepare them, and
- The Center for Educator Development in Languages Other Than English, a resource site to assist with the professional development of LOTE educators in the implementation of the TEKS.

An agreement among the TEA, the State Board for Educator Certification, and Spain's Ministry of Education and Culture has established several programs that provide Texas school districts opportunities to alleviate teacher shortages in specific content areas and teachers and students opportunities to initiate cultural exchanges.

The Languages Other Than English program in Texas schools has experienced moderate growth in enrollment at most levels in most languages in the past several years. Of the approximately 600,000 Texas students currently enrolled in all language courses in Grades K-12, representing close to 43% of students in Grades 9-12, nearly 450,000 are students of Spanish. New instructional materials have recently been adopted at the state level for exploratory languages, French, German, Latin, and Spanish.

Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language Programs in Texas

(The educational requirements for limited English proficient (LEP) students are specified in TEC §§ 29.051-29.064 and in 19 TAC Chapter 89, Subchapter BB. Commissioner's Rules Concerning State Plan for Educating Limited English Proficient Students.)

In accordance with the state policy to provide equal educational opportunity to every student, public schools in the state of Texas are required to provide bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) programs for students that have been identified as having limited proficiency in the English language.

A "student of limited English proficiency" is defined as a student whose primary language is other than English and whose English language skills are such that the student has difficulty performing ordinary classwork in English.

Students of limited English proficiency must be identified by school districts using procedures established by the Texas Education Agency. These procedures include giving a home language survey to each student enrolling in the district in order to determine the language normally used in the home and the language normally used by the student. Students indicating a language other than English are given agency-approved tests to determine their proficiency in the English language. If a student is classified as limited English proficient, the student is recommended for placement in the bilingual education or English as a second language program. Parental approval is required for enrollment in Bilingual/ESL programs. These programs must be provided by appropriately certified personnel.

***Bilingual education programs** (which include content area instruction in the native language and special instruction in English as a second language) are required in the elementary grades when district enrollment exceeds 20 students of limited English proficiency (of the same language background) in any grade.*

***English as a second language programs** must be provided in the elementary grades when there are fewer than 20 LEP students enrolled in any one grade. LEP students in the middle school and in high school must also be provided a program in English as a second language.*

Bilingual education and ESL programs not only must enable students to become competent in speaking, reading, writing and comprehending the English language, but to acquire all the academic skills and concepts that are required in the state's education program.

The Texas Education Agency has developed Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills in Spanish Language Arts in grades K-6 and English as a Second Language in grades K-12 to ensure that schools provide an appropriate curriculum and require appropriate academic standards in these programs. State adopted textbooks in Spanish language arts as well as in mathematics, science and social studies are available in Spanish in the elementary grades and textbooks in English as a Second Language are provided in elementary and secondary grades.

Students of limited English proficiency are enrolled in bilingual education and ESL programs until they have attained a level of English language proficiency which would allow them to succeed in the regular academic program.

The Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) must conduct an annual review of each student's performance on required assessments, the student's academic progress in classes, the student's linguistic development in English and other pertinent information as outlined in 19 TAC §89.1225 to determine if the student is to continue in the program or be recommended for transition into the mainstream educational program.

Students may exit from bilingual or ESL programs if they pass the grade appropriate state assessment (TAAS) in reading and writing (when administered) in English or if they score at or above the 40th percentile in a state-approved standardized achievement test. They must also meet other exit requirements such as oral language proficiency and passing grades in academic subjects.

Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language Program Implementation

The way in which bilingual education/ESL programs are structured and implemented is affected by many factors including geography, demographics, resources, and philosophy.

Although these programs are located in practically every region of the state, the greatest concentrations are in the Rio Grande Valley, and the metropolitan areas of Houston, Dallas, El Paso, San Antonio and Fort Worth.

The first factor that districts must consider in determining what type of program they will provide for limited English proficient students is the number of such students enrolled in the district, the non-English language that they speak, and the grade levels in which they belong. Based on this number, districts determine whether to provide a bilingual education or English as a second language program.

Bilingual education programs differ in instructional approaches, staffing patterns, student characteristics and resources available. Programs also differ in their philosophies toward the use of the primary language in instruction of basic concepts and subjects. Some programs place students into all-English instruction as soon as possible, while others place greater emphasis on insuring the student's successful acquisition of academic skills in the primary language before transitioning into English. These models are called early exit and late exit transitional bilingual education programs.

A small but growing number of school districts are implementing two-way bilingual programs in which English speaking students are enrolled along with limited English proficient students and both groups learn in two languages. These districts have found that these programs are very successful with both groups of students and that they receive widespread community support.

English as a second language programs are found in every region of the state; however, the greatest concentration of programs are within those regions that have the largest concentration of limited English proficient students. There are differences in ESL programs as well. These differences are found in instructional approaches, staffing patterns, student characteristics, district philosophies and resources available.

Program models may range from a daily period of ESL instruction to full day instruction in academic areas using sheltered English instructional approaches. Some districts group students according to levels of English language proficiency and structure their ESL programs to meet the needs of these students. Others place all students together regardless of proficiency levels. Some districts use native language support in content area instruction as part of the ESL program, especially in the secondary level. Others place students in regular classes with English speaking students.

Regardless of the program implemented for students of limited English proficiency, school districts must insure that these students reach the high standards that the state of Texas has set for all public school children.

In 1998-99, LEP students in Texas totaled 533,139 (over 13% of the total student body). Over 87% of LEP students are economically disadvantaged compared to 48% of non-LEP students.

The Texas Education Agency holds districts accountable for the academic achievement of all students, including limited English proficient students. LEP students are required to take the state assessment, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) or may be exempted and given an alternative assessment for up to three years if their language would act as a barrier to measuring student achievement. A Spanish version of the TAAS is available for LEP students in grades 3-6 whose primary language is Spanish. Results from the English and Spanish version TAAS are incorporated into the state's accountability system.

Reading proficiency tests in English (RPTE) for limited English proficient students (LEP) in grades three through high school have been developed to measure their progress as they learn to read in English. The RPTE will be administered to LEP students who are not taking TAAS in English, including students taking TAAS in Spanish. Field testing for this assessment occurred in the spring of 1999, and the tests will be implemented in the spring of 2000. It is anticipated that the State Board of Education will revise assessment to incorporate this assessment into a comprehensive testing program for LEP students.

TAAS results both in English and Spanish have increased annually for LEP students at all grade levels. However, student performance at the middle and high school levels is lower than in the elementary grades. Lower performance of LEP students in middle and high schools may be attributed to many factors including economic stress and academic discouragement. Programs need to be developed to assist older LEP students in transitioning to the English classroom and staying in school.

Goal and Recommendations

Improve academic achievement of LEP students

a. Promote exemplary districts who have high proportions of LEP and economically disadvantaged students by recognizing the achievement of individual students, teachers, campuses and districts.
b. Provide training to all inservice and preservice teachers especially those in middle and high schools, on effective methods of serving LEP students, to facilitate the mainstreaming process.
c. Create incentives to bring more educators to the classroom who are qualified to teach bilingual educaton especially in geographic regions where there are shortages.
d. Create incentives for districts to implement two-way bilingual education programs and recognize such curriculum as advanced.