

Letting English Learners Down: Federal Bilingual Education Programs in Arizona

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Executive Summary

Federally-funded programs account for one-third of the money Arizona spends on education programs for its 140,000 English learners. Much of that takes the form of Title VII bilingual education grants. This study examines official reports filed with the U.S. Department of Education by recipients of those grants. Among its findings:

- Nearly all programs examined either failed to meet major program objectives, submitted unmeasurable objectives, or contained no outcome-based objectives.
- Some programs failed to demonstrate any significant growth in English proficiency for more than half of their students.
- Meanwhile, program funds were spent on tangential activities, including out-of-state travel for program officials and seminars on "The Hegemony of English" and "Cultural Teaching of Wildlife."

Details follow.

INTRODUCTION

Arizona has a growing population of approximately 140,000 English learners. More than one-third of these are enrolled in bilingual education. Others participate in English as a Second Language or Individual Education Programs.

Federal funding provides one-third of all monies for Arizona's education programs for English learners. Much of that funding comes from Title VII Federal Bilingual Education discretionary grants for instructional services. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there are four categories of these: Program Development and Implementation Grants, Program Enhancement Project Grants, Comprehensive School Grants and Systemwide Improvement Grants.

Under current law, 75 percent of all federal bilingual dollars must be spent to support instruction in students' non-English native languages, with the remaining 25 percent reserved for "special alternative" programs – programs that teach English in English.

Both bilingual education and English as a Second Language are transitional programs, intended to provide students with critical English-language skills so that they can graduate to mainstream,

English-language classrooms. But one relevant statistic which has received significant attention in the recent debate there over the merits of bilingual education and its proposed reforms is the very low rate, 5.5 percent, at which English learners in Arizona have been successfully reclassified.

When it comes to assessing its bilingual education programs, Arizona has encountered numerous difficulties. The most important assessment undertaken to date by the Arizona Department of Education encountered largely insurmountable obstacles, to the point where it deemed it necessary to add that "schools and districts reported conflicting information, causing confusion and making analysis difficult."

This study examines actual reports filed with the U.S. Department of Education by recipients of federal bilingual education grants. It focuses on three major concerns:

- (1) Did grant recipients meet stated performance-based objectives?
- (2) Were those objectives useful and relevant?
- (3) Did program activities help English learners?

Program objectives were chosen by school officials and submitted with their original grant application as measurable indicators of program success. Nearly all of the programs examined belonged to one or more of the following categories:

- Programs which failed to meet major program objectives;
- Programs which did not submit criteria for success which can be considered measurable;
- Programs which filed objectives which were not outcome-based, that is to say, contained no objectives that directly related to improved student performance, or
- Programs which stated that required data were not yet available at the time reports were filed.

Normal Curve Equivalent (NCEs) are scoring units based on raw scores and national norms. In Arizona they are used on both the Stanford 9 achievement test (in English) and the Aprenda (in Spanish), both of which measure math, reading and language arts.

FAILED OBJECTIVES AND INCONCLUSIVE RESULTS

The following are several prominent federal bilingual programs in Arizona which demonstrated failed or inconclusive results on key grant objectives:

Lincoln Bilingual School Community Technology and Training Grant, Nogales USD #1,
#T29OU50191-97.

This program was among the worst examined, failing numerous performance-based objectives, and demonstrating very little student improvement. More than half of students failed to improve one NCE in reading English. Further, the report stated "Nearly half seemed to lose (oral) proficiency in Spanish with time in the program." It adds that more than one-third of those students made no gain in English oral proficiency.

Objective 1.1 For each year of instruction, 60 percent of the LEP students taking the Stanford 9 in grades 1-5 at Lincoln Elementary School will gain one NCE or more in reading scores. Not achieved.

Forty-one percent of the students who took the Stanford 9 in 1999, and either the Stanford 9 or the Aprenda in 1998, gained one NCE or more.

Objective 1.2 For each year of instruction, 60 percent of the LEP students taking the Aprenda in grades 1-5 at Lincoln Elementary School will gain one NCE or more in reading scores. Not achieved.

Thirty-six percent of the students who took the Aprenda in 1998 and in 1999 gained one NCE or more.

Objective 1.4 For every year of instruction, 60 percent of the students who are up for the language assessment at Lincoln Elementary School every two years will show an improvement of one level in oral language scores, as measured by district-adopted assessment.

English Oral Proficiency - Achieved.

86 percent of students improved by at least one level of proficiency.

Spanish Oral Proficiency - Not achieved.

51 percent of students improved by at least one level of proficiency.

An addendum to the evaluation report filed in January 2000 offers the following revealing conclusion:

It is apparent that the educational program at Lincoln Elementary School needs to be changed. The educational program encompassing the curriculum, instruction and instructional materials will need to be examined for appropriateness, effectiveness and alignment. A clear educational philosophy needs to be articulated and implemented.

La Escuela Project, serves consortium of Office of Pima County Superintendent, Amphitheater USD, Marana USD, Tucson USD and the University of Arizona Extended University, #T293B70002.

"The primary focus" of the La Escuela Project, explain program documents, "was to create and implement an elementary foreign language program (Spanish) for grades 4 through 6." The

program was designed and run by a consortium composed of the Pima County Superintendent, Amphitheater Unified School District, Marana Unified School District, Tucson Unified School District, and the University of Arizona Extended University.

All four of the program objectives address either professional development or curriculum, and none is tied to student performance.

Objective 2 The number of community paraprofessionals trained for participation in classrooms will increase as follows:

Year 1: 20 Year 2: 50 Year 3: 80

Not achieved. "In the ideal world, there would have been a paraprofessional in every classroom to assist the classroom teacher. However, due to a shortage of volunteers this objective was not achieved."

The report offers the following answer to the question, "How closely linked are the professional development activities to expectations for student learning?"

. . . A well informed and confident teacher will be able to do an excellent job of teaching the students. In turn, once the curriculum and methodology are familiar to the teacher, he/she will be able to articulate his/her expectations to the students.

Amphitheater Public Schools, Tucson, #T20OU70046.

The program offers 4 outcome-based objectives:

Objective 1 Children will develop higher levels of proficiency in their primary language (Spanish or English). Not achieved or inconclusive.

Objective 2 Children will develop higher levels of proficiency in their second language (Spanish or English). Not achieved or inconclusive.

Objective 3 Children will achieve at or above standard levels of performance in all areas of the Amphitheater curriculum. Not achieved or inconclusive.

Student oral proficiency was annually measured using the Idea Proficiency Test in both English and Spanish. In English, 65.3 percent of students showed .00 growth (no change), compared with 29.6 percent of students who showed 1.00 (one level) of growth. In Spanish, 60.2 percent of students showed .00 growth (no change), compared with 17.3 percent who showed 1.00 (one level) of growth.

Reading scores on the Stanford 9 and Aprenda tests did show statistically significant improvement. The report's assessment of progress toward the third objective states only, "These

students' mean NCEs in reading compared favorably with the mean NCE for all Amphitheater second graders, although a statistical comparison was not made."

Math scores on the two tests, however, did not. In fact, they declined slightly, and were outperformed by the district average (mean) by 6.7 NCEs.

The report does, however, list the following factors in its assessment of progress towards these three objectives:

- Over the past 2 years, 5 dual language teachers and 1 instructional assistant (along with the grant coordinator) have attended National Association of Bilingual Educators (NABE) and OBEMLA conferences. (In fact, program funds were used to attend conferences and workshops in Dallas, Phoenix and Denver.)
- A wide selection of computer software in English and Spanish is now available, and Title VII funds have increased the balance in the school library between English and Spanish materials.

Objective 4 Children will increase their levels of self-awareness as well as developing positive cross-cultural attitudes. Inconclusive.

Project FAIR (Facilitating Alternative Instruction Reform), Santa Cruz Alternative High School, Nogales USD #1, #T29OU70414.

None of the program objectives for this grant requires improved student results. Objectives address professional development for teachers, curriculum development and the equipment purchases. Activities also include a summer program for two teachers to study in Mexico as well as travel to programs in Denver, California, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Boston as well as stress reduction classes for students.

Goal 4 To implement a family education program.

Objective 4.1 To purchase materials for a lending library to increase the amount of literature in students' homes as measured by their checkout log and their individual education plan. Not achieved.

Objective 4.2 To purchase computer hardware and software for use in the child development center; by students who are the parents of these infants and toddlers as measured by their checkout log and their individual education plan. Not achieved.

Objective 4.3 To make computers available to students for home use as measured by their checkout log and their individual education plan. Not achieved.

"Unfortunately, no progress has been made toward this goal or its objectives." A note states that for Objective 4.3 "this objective has been achieved in only one case thus far. As a sort of pilot

case, a student who was homebound was provided with a computer and hooked up on the web so that she could email her homework to school... Although the experiment seemed to work, the student's family's circumstances were so difficult that she eventually dropped out of school completely."

Although none of the grant objectives requires progress to be made regarding student achievement, grant documents do report that 61 percent of students demonstrated gains of one-half level of proficiency or more on the District Writing Assessment.

Wade Carpenter Middle Academy of Technology, Nogales USD #1, #T289P990066.

Objective 2.1 All teachers, administrators, and selected parents will develop Intersession and/or standard day programs that are cohesive and integrated into the existing curriculum and the Arizona Academic Standards which will include a set of guidelines for student identification, resources, materials and a list of class offerings. Not achieved.

"The reason being that the teachers clearly stated that they would or would not be interested in teaching certain classes, but they did not have the time or inclination to do curriculum and organizational planning."

Objective 2.2 All teachers, administrators and parents will receive teacher training services in adapting the SDAEI method and performance-based assessment in their instruction through inservices. Not achieved.

"Due to a change in District Board policy, performance-based assessments were not seen to be effective in determining student achievement, and standardized test designs were used for curriculum, planning and evaluation." [It is worth noting that a DoEd staff member has written "WHAT?" in the margin next to this response.]

In addition, the report contains an addendum from the project director which states:

At some point during the two week Intersession period I was able to locate some sample Practice Tests for the Stanford 9 Math and English evaluations. We asked some of the teachers to give these tests to their 7th and 8th grade students so we could determine if they were appropriate to use with our students in the Intersession to be held in January. It turns out they were not. I hope this clears up any possible confusion.

Mexicayotl Charter School Calmecac Project, Nogales, #T29OU980360-99.

Objective 1.1 Students will score at the 70th percentile or better in L1 and at the 50th percentile or better in L2 on standardized tests. Inconclusive.

"Test scores will not be available for several weeks."

Objective 1.3 Cultural literacy. Students will make an oral or written presentation which will demonstrate their ability to analyze critically as determined by an established rubric. Not achieved.

"No rubric has been developed yet."

Objective 3.2 Students will participate in a minimum of two personal cultural activities provided by the school which reflect Calmecac's positive, equitable, and humanistic cultural criteria. Success will be measured by alternative assessments. Not achieved.

"Work is still needed to develop units of study and cultural activities, as well as the alternative assessments which will measure their success.

Objective 4.1 All teachers will develop a professional growth portfolio with alternative assessments, some tied to student outcomes. Not achieved.

"The portfolios themselves have not yet been developed by teachers."

Objective 5.1 A sign-in log will demonstrate 50% family participation as teacher, student and evaluator. Alternative assessments of activity effectiveness will measure the increase in student achievement, including but not limited to results of focus groups. Not achieved.

"Although parents have been welcome visitors and participants at the school this year, a log of their visits has not been kept."

Isaac Elementary SD #5, Phoenix, #T195A980026-98.

Objective 1 By August of each project year, a minimum of 40 district teachers will each have received at least 36 hours of classroom-based support for practice and implementation of language instruction approaches (Total of 1440 hours). Not achieved.

Total achieved at time of report: 1,304.26 hours.

It is again worth noting the margin comment written by DoEd staff: "What are they spending their time 'practicing?'"

Peach Springs SD #8, Peach Springs, #T288S60161.

Objective 1 To improve the English and Hualapai languages of LEP students through intensive bilingual support in all areas of the curriculum. Inconclusive.

Since the objective does not contain measurable goals, marginal results do not necessarily call for a "not achieved" rating. Nonetheless, the results toward this objective can certainly be considered marginal:

Percent of Students Showing Gains of one NCE or more on Stanford 9 Achievement Test			
	Non-LEP	LEP	All Student
Reading	49%	41%	37%
Math	42%	39%	57%
Language	50%	61%	38%

OTHER FINDINGS

Competing Priorities

Many of the federally-funded activities addressed goals which can not be expected to have a direct impact on improving students' language skills. This is critical, because for many English learners, these programs are the only opportunity they will have in school to acquire the English language skills they need to succeed. Some of these activities include:

- Ballroom dancing for students (Wade Carpenter Academy)
- "Phlebotomy Taller seminars in which a local lab technician is working with students so that they may be certified to inject patients and draw blood." (Mexicayotl)
- "The Hegemony of English" workshop for teachers (Mexicayotl)
- "It's Nobody's Fault" workshop for teachers (Peach Springs)
- "Cultural Teaching of Wildlife" workshop for teachers (N. Arizona University)
- "Hispanic Culture in the Classroom" workshop for teachers (Isaac Elementary)
- "Harvest and Preparation of the Mescal Agave" program for 6th graders (Peach Springs)
- "Discovery of America - Columbus vs. Indigenous View" student seminar (Mexicayotl)
- Creation of Red Mesa Navajo Museum (Red Mesa)

Out-of-State Travel

Federal grant dollars were spent on out-of-state travel for teachers and administrators in at least 44 percent of programs examined. Many attended the National Association of Bilingual Educators' national conference. Other destinations included Boston, Dallas, Denver, El Paso, Mexico (several locations), New Mexico, Salt Lake City, San Antonio and Washington, DC. Several other districts did indicate substantial travel expenditures, some totaling upwards of \$7,000, without providing any specific details, and so are not included in the above figure.

CONCLUSION

"Federal bilingual education projects have demonstrated effectiveness in teaching English," asserted the Clinton Administration's official budget request for FY 2000. But a careful analysis of the above programs and others like them show this is not always the case. In fact, many of these grants can actually be said to hurt the students they are intended to help because their failures deny the single best opportunity those students will receive to acquire critical English language skills.

The report card certainly allows room for improvement. Each of the above programs can fairly be said to contain significant disappointments and failings with regard to their chosen objectives, results, or both.

Appendix Arizona Title VII Grants Used in This Study

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Lincoln Bilingual School Community Technology and Training Grant, Nogales USD #1, #T29OU50191-97.

Amphitheater Public Schools, Tucson, #T20OU70046.

Wade Carpenter Middle Academy of Technology, Nogales USD #1, #T289P990066.

Indian Oasis, Baboquivari USD #40, #T29U980022-98.

Mexicayotl Charter School Calmecac Project, Nogales, #T29OU980360-99.

College of Education, University of Arizona, #T195A990016.

Northern Arizona University, Center for Excellence in Education, Flagstaff, #T195A980074-99.

Isaac Elementary SD #5, Phoenix, #T195A980026-98.

Pimeria Alta SD #24, Nogales, #T291R70013.

Peach Springs SD #8, Peach Springs, #T288S60161.

Window Rock USD, Ft. Defiance, #T29OU980369.

Navajo Bilingual Advantage Program, Ft. Defiance, #T291R990005.

Red Mesa High School, Red Mesa USD #27, #T29OU96012.

Benson Elementary School, Benson, #T2885980118.

Creighton Elementary SD #14, Phoenix, #T29OU960012-99.