

# Title VII Grants: Bilingual Education Programs That Hurt Kids

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## **Executive Summary**

Federal bilingual education programs are funded through discretionary grants from the Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs directly to local education providers. "Federal bilingual education projects have demonstrated effectiveness in teaching English," asserts the Clinton Administration's official DoEd budget request for FY 2000.

But a review of bilingual education grants awarded in 1995, the most recent year reports were available for these multi-year grants, reveals how many grants actually hurt the Limited English Proficient (LEP) students they are intended to help. Official grant report documents filed by districts with DoEd and obtained by the Lexington Institute show that many federally-funded Title VII programs:

- Fail to meet most of their stated objectives;
- Omit standardized test scores for large portions of their LEP students;
- Produce lower test scores two years after programs are implemented.

Details follow.

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## **Introduction**

Federal bilingual education programs as they exist today evolved from the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. That legislation, in conjunction with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was designed with the laudable goal of providing equitable education for all students.

But over the intervening thirty years, the Department of Education along with Congress has intermingled the goal of teaching English with such extraneous concerns as multicultural awareness, professional development, and cultivating higher self-esteem among students.

President Clinton signed into law the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) in October 1994, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Goals 2000, the centerpiece and framework of IASA, was designed to help all children acquire the knowledge and skills they would need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Under this legislation, four major discretionary categories of Title VII (bilingual education) grants for instructional services were established. The following are the official descriptions of these categories provided by the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs of the Department of Education:

**Program Development and Implementation Grants** - three-year grants designed to assist Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in developing and implementing new and comprehensive bilingual education for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

**Program Enhancement Project Grants** - two-year grants designed to assist LEAs in carrying out highly focused, innovative, and locally designed projects to expand or refine existing bilingual education for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

**Comprehensive School Grants** - five-year grants designed to assist LEAs in reforming, restructuring, and upgrading all elements of an individual school's program and operations to serve linguistically and culturally diverse students.

**System-wide Improvement Grants** - five-year grants designed to assist LEAs in improving, reforming, and upgrading all relevant programs and operations that serve linguistically and culturally diverse students on a district-wide basis.

The Clinton Administration requested \$170 million for these Title VII instructional services grants for FY 2000. According to the official request, this would support approximately 760 grants serving almost 1.1 million students. Total spending for instructional services grants was \$160 million in 1999 and also \$160 million in 1998.

There are three additional professional development grant categories which are not addressed in this study: Training for all Teachers Grants, Bilingual Teachers and Personnel Grants, and Graduate Fellowships in Bilingual Education. Funding levels for these grants totaled \$25 million in 1998, \$50 million in 1999, and \$75 million in the Administration's budget request for 2000.

This study examines Title VII instructional services grants from 1995. In particular, it is an examination of actual grant reports filed by the grantees with the Department of Education for grants awarded in 1995, many of which were filed with the Department in December 1997. This year was chosen because it was the most recent year for which these reports were available for these multi-year grants.

An examination of these grant reports showed many programs with poor results, dubious procedures, or activities that do not relate to their core educational purpose. Examples and excerpts from the grant reports follow, placed into nine categories characterized by the nature of the concern:

- Frivolous programs;
- Programs that place disproportionate emphasis on “multicultural” goals at the expense of teaching English;
- Bilingual programs that teach only in Spanish;
- Dubious reporting of test scores;
- Superfluous professional development;
- Miserable results;
- Poorly chosen or non-verifiable objectives;
- Redundancy of non-teaching functions;
- Prohibitive exit requirements.

Detailed examples follow.

## **I Frivolous Programs**

*Rocky Boy School District, Box Elder, Montana, \$1,239,508 five-year Comprehensive School Grant, #T29OU950349 p 12.*

“SSOW (Summer School on Wheels) trip to the rain forests of Costa Rica to offer LEP students new experiences. Students gained valuable insights into the rain forests, animals, volcanoes, and the aspects of life in other countries. . . . 9 of the 14 students received passing grades for the trip [and] overall the trip was a huge success for the children and parents and chaperones alike.”

## **II Programs That Place Disproportionate Emphasis on “Multicultural” Goals Rather Than on Teaching English**

The promotion of awareness of the diverse array of cultures within our society certainly has value to Americans young and old. The Improving America’s Schools Act notes:

“The use of a child or youth’s native language and culture in classroom instruction can --

(A) promote self-esteem and contribute to academic achievement and learning English by limited English proficient children and youth;

(B) benefit English-proficient children and youth who also participate in such programs; and

(C) develop our Nation’s national language resources, thus promoting our Nation’s competitiveness in the global economy.” (Section 7102)

But it should not dilute a program that Congress clearly intended to promote rapid acquisition of English. And native languages can be practiced and maintained at home without causing children to fall behind academically.

*Takini School, Howes, South Dakota, \$240,039 four-year Comprehensive School grant #T90U50059, p. 13.*

Developing educational software for students to use to develop written proficiency in Lakota (Sioux). Lakota is an oral language for which no standard orthography exists, so one had to be developed. The reasoning applied by the program's Title VII personnel stated,

"Sioux heritage must be taught in grade K-12. This grant will help remedy the damage done to Sioux culture and the Lakota language in 1887 when the Lakota language was forbidden in Indian schools. It is important to note that the Lakota language and Sioux culture are a part of our national heritage and programs such as this will ensure this language and culture will not be lost."

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*New York City Board of Education, Community School District 3, \$1,250,000 five-year Comprehensive School Grant #T29OU950103, p. 4, p. 11.*

"There were 6 dual language classes during the 1996-97 school year, one at each grade level K-5 and one pre-K class. An outside consultant was hired to provide calligraphy lessons twice a week for each dual-use class. He also provided Chinese brush painting, Tai Chi, introduction to Chinese instruments, Cantonese songs, and conversational Cantonese."

"Program Goal 3: At least 80% of participating LEP and EP children will improve their knowledge of and attitudes toward their own and others' cultures, as measured by project-developed classroom instruments and teacher observations."

*Lodge Grass Elementary School, Montana, \$147,991 two-year Program Enhancement Grant, #T269P950170.*

“As the instructional aides began to work in the classrooms they implemented an approach in which the concepts were presented and reinforced in Crow. Fridays were dedicated to materials development in the morning and work in the computer lab in the afternoon. This approach was implemented in math two days per week, once a week in science and once a week in language arts. The instructional time was assigned on the basis of student needs in science, language arts and math.”

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*Salem Keizer School District 24J, Oregon, \$1,323,900 five-year Comprehensive School Grant #T29OU950045, p. 26.*

“Students have little extrinsic motivation to learn Spanish in an English-dominant environment. Even Spanish speakers begin to prefer English, recognizing it as the language of power. . . . It remains for the school to provide extrinsic motivation by setting up situations that require the use of Spanish and by presenting Spanish as a language of equal status with English.”

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*Zuni Public School District, Zuni, New Mexico, \$922,785, five-year Systemwide Improvement Grant, #T291R950073, pp. 9-10.*

“Develop a computerized Zuni/English dictionary, elderly tape recordings, cultural supplemental theme materials to promote language development (such as Zuni Grandmother’s Day). . . . Train Zuni-speaking teaching staff to administer and score the Zuni Language Assessment during the fall semester and field test during the spring semester. . . . Establish a screening committee of tribal elders and officials to assess the oral fluency of middle and high school students and adult community members.”



### III “Bilingual” programs that only teach in Spanish

Under the Improving America’s Schools Act, the following definition is specified:

“Bilingual education program – the term ‘bilingual education program’ means an educational program for limited English proficient students that –

(A) makes instructional use of both English and a student’s native language;

(B) enables limited English proficient students to achieve English proficiency and academic mastery of subject matter content and higher order skills, including critical thinking, so as to meet age-appropriate grade-promotion and graduation standards in concert with the National Education Goals;

(C) may also develop the native language skills of limited English proficient students, or ancestral languages of American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and native residents of the outlying areas; and

(D) may include the participation of English-proficient students if such program is designed to enable all enrolled students to become proficient in English and a second language.” (Section 7502)

Programs that teach students entirely in their native language and not in English do not fit the above definition, and therefore should not qualify for federal funding under the grant categories specified earlier in this report.

*Community School District 4 Ambos-A-Dos, New York City, \$208,364 two-year Program Enhancement Grant, #T289P50636, Worksheet 5.1.*

LEP students are taught reading and language arts 100% in their native language, Spanish, 100% of the time through the fourth grade.

#### IV Dubious Reporting of Test Scores

The Improving America's Schools Act stipulates,

"An application for a grant under this subpart may be approved only if the Secretary determines that. . . student evaluation and assessment procedures in the program are valid, reliable, [and] fair for limited English proficient students." (Section 7116h)

One particularly troubling trend in programs where English learners are served is that those students are often not included in standardized testing. Occasionally such practice can be reflected in the scores used to determine whether Title VII program objectives have been met.

*Checotah Independent School District, Oklahoma, \$891,633 , five-year Comprehensive School Grant.*

The district's Title VII grant report states in its executive summary,

"The program served 243 students. Of this number, more than 60% gained one or more NCEs (as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills) in each of the academic areas served: English, mathematics, science, social studies, composition, and reading."

The report also cites that

"During the year, 228 of the 243 LEP students participated in core curriculum lab activities."

But a closer examination of how these results are calculated indicates a significant discrepancy in the number of test scores actually reported:

"1.1 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Creek and Cherokee students served will increase their English vocabulary scores by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

"Results: Of the 135 LEP students in grades 7-11 served on this objective, 83 (61.5%) showed a gain of

one NCE or more (Note: Twelfth grade students were served but not tested in this first year of service.)

Similar patterns occurred in the report's analysis of other key objectives. The following table draws from the report's data to describe these trends:

<b>Checotah Independent School District, Oklahoma</b>		
Subject	Number of Scores Reported (243 students in program)	Percent by which results surpassed objectives
English vocabulary	135	1.5
Word Recognition	135	1.5
Reading Comprehension	135	3
English Language	136	.1
Total Reading	135	3
Math	135	3
Science	135	5.9

No explanation is offered as to why the number of scores reported is so low when compared with the total number of LEP students, 243, served in the program, except to note without explanation that the number reported is the number of students served by each objective. To exclude LEP students from standardized tests sends a decidedly negative message to those students and their parents about schools' expectations regarding their performance. It also distorts results and deceives the public, and potentially federal grantmakers as well.

## **V Superfluous Professional Development**

The Improving America's Schools Act stipulates that funds may be spent on professional development with the following definition:

“The purpose of this subpart is to assist in preparing educators to improve the educational services for limited English proficient children and youth by supporting professional development programs and the dissemination of information on appropriate instruction practices for such children and youth.” (Section 7141)

*Artesia, New Mexico, \$220,000 two-year Program Enhancement grant, #T289P50368, p ii*

“A four-week orientation class to encourage high school students to pursue bilingual education degrees.”

While the need for more bilingual education teachers may seem pressing in some districts, using Title VII funds for a program of this purpose would certainly seem to detract resources and energy away from helping English learners acquire basic language skills.”

## **VI Miserable Results**

*Zuni Public School District, Zuni, New Mexico, \$922,785, report for year 2 of five-year System-wide Improvement Grant, #T291R950073, pp. 20-31.*

Students in Zuni remain in the bottom 10% of the state’s standardized test ranking. After year two of this Title VII project, the district provides the following data for participating students in grades 3, 5, and 8, the three grades targeted by the New Mexico State Department of Education for compulsory testing:

“A summary of the Iowa test shows:

“In grade 3, students performed below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in the areas of vocabulary, reading comprehension, math computation and core knowledge. ZPSD ranked 84<sup>th</sup> out of 89 total public school districts in the state. Students in grade 3 are scoring poorly in all areas of language.

“In grade 5, students performed below the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and core knowledge.

ZPSD ranked 80<sup>th</sup> out of 89 districts for grade 5. Students in grade 5 are scoring poorly in all areas of language.

"In grade 8, students performed below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in vocabulary, reading, comprehension, and core knowledge. Overall the 8<sup>th</sup> graders ranked 88<sup>th</sup> out of the 89 districts in the state."

Yet, despite these bleak results, the "Summary-Conclusions-Recommendations" section of the grant report depicts quite a different outlook:

"Out of the twelve objectives for year two of the project, eleven were successfully met or begun"

"The findings in general are very positive. Work continues in all areas towards the goals and objectives. Students are attentive and focused in classes. A variety of strategies are being used to increase academic performance. The school district offers a variety of in-services which are relevant to the goals of the project. The classes offered by the University are assisting a variety of staff to reach their professional goals."

"There were no components which were drastically ineffective. There are several areas where improvements can be made. . . . Bilingual teachers should continue their focus on writing to read, using composition related disciplines. Communications scores are a cornerstone to academic achievement and the overall scores are low."

"A small sample of alternative assessment portfolios might better be able to document true achievement. Although the test scores are low, and sometimes extremely low, there are many examples of exceptional achievement, from the honors students to the challenged underachiever. Students at risk are often poor test-takers. It is up to us to find ways to demonstrate learning gains."

"Overall, the teachers at Zuni 'do whatever works,' with the students who are in need of instructional enhancement."

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*Jay Independent School District, Jay, Oklahoma, \$849,283, five-year Comprehensive School Grant #T29OU950028, pp. 20-22.*

“Program Component One: Academic Student Learning – Academic Skills Objectives:

“1.2 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Cherokee students served will increase their English vocabulary scores by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Results: *Failed*. 42% of students served showed a gain of one NCE or more.

“1.2 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Cherokee students served will increase their word recognition skills by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Results: *Failed*. 44% showed a gain of one NCE or more.

“1.3 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Cherokee students served will increase their reading comprehension scores by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Results: *Failed*. 51% showed a gain of one NCE or more.

“1.4 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Cherokee students served will increase their English language scores by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Results: *Failed*. 42% showed a gain of one NCE or more.

“1.5 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Cherokee students served will increase their total

reading scores by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Results: *Failed*. 49% showed a gain of one NCE or more.

"1.6 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Cherokee students served will increase their total language scores by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Results: *Failed*. 45% showed a gain of one NCE or more."

"1.11 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Cherokee students served will increase their math scores by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Results: *Failed*. 49% showed a gain of one NCE or more.

"1.12 By the end of each project year, 60% of the LEP Cherokee students served will increase their science scores by one NCE as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Results: *Failed*. 39% showed a gain of one NCE or more."

The program also failed to meet similar objectives for social studies, critical thinking skills, composition, and listening ability.

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*Takini School, Howes, South Dakota, \$240,039 four-year Comprehensive School grant #T90U50059, pp. 59-67.*

<b>Takini School, Howes, South Dakota Metropolitan Achievement Test Scores</b>				
Subject	Baseline (94-95)	Year 1 (95-96)	Year 2 - (96-97)	Norm
<b>Grade 4</b>				
English Achievement	53	37.8	25.3	50
Reading Comprehension	42.8	31.9	34.2	50
Total Math	36.4	31	23.7	50
Total Science	31	31.2	25.2	40
<b>Grade 8</b>				
English Achievement	35.8	27.5	26.1	50
Reading Comprehension	34	29.2	28.1	50
Total Math	24.9	27.7	29.9	50
Total Science	32.8	29.8	25.8	50

**VII Poorly Chosen or Non-Verifiable Objectives**

*Checotah Independent School District, Oklahoma, \$891,633, five-year Comprehensive School Grant.*

Family education objective: 25 adults to complete GED each year.

Evaluation: In first two years, 11 adults earned a GED. "Goal should be lowered to five per year."



*Lodge Grass Elementary School, Montana, \$147,991 two-year Program Enhancement Grant, #T269P950170, p. 7.*

“Objective 1.2: By the end of the second school year 60% of the LEP students in grade 8 at Lodge Grass Elementary School will gain 2 NCE’s on the Reading and Language subparts of the Stanford Achievement Tests as measured by pretest data of 4/95 and post-test data of 4/97. Objective 1.2 could not be evaluated because comparison data were not available with the change in the testing schedule.”

### **VIII Redundancy of Non-Teaching Functions**

Programs studied contained a wide range of non-teaching activities, some which appeared to contain significant redundancy. While this is not harmful to students directly, the resulting diversion of essential resources is an avoidable one which should be addressed.

*Okreek School, Todd County School District, South Dakota, \$1,262,013 five-year Comprehensive School Grant, #T29OU950263, p. 28.*

“Okreek’s Title VII staff have developed a native language assessment to manage Lakota language proficiency as well as development of rubrics to measure student performance.”

“A Lakota language proficiency assessment was developed by the Title VII staff with input from teachers, parents, and elders of the community who are fluent speakers, and the Sinte Gleska University staff. The purpose of developing this assessment was that there is no commercially prepared assessment tool to measure the Native American language of Lakota, so using guidance from the Language Assessment Tests (LAS) as a model, the staff developed a Lakota language assessment test.”

“A booklet was developed by staff for students and families on conversational Lakota to aid in increasing usage in the home and community.”

*Takini School, Howes, South Dakota, \$240,039 four-year Comprehensive School grant #T90U50059, p. 17.*

“Goal 2.1: Develop and implement a comprehensive Language Assessment Scales Instrument and process that will appropriately measure student oral Lakota and English language proficiency, in consultation with local resources identified as being fluent in Lakota language. The Title VII personnel was to have used the English version of the LAS during the 1996-97 school year and they were to have developed and piloted the Lakota language proficiency instrument during the 96-97 school year. This did not happen. Implementation of the instrument is scheduled for year three of the project”

## **IX Prohibitive Exit Requirements**

*Todd County High School, South Dakota, \$220,412 two-year Program Enhancement Grant, #T289P950003.*

No students in this program met the following exit requirements:

- “1. Written recommendations and evaluations from the school counselor resource teacher and classroom teacher in content areas.
2. Student performs at least at the national norm on standardized achievement tests. “

(Note: 86% of eleventh graders in the program scored below the national norm.)

- “3. Student indicates proficiency in English on a proficiency test, such as the SAT and/or an informal assessment.”

Once the above are met,

“The classroom teacher, the bilingual program personnel, and the student’s parents will meet and discuss the exiting of the student.”

The report goes on to say that,

“Once the student exits the program, continual monitoring of performance will occur by the classroom teacher in conjunction with bilingual personnel.”

Sadly, however,

“All students are currently in the program. There are no former students who moved into the regular English language classrooms.”