

POLICY BRIEF

A Review of Propositions 58 and 227: Does Bilingual Education Help or Hinder English Language Learners

Jatnna Acosta
University of North Carolina at Charlotte



Introduction

Proposition 58 (California Choices, 2018), the California Non-English Languages Allowed in Public Education Act, was passed in November 2016 repealing Proposition 227. In 1998, California passed Proposition 227 (California Department of Education, 2018) known as the English in Public Schools initiative. Bilingual education is an option made available for students to learn academic content in two languages. Varying program models aim to either transition students towards English proficiency by using their native language or develop complete bilingualism in both languages. Proposition 227 intended to increase the academic achievement of ELLs by having them focus solely on English. However, Proposition 58 repealed this notion under the basis that bilingual education offers the greatest benefit to language minority students. Schools throughout the country are having to redefine the effectiveness of bilingual education on the academic achievement of ELLs as depicted by high-stakes tests scores.

Bilingual Education and

High - Stakes Testing

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 aimed to hold teachers and schools accountable for the academic performance of all students by requiring state and national tests to determine grade level proficiency in reading and math (Smyth, 2008). In 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB by promising that all students at all grade levels, “especially low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, English Learners, and other historically marginalized students” (ESSA, 2015, p. 1), receive a quality education. The passing of NCLB and ESSA promoted high levels of academic achievement for ELLs by ultimately redirecting emergent bilingual students towards English-only instruction (Thomas, 2017). Preparing ELLs to take standardized tests requires focused instruction in mainstream classrooms in order to effectively navigate language barriers. Educators must be equipped with the necessary practices and strategies to facilitate language minority students in performing at a standard level of proficiency on high-stakes tests.

The Impact of Proposition 58

Bilingual education has incited controversial views in terms of its effectiveness with ELLs. Proposition 227 was originally passed in order to promote the prolonged academic success of language minority students. California’s underachieving ELLs and low rates of English learners who were reclassified as English proficient were presented as evidence to depict the failure of bilingual education (Gandara et al., 2000; California Department of Education, 2018)). Years later, the debate for bilingual education continued and Proposition 58 was passed to repeal the English-only requirement made by Proposition 227. Although grade level proficiency continues to be measured by high-stakes tests, research depicts the benefits of language acquisition on academic achievement to be the ability to build on students’ native cultures and maintain their heritage (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015).



Prior to the passing of Proposition 58, the misconception existed that bilingual education was a mandate for all ELLs in California. Supporters of Proposition 227 argued that bilingual programs failed to provide students with the English proficiency needed to be functioning members of society. Bilingual communities throughout the country find that minority languages are often associated with low socioeconomic status and lack of educational achievement (Garcia, 2011). The impact of bilingual education on test scores raises questions as to whether or not it should be offered to ELLs. Opposition to Proposition 58 presents the difficulty in finding teachers who are fully bilingual at the elementary level to teach both languages with integrity. Oftentimes, students in bilingual programs end up receiving the majority of their instruction in the language their teacher is most comfortable with (Rossell & Baker, 1996; Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015).

Critics of bilingual education state that “children emerge from these programs not knowing English, while supporters claim that the alternative- all-English instruction in a regular classroom- stunts a Limited English Proficient (LEP) child’s intellectual development and self-esteem” (Rossell & Baker, 1996, p. 7). The passing of Proposition 58 allows schools to design their programs with the needs of their students at the forefront. Bilingual programs are offered as an option for both ELLs and for students who are interested in learning another language. Parents, schools, and teachers are able to meet the needs of language minority students through the option of bilingual education.

Recommendations

- *Making parents knowledgeable of their ability to opt into bilingual programs* By allowing parents to choose bilingual education for ELLs, they are empowered to make a decision that aligns with their beliefs. Parents should view the option of bilingual education as an

opportunity rather than a requirement.

- *Implementing a curriculum that reflects a developmental approach* Full bilingualism denotes proportionate abilities in both languages. A developmental approach strengthens students’ native language while allowing for second language acquisition.

- *Splitting up language instruction based on teacher proficiency level* Teachers are allowed the opportunity to teach the content they feel most comfortable with so that students are able to receive high-quality language instruction. Splitting up language instruction can alleviate the shortage of language teachers in schools.

References

- Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015).
- California Choices (2018). *Proposition 58 – English proficiency. Multilingual Education. Initiative Statute*. Retrieved from <https://www.californiachoices.org/proposition-58>
- California Department of Education (2018). *Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12*. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/prop227summary.asp>
- Gandara, P., Maxwell-Jolly, J., Garcia, E., Asato, J., Gutierrez, K., Stritikus, T., & Curry, J. (2000). The initial impact of Proposition 227 on the instruction of English learners. *Education Policy Center*, 143(1) 1-39.
- García, O. (2011). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. John Wiley & Sons, Malden, MA.
- Goldenberg, C., & Wagner, K. (2015). Bilingual Education: Reviving an American Tradition. *American Educator*, 39(3), 28-44.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2002).
- Rossell, C. H., & Baker, K. (1996). The educational effectiveness of bilingual education. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 30(1), 7-74.
- Smyth, T. S. (2008). Who is no child left behind leaving behind?. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81(3), 133-137.
- Thomas, B. A. (2017). Language policy, language ideology, and visual art education for emergent bilingual students. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 118(4), 228-239.
- Educational Policy*, 28(1), 96–125. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904812468228>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2018a). *Mathematics performance* [Data file]. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_anc.asp
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2018b). *Reading performance* [Data file]. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_anc.asp
- No Child Left Behind Act. Pub. L. No. 107–110 (2002).
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2018). *Dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs*. Retrieved from