

Bilingual education benefits everyone



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BENEFITS EVERYONE

The 2000 U. S. census report revealed the startling figure that 20 percent of the American population speaks a language other than English at home. In a country where English was once the only accepted language, it is a surprise to see how quickly we have become a multi-lingual nation. For the student who speaks only a minority language, bilingual education is a controversial program that not only enhances their education, but also benefits society as well.

Bilingual education is not a recent development in America. As early as 1839 Ohio enacted a German-English program to teach immigrant students. The political shifts of the 20th century greatly curtailed bilingual efforts and recent political views against it have raised the issue once again. Advocates of an English only system have pointed to the need for national identity, but this approach has led to the sink or swim attitude of educating our students and the effect on the student and society can be detrimental and the cost is certainly high.

Students need to progress into our language as well as our society. With a bilingual program, students are taught the desired English, yet have the chance to explore other subjects in their native tongue. This keeps the student on pace and their additional knowledge aids in the learning of English. If a student gets left behind in the sciences, math, or current events due to a lack of English skills, that student will not develop the necessary skills and requirements at an important point in their education. Students who are not struggling with the language barrier are more interested and involved with the material and subsequently perform better.

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Bilingual education is not a replacement for English, it is a valuable addition to the curriculum. Bilingual education not only provides the only workable approach to teaching non-English speaking students, it also has advantages. In general, educators believe that students who were allowed a slow transition to English were more likely to perform well scholastically than those who experienced an English only program. Neglecting the needs of the student will not only stunt the success of the child, but will increase the likelihood of that child being a financial hardship to society as an adult. If we are to promote a society that values educated students that are also literate in English, we must recognize the importance of a bilingual education in reaching that goal. Total immersion, or a sink or swim approach, will doom many ethnic and immigrant students to academic and future economic failure. Adequate second language programs will assure that we will not have to pay the price for failing to provide essential native language programs to these children.