



On Hispanic Education:

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The BEAC Recommendations

The bilingual education subcommittee of the Non-Mandated Advisory Council to the State Board of Education (SBE) existed for a two-year period up to August of 1987. The purpose of the subcommittee was to submit recommendations to the SBE in the area of bilingual education. The subcommittee membership consisted of the president of the Michigan Association for Bilingual Education (MABE) and bilingual professionals and representatives from both the Arab and Hispanic communities. The subcommittee came to be known fondly within bilingual education circles as the "bilingual education advisory committee," or BEAC, although that was never its formal name.

The BEAC reviewed bilingual education legislation in the state, studied the Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) annual bilingual education reports, became informed about various issues that the staff of MDE's bilingual education office were dealing with, and got familiar with some of the research on bilingual education that had been done in the last ten years. At the final meeting of the BEAC on May 16, 1987, it approved the following recommendations to be considered by the State Board of Education: a) Replace the three-year limit on State incentive dollars for Bilingual Education from Public Act 294 of the School Code of 1974 with "a limit of up to seven years," b) That measures of cognitive academic language proficiency become the criteria for Section 41 funding, and c) Increase the funding for bilingual programs up to \$8,000,000 in order to assure continuity of effort and adequate funding for local school districts providing bilingual education services.

The BEAC's recommendations and the rationale for them have been presented to the State Board of Education (SBE) and the SBE has requested the office of bilingual education to collect more data to support the recommendations. When such data is collected and ready for presentation to the SBE then the SBE will decide whether or not to formally recommend such changes in the legislation to the governor and/or the legislature. If the BEAC's recommendations do not get recommended as legislation within the next few months, the recommendations may very well be passed over for the upcoming legislative/fiscal year.

The BEAC recommendations have far-reaching impact if made into legislation, let's consider their importance. If the three-year limit for funding for students identified as limited English proficient (LEP) is changed so that such students can get funded for "up to seven years," this would allow for greater educational opportunity for LEP students to gain the skills necessary to succeed in an all-English instructional setting. Most LEP students are just beginning to acquire sufficient academic language proficiency within three years. Research has shown that a longer length of time in bilingual programs, up to seven years, is needed for LEP students to attain the academic language proficiency to survive in an all-English instructional setting. Elimination of the three-year limit in

Public Act 294 of the School Code of 1974 would therefore be an improvement by providing the time needed by LEP students to develop the necessary skills to succeed in school.

The second recommendation is that measures of cognitive academic language proficiency become the criteria for Section 41 funding. The current criteria for eligibility for funding in bilingual programs is that a student score at or below the fortieth percentile on standardized English tests. Such tests measure for the most part only oral language proficiency. The research on bilingual education shows that students with oral language proficiency achieve only basic interpersonal communications skills in English, rather than the full range of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) necessary for academic success. (See "CALP for Hispanics," *El Renacimiento*, May 25/June, 1987). It makes sense therefore that bilingual programs use CALP, rather than oral English proficiency, as entry/exit criteria for bilingual programs.

Some persons are of the opinion that testing of all eligible LEP students in all subjects to determine cognitive academic language proficiency, i.e., grade level performance, would prove a real administrative burden. What such individuals don't realize is that this approach asks nothing for LEP students that is not asked of English proficient students—that they demonstrate grade level performance in the subject matter being taught. This is not any more of an administrative burden than that which exists for all students. All that this BEAC recommendation requires is that LEP students not be taken out of bilingual programs within a seven year period without first determining that an LEP student can succeed in an all-English instructional setting for a particular subject matter—teachers do that already for other students, why not for LEP students?

The third BEAC recommendation is to increase the funding for bilingual programs up to \$8,000,000 in order to assure continuity of effort and adequate funding for local school districts providing bilingual education services. In view of fact that only about half of that dollar amount is currently being spent annually for bilingual education in this state, and in view of the fact that only about half of the LEP students are currently being served through bilingual education programs, \$8,000,000 is not an unreasonable amount to request even if the other recommendations are not made into law. If the other BEAC recommendations are made into law, however, the \$8 million would be even more crucial because of the longer period of time, up to seven years, that LEP students could potentially be in bilingual programs. More students for more time calls for more money.

The Michigan Association for Bilingual Education has endorsed the BEAC recommendations, it remains now for the State Board of Education to do so.