

Title III: English Language Acquisition

An End to Bilingual Education, New Money to Support It? Or Both?

The former federal “Bilingual Education Act” (Title VII) has been replaced by Title III, called “Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students” in the No Child Left Behind Act. If fully funded by Congress, Title III significantly increases resources for districts with large numbers of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.¹

No Child Left Behind is singularly focused on the use of unreliable high-stakes standardized tests to judge student, and school performance. Title III requires English Language Learners to take these tests *in English* within three years of entering the public school system. This provision will create pressure on schools to reduce the hours of native language instruction for students with limited English skills, and to focus more heavily on English acquisition. The law, however, does not require schools to move towards English immersion programs. Strong community organizing can insist on high-quality bilingual programs staffed by strong, competent teachers and supported with resources to help students achieve competence in both English and their native language.



MAJOR PROVISIONS OF THE LAW

Title III, *The English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement and Academic Achievement Act*, is supposed to help Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students attain English language proficiency by providing states, local school districts and schools with funding to develop, improve and expand English language educational instruction programs. The law largely block-grants money to the states for this purpose, so local monitoring of state programs will be important. States are required to submit plans to the federal Department of Education outlining their proposal for using Title III funds. These plans must include information about parent involvement and the type of programming that will be used. The federal law is specific in allowing states/districts to use native language instruction programming. The law also specifies that Title III funds must be used to *supplement*,

not supplant local or state funds already being used for LEP student programming.

Local school districts must also file a plan – with the state department of education – specifying how Title III funds will be used.

All districts receiving grants must develop programming that is aligned with state academic standards to improve the overall level of instruction given to Limited English Proficient students.

They are also required to provide services including:

- Assistance in acquiring new curricula and classroom resources;
- Completion of annual assessments of children receiving services;
- Parental outreach in the form of cultural and linguistically sensitive programming, family literacy services and other supports to parents of LEP students;
- Training for school personnel and community members; and
- Providing high quality professional development for teachers, principals, administrators and other school or community-based personnel that will support and improve the level of instruction provided to English language learners.

Specific Grants May Help Support Quality Programs

Under Title III, Part A, Subpart 3, Section 3131, institutions of higher education working with State Education Agencies and local districts may apply for 5-year competitive grants to provide professional development activities to *all* school personnel working with Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. These activities may include teacher licensure and certification courses, skill enhancement and training for paraprofessionals, and the provision of financial assistance/aid for tuition fees and books for participating school personnel.

¹ Concerned about funding for this section of No Child Left Behind, Congress established two parts to Title III. Part A would distribute federal funds through a formula grant program, if the Title is funded at \$650 million or more. Part B is a competitive grant program that would take effect if Part A is not funded in the amount listed above. At the time of this writing, it appears that Congress will provide the \$650 million required to make this a formula grant program. — The Editors

NO CHILD Left Behind continued

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New Requirements

Parent Notification & Participation

Schools *must* notify parents, 30 days or 1 month into the school year, if their child has been placed or identified for placement into a language instruction program for Limited English Proficient students. Parents can decline to enroll their children in assigned programs, and have the option to choose a different program, if others are available.

Parents must also be notified if their child is in a program identified as failing to meet the annual measurable objectives outlined in Title III and also Title I.

Schools must implement language instruction programs that involve parents in their child's education and work with parents to develop effective outreach programs.

English Fluency of Teachers

Districts receiving Title III funds must certify (the process for this certification is not specified) that all teachers in any language instruction program for LEP students are fluent in English, and any other language used for instruction, including having oral and written communication skills.

This provision is controversial, as it potentially impacts districts' ability to recruit or employ teachers from other countries, as many school districts are now doing.

???? QUESTIONS TO ASK LOCALLY

- Are the teachers of all core academic subjects and paraprofessionals employed by local schools certified or in the process of becoming certified to work with Limited English Proficient students?
- Has the school or local school district made concrete attempts at parent outreach?
- Have they scheduled parent meetings to gain input into developing an effective outreach program?
- Have all forms of communication to parents of Limited English Proficient students been made accessible and in a format non-English speakers could understand?



ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES

If fully funded, Title III should send federal program dollars for bilingual education to many school districts that have not previously qualified for funding. Making sure that the money is used to provide high quality services to LEP kids, and to strengthen the teaching force working with them is key.

- Are parents of non-English speaking students being fully involved in decisions about their children's education?
- Does the school district / school have a coherent plan for the education of LEP students, and is that plan being implemented aggressively?
- If significant numbers of teachers and paraprofessionals working with LEP students are not fully certified, or "highly qualified," what is the district's plan for moving them towards full certification? Demand that the District apply for a federal grant to work with a local university to recruit and train bilingual teachers.



RESOURCES

Rethinking Schools Online: Special Collection on Bilingual Education: http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bilingual/resources.shtml

National Association of Bilingual Educators, NABE News, Volume 26, Issue #3 (January/February 2003) is a focused issue on the No Child Left Behind Act. It is available from NABE at 1030 15th Street, NW, Suite 470, Washington, DC 20005. 202-898-1829. NABE's website is also a good source of information, www.nabe.org

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition – formerly the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education is also a good resource. Its website is: www.ncela.gwu.edu/

The full text of the **No Child Left Behind Act** is available at: <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/>

In addition, the Department of Education has developed a **Desktop Reference** to NCLB that can be useful. The Reference is available in PDF format at: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/reference.html>