STUDY OF BILINGUAL/ESL TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Texas A&M University

Bilingual/ESL Teacher Retention and Recruitment Coalition

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FINAL REPORT  EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

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Introduction

By the turn of the century it had been estimated that up to 40% of the children in the nation’s classrooms would be non-White, with Hispanics as the majority. Indeed, according to the latest U.S. Census report, Hispanics have surged past African Americans and now constitute the largest minority group in the United States. In Texas schools, Hispanics constitute 48% of the student demographics, while there are only 17% Hispanic teachers. With the Hispanics being the largest ethnic majority, there comes an increased awareness of the numbers of English language learner (ELL) students in schools and the need for certified teachers to teach these students. In Texas, the ELL population is at 13%, while there is only an 8% teacher population serving bilingual/ESL education. Not only is there a discrepancy in teacher/student populations, there is also a shortage of bilingual/ESL teachers. In Texas, a study conducted by Texas A&M University determined that the greatest teacher shortage in 2001-2002 occurred in the elementary bilingual/ESL area where figures soared to 2,906; the study also determined that school districts were unable to fill 40% of open secondary bilingual/ESL positions.

Our research addressed three of the top priorities set forth by the Texas A&M Regents’ Initiative:
1. An analysis and evaluation of efforts by districts to recruit teachers to serve bilingual/ESL populations
2. The ways in which districts can “grow their own” certified teachers for bilingual/ESL education
3. The identification and evaluation of practices to recruit college students in the high need discipline of bilingual/ESL education.

The project objectives were as follows:
1. To determine efforts by districts to recruit and retain teachers who serve bilingual/ESL populations
2. To determine ways in which districts participate in “growing their own” certified teachers
3. To identify practices to recruit and retain college students in the high need discipline of bilingual/ESL education.
4. To develop an online clearinghouse of practices currently in use by districts and universities to recruit college students in the high need discipline area of bilingual/ESL education

Specifically the research was guided by the following three major research questions:

1. What main strategies/policies/activities are school districts in Texas implementing to the critical shortage of bilingual/ESL teachers?
2. What strategies/policies/activities to districts in Texas apply to retain bilingual/ESL teachers?
3. Which districts in Texas attract the most (least) bilingual/ESL teachers, and what are the key factors for doing so?

Research Design

Our study was a statewide survey that collected data from superintendents on the key elements of bilingual/ESL teacher recruitment and retention.

Data Collection Procedures

The Survey. The Texas A&M University Bilingual /ESL Teacher Retention and Recruitment Coalition developed a survey based on literature and questionnaires found in the review of literature that related to teacher retention and recruitment. The survey was piloted with 15 regional administrators to determine its face validity. The internal consistency was established using Cronbach’s alpha (α=.89). Once the survey was finalized, it consisted of 41 items composed of both open-ended and forced choice questions and was delivered through the Internet to all superintendents in Texas that had an e-mail address (N=926). This e-mail list of superintendents was supplied by the Texas Association of School Administrators. Participation was voluntary and confidential. The survey was launched in October 2002 and was closed in November 2002. Participants logged on to the designated website and completed the survey.

Participants. Total responses numbered 635 (68% return rate); however, a total of 467 respondents returned the information with no missing demographic data. Those are the data that were used in the calculations of the reported demographic data. The total population from which the sample was drawn represented 926 Texas Superintendents with email addresses. Total respondents were 635 (68% return rate). Respondents without missing demographic data totaled 467 Texas Superintendents (50% of the e-mail superintendent population).
Selected Major Findings

Our study found that the majority of bilingual/ESL teaching vacancies are occurring in suburban and urban districts where the majority of the ELL student population are situated and in bilingual programs, not ESL programs. The majority of the superintendent respondents believed that recruitment of bilingual/ESL teachers was difficult, yet they placed a high priority on recruitment. In summary, there are several variables that superintendents related to recruitment and retention of bilingual/ESL teachers in Texas, and, based on those variables, specific strategies that superintendents may consider as they successfully attempt to recruit and retain bilingual/ESL teachers can be gleaned:

- Make recruitment a priority
- Provide stipends
- Provide health insurance
- Provide professional development opportunities via funds
- Actively recruit via newspapers, websites, career fairs and colleges
- Engage Educational Service Centers in assisting with recruitment, certification, and staff development
- Recruit at home and within the state
- Encourage paraprofessionals to obtain their degrees and provide them support to do so
- Encourage teaching staff to obtain a bilingual or ESL certificate and assist financially
- Provide a formal mentoring/induction program
- Pay attention to numbers of ELL students in the district and the trend to determine needs.

Texas superintendents, no matter what their specific ethnicity, gender, or years of service, are concerned statewide with the recruitment and retention of bilingual and ESL teachers. They recognize the shortage, and the majority place a priority on recruitment of such teachers. One superintendent stated, “Bilingual/ESL teachers are in great demand and merit much more recognition than school districts give them today. These teachers are faced with many obstacles in the classroom including translating and developing their own teaching materials. If salaries matched the work demand, perhaps we could keep them and attract others to the field.”

Recommendations for Policy Makers

We recommend that superintendents implement “grow your own” programs, utilize the Texas Educational Aide Exemption College Grant Program, and work closely with university teacher preparation programs and Educational Service Centers to create the best routes to teacher certification. We also recommend that school boards provide teaching stipends to the critical shortage teaching area of bilingual/ESL education. Considering recruitment and retention of bilingual/ESL teachers as a priority may be a key in aiding superintendents and school boards in limiting the inconsistencies that exist between ELL student populations and the certified teachers that serve them.