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Position Statement on Bilingual Education in Early Childhood/Preschool Programs

New York State Association for Bilingual Education

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Position Statement on Bilingual Education in Early Childhood/Preschool Programs

The main goal of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education (NYSABE) is to ensure equitable access to all educational opportunities for English language learners (ELLs)/bilingual students in New York State. To this end, NYSABE affirms its commitment to Bilingual Early Childhood/Preschool programs for all ELLs/bilingual learners that underscore the academic, socio-emotional, and language needs of these students by building upon the rich linguistic and cultural experiences that they bring from their homes and communities.

Rationale

A growing number of studies on instructional approaches in early childhood reveal benefits from teaching young children in their home language. Dual Language or developmental bilingual programs which utilize English and the students' home language for instruction demonstrate significant gains for English Language Learners/emergent bilinguals (Barnett et al., 2006; Collier & Thomas, 2009; Tazi, 2011). These studies suggest that bilingual instruction in the preschool years has cumulative benefits in addressing school readiness – it combines the enrichment of early experiences with the efficacy of accessing background knowledge and existing strengths in home language development. For children who speak little or no English as they begin school, bilingual instruction activates and builds upon what they know in the home language, and continues to positively impact children's cognitive progress as they acquire new academic skills across languages. Examples include:

- Vocabulary mastery in the home language supports reading comprehension in English (Bialystok, 2007).
- Storybook reading and storytelling in a child's home language promotes English vocabulary acquisition (Roberts, 2008).

- Bilingually instructed children exit the “English Language Learner” category earlier than children who are only taught in English (Tazi, 2011).
- Sustained gains in concepts of print are evident when children are exposed to shared reading and writing activities in the primary language (Coppola, 2005).
- Bilingually instructed children evidence greater rates of phonemic awareness by the end of Kindergarten (Tazi, 2011).

Recommendations

NYSABE proposes the following recommendations that align current research on early childhood education and bilingual education:

- Ensure equitable access for all ELLs/bilingual learners to Universal Pre-K in schools and early care settings;
- Adopt a vision that underscores the beliefs that (1) the path towards academic achievement begins in the preschool years, and that (2) central to this vision, ELLs/ bilingual learners, must be educated bilingually, through their home language and English;
- Secure adequate funding to initiate and sustain preschool bilingual programs;
- Develop high quality comprehensive bilingual preschool education programs that include research-based bilingual instruction, bilingual support services, and parent/family engagement in order to ensure academic success as well as optimum socio-emotional development;
- Ensure that bilingual preschool programs implement research-based bilingual instructional strategies that link language development to literacy and strengthen the student’s home language and English, thereby building a foundation for biliteracy;
- Attain, develop, and use age-appropriate, culturally relevant instructional materials in multiple languages;
- Attain, develop, and use age-appropriate, culturally relevant formative assessment tools in multiple languages to screen and identify the educational needs of bilingual preschool learners;
- Provide a supplement to offset the cost for preschool teachers to earn a bilingual extension;
- Ensure that teachers are bilingual and biliterate and that they have the teaching credentials and preparation that will qualify them to work with young bilingual learners;

- Implement a comprehensive, long term, research-based professional development plan for educators, administrators, families, and support personnel involved in the education of early childhood/preschool bilingual learners;
- Create an early education data collection system that provides disaggregated data on bilingual learners and the type of programming they are receiving. Use this data to build and improve the instruction and support services in bilingual early childhood/preschool programs;
- Provide disaggregated data on bilingual learners with disabilities, to ensure that their special needs are met within bilingual programs at an early age;
- Develop and maintain an effective accountability system to ensure that funds generated by preschool ELLs/bilingual learners are allocated to bilingual preschool classrooms according to specified guidelines.

On behalf of the students, families, educators, members of community-based and private entities whom NYSABE represents, we thank all individuals and organizations that will support this Position Statement and will ensure the access of all preschool ELLs/bilingual learners to bilingual Universal Pre-K programs.

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