

CHAPTER FIVE

Bilingual Education Policies in Chicago Public Schools

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Introduction

Educational institutions in Chicago enjoy a history of embracing a mosaic of cultures, languages, and heritages. The city has long been a hub of migration and global connectivity, reflected in its language pool. Chicago students' home lives feature more than 180 distinct languages, underscoring a growing educational need as the population became less homogenous.¹ Consequently, the institutions of Chicago face a multifaceted quandary: how to educate such a diverse population, a substantial contingent of whom are English language learners? The proposed solution to the quandary has been the introduction of “bilingual education” in schools.

“Bilingual education” in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is defined as a “program of instruction designed to promote meaningful access to core content through Transitional Bilingual Education, Transitional Programs of Instruction, or Dual Language Education. English Learners are provided with tools, resources, and program structures to ensure that students are fully engaged in rigorous instruction preparing them for college, career, and life.”² The CPS definition of “English Learner” (EL) is a student “whose home language background is a language other than English and whose proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may be insufficient” as determined by assessments or general performance.³ The availability of bilingual education services is required for every student in CPS, from kindergarten through the end of high school.⁴

This chapter will scrutinize the policies linked to bilingual education at Chicago Public Schools, including their historical evolution, contemporary implementation and efficacy, and their implications for the city's educational landscape. More specifically, I investigate the historical foundation of the CPS bilingual education programs, their current implementation, and the unforeseen/unaccounted for problems. The analysis confronts the persistent difficulties and disparities within the system, along with the proposed “gold-standard” of CPS bilingual education programs: dual-language schooling.⁵ The goal is to understand the problems in hopes of remedying and improving bilingual education in Chicago – with the ultimate aim of ensuring that English Learner students are given the best

chance to succeed in an English-speaking Chicago while preserving their own cultural heritage.

Historical Policies and Motivations Shaping CPS Bilingual Education

Chicago has continued to grow more diverse and over time, the policies related to bilingual education have adjusted to meet the unique requirements of students representing varied linguistic backgrounds. The first notable federal measure is the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, which played a crucial role in providing financial support for bilingual programs, describing such programs as “new and imaginative elementary and secondary school programs” “designed to meet the special educational needs of children of limited English-speaking ability.”⁶ The next notable federal development was the adoption of the Lau Remedies in 1975, emphasizing the *equitable access* to education for students with limited English proficiency.⁷ Following an investigation concluding that most schools were failing to meet the needs of their English-learner students, the remedies provided specific policy guidelines for the education of this population. In the wake of the landmark 1974 Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* (which found language barriers to educational access to conflict with civil rights), these remedies translated legal obligations into pedagogical directives, specifying the appropriate methods to distinguish whether a student is an English-learner, and creating standards for the types of programs that must be provided for them.⁸

In 1968, Lafayette Elementary School was the first CPS facility to open a bilingual program. By 1973, “more than 12,000 preschool through high-school children were enrolled in 64 bilingual programs serving Spanish, Arabic, Cantonese, Greek, and Italian-speaking students” in the city.⁹ By 1980 there were 183 schools providing bilingual programs, serving 28,337 students in 19 different languages.¹⁰ The top five language groups included Spanish, Polish, Korean, Vietnamese, and Assyrian.

A major milestone in the evolution of bilingual education policies within CPS is the 1990 establishment of the Office of Language and Cultural Education (OLCE), the committee that continues to oversee Chicago Public Schools’ bilingual education programs today.¹¹ This move centralized Chicago bilingual programs, with the goal of providing equitable educational opportunities for all limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. At the OLCE’s inception, 44,955 students in Chicago were identified as needing bilingual education; in autumn 2023, this population now numbers 70,400, or 22% of all students.^{12 13}

The 2016 Bilingual Education Policy in Chicago Public Schools

The CPS Bilingual Education Policy attempts to “ensure that students in Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 whose home language is not English have equity in education and language acquisition opportunities” and “recognizes bilingualism as a desirable goal and a reflection of cultural heritage.”¹⁴ Chicago Public School policy provides three options for the bilingual program, at least one of which each CPS school is required (by Illinois State law) to implement.¹⁵

CPS’s three bilingual program models are: Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE), Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI), and Dual Language Education (DLE).¹⁶ Every traditional CPS school is required to have either a TBE or a TPI program (Article 14C of the Illinois School Code).¹⁷ The choice of program hinges on the number of ELs in a given school/institution, with TBE accommodating schools with 20 or more ELs sharing the same language classification, and TPI servicing schools where the number of ELs in a single language classification falls below 20.¹² TBE requires that English Learner students be taught core subject areas (Language Arts, Social Science, Science, and Math) in their native language. Alternatively, TPI only requires that core subject areas be modified for the English-learner’s English proficiency level: no native language instruction is required. Aside from this key distinction, TPI and TBE are similar: they both require English as a Second Language (ESL) guidance along with introduction to US history and culture classes.

Dual-Language Education (DLE) is an option, not a requirement, for CPS schools: currently there are three dual-language high schools and 36 DLE elementary schools.¹⁸ The DLE program endeavors to cultivate bilingualism and biliteracy among all students (English learners and English-proficient students) by imparting instruction in both English and another language. As of autumn 2023, all 39 dual-language schools focus on the goal of biliteracy in English and Spanish.

The rollout of TPI and TBE programs is governed by procedural protocols. For instance, before a new student (of any grade) enrolls, the student is mandated to complete a Home Language Survey. If the results of this survey indicate that the student speaks or is exposed to a language other than English at home, the student must be assessed on his/her proficiency in the English language. Furthermore, the eligibility and placement of transfer students is based upon their previous evaluation results (if they exist) or the application of state-prescribed screening tools. Discretion is also extended to parents and guardians, permitting them to request their child's inclusion in bilingual education services should the initial assessment not categorize the child as an English Learner.¹⁹

The policy also details how to monitor student progress and implement transitions out of the program. ELs take annual assessments designed to gauge their progress in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. ELs are deemed eligible to transition out of bilingual education programs once they attain the prescribed level of proficiency in the English language. Transition does not end the scrutiny of the language capabilities of transitioned students. If academic indicators point to a requirement for continued assistance, students can be reintegrated into bilingual education services.²⁰

Supervising the bilingual education policy involves a cooperation between the CPS Office of Language and Cultural Education (OLCE) and the Department of Internal Audit and Compliance. Together, these systems monitor the operation of CPS language policy, and its alignment with federal and state regulations. OLCE provides technical guidance and assistance to educational institutions concerning policy, facilitating the execution of services related to bilingual education. Additionally, it aims to extend advice to schools regarding the acquisition of support services from various CPS divisions, to enhance the resources available for ELs. Periodic assessments are carried out to evaluate policy implementation, encompassing the tracking of individual petitions for non-enrollment and disengagement from bilingual education services by parents and guardians. This cooperative monitoring framework aims to secure compliance with the policy and aid in pinpointing areas where supplementary assistance or adjustments may be needed.²¹

The funding for the CPS Bilingual Education Policy comes from a composite of federal, state, and local resources. On a federal scale, Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) extends monetary backing to institutions catering to English learners, aiding the execution of bilingual education initiatives.²² Furthermore, CPS secures state funding tailored to enhance their endeavors in bilingual education.²³ These monetary provisions play a pivotal part in delivering essential resources, competent personnel, and educational materials aimed at meeting the diverse linguistic requisites of students. Notwithstanding the availability of these fiscal channels, the CPS bilingual policy frequently encounters funding shortcomings, some traceable to inequities in the distribution of resources. The funding that schools are supposed to receive doesn't reliably reach schools situated in economically disadvantaged regions – while their more prosperous counterparts are able to access resources.²⁴ Furthermore, the presence of educators who are appropriately qualified according to the policy is not guaranteed, resulting in increased class sizes and a reduction in the quality of the programs in some areas.²⁵ These imbalances are crucial to address to guarantee that all ESL students in Chicago can access an equitable educational

experience, aligning the commitment to bilingual education with commensurate financial support.

The bilingual education policy embedded in Chicago Public Schools encapsulates a multiplicity of program models calibrated to address the diverse linguistic needs of students. While the aims of CPS language policy are laudable, tackling inequalities in accessibility and quality emerges as a prerequisite for creating an equitable educational environment for all students across the city. The worthy aims of CPS language policy might not all be achieved in practice.

The Challenges for Bilingual Education in CPS: Theory Versus Practice

The previous section outlined the design of CPS's bilingual education policy. The implementation of the policy, however, sometimes fall short of achieving its intended aims. Here, focusing on the transitional TBE and TPI programs, I examine five continuing challenges to CPS in successfully implementing its bilingual policies.

Outcomes for students: bilingual students falling behind

Transitional bilingual programs often have questionable effectiveness — particularly related to their capacity to support students in transitioning from their native language to English in preparation for full-time English instruction. That is not to say that bilingual education is a futile endeavor; when programs run as intended, they can have measurable positive effects on test scores, for instance. In December 2019, the UChicago Consortium on School Research determined that “more than one-half of students who began as ELs passed the ACCESS proficiency exam and became former ELs by third grade, and three-fourths passed the exam by the end of fifth grade.”²⁶

High performance on the ACCESS test, however, may or may not translate into student success more generally. Consider the case of Christopher, an eighth grader at John Spry Elementary, as related in a 2020 WBEZ interview. Christopher has not received language support in his native language since passing English proficiency tests in the fourth grade. Despite his exam-certified English-proficiency, some years later, the then 14-year-old Christopher still struggled to understand his English-speaking teachers. Christopher's mother highlighted the frustration experienced throughout their journey; she noted that after he passed the test in the fourth grade, “nobody will speak to him in Spanish anymore.”²⁷

Christopher's story mirrors more general concerns about the system's ability to cater adequately to individual student needs, potentially perpetuating an educational deficit. The policy focus on overall program structure and clear criteria for entrance/exit creates gray

zones where students like Christopher don't receive the support they need. In 2012, Julia Gwynne, from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, found that "long-term bilingual students are more likely to fall behind their peers in high school," further stating that such students "have the lowest course grades, highest number of course failures, the highest number of absences, and the lowest on-track rates."²⁸ These adverse results can be attributed to a whole host of factors, including inadequate teacher preparation and unsuitable transition timelines for students.

One curious, pertinent fact comes from a 2019 report by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research: the Consortium found that in term of academic growth, EL's and non-EL's perform remarkably similarly before the 9th grade.²⁹ Yet, about one-fifth of students beginning as EL's never reach the point of transitioning out of the EL classroom.³⁰ When they do manage to transfer out (as in Christopher's case), support and tracking for students ends. That is, once students are deemed "English-proficient," they are considered marks of success and not evaluated again.³¹ The goal of bilingual education is to transition students into success in standard class settings; thus, gauging the effectiveness of the programs requires that former-EL's be monitored after they exit from bilingual classes.

The demographic needs of Chicago's EL population

The circumstances of the English-language learning students – particularly regarding the stability of their living situations – complicates the delivery of the intended high-quality bilingual education. CPS accommodates students from a wide variety of backgrounds, including many recent immigrants who are still unsettled in Chicago. These young newcomers often subsist in very difficult circumstances, sometimes lacking essentials such as clothing, healthcare, and housing. In this context, overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of qualified bilingual instructors, and restricted access to essential socio-emotional support services compound the educational difficulties faced by these students.

At this moment (autumn 2023), Chicago is in the midst of a significant influx of migrants who recently entered the US by crossing the Mexico-Texas border: the number of such migrants exceeds 18,500 since 2022.³² Many of the children among these migrants live in crowded apartment buildings, with ill-fitting clothing and inadequate medical care.³³

As the number of recent migrants in Chicago continues to grow, the pressing need to address their educational requirements becomes increasingly apparent. Baltazar Enriquez, the president of the Little Village Community Council, reflects on his personal experiences, highlighting the challenge of helping these newcomers establish a sense of home – a challenge made poignant by a simple question from a toddler he encountered when

distributing food to migrants at a downtown train station: “Mommy, are we home?”³⁴ Enriquez explains that this problem of housing instability must be addressed if CPS is to be successful in its transitional bilingual programs. Gabriel Paez, a CPS bilingual coordinator, has emphasized that students in CPS also face impediments when seeking essential medical and psychological support. Educators also frequently point other student challenges, with one stating that “the children are in clothes that are too small and shoes that are too big,” and underscore the necessity for resources beyond the purview of conventional academics.³⁵ Students are legally entitled to transportation services (even if they move) for the school year they enroll in – but lengthy and confusing commute times and instability threaten the feasibility of regular school attendance.³⁶

English learners (ELs) grapple with the insufficiency of the current support mechanisms. Substantial efforts have been taken to fortify student well-being, including a budgetary infusion for 630 new social workers and a \$13 million increase in funding for social workers, nurses, and case managers. Nevertheless, needs still outstrip resources, especially for ELs.³⁷ Only one social worker in the whole CPS district is equipped with bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) credentials. Although CPS education policy does not directly comment on the need for such support staff, the lack of consideration for such needs can result in EL students never even enrolling in school: an August 2023 incident at CPS’s Emmet Till Math and Science Academy involved the turning away of eight students due to lack of bilingual support staff.³⁸ Furthermore, while the school district has made considerable strides in broadening the responsibilities of counselors and case managers, only 5% of over 800 counselors and 28% of about 250 case managers boast bilingual or ESL endorsements.³⁹ This scarcity of bilingual support staff, even considering augmented funding, brings into question the depth of the district's commitment to tending to the distinct needs of English learners. Linguistic and cultural assistance needs to be augmented in CPS, if ELs are to avoid marginalization.

Teacher deficits and instructor preparation

CPS possesses inadequate numbers of certified bilingual instructors. An analysis conducted by Chalkbeat Chicago shows a steady decline in qualified professionals in recent years: a decline of 23% in certified bilingual instructors within CPS from 2015 to 2023.⁴⁰ This decrease in qualified educators is particularly detrimental when considering the escalating numbers of students requiring language assistance. There are currently (autumn 2023) over 77,000 students categorized as English learners in the district, representing a 5400-student increase over the 2022-23 school year.⁴¹ Gabriel Paez, who serves as a bilingual

coordinator at an elementary school in Humboldt Park and holds the position of chair for the Chicago Teachers Union Bilingual Education Committee, emphasizes the “need to accord [this situation] the urgency it merits.”⁴² This sentiment resonates with the apprehensions voiced by educators, who regularly emphasize the necessity for more certified bilingual instructors within CPS. Those bilingual instructors who are on-staff frequently cite a lack of funds and resources as a significant hindrance to successfully undertaking their jobs.⁴³

This shortfall of bilingual educators is well-documented. The 2017 Chicago Reporter report found that at least 24 of the 342 schools they audited “that were required to have bilingual teachers had none.”⁴⁴ They also noted that across the city, “at least 100 bilingual and ESL teaching positions remain open at the end of each school year.”⁴⁵ Of the bilingual teachers who do exist, 1/3 of them are substitutes.⁴⁶

In Illinois, there has been a significant disparity in the passing rates of the basic skills test required for bilingual teaching licensure: the test includes a mathematics portion which would not appear to be relevant for many teachers. Latino teaching candidates are among those who often struggle to pass the test. (Many of these candidates themselves learned English as a second language, putting them at a disadvantage on standardized exams.) The shortage of bilingual teachers is further exacerbated by the additional coursework and costs that non-credentialed teachers have to undertake, even though the school district subsidizes a portion of the expenses.

Many educators find the prospect of working as bilingual teachers unattractive due to the increased workload and responsibilities without corresponding financial incentives or adequate support. In 2017, the bilingual education coordinator at Benito Juárez Community Academy in Pilsen acknowledged that schools are constrained by their hiring options, which has resulted in limited offerings for their bilingual programs. (Benito Juárez Community Academy is a school that was flagged by CPS for having too few bilingual educators). In response to this challenge, 15 Juárez teachers volunteered to undertake additional coursework to obtain the necessary credentials.⁴⁷ This situation highlights a problem that continues into 2023; without the necessary support for teachers, creating the workforce necessary to address the needs of Chicago’s many English Learners is a difficult task.

Budgetary issues

For over a decade, state lawmakers have consistently underfunded bilingual education. Funding levels have remained relatively stagnant in recent years, while the increasing population of English learners has resulted in a diminishing allocation per student. In 2017

the state's reimbursement to schools amounted to less than 60 cents for every dollar spent on bilingual education.⁴⁸ This lack of funds within Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) bilingual education system raises thorny questions. Teachers in CPS's bilingual programs consistently request additional funding "to hire more teachers and provide current teachers with support to obtain a certificate in bilingual education," in the face of ongoing claims that CPS desperately lacks qualified professionals.⁴⁹ Yet around six percent of bilingual education positions remain unfilled, even though they are funded within the budget (due to lack of proper training, and the low salaries of such positions, etc.).⁵⁰ Furthermore, Governor J.B. Pritzker recently announced a \$3 million increase in funding for the hiring of qualified educators in bilingual education programs, but the pre-existing unfilled slots raises the question of whether this funding is needed and will be effectively utilized.⁵¹

Within CPS, there is a steady plea for increased financial backing from state and federal entities. CPS is confronted with the complex task of tending to a multifaceted student demographic, characterized by a tapestry of distinctive backgrounds, scholastic aptitudes, and language proficiencies. Effectively addressing this varied and changing population calls for an adaptable approach to resource allocation.⁵² That is, any funds that CPS receives for its English-learner population need to come with flexibility in their utilization, a solution that has proved successful in a dual-language school case study.⁵³ Nonetheless, the existing infrastructure and protocols are not set up for the sort of discretion that might allow schools to effectively utilize their allocated budget. This landscape of enduring and increasing financial needs coupled with the desirability of a versatile resource allocation system poses a formidable challenge to CPS in its endeavor to educate its diverse student body.

CPS budget allocation practices don't assure that bilingual education programs benefit from systemic budget increases. While CPS has announced an increase of \$290 million in their budget for schools in 2023, about 40% of those schools will still see budget cuts, "in a few cases of \$800,000 or more."⁵⁴ CPS indicated that the majority of the \$290 million increase "will not go directly into school budgets but rather into central pots campuses can draw from, such as a \$45 million bucket for educator professional development."⁵⁵ Notice that much of what teachers believe to be the most pressing needs – improved housing assistance, medical care, and day-to-day quality of life expenses (like clothes and shoes) – are not considered. Even if bilingual education-specific funding increases, if it is tied specifically to hiring new teachers and not allocated toward resolving the problems that teachers see with their students – the funding is not going to be as effective in addressing issues compared to increased discretionary power on the school's behalf.

Accountability and evaluation structures

CPS faces mounting criticism surrounding its bilingual program evaluation system, used by schools to rate the quality of their bilingual programs including teachers, curriculum, and services provided.⁵⁶ Many educators have found this system ineffective in addressing the fundamental challenges within bilingual education – and to be frustrating as well.⁵⁷ While the introduction of these evaluations (circa 2018) aimed to monitor and strengthen schools, they have faced backlash for emphasizing bureaucratic processes that detract from in-class support. Educators argue that the systemic issues that hinder education, including insufficient funding and a shortage of qualified instructors, are beyond their control. Eva Corona, a bilingual teacher on the Northwest Side, highlights this frustration and urgency, stating, "[t]here is no way you can be in compliance if you are not being given the funds to make sure the right teachers are being hired."⁵⁸

What happens if a school's bilingual programs are evaluated, and shortcomings are identified? There are no immediate consequences for schools failing to address the problems identified in bilingual evaluations. There seems to be little prod for identified shortcomings to be addressed, but furthermore, some schools can't even get evaluated: in 2017, the state conducted fewer than half of the required compliance visits to districts.⁵⁹

State-level supervision remains inadequate. In 2017, only four individuals were responsible for overseeing numerous school districts and managing approximately \$80 million in state and federal funding allocated for English learners.⁶⁰ This situation prompted at least three advocacy groups to bring their apprehensions to the attention of state board officials. Sonia Soltero, an expert in bilingual education and an associate professor at DePaul University, voiced concerns that reduced compliance monitoring conveys a message that English learners are not a priority: "[Districts] are well aware that they can engage in various practices without accountability because there is no one to oversee them. Unfortunately, this is problematic, as there was a period when people were more responsive and took [the state] more seriously in recent years. Now, it feels like we're regressing to a time 30 years ago when nobody cared."⁶¹ Even schools found to be noncompliant are given no penalty and face no sanctions or loss of state funding.⁶² In a report following the 342 schools audited in the 2015-2016 school year, nearly 71 percent, or 242, had bilingual programs that were in serious violation of state law.⁶³

Dual-Language as the Gold-Standard: A Possible Solution?

The knowledge that bilingual education and Chicago's transitional programs for English Learners fall short of expectations is widespread and longstanding. While increased

funding and exhortations of importance have been the general go-to solutions aimed at these deficiencies, there is another approach that Chicago Public Schools has supported: Dual-Language Education (DLE) programs. As stated in the 2016 Bilingual Education Policy that CPS implements, there are three recognized programs for English-language learners that schools can put in place. This chapter so far has focused on the two transitional programs, Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) and Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI); these programs are currently the most common among district schools, with 599 out of 638 CPS schools utilizing at least one of TBE and TPI.⁶⁴ DLE might offer a better alternative, though its overall efficacy is still up-for-debate.

CPS Dual Language Programs represent specialized bilingual education initiatives offered in designated neighborhood, charter, and magnet schools. The aim of such programs is to cultivate bilingualism and biliteracy among the whole student population. The dual-language paradigm thus distinguishes itself from transitional bilingual programs (TPI and TBE), which primarily emphasize rapid transition from the native language to English proficiency for ELs, with a lesser focus on achieving long-term language maintenance.

There are two types of dual-language programs at CPS: the one-way and two-way model. The one-way model focuses primarily on serving English Learners (ELs), former ELs, and heritage language learners (those who speak the heritage language at home), while the two-way model seeks a balanced mix of ELs/heritage language learners and non-ELs in the classroom (a mixed background student population). In both program types, students receive core instruction in subjects like language arts, math, science, and social science in a second language, such as Spanish, with the overarching objective of fostering bilingualism and biliteracy in both English and Spanish. Moreover, students are encouraged to demonstrate positive cross-cultural adaptability and behaviors.⁶⁵ Currently, all CPS dual-language schools are English/Spanish schools.

Dual-language education, often heralded as the gold standard in bilingual instruction, possesses many strengths.⁶⁶ For instance, “dual language programs are the only programs that assist students to fully reach the 50th percentile in both their first and second languages in all subjects and to maintain that level or higher through the end of schooling.”⁶⁷ This dual proficiency and instruction can significantly enhance English reading proficiency, when compared to English-instruction at both the elementary and secondary levels.⁶⁸ The role of dual-language education in fostering reading achievement and its efficacy for all students is also emphasized, and many researchers have concluded that “learning to read in the home language promotes reading achievement in the second language” and that a balanced dual-language model is beneficial for English-learners and non-English learners alike.⁶⁹

Despite these advantages, the dual-language education model faces substantial challenges. A study by Nancy Dominguez-Fret (2022) highlights the foremost limitation: the issue of access. Dual-language programs within CPS exhibit glaring disparities in access, resulting in Latina/o/x communities not being served to their full potential.⁷⁰ This inequity is exacerbated by physical location, rendering the programs less accessible for the intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, the study reveals a disconcerting connection between the spatial distribution of dual-language programs and gentrification patterns within CPS neighborhoods.⁷¹ The proximity of these programs to areas experiencing gentrification trends poses a risk of displacing Latina/o/x communities. Of the 39 dual-language CPS schools, only 9 are located south of Chinatown, reflecting a continuing pattern of not investing in black and minority neighborhoods (the majority of which are located south of Chinatown).^{72,73}

Dominguez-Fret delves deeper into these concerns, unveiling the potentially concerning spatial relationship between dual-language programs and white populations, wherein either the programs congregate in areas of white population growth, or white populations aggregate in areas of program growth.⁷⁴ This proximity to whiteness, as corroborated by prior research, has an alarming influence on program distribution, potentially compromising equitable access. The issue of instructor preparation arises here as well, as “few college education programs offer classes to prepare for dual language instruction” even though these programs require that teachers can instruct in two languages in subjects like science and math.⁷⁵ A small pool of qualified teachers also means that poorer schools trying to start a dual-language program cannot do so.

Moving from the issue of access, there also exists research that challenges the claimed effectiveness of dual-language programs, raising important questions about their universal success. In contrast to previous studies that have predominantly celebrated the success of dual-language education in enhancing academic achievement and linguistic proficiency, Shajaira Lopez's investigation, contextualized within the CPS system, contests this conventional narrative. Her findings “do not support that dual language education (DLE) programs in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) yield higher reading achievement for ELs at the third grade level,” with no statistically significant improvement in reading scores.⁷⁶ In fact, her research finds that TBE programs actually “significantly outperformed the DLE programs as measured by the ACCESS for ELLs reading proficiency levels.”⁷⁷ Lopez's work coheres with Crawford (2004), who found that “any bilingual education program that uses the native language to develop the second language and utilizes a gradual transition to English—such as TBE programs—have often proven superior in promoting long-term

achievement among ELs.”⁷⁸ These conclusions cast doubt on the usual claim that dual-language programs are significantly more effective for student achievement. Thus, although dual-language is a highly touted solution, its implementation is challenging, and successes seem to occur in predominantly low-need areas. In addition, the effectiveness of the dual-language approach itself is up for debate, and implementing programs/reforming schools to offer dual-language is a costly investment with doubtful returns. Dual-language should continue to be considered, but more case studies are necessary with a variety of Chicago schools to draw a proper solution on whether DLE is indeed the holy grail of bilingual education.

Conclusion

The CPS bilingual education approach has shown to have trouble addressing the multifaceted needs of the English learner (EL) population, and schools struggle to implement the CPS policy. The issues at hand are far from simple, transcending language barriers to touch upon fundamental aspects of socio-economic disparities, educational infrastructure, and policy effectiveness. The essence of the problem extends beyond mere numbers, budgets, or compliance measures. Many of the policy shortcomings are attributed to staffing deficits and lack of program oversight at the state level, and evidenced by the unsatisfactory experiences of many EL students and teachers working in the system.

The current approach to increase funding toward bilingual education (or, more combatively, to throw money at the problem) – as Illinois Governor JB Pritzker has recently done – has not managed to solve the many issues that the system faces.⁷⁹ Increasing funding and expanding teacher preparation will continue and need to continue to be emphasized. However, alongside these obvious measures, the revising of accountability systems and testing mechanisms will be key to diagnosing the specific problems faced by each individual school. When problems are better diagnosed, treatment plans for improved funding and support can be developed.

As with public policy generally, the success of any reforms ultimately hinges on a deeper understanding – one that goes beyond budgets and ideals. Policy makers require a thorough understanding of the holistic needs of the EL student population, a familiarity with their unique challenges, and a commitment to providing them with the tools they need to build a better future. An understanding of EL and teacher experiences would go a long way in measuring the current successes and requisite reforms of programs within Chicago. Bilingual education is situated in an already complex institutional landscape, and any such reforms would need to address the nuances and realities that exist.

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