FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION DOESN'T HELP SCHOOLCHILDREN

"Bilingual education" is a federal program originally designed to "mainstream" non-English-speaking children, but which has become principally a device to perpetuate the Federal bureaucracy. Studies done by Dr. George Roche, chairman of the National Council on Educational Research, show that it actually is a disservice to the disadvantaged children it was designed to help and may be relegating them to a permanent status as second-class citizens.

It all started with the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). The stated purpose was to provide greater equality and opportunity to poor, minority students. Subsequent amendments in 1974 and 1978 removed the poverty clause and broadened the base of potential participants.

The rhetoric that accompanied the original funding was so noble. As explained by its sponsor, Senator Ralph Yarborough (D-TX), in 1967: "It is the main purpose of the bill to bring millions of school children into the mainstream of American life and make them literate in the national language of the country in which they live: namely English."

For generations, immigrants to America have successfully moved into the mainstream of U.S. commerce and industry, the arts, government, politics, and other professions. Instead of clinging to their mother tongue, they learned English.

But the bureaucrats drew up guidelines in the 1970s which specified that students must be taught in their native language about their native culture in order to produce "a student who can function, totally in both languages and cultures." Instead of a plan to teach English to non-English-speaking children, it became a bilingual-bicultural education system.

These guidelines did not permit either of the two methods with a proven track record of success: (a) the English-as-a-Second Language technique which provides English instruction for part of the day and regular instruction for the rest, or (b) the Structured Immersion technique, in which most instruction is given in English. Because

both of these methods stress the primacy of English, they were said to violate the bilingual-bicultural mandate of the guidelines.

Secretary of Education Shirley Hufstedler tried to get these guidelines codified as Federal regulations in 1980. Fortunately, the election of Ronald Reagan intervened and in 1981 Secretary of Education Terrel Bell withdrew those regulations.

Although the Department of Education no longer requires the bilingual-bicultural approach, Dr. Roche estimates that 90 percent of the 400 school districts monitored by the Office of Civil Rights still use it. These districts include the big majority of the limited-English-proficient students (mostly Hispanic).

The bilingual-bicultural approach, with ever-increasing Federal funding, has been promoted by those who have an inferiority complex about the traditional failure of Americans to learn a foreign language. Only 15 percent of American high school students study a foreign language.

But the bilingual education program funded by the Federal Government has nothing whatsoever to do with helping Americans to learn a foreign language. Its purpose, as repeatedly stated by Secretary Bell, is to prepare students to transfer into all-English classrooms as quickly as possible without falling behind in other subjects.

Some liberals, using the sanctimonious argument that no language is superior to another, argue that bilingual-bicultural education is "enrichment." They want students to continue in bilingual classes long after they learn English.

A National Academy of Sciences panel concluded that many American high school graduates are unemployable because they lack the skills needed to hold a job. Heading the list of the qualifications necessary to the performance of entry-level jobs is a good command of the English language.

This proven route of success is being denied to non-English-speaking students today by the do-gooders who have a vested interest in Federal funding. The Hispanic lobby now looks to Federal funds to maintain the Hispanic language and culture, not to expedite transition to effective use of the English language in the American economy.

The San Diego County Grand Jury recently took an objective look at bilingual education in that county. It concluded that current bilingual education promotes "a type of cultural apartheid," delays "the assimilation of young students into the American mainstream," and is a "disservice to the student."