



Multilingual Education in Connecticut

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States is one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world, and in recent years, has implemented programs providing equity to multilingual learners in the K-12 education system. The brief will cover the effectiveness of these programs in the state of Connecticut, and how these programs can be enhanced with policy implementations.

II. OVERVIEW

Multilingual education in Connecticut is an issue that has increasingly led to gaps in opportunity and exposure to rigorous academic content. Multilingual learners can remain trapped in a cycle of lower achievement due to discriminatory barriers. Despite efforts to increase equitable opportunities in education, state testing data highlights a discrepancy between multilingual learners and their peers. This paper explores the gaps in educational performance and functionality of equity programs in order to understand how multilingual learners can break barriers, foster English language acquisition, and easier access to opportunities in public life.

A. Relevance

The term ‘English learner’ became the official label utilized by the federal government in 2015 after the Every Student Succeeds Act to describe

students who are legally eligible for English-language acquisition support. The term ‘multilingual learner’ was coined as an inclusive term used by researchers and organizations highlighting the fact that students speak many languages apart from English. The Connecticut State Department of Education utilizes both terms equally.

III. HISTORY

A. Current Stances

Educational inequity for multilingual learners is a long-standing global issue, with the United States being at the forefront of it. The United States has historically been dominated by a discriminatory history that has disproportionately impacted racial and ethnic minorities in healthcare, employment opportunities, the justice system, public life, and more.

While education has been designated as a local and state responsibility in the United States, many federal landmark court cases have shaped multilingual education in Connecticut and other states.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. This led to integration and the desegregation of schools.

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provided more funding

and resources for low-income students and school districts. In 1967, ESEA was revised with Title VII, instituting a bilingual education program for Spanish speakers. Later, in 1968, Title VII was named the Bilingual Education Act, providing bilingual education to lower-income multilingual students and acknowledging conflicts these students face.

In 1974, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Lau v. Nichols* that similar education is not the same. This would mandate schools to assist multilingual students to overcome educational barriers.

Lastly, in 1982, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Plyer v. Doe* that states are unable to deny undocumented students a free public school education.

While some of the court cases listed may not have addressed multilingual education directly, oftentimes these cases increased access to education for lower-income residents and students of color, many of which are multilingual learners.

IV. POLICY PROBLEM

A. Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders are multilingual learners themselves. Disadvantages in current multilingual education programs in Connecticut prevent their career advancement, limiting their access to job opportunities and opportunities in public life.

B. Risks of Indifference

The risk of indifference to the improvement of multilingual programs rests in the lack of acknowledgment of this issue from both the public and the government. If stakeholders

continue to neglect the problem at hand, it is a given that the gaps of opportunity would increase and exposure to rigorous academic content would worsen. Multilingual learners account for approximately 11 percent of student enrollment, and over time, an inability to restructure learner programs can limit immigrant, international, and refugee communities from contributing to Connecticut's existing, rich traditions and its economy. Barriers in education are often linked to higher rates of homelessness and involvement in criminal activity, while also limiting household income and increasing preestablished social inequities. Consequently, action must be taken.

C. Nonpartisan Reasoning

Since inequities in Connecticut's K-12 multilingual language programs have a broader impact beyond the individual, it is necessary that nonpartisan intervention takes place. The benefits of such intervention include but are not limited to the following:

- 1) Economic growth: Minimizing barriers to the advancement of multilingual learners benefits the entire economy. When multilingual learners can foster language acquisition and progress in the education system, they are given more access to employment opportunities and are able to contribute more to the household income.
- 2) Diverse perspectives: Multilingual learners come with a variety of fresh, new perspectives and are equipped with the superpower of knowing multiple languages. Diverse perspectives in the workforce leads to increased problem-solving, innovation, and efficiency.

V. TRIED POLICY

The Connecticut State Board of Education affirms the importance of inclusive, effective, and research-driven multilingual education programs. As a result, the Connecticut State Board of Education has identified 17 ways it has been supporting multilingual learners. This includes the creation of Connecticut's Seal of Biliteracy, eliminating barriers for bilingual educators in the certification process, programs using proven methods in instruction, detailed standards, and more.

The Connecticut Bilingual Statute orders schools with 20 or more speakers of the same native language who are recognized as English Language Learners (ELLs) to offer bilingual education programs.

In 2023, the Connecticut General Assembly passed House Bill No. 6762, which included the Parent Bill of Rights for multilingual learners. This required the Connecticut State Board of Education to compile a list of rights for parents of multilingual students. In addition, regional boards of education were mandated to provide a copy of this to families in their main language and make the document readily available online.

While there have been many positive pieces of legislation and initiatives regarding multilingual education in Connecticut, the quality of education students receive is often determined by their location, wealth, race, and ethnicity.

VI. POLICY OPTIONS

Creation of the Connecticut Commission for Multilingual Education

Connecticut has various boards, councils, and commissions that advocate and are responsible for overseeing various issues including education,

such as educational technology, criminal justice, health equity, human rights, and more.

The Connecticut Commission for Multilingual Education would be established by the Connecticut General Assembly under the Connecticut Statutes, representing over 50,000 multilingual students in K-12 public school systems.

Restructuring Multilingual Education Funding and Increasing Transparency

According to the State and Finance Project, there are significant funding gaps that exist between schooling districts that primarily serve white students versus people of color. It would take \$639 million dollars for schooling districts with majority students of color to be given the same funding as their predominately white schooling district peers.

To combat this inequity, I suggest restructuring the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula. This formula is used by the state of Connecticut to provide aid to schooling districts across Connecticut.

The ECS formula includes various pieces, one of which is need-student weights. This increases the funding amount for municipalities for students with further educational needs, on the basis of income, concentrated income by district, and multilingual learners.

While the ECS formula includes the multilingual learner weight, driving additional funding for municipalities with multilingual learners, there is no mandate requiring these funds to be used for multilingual education. I suggest a clause stating that the calculated \$700 million dollars in funds generated from the multilingual learner weight be used for multilingual education in respective schooling districts.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have investigated Connecticut's current multilingual programs in the K-12 education system and legislation regarding this topic.

I believe these barriers can be overcome through increased transparency and funding for multilingual learners, particularly for public schooling districts in areas with underserved and underrepresented communities. I also propose the creation of the Connecticut Commission on Multilingual Education, which will advocate for and represent more than 50,000 multilingual learner students across Connecticut.

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