

## English Language Learning in Iowa

This IPRO report presents an overview of statewide bilingual education programs and examines the state of bilingual education in Iowa.

### Overview

In the past 10 years, the number of students lacking English proficiency has risen from 9,059 students to 20,774 students.<sup>1</sup> Over the same period, the number of Hispanic students enrolled in Iowa public schools has increased by 162 percent.<sup>2</sup> The current change in demographics has put many Iowa schools in the difficult position of trying to teach basics skills in a classroom in which not all students speak the same language. Between 10-16 percent of households in the Iowa counties of Buena Vista, Crawford, Davis, Johnson, Louisa, Marshall, Muscatine, and Woodbury spoke a primary language other than English at home.

These circumstances become problematic for schools that, in accordance to the Civil Rights Act which states no person in the United State can be prevented from participating and benefiting from federally funded education on the basis of race, color, or national origin,<sup>3</sup> have the legal duty of teaching students they may not have the resources or training to teach. In order to best educate the entire student body, non-English speakers and English speakers alike, states across the nation have developed divergent approaches to deal with the problem. In Iowa, no one English Language Learner program has been mandated, so each individual school district has been left to decide for itself.

### Definitions

#### *English Language Learner (ELL)*

Under Iowa law, an English Language Learner is defined as a student whose primary language is a language other than English, with English proficiency low enough to decrease the probability of educational success in an English-only classroom.<sup>4</sup> In other states, while definitions and titles of a student needing further education in English vary, the meanings are similar.

### Types of English Language Learner (ELL) Programs<sup>5</sup>

English Language Learner programs cover a large spectrum of diverse methods of teaching. This list is intended to provide a generalized overview of basic program types.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> "Education Statistics - Iowa Department of Education." *Iowa.gov – The Official Website of the State of Iowa*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=346&Itemid=2454](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=346&Itemid=2454)>.

<sup>3</sup> "English Language Learners - Iowa Department of Education." *Iowa.gov – The Official Website of the State of Iowa*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=683&Itemid=1391](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=683&Itemid=1391)>.

<sup>4</sup> "Education Statistics - Iowa Department of Education." *Iowa.gov – The Official Website of the State of Iowa*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=346&Itemid=2454](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=346&Itemid=2454)>.

<sup>5</sup> "ECS Education Policy Issue Site: Bilingual/ESL." *Education Commission of the States*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <

*English as a Second Language (ESL)/ English Immersion* The main focus in this kind of program is to teach students English. Classes may include students with different native languages all receiving intensive, individualized instruction. Language instruction is mostly in English, with little to no use of the native language. Usually, ESL is taught during a specific school period and students are involved in other mainstream, immersion, or bilingual classes during the day. Students are held responsible for content taught in English-speaking courses.

- Benefits: This kind of program allows students to interact with English-speaking students, while at the same time quickly teaching them English. A level of integration between English-speakers and non-English speakers is achieved; while at the same time allowing for specialized instruction. In addition, English immersion programs place more of an emphasis on rapid acquisition of English language skills than bilingual education programs.
- Concerns: Some argue that some students could never become proficient enough in English to learn content in English-only classes. Also, some are concerned about the extra expense of separate class space and teachers for ELL students. Finally, studies have found that students in developmental bilingual programs (gradual transition to English) significantly out-performed those in quick-exit, transitional bilingual programs and in all English immersion programs.<sup>6</sup> One study found that English-only classrooms led to low academic achievement and high dropout rates for English Language Learners.<sup>7</sup>

### *Bilingual Education*

This kind of program emphasizes English learning with the goal of integrating students into regular all-English class work as quickly as possible. Both the native language and English is used for instruction.

- Benefits: Those in favor of bilingual education argue that bilingual education effectively teaches English and improves the academic achievement of students in the program. Proponents also argue that bilingual education in most forms help immigrant children assimilate into society while preserving the minority group's linguistic and cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup> Proponents also fear that teaching non-English speaking students without also formally teaching those students English would be a waste of resources.<sup>9</sup> One study by US Department of Education found that developing children's native-language skills led them to score higher academically in the long term in English.<sup>10</sup>
- Concerns: Opponents of bilingual education are concerned that encouraging students to speak different languages could lead to a lack of social cohesion, namely that the country as a whole could lose a part of its national identity. Opponents believe bilingual education could

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<sup>6</sup> "NABE - BilingualEd." *NABE - HOME*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.nabe.org/bilingualed.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "Bilingual Education: Pros and Cons." University of Michigan. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <[http://sitemaker.umich.edu/370blinged/pros\\_and\\_cons](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/370blinged/pros_and_cons)>.

<sup>10</sup> <sup>10</sup> "NABE - BilingualEd." *NABE - HOME*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.nabe.org/bilingualed.html>>.

lead to ethnic division and prevent immigrant populations from assimilating properly, leading to a general misunderstanding and distrust between immigrant and native groups.<sup>11</sup> Also opponents argue that bilingual education programs cost more than English-only programs.<sup>12</sup> To teach a student English to a sufficient level of proficiency can take anywhere from three to ten years.<sup>13</sup>

### *Dual Language Immersion*

In this type of program, ELL students are taught alongside a roughly equal number of English-speaking students. The curriculum is taught in English and the native language of the minority group. Both sets of students are expected to know both languages.

- **Benefits:** As with traditional bilingual education, use of the native language could have positive effects for ELL student academically. This particular form of bilingual education addresses concerns that separate classes for non-English speakers and English speakers could be a form of segregation.<sup>14</sup> Also, this form of bilingual education program helps English-speaking students to learn another language.<sup>15</sup>
- **Concerns:** Some fear this form of bilingual education is too costly, as teachers with knowledge of both languages must be hired in all teaching positions. Also many are concerned, as with bilingual education in general, that this particular form makes it more difficult for immigrant children to assimilate properly because—they argue—it encourages ELL students to not learn English.

### **English Language Learning in Iowa<sup>16</sup>**

Iowa currently has no mandated program for teaching ELL students. Rather, the state offers guidelines and outlines for possible programs and funding sources, and allows individual school districts to decide. Extra funding is granted to schools based on a weighted number of reported ELL students to use on the programs of the district's choice. For example, if the state would normally spend \$100 per native English-speaking child, they might provide an add-weight of .20 for an ELL, resulting in total funding for the ELL learner of \$120. Small schools have a hard time accommodating ELL students because of Iowa's way of funding ELL programs, and because small schools generally have fewer resources and smaller budgets to provide the same services as larger

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "Bilingual Education: Pros and Cons." University of Michigan. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <[http://sitemaker.umich.edu/370blinged/pros\\_and\\_cons](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/370blinged/pros_and_cons)>.

<sup>13</sup> "English Language Learners - Iowa Department of Education." *Iowa.gov – The Official Website of the State of Iowa*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=683&Itemid=1391](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=683&Itemid=1391)>.

<sup>14</sup> "Bilingual Education." *ProEnglish*. US Inc. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[www.proenglish.org](http://www.proenglish.org)>.

<sup>15</sup> "NABE - BilingualEd." *NABE - HOME*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.nabe.org/bilingualed.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> "English Language Learners - Iowa Department of Education." *Iowa.gov – The Official Website of the State of Iowa*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=683&Itemid=1391](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=683&Itemid=1391)>.

schools. Certain schools in Iowa, however, have adapted well to these challenges; one example would be West Liberty Schools.

*West Liberty's Bilingual Education Program*<sup>17i</sup>

Since 1998 after receiving a \$1.7 million grant from the US Department of Education, West Liberty Schools in West Liberty, IA has had bilingual education available for grades K-12. The percentage of students who are ELL students varies with grade and class, but it is roughly 50 percent. The amount of time spent with instruction in Spanish or English, as well as the percentage of bilingual teachers varies base on grade. Elementary school and early learning programs have complete language integration and bilingual staff while the higher grades have as little as a quarter of class instruction done in Spanish and a smaller number of bilingual teachers.

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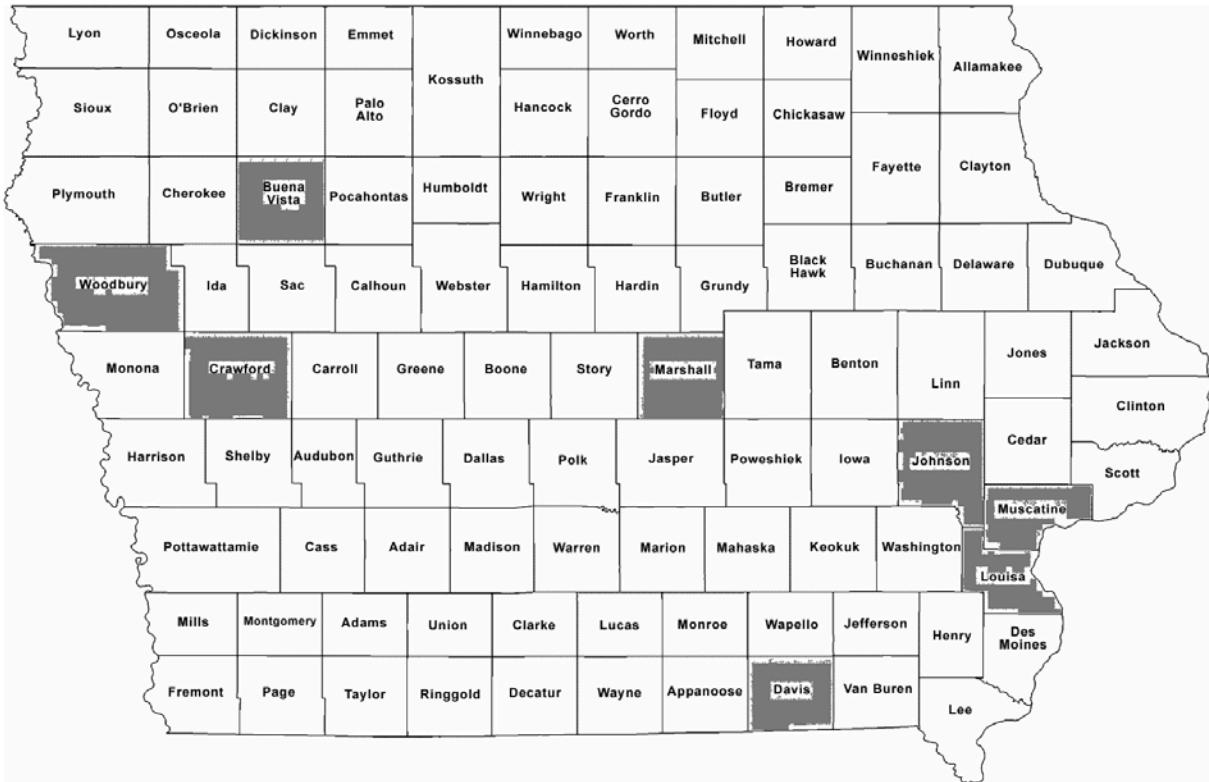
<sup>17</sup> "Directory of Two-Way Bilingual Immersion Programs in the U.S." *Center for Applied Linguistics*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.cal.org/jsp/TWI/SchoolView.jsp>>.

## A Sample of State-wide Mandates and Sources of Funding

	Bilingual	English Immersion/ESL	No Mandate	Funding <sup>ii</sup>
Alabama <sup>iii</sup>			X	
Alaska <sup>iv</sup>			X	
Arizona <sup>v</sup>		X		Add-on weight
California <sup>vi</sup>		X		\$100/student
Colorado <sup>vii</sup>	X			
Connecticut <sup>viii</sup>			X	
Florida <sup>ix</sup>			X	Add-on weight .38
Georgia <sup>x</sup>			X	
Idaho <sup>xi</sup>			X	
Illinois <sup>xii</sup>			X	
Indiana <sup>xiii</sup>			X	
Iowa			X	Add-on weight .19
Kansas <sup>xiv</sup>			X	
Maryland <sup>xv</sup>			X	\$500/student
Massachusetts <sup>xvi</sup>		X		
Michigan <sup>xvii</sup>	X			Funding divided equally among LEP students
Minnesota <sup>xviii</sup>			X	
Missouri <sup>xix</sup>			X	
Montana <sup>xx</sup>	X			
Nebraska <sup>xxi</sup>			X	
Nevada <sup>xxii</sup>		X		
New Jersey <sup>xxiii</sup>			X	
New Mexico <sup>xxiv</sup>	X			
New York <sup>xxv</sup>			X	\$143/student
North Carolina				
North Dakota <sup>xxvi</sup>			X	
Ohio <sup>xxvii</sup>	X			
Oklahoma <sup>xxviii</sup>			X	
Oregon <sup>xxix</sup>			X	
Pennsylvania <sup>xxx</sup>			X	
South Carolina <sup>xxxi</sup>			X	
South Dakota <sup>xxxii</sup>	X			
Tennessee <sup>xxxiii</sup>		X		
Texas <sup>xxxiv</sup>	X			Add-on weight .1
Utah <sup>xxxv</sup>			X	
Vermont <sup>xxxvi</sup>			X	
Virginia <sup>xxxvii</sup>			X	
Washington <sup>xxxviii</sup>	X			
West Virginia <sup>xxxix</sup>			X	
Wisconsin <sup>xl</sup>			X	

## Appendix

*Counties where over 10 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home.*



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For number of ELL students by school district see:

[http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=532&Itemid=55](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=532&Itemid=55)

This report was prepared in September 2010 by the Iowa Policy Research Organization (IPRO), a non-partisan public policy undergraduate research group at the University of Iowa. For additional research on this or other issues, please visit our website at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~ipro/> or contact us at [caroline-tolbert@uiowa.edu](mailto:caroline-tolbert@uiowa.edu).

<sup>i</sup> “Communication with the World: Recommendations for World Languages in the Mount Vernon Community Schools.” *Cornell College*. Web. 10 Oct. 2010.  
<[http://www.cornellcollege.edu/classical\\_studies/amici/world%20language%20advisory%20report.pdf](http://www.cornellcollege.edu/classical_studies/amici/world%20language%20advisory%20report.pdf)>

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- ii "ECS Education Policy Issue Site: Bilingual/ESL." *Education Commission of the States*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=16>>.
- iii "English Language Learners in the Southeast." SERVE. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.seirtec.org/\\_downloads/publications/ell.pdf](http://www.seirtec.org/_downloads/publications/ell.pdf)>.
- iv "Bilingual Education." *ProEnglish*. US Inc. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[www.proenglish.org](http://www.proenglish.org)>.
- v "English Language Learners in the Southeast." SERVE. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.seirtec.org/\\_downloads/publications/ell.pdf](http://www.seirtec.org/_downloads/publications/ell.pdf)>.
- vi Ibid.
- vii Ibid.
- viii Ibid.
- ix "Bilingual Education." *ProEnglish*. US Inc. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[www.proenglish.org](http://www.proenglish.org)>.
- x "English Language Learners in the Southeast." SERVE. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.seirtec.org/\\_downloads/publications/ell.pdf](http://www.seirtec.org/_downloads/publications/ell.pdf)>.
- xi Ibid.
- xii Ibid.
- xiii "Indiana Standards & Resources." *Indiana Reading First*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <<http://dc.doe.in.gov/Standards/AcademicStandards/PrintLibrary/elp.shtml>>.
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- xix "English Language Learners in the Southeast." SERVE. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.seirtec.org/\\_downloads/publications/ell.pdf](http://www.seirtec.org/_downloads/publications/ell.pdf)>.
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- xxi "English Language Learners." *Nebraska Department of Education Home Page*. Web. 04 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.education.ne.gov/Title1/plan/english\\_language\\_learners.htm](http://www.education.ne.gov/Title1/plan/english_language_learners.htm)>.
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- xxiii "English Language Learners in the Southeast." SERVE. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.seirtec.org/\\_downloads/publications/ell.pdf](http://www.seirtec.org/_downloads/publications/ell.pdf)>.
- xxiv Ibid.
- xxv "Bilingual Education." *ProEnglish*. US Inc. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[www.proenglish.org](http://www.proenglish.org)>.

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- xxvi "State English Language Learner Program." *ND Department of Public Instruction*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/bilingul/seclang/index.shtm>>.
- xxvii "Limited English Proficient Students." *Ohio Department of Education*. Web. 03 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEPrimary.aspx?page=2&TopicID=499&TopicRelationID=499>>.
- xxviii "English Language Learners in the Southeast." SERVE. Web. 3 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.seirtec.org/\\_downloads/publications/ell.pdf](http://www.seirtec.org/_downloads/publications/ell.pdf)>.
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