

SUBJECT: Adopting a dual language immersion program in certain public schools

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Sadler, Dutton, Dunnam, Grusendorf, Hardcastle, Hochberg,
Oliveira, Olivo, Smith

0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, March 8 — 30-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: For — Rene Lara, Texas Federation of Teachers; Phyllis Thompson, Texas Foreign Language Association

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Education Code, sec. 28.005 requires English to be the basic language of instruction in Texas public schools. The state must ensure the mastery of English by all students, except that bilingual instruction may be offered in situations in which it is necessary to ensure students' reasonable proficiency in English and ability to achieve academic success.

DIGEST: SB 467 would amend the Education Code to authorize a school district to adopt a dual language immersion program for students enrolled in elementary school grades, beginning with the 2001-2002 school year.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Although current law already allows bilingual instruction, SB 467 is needed to provide clear statutory authority to public schools that wish to offer a dual language immersion program.

Dual language immersion programs promote bilingual proficiency, cross-cultural awareness, and high academic achievement for all students. They would prepare Texas students academically and linguistically to be multi-

lingual citizens in an international community as they mastered “English-Plus” another language. It is becoming increasingly important for economic development in Texas to be able to speak two languages, especially English and Spanish. Texas students should be able to take advantage of and benefit from our state’s cultural and ethnic diversity.

A distinct difference exists between bilingual instruction programs and dual language immersion programs. A traditional bilingual instruction program instructs students who speak a language other than English. They first are taught in their native language and then make the transition into English instruction, but they are labeled as limited English proficient. A traditional dual language immersion program provides instruction in two languages to a class of students who are native speakers of each language. The first language is maintained while the second language is acquired. A bilingual instruction program can include a dual language immersion program.

Dual language immersion programs already are popular in Texas, especially in school districts located near the border. In addition to local, grass-roots efforts to offer dual language programs, the United States Department of Education recognizes the growing number of linguistically and culturally diverse children enrolled in schools and the importance of dual language programs by funding about 20 dual language programs in various school districts around the state.

OPPONENTS SAY: SB 467 is not needed because current law already allows public schools to offer bilingual instruction if necessary to ensure a student’s academic success.

NOTES: The committee amendment to the Senate-passed bill would delete specific requirements for an immersion program.