

**Teachers and Personnel for Emergent Bilinguals with Special Needs in NYS:
What must be done to meet the need?**

A White Paper

for discussion by

The NYS Higher Education Task Force
NYS Institutions of Higher Education
and
Policy experts at NYSED

by

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*The opinions expressed in this white paper are mine and do not necessarily reflect the views or official position of NYSED

1. Introduction

In the three years that I have been involved as a consultant to Measurement Incorporated in their execution of the New York State Education Department's 2H-1 Survey: Personnel Development for Special Education and Related Services in Selected Areas¹, the gap between supply of teachers and personnel to serve English language learners (hereafter emergent bilinguals) with special needs and the demand has widened considerably. Whereas the number of emergent bilinguals with special needs in the state has risen, the number of enrollees and completers in university programs that prepare teachers and personnel to work with these students continues to be insufficient and in some cases has actually decreased. The 2010 data are particularly worrisome, for there are few enrollees in bilingual titles in universities, and even less program completers.

This white paper is an attempt to get institutions of higher education and policy makers at the state level to do something more than gather data for a survey. Data alone, without action by many of us, will not mitigate the crisis. This white paper is a call to action by institutions of higher education and policy makers. As a university professor, and a former Dean of a School of Education, I write this white paper to urge my colleagues in

¹ Funded by the New York State Office of Special Education under NYSED Contract #C009402, the 2H-1 survey annually assesses personnel preparation programs to inform the Board of Regents of the progress that colleges and universities in New York are making to train staff for hard-to-fill positions in K-12 education. The survey data are also used to direct policy changes and target financial assistance to institutions of higher education (IHEs) that want to increase enrollment and capacity in these programs.

institutions of higher education to act now on behalf of emergent bilingual students with special needs. As a bilingual professional in NYS, I write also to inform NYS policy makers of changes that need to be made, of support that these institutions of higher education need, and of innovations that need to be considered in order to prepare qualified bilingual personnel to serve NYS emergent bilingual students with special needs. In so doing, I issue a series of recommendations. Some of these recommendations require only good will and a bit of effort by the people of NYS, including university administrators and faculty, as well as policy makers. Others require financial incentives and support by NYSED for institutions of higher education that make substantive changes in their recruitment of students and faculty, and in their curriculum. All of the recommendations are meant to inform and develop deeper understandings of what needs to get done in order to meet the educational needs of emergent bilinguals with special needs in NYS.

I start by describing the problem that we face as a state and enumerating a series of issues that is gleaned from the 2010-2011 data. Some of these issues have to do with the ways in which we have chosen to construct the need in the gathering of information.

2. Description of the problem

2.1. Low number of enrollees and program completers in the bilingual certification titles

To understand the dire situation in which NYS finds itself with regards to serving emergent bilinguals with special needs, it is important to look **only** at the data for students who are pursuing bilingual and bilingual extension certificates, for these are the teachers who will be **best** qualified to teach and support these students. Table 1 below displays the number of students **enrolled** in bilingual and bilingual extension certificate titles to serve emergent bilinguals with special needs in Fall 2010 across the 88 IHEs for which data was gathered.

**Table 1. Enrollment in bilingual titles and bilingual extension certificates:
Fall 2010**

	Undergraduate Bilingual	Graduate Bilingual	Bilingual Extension
Teaching Students with Disabilities	18	181	339
Speech-Language Pathology		3	
Speech & Language Disabilities/Combined Speech-Language Pathology & Speech & Language Disabilities	0	58	38
School Psychology		96	
Psychology		1	
Deaf & Hard of Hearing	0	0	0
Blind & Visually Impaired	0	0	0

As we can see in Table 1, with the exceptions of the Teaching Students with Disabilities title where there were 181 enrolled students in graduate bilingual certificate programs and 339 enrolled in the bilingual extension, and School Psychology where there were 96 students enrolled in graduate bilingual certificate programs, there are very few enrollees in the other titles. In fact, there are none in programs to prepare teachers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing and in Blind and Visually Impaired students.

The data for **program completers** in the bilingual titles (undergraduate, graduate and bilingual extension) is even more troubling. In the whole state, the 2H-1 survey data show there were only 36 completers in Teachers of Students with Disabilities, 27 in Speech and Language Pathology and Speech and Language Disabilities, 32 in School Psychology, and 1 in Psychology in 2010-2011. These numbers are clearly not enough to meet the many needs of NYS emergent bilingual students with suspected or identified disabilities. Professionals to meet these needs must not only be able to educate in ways that is effective and comprehensible, but must also be able to conduct appropriate bilingual multidisciplinary evaluations.

2.2. Lack of bilingual Spanish-speaking enrollees and completers

These data do not tell us whether these enrollees and program completers in bilingual titles are indeed speakers of Spanish and other high-need languages. However, there is much anecdotal evidence, as well as qualitative evidence from survey respondents that suggest that many of these programs graduate bilingual professionals who speak languages other than Spanish, often Russian. There is clearly a mismatch between the languages these certified bilingual professionals speak and the needs of emergent bilingual students with special needs in the state, who are most often Spanish-speakers.

2.3. Confusion over the content of bilingual extensions

Table 1 above confirms the fact that a fair number of candidates in these specialized titles are certified as bilingual professionals through the bilingual extension certification. Bilingual extension certifications thus hold much promise. However, it is not clear whether the bilingual extension certification program for these candidates addresses the specialized content knowledge and skills needed for serving students with special needs or is simply the general bilingual extension certification, which may or may not be adequate for their preparation.

2.4. Lack of recognition and engagement of general bilingual education

The general bilingual education title is not included in the information gathered in the 2H-1 survey, in effect creating a division between the specialized bilingual titles from the general one, and putting programs in competition for students. Thus faculty most likely to advocate for the development of these programs — those in general bilingual education — is disengaged from efforts to grow specialized bilingual professionals.

Yet, the candidates for these specialized bilingual titles often come from the general bilingual education title, which in itself is a shortage area.

2.5. Inadequacy of over-relying on TESOL certificates

TESOL is a title included in the 2H-1 survey, and indeed teachers of English as a Second Language do much to educate emergent bilingual students in the state. Although with some additional education TESOL teachers would be able to teach emergent students with special needs, TESOL candidates (unlike general bilingual education candidates) are often not bilingual. Thus, the fact that TESOL is the only title in the survey that is on the increase and that has substantial enrollment (167 students at the undergraduate level, and 1,912 enrollees at the graduate level) has little to do with addressing the shortage of qualified bilingual candidates to support the specialized services in Speech and Language Pathology/Speech Language Disabilities, School Psychology, Teaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Teaching Blind and Visually Impaired, Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy.

2.6. Inadequacy of over-relying on monolingual titles

In the same way, the fact that there are enrollees and program completers in monolingual specialized titles should not be encouraging. Only candidates who have bilingual certification or add the bilingual extension certification to their monolingual titles are certified and qualified to work with emergent bilinguals, able to bilingually assess their multiple needs and educate them meaningfully.

2.7 Summary

Institutions of Higher Education are not vested in preparing teachers and personnel for emergent bilinguals with special needs. First of all, many of the titles are low-incidence. Thus, the programs cannot yield a tuition-return that would justify offering programs that require expensive equipment, and small student-to-faculty ratios. Although this is a problem for all titles of teachers and personnel working with students with special needs, it is particularly critical for the bilingual titles, for bilingual faculty must also be hired, and collaboration across departmental structures is often required.

What the 2H-1 data clearly communicate is that the situation is dire, that IHEs are not sufficiently vested in attracting candidates to these bilingual titles and graduating bilingual professionals, that there is confusion about who can best serve emergent bilinguals with special needs, and that despite their best intentions, NYSED has not been successful in encouraging certification in these bilingual titles. Only a close collaboration between IHEs and NYSED can help address this situation. Some recommendations are then in order.

3. Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are grouped into two categories. The first set of recommendations targets institutions of higher education. Without the full commitment of IHEs (beyond the committed individual faculty members who have labored tirelessly over the years), nothing will be gained, and NYSED resources will be wasted. However,

IHEs need to be supported by NYSED, and so the second set of recommendations addresses policy makers in the New York State Department of Education.

3.1. For Institutions of Higher Education

3.1.1. Form a Bilingual Team that consists of faculty from different programs and departments, as well as an academic Dean. Require that this Bilingual Team develop an Action Plan to increase enrollment and program completion in bilingual titles for students with special needs. In addition, this Bilingual Team would be responsible for completing and signing the 2H-1 survey.

The Bilingual Team would facilitate dialogue and collaboration between faculty who are specialists in bilingualism (most often assigned to departments of Elementary Education and responsible for general bilingual extensions), faculty who are specialists in TESOL (often in their own departments of English or Linguistics, and often separate from Bilingual Education), and faculty who are specialists in educational services for students with special needs (often in different departments). In addition, the presence of an academic Dean would ensure interdepartmental collaboration and the development of a realistic institutional Action Plan.

Inasmuch as the survey instrument and the delivery of the 2H-1 survey have been much improved, there continues to be issues with the quality of the data provided by the IHEs, an indication that they do not always take it seriously. Although there was a 10% reduction in the number of surveys requiring data verification this year, the fact that 83% required it speaks to this issue. Although some local knowledge of the information needed rests with faculty, high-ranked administrators must become aware of the gaps in institutional knowledge surrounding data supplied on the 2H-1 survey so that they can assign resources when needed. Thus, the survey should be filled out and signed by both Dean and faculty members responsible for the different titles. Faculty might be more familiar with the actual data required by the survey, but Deans will be the only ones who will be able to increase capacity to ensure accountability.

3.1.2. Focus on developing bilingual titles and adequate bilingual extensions.

Institutions of Higher Education should not hide behind the numbers of enrollees in monolingual titles or those in the TESOL title. Although these titles are important, it is the bilingual specialized titles and the bilingual extensions that best qualify candidates to work with emergent bilinguals with special needs.

Bilingual extensions continue to be important sources of certification for specialized titles. However, institutions of higher education must ensure that the content of bilingual extensions for specialized titles is relevant for professionals working with emergent bilingual students with special needs.

3.1.3. Engage the general bilingual education faculty in recruitment and educational efforts for specialized bilingual titles and insist that all faculties collaborate.

Programs in general bilingual education have the longest history in educating emergent bilinguals in New York State. Specializing in both linguistic and content knowledge, this faculty is often closer to bilingual communities than monolingual specialists. Thus, the general bilingual education faculty must see the preparation of teachers for the specialized bilingual titles as an important need that they must support, and become advocates for these titles. In many ways, the general bilingual education faculty has to be put back at the center of the IHE's efforts in this regard.

General bilingual education is also a shortage area, with a NYS rate of 20% shortage at the secondary level, and a 9% shortage at the elementary level. In fact the shortage rate of 20% at the secondary level in general bilingual education is equal to that of bilingual special education. Unless efforts to educate **all** bilingual professionals for schools are considered holistically, and general bilingual education is seen alongside these specialized bilingual titles, certification programs will see each other in competition for the few students available, and will not collaborate to increase bilingual student interest in these titles.

Efforts to develop inclusive educational settings make general bilingual education teachers a most important ally of teachers of students with special needs. This is another reason why it is important to see all bilingual titles as complementary to each other.

Bilingual teacher candidates most often pursue the general bilingual education certification. It is precisely this population that could be recruited for some of these titles since they have learned to meaningfully use bilingualism in education as a scaffold to educate students and to assess their progress. Thus, the general bilingual education program cannot be ignored and separated from these efforts.

3.1.4. Make every effort to recruit Spanish-speaking students in these titles.

The language other than English that the bilingual candidates speak is most important. IHEs need to identify the number of enrollees and program completers who speak Spanish, as well as other languages, in their bilingual titles, and make efforts to specifically recruit Spanish-speaking candidates, and faculty who can support these candidates.

3.2. *For NYS Policy makers*

3.2.1. Incentives to Institutions of Higher Education

3.2.1.1. Support IHEs in recruiting bilingual applicants, especially pre-service candidates in all the bilingual titles, including general bilingual education. ITI funds may be a possible funding source for this initiative, pending changes.

Our respondents often identified the lack of applicants for these bilingual titles as a major obstacle. IHEs must be given incentives to mount strong **recruitment** projects of qualified bilingual candidates, especially those who speak Spanish.

One way to increase recruitment efforts would be to give greater support (and attention) to the general bilingual education certification (which is presently excluded from the 2-H1 survey and which is also a shortage area). General bilingual teacher candidates are most often those who could be recruited for dual certification in a specialized area. Furthermore, bilingually certified teachers can work collaboratively in inclusive classrooms with teachers who specialize in teaching students with special needs; thus meeting an important need.

Another way to improve recruitment efforts would be to use funds, such as those of ITI, in different ways. At the present time ITI funds are divided into general ITI-BE/TESOL and ITI-BSE/TESOL, with more funds supporting TESOL students in the general BE/TESOL category, and more funding supporting bilingual extensions of students certified in special education. In order to build a critical pool of bilingual candidates, **all** ITI funds should be extended. Furthermore, a formula should be reached that prioritizes funds for pre-service candidates in all bilingual titles. Although it is most important to continue funding TESOL certification to meet the needs in NYS outside of NYC, incentives must be given to all institutions in the state to recruit candidates who are bilingual and to register programs with bilingual titles. This is most important especially for emergent bilinguals with special needs since they must be assessed bilingually.

At the present time, ITI-BSE provides funding for full-time undergraduate students pursuing certification in teaching students with disabilities and speech and language disabilities with a bilingual extension. But ITI funding is not used to support other pre-service candidates, including graduate students in other titles. With the higher standards for school professionals, there are fewer candidates already working full-time who need bilingual certification. Pre-service bilingual and TESOL candidates who have passed the Liberal Arts and Science Test of the New York State Teacher Certification Exam should be given priority for ITI funds, and a criteria that reflects the state needs should establish the proportion of funds going to each category. Further, those working towards dual certification with a specialized title should be given priority over those pursuing general bilingual education or TESOL exclusively.

As long as IHEs have other students who are receiving tuition remission, they will not recruit candidates nor develop programs for other high-need bilingual titles. But if a greater proportion of ITI funds were reserved for institutions (and candidates) that supported the bilingual specialized titles, more effort would be made to recruit qualified bilingual candidates.

3.2.1.2. Support IHEs in identifying bilingual applicants and in enhancing their language development.

In identifying bilingual candidates, IHEs must be supported. Often the faculty has no way of evaluating the candidate's bilingual abilities before accepting them into a program. Appropriate bilingual assessments should be identified and a NYS bilingual evaluation service, possibly coordinated by the NYS Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks (formerly BETACs), should be established. This bilingual evaluation service would then enable IHEs to determine the bilingual ability of candidates in order to admit them, and to gauge the amount of support that they might need to develop bilingual capacity by the time of completion and certification. The availability of such an assessment would also increase the number of programs that would be able to recommend candidates for the Bilingual Education Extension.

It is often the case that candidates for these specialized bilingual titles may need additional language development in the language other than English, and sometimes even in English. IHEs often have often little capacity to assist students with language development. Again, a centralized service or statewide web-based program to which IHEs could refer candidates would be beneficial. There have been some efforts in this regard that should be extended. For example, the Speech-Language and Bilingual Speech-Language Personnel Development Technical Assistance Center, jointly run by the NYCDOE and the United Federation of Teachers, provides classes in Spanish for students seeking licensure in speech-language pathology or a bilingual extension to speech certification.

3.2.2. Incentives to student candidates

3.2.2.1. Support bilingual students who enroll in coursework for these titles, especially bilingual candidates who speak Spanish and pre-service candidates so that they can complete their clinical experiences and degrees.

Student interest in these titles needs to be bolstered through financial support to these candidates. Incentives, such as the ones presently afforded through ITI for tuition remission, need to continue. But as we pointed out in Recommendation 3.2.1.1 above, these incentives should target pre-service candidates, as well as candidates who speak Spanish.

Bilingual candidates, especially Latino candidates, often need to work while going to school, and are unable to complete intensive clinical experiences. Incentives could be created that would offset the inability of bilingual candidates to work while pursuing these titles.

3.2.2.2. Encourage student completion of graduate certification programs by providing a financial incentive to those who graduate in two years' time.

One of the most discouraging findings of this year's survey is the higher non-completion rate among all titles. The qualitative data indicates that the slow economy has greatly impacted students' ability to devote themselves to graduate study because of their need to work. Providing even a small cash incentive to students who graduate within a two-year time limit might improve this statistic.

3.2.3. Development of an original instructional model

3.2.3.1. Consider the creation of a P-12 OSE Bilingual Consortium as an innovative model for delivering coursework, especially for the bilingual extension, as well as other titles. This would address some of the most serious gaps in bilingual enrollment and program completion, namely,

- **The lower-incidence titles (Blind and Deaf)**
- **SLP/SLD**
- **School Psychology**
- **Teachers of students with disabilities at the 0-2 group and especially 7-12 grades.**

At present, most of the bilingual extensions are offered by IHEs in a traditional manner through coursework, usually targeting the general elementary education population. This is clearly not adequate for these specialized titles. To address this problem, IHEs with registered titles in these areas would be invited to join a P-12 OSE Bilingual Consortium that would be operated as part of the overall Bilingual Network effort. Consortium members (IHEs) that specialize in the different titles and age groups where there are serious gaps (identified above) would now be able to offer these courses to students at any IHE. These specialized courses could be offered online with financial support from NYSED. A shared tuition policy could be established between the referring IHEs, those designing the course, and the Consortium. Such a manner of resource-sharing could greatly mitigate many of the impeding issues cited by the survey respondents in this study.

In addition, the Consortium would coordinate field placement for some of the low-incidence titles. The Consortium would have a field placement coordinator for titles other than TSWD, since all online courses for the bilingual extension would need to be accompanied by meaningful clinical practice. The difficulty in finding field placements for these students has been identified as one of the obstacles in developing more programs.

The online delivery of specialized coursework through a Consortium, coupled with the assistance of a Consortium's placement coordinator, will greatly facilitate the willingness of faculty and IHEs to participate in these titles.

3.2.4 Expedited and Innovative Certification Routes

3.2.4.1. Provide expedited ways of registering five-year programs with bilingual certification.

The decrease in number of undergraduate programs that offer these titles continues. It is clear that most IHEs do not feel it is possible to meaningfully educate students for these titles at the undergraduate level. There are no enrollees in any of the bilingual undergraduate titles, except for 18 in Teaching Students with Disabilities.

Clearly, IHEs cannot deliver these programs at the undergraduate level. But 5-year programs are attracting many students, especially at some of the private IHEs, and the State should encourage registration of such programs that lead to bilingual certification by approving an expedited registration and review process for these 5-year programs.

3.2.4.2. Provide expedited ways of registering dual certificate programs in general Bilingual Education (BE) and bilingual Teaching Students With Disabilities (TSWD).

NYS should design an expedited process to register dual certificate programs in general and special education bilingual certification. This would greatly increase the number of bilingual teachers capable of teaching students with disabilities. In addition, faculty in bilingual education and special education who are often in separate departments will be encouraged to work together.

3.2.4.3. Encourage IHEs to offer coursework that would lead to an additional certification in these titles through individual transcript evaluation, without necessarily registering programs.

It is clear that although the IHEs are increasing their capacity, there are program titles that they would find difficult to register, such as a bilingual extension to Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired. Yet, they are capable of offering coursework that would qualify students for these titles. For example, when faculty vacancies occur, full-time faculty applicants with these areas of expertise are often not chosen by search committees because they are too specialized. But there are many qualified adjuncts that IHEs can safely hire. If these courses would bring in more students (and tuition assistance and instructional resources) institutions would have an incentive to offer them. My recommendation would be to promote certification through transcript review in cases where candidates already hold at least one certificate in a related field. Further, NYSED needs to accelerate the process of transcript review so that professionals can secure certification in a more timely way beyond the present process of expedited transcript review for some titles of interest.

3.2.5. Focus interest in titles with potential

3.2.5.1. Focus for the next year on promoting programs that prepare early childhood and 7-12 bilingual teachers for students with disabilities (TSWD).

Bilingual teachers of students with disabilities continues to be the most needed bilingual title of those included here, and thus has the most potential for growth. However, candidates interested in teaching students with disabilities continue to gravitate towards the *Grades 1-6* certification level.

The growth in the number of students enrolling and completing bilingual extension programs in early childhood TSWD is encouraging (274 students enrolled) and points to the critical need in this area. Especially before going to school, children speak the languages of the home. One cannot then service children with disabilities who speak languages other than English except by building on their home language practices. Efforts along these lines should continue.

It is, however, at the 7-12 level where the situation is dire. At the high school level, there are only 3 students enrolled in undergraduate programs leading to bilingual 7-12 TSWD certification, and 2 enrolled in TSWD bilingual extension programs. At the middle school level, there are a total of 3 graduate students in bilingual 5-9 TSWD certification and 18 students in the 5-9 TSWD bilingual extension.

Because both early childhood and 7-12 are areas of both growth and need, it is recommended that the State encourage IHEs to focus on these titles, as an area of potential growth. Starting to focus on these titles would also have the potential to encourage the much-needed collaboration among faculty across departmental lines—a pre-requisite for the Consortium model expansion.

4. Conclusion

Without adopting some of these recommendations, there will not be any progress in preparing professionals to teach and serve emergent bilinguals with special needs in New York State. No amount of data can make up for the efforts of educators and policy makers in reversing this trend.

I have chosen to write this White Paper because it has become evident to me that gathering the data, year after year, without any action on the part of institutions of higher education or the New York State Department of Education will leave the children in the same dire situation in which they have been. For years, individuals at both the NYSED and many institutions of higher education across the state have worked non-stop to prepare educators for emergent bilingual students with special needs. But the effort needed is huge and it demands attention of many more than just a few committed and brave individuals. The effort needed requires close collaboration between policy makers, IHE administrators, and IHE faculty.

