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It's time to replace Texas' bilingual education policy

 By **CHRISTINE ROSSELL**
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English is the language of opportunity in the United States and Texas. To ensure a bright future for all Texans, teaching English effectively and as quickly as possible to those who do not speak it must be of paramount importance to educators and policymakers.

While Texas' non-English speaking population continues to steadily increase, Texas maintains an outdated and ineffective bilingual education policy that only three other states — New York, New Jersey, and Illinois — still have.

Texas lawmakers need to examine whether the state's bilingual education programs can be more effective at teaching students

English. The new research report I produced for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, "Does Bilingual Education Work? The Case of Texas," examines this question and determines that current bilingual education programs are ineffective and should be replaced with sheltered English immersion.

Bilingual education is instruction in all subjects in the student's native tongue in a separate classroom with other students who speak the same native tongue. Sheltered English immersion is instruction in English, at a pace they can understand, by a trained English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in a separate setting with other students learning English as their second language.

In the 2008-09 school year, Texas had 448,917 students in bilingual education, of which 99 percent were Hispanic. Texas' state demographer estimates the Hispanic population will more than double from 6.6 million people in 2000 to more than 13.4 million people in 2025. Therefore, it is increasingly important for Texas to have the most effective program in place to teach English to non-English speaking children.

The foundation's report finds that bilingual education in Texas has a negative effect on English-language learner achievement. In addition, Texas does not require students in bilingual education to be tested on the English TAKS for the first three years, starting in third grade. This allows untested students' progress in English to disappear from public scrutiny.

Bilingual students need to be tested in English because it is the best way to hold schools accountable for whether their students are learning English and to recognize schools that are doing an extraordinary job.

Numerous research studies indicate that sheltered English immersion programs are much more effective at teaching students English, causing states such as California, Arizona and Massachusetts to replace bilingual education with sheltered English immersion.

Surprisingly, only 10 states have ever required bilingual education, and six of them have abandoned it, leaving Texas among a small minority as noted above.

Bilingual education also costs more than alternative approaches such as English immersion. Texas schools with a bilingual education program spend \$402 more per student than schools without a bilingual education program. Other studies find that bilingual education costs \$200 to \$700 more per pupil than alternative approaches for English language learners.

Although parents have the right to opt out of bilingual education in Texas, they often accept the default assignment of the school, trusting that educational experts know best. Texas should make the most effective program — sheltered English immersion — the default assignment for non-English speaking students, and educate parents to allow them to place their children in a different program if they choose and resources are available.

If Texas lawmakers want to help non-English speaking students learn English as quickly as possible and be prepared for future academic success, they should replace bilingual education with sheltered English immersion. Effectively teaching English to non-English-speaking students is the best possible investment in our children's future and the future of Texas.

Rossell is a professor at Boston University and the author of the Texas Public Policy Foundation's study "Does Bilingual Education Work? The Case of Texas," which is available online at www.TexasPolicy.com.

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