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## Expand Bilingual Education To Close The Learning Gap



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By **Editorial**

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**M**any children arriving in Connecticut from outside the mainland United States are not proficient enough in English to understand and complete their schoolwork here. That's a problem that needs addressing promptly.

As reported by Courant writer **Kathleen Megan**, a national test given in 2013 showed that English-language-learning students from Connecticut had the lowest score in the country on the eighth-grade math test. Also, our state's gap between the scores of native English speakers and students learning English was the widest in the country.

That's solid evidence that the state needs to change the way non-English speakers are taught when they first arrive here. Apparently, other states have better ways to incorporate such students into the mainstream curriculum.

The problem is growing, not shrinking: The percentage of English-learning students in Connecticut schools climbed 50 percent in the past dozen years.

The state Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission, which has a stake in the issue, has recommended several changes that are worth trying. One is to increase the maximum number of months allowed for bilingual education from 30 to 60. The trick is to give students enough teaching in their native language so they can understand the subject matter, but not so much that they fail to learn the English they'll need to succeed. It's a delicate balance, and some tinkering with the formula may be needed.

Another suggestion involves lowering the threshold before a school is required to provide bilingual education. Presently, at least 20 students in a school district must share a non-English language before multi-language courses must be offered (and paid for by the state).

How about more dual-language immersion programs? They have worked well in Canada and elsewhere.

Bilingual learning is such a stepping stone to success that it ought to be more widely available.

Will these changes take more tax dollars? The answer is obviously yes, but if ever extra spending could be accurately described as an investment, this is it.

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