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# The coming crisis in bilingual education

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**FORUM**

All is not well with bilingual education despite its demonstrated success in the classroom. The number of new bilingual teachers each year is not keeping pace with the increase in the number of non-English-speaking students who need bilingual instruction. This teacher shortage rapidly is becoming a crisis throughout the nation.

The Texas Education Agency estimates that 3,000 new teachers are needed now and, in California, state education officials estimate that 8,000 new bilingual teachers are needed in that state.

How do these figures translate into the number of students who are not being served?

Using an average of 22 students per classroom, the shortage of 3,000 teach-

ers in Texas means that 66,000 students do not have a certified bilingual teacher. In California, 176,000 students are not being served. These figures call for more, not fewer, certified bilingual teachers.

There should be no doubt that bilingual programs work. Recent research has documented the success of bilingual programs in teaching English and in using both the native language and English to teach math, science and social studies concepts.

There are long-term benefits as well. Students who have had the advantage of bilingual education are more likely to graduate from high school than those who have not.

Surprisingly, when Congress appropriated funds for bilingual education before adjourning last fall, nothing was allocated for Professional Development, the teacher training program that has helped thousands of college students become qualified as bilingual teachers since 1974.

This appeared to be a major oversight and, in December, Secretary of Education Richard Riley sent a re-programming request to the Congressional Joint Appropriations Committee asking that \$15 million be moved from school system grants to teacher training for the 1997 fiscal year. Approval of the secretary's request would leave \$142 million

for school systems to use for bilingual education, which still would be more than school districts received in previous years.

What impact would Riley's request have on students?

If the \$15 million in teacher training funds is provided this year and is renewed in following years, 2,000 new bilingual teachers would enter the field annually, according to U.S. Department of Education estimates.

Using the 22 students per classroom average, these teachers would reach 44,000 students each year. In five years, they could serve 220,000 students. If 2,000 additional teachers were to enter the field each year for five years and remain in service for five years, they would serve 1.1 million students.

The members of the Joint Appropriations Committee, including Rep. Henry Bonilla, R-Texas, can take a major step toward resolving the bilingual teacher shortage by approving Secretary Riley's request. In the process, they will be giving hundreds of thousands of at-risk students a better chance to succeed.

*(William Pulte is director of Bilingual Education Programs at Southern Methodist University and an associate professor of anthropology.)*

**Some 66,000 students in Texas alone do not have a certified bilingual teacher.**