

# **IS ENGLISH THE MISSING LINK?**

**A KOSCIUSKO LEADERSHIP ACADEMY  
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**BY PATRICIA DECK AND SUSAN HIGHT  
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## **Is English the Missing Link?**

- I. Introduction
- II. Today's Situation
  - A. Number of LEP Students in Warsaw Schools
  - B. Definitions of Language Levels
  - C. Number of LEP Students in Warsaw Schools by Language Level
  - D. Migrant Status
- III. Why Are These Students Here?
  - A. Employment Reasons
  - B. Economic Reasons
- IV. What Legislation Relates?
  - A. Federal Legislation
  - B. State Legislation
- V. What is Required for Legal Compliance?
  - A. Office of Civil Rights Standards
  - B. Performance Based Accreditation Plan
- VI. What Steps Are the Warsaw Schools Already Taking?
  - A. Steering Committee
  - B. Instructional Assistants
  - C. Materials & Resources
  - D. Translation
  - E. Language Classes
  - F. Cultural Awareness Training
- VII. What Does the Future Hold?
  - A. Dropout Projections
  - B. Recommended Type of Assistance
  - C. Funding
- VIII. Conclusion

# Is English the Missing Link?

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine for a moment that you have been selected by NASA for a special space mission to a distant planet. You did not apply for this opportunity. You don't really know how you were selected for the mission, but suddenly you find yourself aboard a spacecraft landing in an unknown world. Upon landing, you discover that the planet is inhabited by strange creatures. The creatures seem to have different habits and ways of doing things, and they don't speak English. One of the creatures takes you to a building which appears to be a school. You are taken to a classroom, and the creature points to you and then points to the room. You ask the creature if it speaks English. It says something to you, but you can't understand it. The creature says something else, but you continue to stare blankly. Then the creature starts to speak louder and more slowly. You still don't get it. Finally the creature grabs your arm and pulls you into the room.

You begin to attend class here every day. Each morning one of the creatures takes you back to the classroom. After several weeks, you begin to be able to understand a few words, but you still cannot communicate with the creatures nor can you comprehend much of what they are saying to you. You don't even know your legal status. You know you are an alien, but you don't know how the creatures view aliens or what your rights are, if you have any. As the months go by, you begin to sink into despair because no one will help you with the creatures' language, and you have realized that you probably aren't ever going to get back home again. Knowing the language might not get you back home again, but at least it would help you to make the best of your new place of residence, and it appears that you don't have any choice but to make the best of it.

This scenario describes the daily learning challenge facing a growing number of our county's primary and secondary students. They have arrived in our community through parental choice or necessity and are now trying to assimilate a foreign culture and learn its language. Exactly how many such students are there in the Warsaw Community School System?

### TODAY'S SITUATION

Following are figures reflecting the increase in the number of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Students in Warsaw Community Schools (as of February 20, 1997):

	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>
Harrison	0	3	5
Lincoln	4	14	43
Leesburg	3	5	9
Jefferson	11	4	27
Washington	3	4	9
Madison	9	11	14
Eisenhower	0	1	3
Lakeview	1	4	16
Edgewood	0	2	1
WCHS	5	16	25
TOTALS	<u>36</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>152</u>

During the last two years, the numbers have virtually doubled over each previous year.

The level of English proficiency of these students can be further defined according to the following language levels:

### LANGUAGE LEVELS

Level I: The student does not understand, speak, read or write English, but may know a few isolated words or expressions.

- Level II: The student understands simple sentences in English, especially when spoken slowly, but does not speak English except isolated words and expressions.
- Level III: The student speaks and understands English with hesitancy and difficulty. With effort and help, the student can carry on a conversation in English, understand at least part of a lesson, and follow simple directions. Sentences are produced, but with errors in syntax and fact.
- Level IV: The student speaks and understands English without apparent difficulty, but displays low achievement indicating some language or cultural interference with learning. Cognitive academic language development is essential for success in content areas.
- Level V: The student speaks and understands both English and the home language without difficulty and displays normal academic achievement for grade level.

The following figures reflect the number of Warsaw Community Schools LEP students in each of the five language levels (Level I being most limited):

	<u>Level I</u>	<u>Level II</u>	<u>Level III</u>	<u>Level IV</u>	<u>Level V</u>
Harrison	3	1	0	0	1
Lincoln	22	3	11	3	4
Leesburg	4	0	3	1	1
Jefferson	13	4	3	2	5
Washington	3	1	2	2	1
Madison	4	0	3	5	2
Eisenhower	2	0	0	0	1
Lakeview	7	4	2	0	3
Edgewood	0	0	1	0	0
WCHS	13	7	4	0	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<u>71</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>19</u>

The breakdown by elementary/secondary is:

	<u>Level I</u>	<u>Level II</u>	<u>Level III</u>	<u>Level IV</u>	<u>Level V</u>
Elementary	51	9	22	13	15
Secondary	20	11	7	0	4
TOTALS	<u>71</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>19</u>

A distinction exists among these students regarding eligibility for services under migrant status. The following figures reflect the number of LEP students identified as migrant, and thus eligible for services under the state migrant grant.

	<u>Migrant</u>	<u>Non-migrant</u>	<u>Total</u>
Harrison	2	3	5
Lincoln	13	30	43
Leesburg	0	9	9
Jefferson	4	23	27
Washington	2	7	9
Madison	6	8	14
Eisenhower	2	1	3
Lakeview	6	10	16
Edgewood	0	1	1
WCHS	3	22	25
TOTALS	<u>38</u>	<u>114</u>	<u>152</u>

### WHY ARE THESE STUDENTS HERE?

The primary reason which has brought the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students to this area is employment for their parents. According to Workforce Development Services of Northern Indiana, Kosciusko County had an unemployment rate of approximately 3.3 to 3.8 percent from 1990 to 1995. During the same period, employment growth was 18% while population growth was only 6%. A comparison with Elkhart and Marshall Counties shows similar percentages. From 1990 to 1995 in the three-county area, the unemployment rate was 3.5 to 4.9 percent. Employment growth in the tri-county area was 18% while population growth was 6.6%. According to Workforce Development, immigration becomes a vehicle to supply the demand for new workers, particularly at the lower end of the wage scale. "Clearly, people are moving to where the jobs are," according to Charles Guthrie, a University of Indianapolis professor and co-author of a history of local Hispanics, quoted in the January 25, 1996, Indianapolis Star.

While there are a number of language groups and ethnic backgrounds represented by Warsaw's LEP students, the majority (96%) are Hispanic. This reflects a surge in the U.S. Hispanic population which is taking place across the Midwest (USA Today 12/15/95). From 1980 to 1992, the number of Hispanics in ten Midwest states (including Indiana) climbed from over 1.2 million to 1.8 million. Indiana saw a 22.2% growth in its Hispanic population during this period. Much of the growth can be attributed to the fact that jobs for unskilled laborers are abundant in the Midwest, and that those jobs pay well compared to typical wages in the immigrant's home country. In one example cited by USA Today, an employer in Minnesota offered immigrants an \$8-an-hour starting wage—more than many immigrants earned in a full day in Mexico.

The Calderon family of Goshen, interviewed for This Week (7/24/95), published by the Elkhart Truth Publishing Co., noted that Mexicans often take jobs that whites don't want, and that many Elkhart County employers still don't have enough workers. "This country was built

on immigrant labor," Jose Luis Calderon commented. Another This Week article (7/31/95) mentioned that Hispanics come to our area for the same reason most immigrants have come: economic opportunity. "When one compares 50 cents an hour for a construction job in central Mexico with \$10 to \$15 an hour for the same kind of work in northern Indiana, it's not hard to understand why they keep coming," says This Week writer Dan Shenk. And according to Ludy Diaz who operates an immigration counseling and translation business in Goshen, the majority of local Hispanic people are here legally.

### WHAT LEGISLATION RELATES?

The legal basis for services to LEP students in the United States was established by the Supreme Court ruling in *Lau vs. Nicholas* (414 US. 563, 1974). This was a class-action suit filed against the San Francisco Unified School District in 1970 on behalf of 1,800 Chinese public school students who did not speak English. The Supreme Court decision ruled that a school system(s) denial of a meaningful opportunity to learn English in order to benefit from instruction in all school subjects violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned discrimination on "grounds of race, color, or national origin." The Supreme Court stated that:

"...there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education." (414 U.S. at 666, 1974)

In May, 1970, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare issued a memorandum to school districts to clarify Title VI requirements concerning the responsibility of school districts to provide equal education opportunity to language minority students. The court upheld this 1970 memorandum which stated that:

"Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to open its instructional program to these students." (34 Fed. 11595)



Other federal legislation which confers rights on language minority students includes the:

1. Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974.
2. Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142), and
3. Section 504 (Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

Indiana public schools must also adhere to the requirements of the state's "Equal Educational Opportunity Act" (P.L. 218, 1973), which states that:

"It is the public policy of the state of Indiana (a) to provide, furnish, and make available equal, non-segregated, non-discriminatory educational opportunities and facilities for all regardless of race, creed, national origin, color or sex." (IC 20-8.1-2-1)

### **WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR LEGAL COMPLIANCE?**

Subsequent publications from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) outlining OCR legal standards for compliance were issued in December, 1985, and September, 1991. At the most fundamental level, the legislation requires effective instruction which leads to timely acquisition of proficiency in English. To accomplish this, schools must:

- identify students who need assistance;
- develop a program which, in the view of professional educators, has a reasonable chance for success;
- ensure that needed staff, curricular materials, and facilities are in place and used properly;
- develop appropriate evaluative standards for measuring the progress of students, including program exit criteria; and,
- continue program assessment and modification where needed.

Local compliance has been further defined by the Performance Based Accreditation (PBA) for Language Minority Students District Plan adopted by the Warsaw Community Schools in October, 1990, which clearly delineates the school corporation's responsibility for the

education of students with limited or no English proficiency. The Warsaw Community Schools' English as a Second Language (ESL) Handbook (June, 1993), also describes needs related to services for these students.

Among the Warsaw Community Schools PBA District Plan guidelines are the following:

1.D The school corporation shall provide a weekly minimum of 10 hours of ESL instruction that is individualized and that builds skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and concepts in the content areas (e.g., math, science, and social studies).

1.F.1 The school corporation shall provide counseling services to language minority students in social and emotional adjustment to American society, selection of vocational and college preparatory courses, pursuit of post-secondary studies and career choices, and other issues normally provided to other students.

1.F.2 The school corporation shall provide counseling services above in the native or preferred language of students, to the extent possible.

1.H The school corporation shall employ or train personnel to provide instructional services appropriate to the needs of LEP students, not to exceed a class ratio of 15 students to one teacher.

1.K The school corporation shall communicate with the homes of language minority students in the native (or preferred) language.

### **WHAT STEPS ARE THE WARSAW SCHOOLS ALREADY TAKING?**

-A Steering Committee has been formed and meets regularly to gather information, plan services and make recommendations regarding meeting the needs of language minority students in Warsaw Community Schools.

-Five instructional assistants have been employed to work with language minority students in Warsaw schools.

-Scheduling of language minority instructional assistants has been arranged to provide maximum time for services to students.

-Instructional materials appropriate for limited English-proficient students have been purchased.

- Classroom teachers have been provided a means to request resource support to assist with adapting curriculum to language minority students' needs.
- Arrangements have been made to provide for translation services as needed in an effort to promote positive communication with the language minority community.
- Warsaw Community Schools' forms, memoranda, and informational items are being translated to promote improved communication with the language minority community.
- The Adult Basic Education program offers English language classes to members of the language minority community.
- Schools have implemented cultural awareness and sensitivity initiatives to promote understanding among all students and stakeholders.

Yet, despite all these positive steps, more remains to be done. The five instructional assistants each currently have a case load of more than 30 students to whom they must teach English, and also communicate with classroom teachers, translate/explain classroom and homework assignments, re-teach lessons, administer quizzes and tests, explain concepts which are typically foreign to students with cultural differences, and assist teachers with modifications and accommodations in the classrooms. In addition, they and the Language Minority Coordinator, who is employed for 5 hours per week, must also attend case conferences, make home visits, assist in translations, place phone calls after school, and assist with parent-teacher conferences. They must also do state mandated testing on all 152 language minority students every fall and again in the spring. (Scores and statistics must be sent to the state department for language minority records and for ISTEP reporting.)

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

A September 6, 1995, USA Today article projected that approximately 25% of Hispanic teens enrolled in the nation's high schools that fall would not graduate. And with a projection that the number of Hispanic young people will increase by 61% from 1995 to 2010, the current dropout rate for Hispanics is twice as high as it is for blacks and more than three times as high as it is for whites. Unlike the dropout rate for black students, the Hispanic dropout rate has defied nearly all attempts to lower it substantially.

Reasons for failure of Hispanic young people to finish school include lack of ability to speak English, the lower value some in the Hispanic community place on education, and bilingual/multicultural education issues. According to USA Today writers Maria Puente and Sandra Sanchez, a key question is whether "education bureaucracies have the flexibility to adapt to a growing new population of students."

According to Linda Chavez, also writing for USA Today, the ability to speak, read and write English well is the single most important factor in determining Hispanics' educational achievement and future income. And, she continued, the overwhelming majority of immigrant parents want schools to teach their kids English. A survey for the U.S. Department of Education found that 78% of Mexican-American parents and 82% of Cuban-American parents oppose schools teaching their children in Spanish if it means less time for English instruction.

The WALL STREET JOURNAL (9/5/96) confirms this fact according to an article entitled, "Hispanic Parents Want English Education." According to the article, the Center for Equal Opportunity commissioned a national survey of Hispanic parents to discover what they most want their children to learn in school. The results were overwhelming: Hispanic parents want their children taught English as quickly as possible. They want their children's lessons for all academic subjects taught in English, so that their children will spend more time hearing

and speaking English. And they think learning to read, write and speak English is the single most important goal of education.

While bilingual-education advocates claim that Hispanic children must learn to read and write in Spanish first if they are to succeed in mastering a second language, the WALL STREET JOURNAL reports that there is little solid empirical evidence to suggest that native-language instruction is superior to all-English instruction. The JOURNAL reports that researchers Christine Rossell and Keith Baker have systematically reviewed every existing bilingual-education study that meets minimal academic standards. They report that 78% of program evaluations show native-language instruction to be either no better than or actually worse than doing nothing for non-English-speaking children. And they add, as anyone who has ever struggled with learning a new language knows, the time spent actually practicing it is absolutely critical.

Another study conducted by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier of George Mason University resulted in nearly opposite conclusions. The Thomas/Collier study cited early bilingual education as a primary foundational factor in later success in school for language-minority students.

Regardless of whether one ascribes to a bilingual, ESL (English as a Second Language), or another approach to helping LEP students, it is clear that assistance is mandated by the U.S. Office on Civil Rights. What is equally clear is that current efforts in Warsaw, while making some progress, are insufficient to fully meet student needs and to be in full compliance with OCR legislation and guidelines. A complicating factor to moving toward full compliance is the lack of funding earmarked for assistance staff and programs.

At present, funding is available only for migrant students (currently only 1/4 of those in need of language assistance locally). However, the Office for Civil Rights' Title VI Language Minority Compliance Procedures clearly state that limited financial resources do not justify

failure to remedy a Title VI violation. Nonetheless, the OCR does not require schools to implement a program that places unrealistic expectations on a district.

Additional funding could become available under federal Title VII to any school corporations that adopt a bilingual education program. Such an approach would involve teaching subjects to English-speaking students in Spanish or other languages during part of the school day. We believe that a move to a bilingual approach would be impractical for Warsaw at the present time, and we do not advocate this approach.

### CONCLUSION

So, what should be done? Perhaps we can take some preliminary steps toward multiculturalism as a community while the school administrators sort out how to stretch funding to accommodate additional steps for legal compliance. Goshen, where Hispanics currently account for 10 to 15 percent of the population (This Week 5/6/96), has recently assembled a Human Relations Commission whose charter is in part to "develop an environment where all people who choose to live in Goshen will have equal access to public conveniences and amicable relationships in neighborhoods." Another positive idea from the Goshen community matches new Hispanic families with established Goshen families to build bridges between ethnic groups and cultures. An idea already under discussion by the Warsaw school system is the utilization of peer tutors. This seems an excellent opportunity to help language-minority students while simultaneously building self-esteem and skills in language-majority kids.

The bottom line is: what kind of community do we want to have? If we desire a growing community where economic development remains a reality, then we must welcome productive members to our workforce. And a true welcome includes accommodating the learning challenges of our workers' children in our school system.