

Measure J327

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please carefully read the following description of a ballot measure that was written by a disinterested expert. Feel free to take notes or outline passages as you read.

This should take approximately 10 minutes.

BALLOT MEASURE J327

BACKGROUND

California's public schools serve 5.6 million students in kindergarten through twelfth (K-12) grades. In 1996-97, schools identified 1.4 million, or 25 percent, of these students as "limited English proficient" (LEP). These are students who cannot understand English well enough to keep up in school. Eighty-eight percent of the state's schools had at least one LEP student, and 71 percent had at least 20 LEP students.

Under current law, schools must make their lessons understandable to LEP students. To help schools address the needs of these students, the State Department of Education created guidelines for the development of local LEP programs. These guidelines state:

- The main goal of all programs is to make LEP students fluent in English.
- Programs must allow LEP students to do well in all school work. In some cases, this means teaching some subjects to LEP students in their home languages.
- Schools must allow all LEP students the option of being in bilingual programs. A bilingual program is one in which students are taught both in their home language and in English.
- Schools must allow parents to choose whether or not their children are in bilingual programs.

How Are Students Currently Served?

Schools currently use a range of services to help LEP students (1) learn how to speak, read, and write English; and (2) learn academic subjects (such as math, reading, writing, history, and science).

Services to Help Students Learn English. Almost all LEP students get special services to help them learn English. These services are often provided during a part of the school day, separate from lessons on regular academic subjects.

Services to Help Students Learn Academic Subjects. Most LEP students receive special help in their academic subjects in one of two basic ways:

- **Lessons That Use Special Materials.** About 40 percent of all LEP students are taught their academic subjects in English. The class materials and teaching methods for these students, however, are specially designed for students who do not speak English well.
- **Lessons That Are Taught in Students' Home Language.** About 30 percent of all LEP students are taught some or all of their academic subjects in their home languages. These are what people usually refer to as bilingual classes.

The remaining 30 percent of LEP students do not receive special help in their academic subjects. This is either because they do not need it or because the school does not provide it. These students are taught their academic subjects in regular classrooms.

How Long Do Students Receive LEP Services? State guidelines say that schools should give LEP students special services until (1) they can read, write, and understand English as well as average English speakers in their grade; and (2) they can participate equally with fluent speakers in the classroom. Schools report that LEP students often receive special services for many years.

How Are LEP Services Funded? The state currently provides over \$400 million in special funds for students--both LEP and non -LEP--who need extra help to succeed in school. These funds are known as "compensatory" funds. Schools report that the majority of this money is spent for LEP students. In addition, schools may spend federal and local funds for special services for LEP students.

PROPOSAL

This proposition significantly changes the way that LEP students are taught in California. Specifically, it:

- Requires California public schools to teach LEP students in special classes that are taught nearly all in English. This would eliminate "bilingual" classes in most cases.
- Shortens the time most LEP students would stay in special classes. The initiative states that: (1) LEP students should move from special classes to regular classes when they have acquired a good working knowledge of English and (2) these special classes should not normally last longer than one year. This would eliminate most programs that provide special classes to LEP students over several years.

Exceptions. Schools would be permitted to provide classes in a language other than English if the child's parent or guardian asks the school to put him or her in such a class and one of the following happens:

- The child is at least ten years old and the school principal and teachers agree that learning in another language would be better for the child.
- The child has been in a class using English for at least 30 days and the principal, teachers, and head of the school district agree that learning in another language would be better for the student.
- The child already is fluent in English and the parents want the child to take classes in another language.

If a school lets 20 or more LEP students in a grade choose to take their lessons in a language other than English, then the school must give such a class. If there are not 20 students or more, then the school must let the students go to other schools that have classes in those languages.

Funding Provisions. The initiative requires the state to provide \$50 million every year for ten years for English classes for adults who promise to tutor LEP students. In addition, the measure requires that any special funding currently spent on LEP students be maintained, if possible.



STOP!

Please go to the online survey, enter the 4-character code for this ballot measure (printed at the top and bottom of this page) and answer the survey questions.