

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates Youth Build Immigrant Power Project : Action Research Results



Finding #1 : Immigrant Students Value Biliteracy

"English Learner Development (ELD) students can be good English speakers, too."

- **Over 78%** of survey respondents were immigrants who uniquely understood the importance of biliteracy skills in an increasingly global society and economy.
- **Over 85%** were attentive to and concerned about the role of their school to encourage biliteracy and believed that it should value all languages equally.

Bottom Line:

Immigrant students want to take leadership in institutionalizing the value of biliteracy in our district.

Finding #2 : Educational Institutions Value Mono-literacy (English)

"Sometimes I don't do homework because I don't understand, but English teachers think I am lazy"

- **Nearly 80%** of all the student respondents believed that English was valued over other languages in their school.
- **Nearly 75%** of the respondents cited structural reasons for this belief. They called attention to the fact that classes are taught only in English, most teachers and staff only speak English, and school materials are not translated.
- *"Language barrier", "Unable to communicate with teachers", "Boring because I don't understand anything", and "Don't know how to do homework"*

Bottom Line:

Students are acutely aware of the institutional dominance of English over a school-wide subordination and suppression of their home languages.

Finding #3 : ELD Students Lack Confidence Compared to Non-ELD Students

"After I lost my confidence, I didn't want to speak English anymore."

- **68%** of respondents felt less confident than non-ELD students.
- **Over 50%** attributed this lack of confidence to their social, academic, and bilingual struggles in school, including teasing and taunting by other students.
- *"Not happy", "Don't want to go to school", "No more confidence", "Feel like a stranger to the environment", and "People look down at me"*

Bottom Line:

The existing climate in our schools discourages and hurts ELD students, an already vulnerable student population.

Finding #4 : Building Confidence through Positive Recognition

"Recognize ELD students more..."

- **75%** of respondents approved of implementing a Seal of Biliteracy program and articulated that it would improve not only their sense of self-confidence but more importantly increase their feelings of acceptance and participation in their school.
- *"Provide more support, so ELD students can be confident"*

Bottom Line:

ELD Immigrant students arrive to our schools with assets and skills that deserve to be institutionally recognized.

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Overview

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates' Youth Build Immigrant Power project surveyed 263 students and led focus groups with an additional 20 students in the spring of 2010. Surveys were collected anonymously in English, Chinese, and Spanish.

Analyses of the surveys indicate that a substantial majority of English Learner students value bilingual and bicultural skills as vitally important in today's world. Yet almost 80% perceive their educational system as suppressing all other skills and talents in order to emphasize a singular focus on acquisition of the English language. Three quarters of respondents also admitted to feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, and low confidence as a result of this emphasis. These survey results indicate there is tremendous room for improvement in the educational delivery of English Learner Development (ELD) programs.

Potential Advantages of a Seal of Biliteracy for Immigrant Students

The Seal of biliteracy is a concrete step in the longer term efforts to increase visibility of English Learner immigrant students and support for immigrant achievements. An official biliteracy certification would recognize all bilingual students (English Learner immigrants or not) who have achieved fluency in one language and proficiency in a second language, with a "Seal of Biliteracy" award which identifies them as talented global citizens. The certification would also offer a more balanced assessment of immigrant students' strengths and increase the respect and visibility of ELD students among potential employers and colleges. On a less concrete level, it is hoped that biliteracy recognition would help immigrant students feel more accepted, respected and confident at school and in society.

For More Information

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About AIWA/YBIP

Asian Immigrant Women Advocates' Youth Build Immigrant Power (YBIP) project works with limited English speaking immigrant youth to lift their voices, encourage their confidence and facilitate their participation in efforts to advocate for positive changes in their educational system. YBIP believes everyone's voice should be valued, regardless of what language they speak. Immigrant youth should feel good about their culture and encouraged to overcome any challenges they face, to flourish both academically and in life. YBIP will continue to advocate for an educational system that values the assets that immigrant students bring to our schools and our society, and that offers immigrant students equal visibility, opportunities and respect for their talents.