

Results from the State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy

Focus Groups

La Cosecha Conference

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Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest

- The purpose of REL Southwest is to work with state education agencies, districts, schools and other stakeholders to develop and apply research evidence to meaningfully improve student outcomes.
- In New Mexico, REL Southwest conducts this work within the Southwest English Learners Research Partnership.
- REL Southwest provided technical support to New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) for the New Mexico State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy (SSBB) focus groups.



The New Mexico SSBB is the capstone of culturally and linguistically responsive education that the NMPED envisions for NM students.

To earn the SSBB, students must meet the graduation requirements and demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English through one of four pathways:

1. language proficiency certification by an individual Tribe
2. units of credit and an assessment
3. units of credit and an alternative process portfolio, or
4. an assessment and an alternative process portfolio.



Since the State of New Mexico adopted the SSBB in 2015:

- Twenty-five school districts and four state charter schools have adopted the SSBB.
- Around 3,305 students have received a diploma of excellence with the SSBB.
- In 2019-2020, about 1,100 students graduated with the SSBB.



SSBB focus groups

- Focus groups were conducted in 2019-2020 to gain a better understanding of the priorities, experiences, challenges, and successes of adopters of the SSBB to inform NMPED efforts to support successful implementation.
- The study was designed and conducted by a team from NMPED and other NM stakeholders with coaching and technical support from the REL Southwest English Learner partnership researchers.

Focus group methodology

- Focus groups are a good technique for investigating complex topics.
- Qualitative data is collected through moderated, semi-structured discussions.
- Transcripts are coded, analyzed, and major themes summarized.
- Group interaction can produce a richer description of participant views and experiences than a set of individual interviews or surveys.
- Unlike surveys, results do not include quantitative summaries.



So results would reflect experiences from multiple stakeholder perspectives, we recruited different types of participants. A total of 34 stakeholders ended up participating in the focus groups:

- 14 bilingual and world language teachers,
- 12 bilingual district directors/coordinators,
- 1 tribal educator, and
- 7 students.

We conducted ten focus groups.

- bilingual and world language teachers (3 groups)
- bilingual teachers of students with IEPs (1 group)
- district bilingual program directors/coordinators (4 groups)
- tribal educator (1 group)
- students (1 group)

Focus groups covered 13 main topics.

1. original reasons for adopting the SSBB
2. current priorities for the SSBB
3. how and when are students informed
4. how and when are parents informed
5. how and when do students sign up
6. students with IEPs
7. how students are recognized
8. which pathways are used
9. appropriateness of requirements
10. needed resources
11. successes
12. challenges
13. recommendations

What did we learn?

What were the original reasons for adopting/pursuing the SSBB?

| Directors and teachers | Teachers of students with IEPs | Tribal educator | Students |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• give bilingual students recognition of their native language and cultural heritage• to say, “you are valuable”• encourage students to continue studying dual language into and throughout high school | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• create equity in access to opportunities• to develop students' first language because that impacts their development of English | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• validate students who wanted to become fluent in their native language | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• emphasize their family's heritage and culture• help get into college or get a job |

What are the current priorities for the SSBB?

| Directors and teachers | Teachers of students with IEPs | Tribal educator |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• strengthen students' identity and heritage• keep the level of rigor high so that students who attain the SSBB are truly bilingual and biliterate• offer the SSBB in more languages• promote the SSBB to more students• connect with business community | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• consider special pathways for students with IEPs, determine appropriate accommodations• include language goals into IEPs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• increase number of students who are fluent in their tribal language• strengthen students' identity with their tribal culture |

How and when are students informed about the SSPP?

| Directors and teachers | Tribal educator | Students |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high school staff visits to 8th-grade students • events for incoming freshman • in some schools the SSBB has become part of the school culture; all staff keep an eye out for potential students • language teachers promote the SSBB in their classes • counselors promote the SSBB when they meet one-on-one with students • district website | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • every Native American student is enrolled into the tribal language culture program and learn about the SSBB requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • siblings • Spanish teachers and bilingual coordinators make sure students know what to do through meetings, Remind, Google classroom, or email reminders |

How and when are parents informed about the SSBB?

| Directors and teachers | Tribal educator |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• parents' night, open house, orientation meetings, parent-teacher conferences• brochure• Bilingual parent advisory committee where seniors who are pursuing the SSBB present to parents and students• text messaging system that goes to all parents• word of mouth• district website• one district doesn't inform parent until they are invited to attend the celebration when student receives the SSBB | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• parents are informed by their students• through their website• during monthly parent advisory council meetings |

How and when do students sign up?

| Directors and teachers | Tribal educator | Students |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• all directors said that the SSBB is available to anyone• one district planning to establish Spanish I and II as prerequisites• most have no formal way to “sign up” until they have completed requirements• schools rely on teachers or coordinators to keep a spreadsheet to record students’ language courses they have taken (some worry about tracking when students move) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• no formal way to “sign up” | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• no formal way to “sign up” until they have completed requirements |

Are students with IEPs pursuing the SSBB?

| Directors and teachers | Teachers of students with IEPs |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• all agree that students with IEPs can pursue the SSBB, but this is happening in only some schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• school is working on developing a pathway for students with IEPs• they need accommodations for requirements aligned with IEP |

How are students recognized as they work toward the SSBB?

| Directors and teachers | Students |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• most say students are not recognized until graduation• one district has celebrations with parents during middle school | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• no student reported having formal recognition prior to graduation• most students feel recognized by teachers who support them to earn the SSBB• however, clubs, sports and AP courses seem like a higher priority schoolwide |

Which pathways are used for demonstrating proficiency?

| Directors and teachers | Teachers of students with IEPs | Tribal educator | Students |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one district does not use portfolio option because it's hard to get judges in all languages • one district doesn't offer assessment options because not sure students will pass • some don't offer course unit requirement because they lack world language teachers • some teachers worry about inconsistent assessment requirements across districts; could have more SSBBs if less rigorous | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating unique pathway with modified requirements to make accommodations consistent with a student's IEP • some resistance from teachers who hesitate to deviate • requires someone to advocate for students with IEPs, keep careful records about accommodations and extensive documentation to the state for why the student qualifies for the SSBB | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students can take courses and an assessment developed by teachers and language board to be rigorous or give a portfolio presentation in the tribal language to the tribal language board | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some confusion about requirements for different seals of biliteracy (state, district, global) • students pursuing portfolio option had some confusion about this would entail |

Are the requirements appropriate; does the SSBB indicate proficiency?

| Directors and teachers | Teachers of students with IEPs | Tribal educator | Students |
|--|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• some district leaders feel that requirements are appropriate (they go beyond state minimum requirements)• Navajo nation sets high standards for tribal pathway• some felt English requirement is too low | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• proficiency requirements for the SSBB are typically too high for students with IEPs without accommodations | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• requirements are good; portfolio must demonstrate proficiency in native language and students need to perform well on assessments | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• with one exception, students felt that the level of proficiency required to obtain the SSBB was low |

What are the successes?

| Directors and teachers | Teachers of students with IEPs |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• gives status to biliterate and bicultural students affirming the value of their language and identity• increasing numbers of students earning the SSBB; foreign language classes are full because so many students are pursuing the SSBB• our ability to keep the rigor high• restructuring of the SSBB opportunity and establishment of clear processes, getting more attention and support for the SSBB.• offering a variety of different languages• portfolio presentations are very powerful, inspirational• seal validates students' and teachers' work | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• many students finally know about the SSBB and ask about it• navigating the SSBB requirements and succeeding in completing the requirements has given students agency and taught them to advocate for themselves |

What are the successes? (cont.)

| Tribal educator | Students |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">students are feeling more part of their tribe because they know the language and understand the culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none">better Spanish skills means better communication at home with parents and grandparents and able to help them translate; at work helping customerscommunity service requirement helped them get to know their community better and feel proud to give back to their communityhelp them to stand out when they apply for college or scholarships, or apply for jobs; can earn more if bilingual<i>"I feel like it empowers you and reminds you where you came from."</i><i>"The bilingual seal really distinguishes you from other people and it helps you be determined. I feel like it helps you set a goal and helps you pursue that goal and finish the goal, so I feel like that's gonna help us in college."</i> |

What are the challenges?

| Directors and teachers | Teachers of students with IEPs | Tribal educator | Students |
|--|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of qualified teachers • portfolios: judges for all languages • unable to connect with all tribes in their district to create a pathway • high cost of assessments • keeping accurate records especially when student changes school • <i>"How do we really know if they are proficient in English if they are taking ELD classes and they have a C or higher."</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not aware of what the law says about the rights of students with IEP and what it means to provide accommodations • many teachers are not certified to teach bilingual students and those with IEP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disagreement about who should have the final say in defining the requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time management: stress about all the schoolwork, community work, club activities, employment, and the SSBB requirements in order to graduate • portfolio requirements challenging |

Participants' recommendations – guidance

- Provide **state-wide seal training** for administrators and teachers to break down the process of implementing the SSBB.
- Provide an **updated guidebook** because the current SSBB handbook is viewed as not providing enough guidance. Teachers would like PED to provide more guidance about how to help students with IEP to obtain the SSBB (in each seal pathway).
- Have **more consistent requirements and procedures**. Finding the right level of rigor. One participant said: "Avoid the watered-down versions and keep the high, rigorous ones."
- Provide a **PED SSBB contact person** who will answer questions about the SSBB.
- Provide opportunity for **cross-district sharing** so staff can exchange ideas, network, and learn from each other.

Participants' recommendations – promotion

- Identify **student ambassadors** to help recruit new SSBB participants (and have them share their portfolio presentation with the legislature).
- Invite **business leaders/owners** to come to schools and talk about the usefulness and value to being bilingual (could be district initiative)
- Get **colleges** to recognize the SSBB in college application process.
- Work with **community partners** to promote the SSBB throughout the state, such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for Spanish speakers.
- Reach out to **tribes** and educate them more about the SSBB so that more tribes would establish the SSBB requirements and be ready to support a student who would like to obtain the SSBB in one of the native languages.

Participants' recommendations - portfolios

- Post and maintain a **centralized list of portfolio judges**, particularly for judges for rare languages.
- Create an **exemplar rubric for portfolio evaluations** so that everyone across the state is using the same requirements. As one teacher put it: “I appreciate the openness in the guidelines, but at the same time, I kind of wonder sometimes like, are we too hard on them or maybe not hard enough?”

Discussion:

- What do you think were the most important examples and features of successful implementation of the SSBB? How are these the same or different from implementation in your school, district, or state?
- What do you think were the most important challenges/needs expressed by participants? How are these the same or different from your experiences?
- What are the most important implications or next steps suggested by the results of these focus groups?

Thank you!

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