

BESO Tip: Advocating for Bilingual Education

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Did you know that one of the responsibilities of a bilingual teacher is to be an advocate for bilingual students and for bilingual education? The *Preparation Manual for the Bilingual Generalist EC-6* (TEA, 2011) describes the competencies that a bilingual teacher must develop. In Domain I (Bilingual Education), the manual states that “The beginning teacher uses knowledge of the historical, legal, legislative and global contexts of bilingual education to be an effective advocate for the bilingual education program and to advocate equity for bilingual students” (p. 21).

What does it mean to be an advocate? Being an advocate means speaking up. It means taking action. It means being informed. After all, to be an effective advocate, you need to know what is going on. You need to know what is happening in your local area, in the state and in the nation that impacts bilingual education.

How can you keep yourself informed? Of course, you should be watching the news and reading the newspaper. You should be reading professional journals and newsletters. Another good way to keep yourself informed is to join professional organizations. The Texas Association for Bilingual Education is the state organization that advocates for bilingual education. The National Association for Bilingual Education is the national organization. Go to www.tabe.org and www.nabe.org for information on how to join these organizations. Note that there is a tab for advocacy on each organization’s home page. Once you begin teaching, it is likely that there will be a local bilingual organization as well. Join your local organization; attend its events, present at conferences and volunteer to serve on committees and to be an officer. Also, be active in the state and national organizations. There is a state and national bilingual conference each year. Volunteers run these conferences so volunteer your time; you will find it to be a help not only to the organizations, but beneficial for you as well.

How can you advocate for bilingual education and for your students? There are many things you can do to advocate. First of all, in your classroom, you can send home brief, weekly updates that will help keep your parents informed of what is happening in your classroom and in the school. You can hold parent meetings on a regular basis and present parent workshops. By keeping the parents of your students informed, you will be helping to provide educational equity.

Be sure to teach in the students’ native language. Advocacy includes being a model of bilingualism, so be sure to speak to your students in the native language; be sure to show your love of the language and demonstrate its value in your life. It is also important to intentionally teach your students English. Being bilingual means knowing two languages, so it is essential to teach students English as well.

It is also important that you volunteer to serve on committees in your school and district. Sometimes, decisions are made without taking into consideration the needs of bilingual students. Without

representation from the bilingual program, it is difficult for the needs of the bilingual students to be expressed and taken into consideration. Your participation on committees will help ensure that bilingual students are not forgotten.

What else can you do? Attend school board meetings. Write letters to the editor and to government officials that explain why bilingual education should be supported. Speak up when you hear bilingual education being criticized. Listen respectfully, respond with facts, and share personal stories as well as research support for bilingual education.

In conclusion, to be an advocate for bilingual education, it is vital that you have a strong belief in bilingual education. Take some time to think about why you are becoming a bilingual teacher. Reflect on what you have learned about bilingual education, about the theories that are the foundation for the program and the research that shows that bilingual education works. Your future students and their families need you. Remember, to be an advocate for bilingual education.

Resources:

A good article about advocacy (not advocacy in terms of bilingual education, but good ideas in general) is *Becoming an Effective Advocate*, by Mark Sweet. You can find this article by doing a Google search.

The Preparation Manual can be found at the following website.

Texas Education Agency. (2011). Preparation manual: 192 Bilingual generalist EC-6.

texas.ets.org/index.php/download_file/view/524/

Tips on writing letters to the editor written by Jill Mora can be found at this website.

<http://www.moramodules.com/Prop227/LetterWriting.htm>

Information on policies related to bilingual education can be found at Jim Crawford's Language Policy website.

<http://www.languagepolicy.net/books/AEL.html>

Jim Cummins' website has many resources related to bilingual education.

<http://iteachilearn.org/cummins/index.htm>