

Bilingual-Bicultural Education Best Means for Minorities

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Bilingual-bicultural education is currently the best means of educating large numbers of minority children who speak a language other than English, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights said in a 141-page report released today.

Titled "A Better Chance to Learn: Bilingual-Bicultural Education," the report examines the principles of bilingual-bicultural programs and contrasts them with the monolingual English school and with other methods of teaching language minority students.

In bilingual-bicultural programs, minority language students are taught subject matter first in their native language while they learn English as a second language.

Subjects are taught totally in English only when the child is no longer handicapped by inability to communicate fully in that language. Such programs also stress the incorporation of the minority child's cultural traditions in the curriculum.

"Without a doubt, it is easier for children to learn in a language they already understand," the Commission said. "Native language instruction capitalizes on children's previous knowledge and maximizes the possibility that children will develop healthy self concepts and positive attitudes toward learning."

The Commission pointed out that it is impossible to apply a blanket rule as to how long bilingual instruction should continue, since different groups are exposed to different amounts

of English, depending upon their numbers and concentration.

"For example, Navajo children who live on the Navajo Reservation and are isolated from English speakers may need 12 years of bilingual-bicultural education," the Commission said.

"Steps must be taken immediately to overcome the barriers to education facing language minority students. At stake are futures of a large number of American children.

"Many language minority children are handicapped by poverty and discrimination before they even enter school, and although language is only one obstacle which they face in attempting to complete an education, it is a major one.

"Bilingual-bicultural education can remove much of the burden

from those children and thus put completion of an education within their grasp."

The Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan, factfinding agency concerned with the rights of minorities and women. Chairman Arthur S. Flemming is also Commissioner on Aging of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Other Commissioners are Vice Chairman Stephan Horn, president of California State University, Long Beach; Frankie M. Freeman, an attorney specializing in international law in St. Louis; Manual Ruiz, an attorney specializing in international law with offices in Los Angeles; Robert S. Rankin, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; and

Murray Saltzman, Rabbi, Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation, Indianapolis, Indiana. John A. Buggs is Staff Director.