



## Statement on Funding Immersion Programs in SFUSD Middle Schools

April 15, 2024

The Education for Social Justice Foundation expresses our strong support for funding SFUSD K–8 school dual language immersion programs in multiple languages. Last year, SFUSD defunded 6–8th grade language immersion programs and converted them into World Language electives. Parents responded to this budget cut with serious disappointment; they viewed it as insufficient and detrimental to students who want to retain the valuable education and skills gained from elementary dual language immersion programs. Studies show dual language immersion programs are a highly effective bilingual education model for achieving biliteracy. As SFUSD continues with its RAI plan, we ask the district to meet parents’ expectations and demands by once again funding immersion programs in 6–8th grades as a continuation of the K–5 immersion programs. Strong K–8 dual language immersion programs will serve as a pull factor to attract more families to enroll in SFUSD.

It would be a responsible decision for SFUSD to restore funding to 6–8th-grade dual language immersion programs to meet families’ demands. It would also be a timely decision that responds to state demographics and needs. Additionally, it recognizes that bilingual education is a language right for linguistic minorities.

Approximately 40 percent of students in California are currently or were once English learners, making California the state with more English learners than any other state. However, The Century Foundation, a public policy think tank based in New York City and Washington, D.C., reports in 2023 that the percentage of California enrolling English learners in bilingual education programs is far lower than that of other states. California Proposition 58, passed in 2016, illustrates California’s rising support for bilingual education. It overturned CA Proposition 227 (1998), which restricted bilingual education in public schools. California Assembly Bill No. 1912, which passed in 2022, supports and legitimizes district programs, such as immersion programs. AB 1912 states that “Any affirmative action by the governing board of the school district to implement a school closure or consolidation shall be made only after it adopts a resolution concluding that the community engagement process required pursuant to this section has been completed.” (SEC. 1, (2) (c))

SFUSD must restore funding to K–8 dual language immersion programs as an extension to honoring linguistic minorities’ language rights. For linguistic minorities whose first language is not English, bilingual education is part of their language rights in the public school system. The case of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), which marks its 50th anniversary this year, reminds us of that. The UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner defines language rights as human rights that encompass diverse linguistic groups. Its 2017 guide, *Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A Practical Guide for Implementation*, states the importance of “funding for all public educational activities, including for those in minority languages, be accessible and disbursed in a non-discriminatory manner.” It adds, “Public education in minority languages must in addition seek to achieve bilingualism.” It also recommends the instruction in the mother tongue for a minimum of six to eight years or more. Up until this year, SFUSD K–8 immersion programs have aligned with the UN Human Rights recommendations.

The Education for Social Justice Foundation urges SFUSD, California’s first unified school district founded in 1851, to fund and maintain K–8 dual language immersion programs in the district as it has in the past. The clear marking of K–8 dual language immersion programs on the RAI roadmap will position SFUSD as a leading exemplary district actively preserving and celebrating diverse languages and cultures for our shared humanity.

PROVIDING EDUCATION ON PAST INJUSTICES RELEGATED TO THE SIDELINES OF HISTORY

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*ESJF is in special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council*

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