

The Value of Bilingualism and the Seal of Biliteracy
In the California Labor Market
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The implementation of the State Seal of Biliteracy in 2012, and the fact that even in the first year about 10,000 graduating seniors were able to receive the SSB prompted us at the Civil Rights Project to ask, **What will this mean for these students, how might it affect their postsecondary options and will it have any value in the labor market?** To answer this last question, we conducted a statewide survey of employers in late 2012 and early 2013 to see how they might view a potential employee who holds the seal. We also contacted a number of colleges and universities to see if they would be incorporating the seal into their reviews of applicants.

With respect to colleges and universities it was simply too soon for them to have incorporated the SSB into admissions, procedures and in fact, few actually even knew about it. **This signaled to us that it was important to alert the postsecondary education sector to the existence of the SSB and its potential to be used as a consideration in admissions and course credit. Incorporating the SSB into the state accountability system is one way to bring greater attention to it.**

With respect to employers, however, we had a number of very interesting findings. Like the college and university officials with whom we spoke, most employers were not familiar with the SSB, however they did have a lot to say about bilingualism and about potential employees who held some certification of their bilingualism/biliteracy.

The Survey

The survey was conducted over a period of about 6 months and employed over a dozen UCLA graduate and undergraduate students. 289 employers from across the state, most heavily represented in the Southern California area, responded to a 19 item questionnaire about their attitudes and practices regarding hiring of bilingual personnel. The table below shows the employment sectors represented. We consulted the literature to map out different employment sectors and made every effort to gain representation across all sectors. We worked initially from a variety of lists of employers and also relied on word of mouth and to some extent personal contacts. 183 interviews were conducted in person or by phone and 109 were received online.

Additionally, 10 interviews were conducted with multilingual individuals across different job sectors in order to understand better how their language skills were used and valued in the labor force.

Number and Share of Companies by Industry

Industry	Number	Percentage
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services & Information	65	22.5%
Public Administration & utilities & other services	54	18.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	35	12.1%
Educational Services	28	9.7%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation & Accommodation and Food Services	26	9.0%
Finance and Insurance & Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	23	8.0%
Manufacturing & Construction	16	5.5%
Retail Trade	15	5.2%
Management of Companies and Enterprises & Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	15	5.2%
Transportation and Warehousing	12	4.2%
Total	289	100.0%

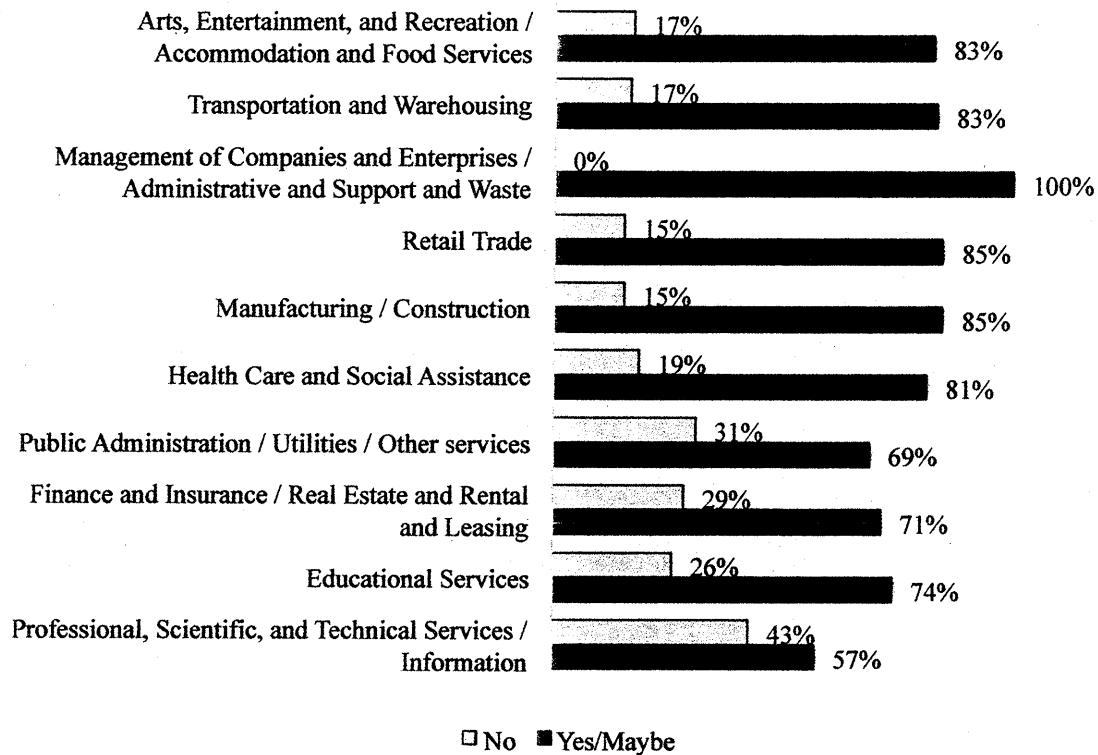
The Sample

Forty-two percent of participants represented companies that had fewer than 100 employees. More than 25 percent of participants were from companies that had between 100 to 499 employees. Approximately six percent had between 500 to 999 employees. The remaining 27 percent represented companies with 1,000 or more employees. Some were from small businesses with a presence only in California, while others were from large corporations with multiple locations in numerous states. In addition, some respondents provided services to a national customer base via their business centers in California.

The Findings

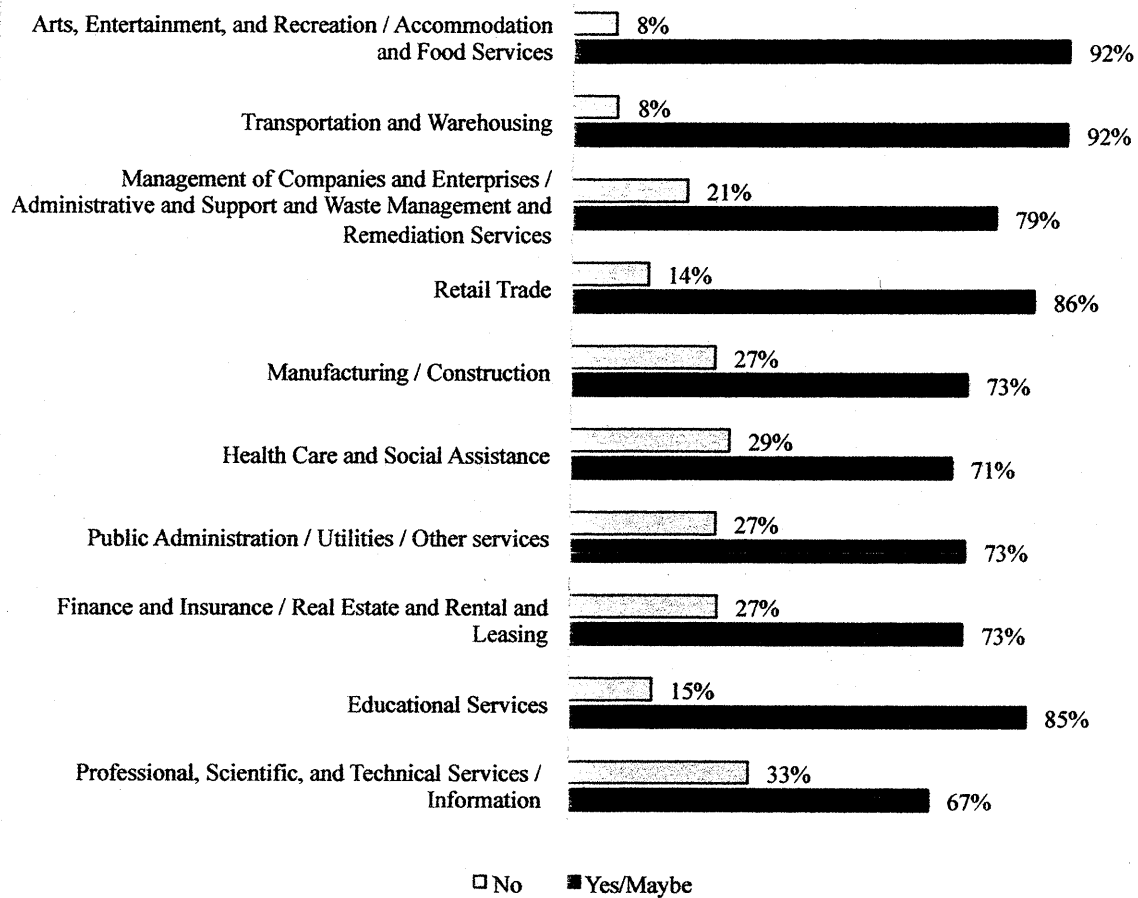
- In every industry bilingualism was a desirable trait for some or all positions. Overall about 66% of employers responded that they would prefer a bilingual employee over a monolingual English speaker if they were comparable in other respects. There was some variation by job sector.

With two similarly qualified applicants, would you be more likely to hire the bilingual applicant?



We then asked if holders of a State Seal of Biliteracy (and we explained exactly what was involved in acquiring this seal) would have any benefit in hiring. Again, overwhelmingly employers responded that they would. For example, 57 percent of employers in professional/scientific/technical services said they would be more likely to hire a bilingual candidate over a monolingual one; in addition, the likelihood of hiring a bilingual jumped by 10 percent in this sector when the SSB was mentioned. Sixty seven percent of employers in professional/scientific/technical services said SSB candidates would be offered the job over a monolingual candidate. As employers become more familiar with the SSB award, perhaps holders in more sectors would experience a clearer advantage in the hiring process. Especially in positions that require some kind of certification involving a test of language skills, it would appear that the SSB could be an efficient and money-saving alternative to current assessment practices.

Will holders of the SSB have an advantage in hiring?



The foregoing is a brief synopsis of an article published under the title:

Employer Preferences:

Do Bilingual Applicants and Employees Experience an Advantage?

By Diana Porras, Joy Ee & Patricia Gándara

in

Callahan, R. & Gándara, P. (2014). *The Bilingual Advantage: Language, Literacy and the U.S. Labor Market*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Other findings reported in the book that educators may find compelling with respect to biliteracy include that students who are able to maintain first language literacy alongside English are less likely to drop out of school, more likely to go to college, and Latinos are more likely to go to 4 year colleges. **Such important outcomes would be fostered by incorporating the SSB in the state accountability system and thereby providing greater incentive for districts to encourage students to work for the designation, and schools to support the instruction that allows them to do so.**