

## BILINGUAL SCHOOLS SHOW SUBSTANTIAL PROMISE

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*The controversy over bilingual education has not abated. Parents and educators see the substantial promise in well-implemented bilingual programs, but pundits and editorial writers who rarely set foot in a school continue to rail against what they see as the ultimate evil for students learning English.*

What is it that convinces us that such well-implemented bilingual programs are worth the effort? Well, the data from the state's accountability system does shed some light on this. According to Proposition 227, parents do have a legal right to submit a waiver to enroll their children in bilingual education. Should they?

### **Which school would you prefer?**

Let's say you are the Spanish-speaking parents of an English Learner in Orange County, and you have a choice of where to enroll your child. Wouldn't you want to enroll in the school that is getting stronger academic results? Parents do choose bilingual education for many reasons. They know the teachers in these programs will build on the child's strengths in their home language. They will be able to work more closely with the school, since parents and teachers share a common language. Often, they appreciate the academic, economic and social benefits that come from building strong academic skills in two languages. They most certainly want their children to excel in English, since they are aware of how difficult it is to make any headway in a career without strong English skills.

The major educational research on the topic confirms that well-implemented bilingual instruction results in equal or better results, in English, than programs implemented only in English (see, especially Jay Greene, 1998; and Slavin and Cheung, December 2003). These programs lead to strong academic skills both in English and the home language. Nevertheless, parents want to look at concrete examples of real schools before making important choices for their own children. Consider the data in Table 1.

**Table 1 - Selected Bilingual and English-Only Schools**

School*	2001-02		2001 API			2002 API		
	EL Total	% Enr in Bil. Inst.	API	State Rank	Sim Schools Rank	API	State Rank	Sim Schools Rank
A Harvey	466	26%	622	4	10	641	4	10
B Heninger	920	30%	568	2	9	580	2	7
C Pio Pico	811	69%	508	1	7	550	1	6
D Walker	813	38%	532	2	5	583	2	8
E Washington	1,109	40%	532	2	5	614	3	10
1 Edison	983	--	494	1	3	529	1	3
2 Key	506	--	492	1	3	518	1	2
3 Mann	773	--	512	1	4	550	1	4
4 Palm	837	--	539	2	7	568	2	4
5 Revere	892	--	494	1	5	546	1	4

**SOURCE:** <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (DATA QUEST).

\* Schools marked A-E are in Santa Ana USD. Schools numbered 1-5 are in Anaheim ESD.

Note that both groups of schools (A-E and 1-5) enroll mostly English learners who speak Spanish. The Santa Ana schools have 74% to 89% ELs. The Anaheim schools have 72% to 81% ELs. They have similar indices of parent education and income.

These schools in Santa Ana USD provide substantial bilingual instruction to many of their students. The Anaheim ESD schools provide NO bilingual instruction.

Note that the scores in both groups of schools have increased from 2001 to 2002, but NONE of the English-only schools tops 570. By contrast, only one of the bilingual schools is below 570, and ALL of them placed ABOVE the median (ranks 6-10), when compared with 100 similar schools. The English-only schools all placed below the median (ranks 2, 3 or 4) when compared with similar schools.

These Santa Ana USD schools implementing bilingual instruction scored higher and appear to have made progress when compared to the Anaheim schools. One bilingual school moved from state rank 2 to 3 (Washington). Washington and Harvey reached the top rank (10) in comparison with similar schools, and Walker jumped from rank 5 to rank 8.

An examination of a total of eleven schools with substantial bilingual instruction in Santa Ana shows that all except three of these schools are at rank five or higher. They are performing above the median for all schools in their comparison band (See Table 2).

**Table 2 - Santa Ana USD  
Selected Elementary Schools  
Implementing Bilingual Instruction**

School*	2001-02		2001 API			2002 API		
	EL Total	% Enr in Bil. Inst.	API	State Rank	Sim Schools Rank	API	State Rank	Sim Schools Rank
Carver	711	46%	472	1	4	500	1	2
Davis	794	84%	483	1	2	515	1	3
Garfield	907	42%	476	1	4	518	1	3
Harvey	466	26%	622	4	10	641	4	10
Heninger	920	30%	568	2	9	580	2	7
King	850	56%	512	1	5	550	1	5
Lincoln	1,125	34%	495	1	3	539	1	5
Lowell	988	52%	510	1	7	535	1	5
Pio Pico	811	69%	508	1	7	550	1	6
Revere	813	38%	532	2	5	583	2	8
Washington	1,109	40%	532	2	5	614	3	10

So, which school would you prefer? A school that provides only instruction in English, or a bilingual school which scores higher on the API (based on tests given ONLY in English) and that ranks substantially above the median when compared with similar schools?

The choice made by parents to enroll in bilingual instruction is a logical, rational one. They want the best for their children. Many schools in the state offer well-implemented bilingual instruction with a strong English development component from the outset. These schools do produce impressive results, and parents, teachers and school administrators are working to help these schools improve even more.

This analysis demonstrates that there are some bilingual schools which produce results that all would agree are helping ELs to approach state standards. These schools demonstrate relative success in English.

Bilingual instruction is not for everyone. It is a good choice for many. It is legal, with close adherence to the waiver provisions of Proposition 227. It does work when well-implemented.

CAVEAT: This report is based on an analysis of data from state sources. It compares students' academic growth over two years (2001 – 2002) in two groups of schools that were substantially similar in ethnicity, mobility, socio-economic status and proportion of English learners. This analysis cannot answer the question of which program is best for all English learners, nor can it provide the ability to generalize that might come from an experimental research design. Nevertheless, it provides a practical illustration that there are schools operating bilingual programs that obtain strong results – in English. When we add into the equation the fact that these schools have also strengthened students' Spanish academic proficiency, there are compelling reasons for parents to choose these programs.

J. Greene. *A Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education*. Austin, TX: Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, the Public Policy Clinic of the Department of Government, University of Texas at Austin, and the Program on Educational Policy and Governance at Harvard University. (1998)

R.E. Slavin and A. Cheung. *Effective Reading Programs for English Language Learners: A best-evidence synthesis*. Baltimore, MD: CRESPAR, Johns Hopkins University. (2003)

See also a previous report on 63 bilingual schools:

Gold, N. *Bilingual schools make exceptional gains on the state's Academic Performance Index (API)*. Oakland, CA: Californians Together, December 2000. <http://californiatomorrow.org/archive/>

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