



# The Sacramento Bee

## Star Latino teacher joins bilingual foes

By Phil Garcia  
Bee Deputy Capitol Bureau Chief

The nation's most celebrated Latino educator has joined forces with organizers of a proposed ballot initiative that would all but eliminate bilingual education in California schools.

Hiram Johnson High School mathematics teacher Jaime Escalante, whose success with Latino public high schoolers from

East Los Angeles was depicted in the 1988 film "Stand and Deliver," has joined the campaign as honorary chairman, the group announced Wednesday.

The proposed initiative would require that all California public school instruction be conducted in English, allowing exceptions in limited circumstances when parents request it. It has yet to qualify for the

Please see BILINGUAL, page A13

## Bilingual: 84 percent of Latino voters back proposal, poll finds

Continued from page A1  
June primary ballot but already has become the subject of much political debate.

Escalante said his support for the measure stems from his own experience as an immigrant who struggled in menial jobs until he learned enough English to pursue a career. He believes that bilingual education programs "are a negative factor for most immigrant children," as he wrote earlier this month in accepting the honorary post.

"From my experience, working at Garfield High (in Los Angeles) and over here at Johnson High, I notice that the kids who are not proficient in English always sit in the back of the room," Escalante said Wednesday.

"They don't want to be involved or participate because they haven't mastered the language," he said. "It creates a complex of inferiority in the classroom, naturally. It's great to have a bilingual teacher to motivate the kids to participate in the class, but unfortunately we don't have that."

Ron Unz, the wealthy Silicon Valley businessman and former California GOP gubernatorial

candidate who is behind the proposed measure, called Escalante's support "a tremendous boost" to his campaign.

"Having the most prominent Latino educator serving as honorary chairman really just allows more of these Latino public figures to voice their true feelings on the issue," Unz said.

Backing up his claims, Unz pointed to a Los Angeles Times poll published Wednesday that showed 84 percent of all California Latino voters supporting the proposed initiative.

The Times poll also found that 80 percent of white voters — and an equal percentage of all California voters — support the proposed measure, which its backers call "English for the Children."

Jorge Duran of Redwood City is one Latino parent who said he supports the proposed measure — and didn't need Escalante's endorsement to decide.

He said he and his wife finally succeeded in getting their two girls, now age 9 and 7, out of a local school that spent maybe "20 minutes" in English language instruction. For now, they have them, along with a son in kinder-

garten, in a school that splits instruction evenly between Spanish and English. But they want more English instruction.

"There were neighborhood children who came from Mexico and they knew more English than my own children, who were born in this country," Duran said in explaining his support for the Unz measure. "... I want my children to have a better future, that they learn English so they can fight for their rights and be somebody in life."

Ray Muñoz, who teaches a "newcomer" class for seventh- and eighth-graders at Martin Luther King Junior High School, said parents who say they support the initiative may not yet fully understand the proposal, which he considers "extreme" in its approach.

Muñoz, who said he was "shocked" that Escalante had endorsed the measure, said his own experience and research have shown him that students who speak, read and write their primary language well first are the ones who will learn English rapidly.

"I know his heart's in the right place, but he is really making a big mistake by endorsing that," he



Jaime Escalante

His success teaching mathematics to Latino public high schoolers was dramatized in the film "Stand and Deliver."

said. "The research shows if you take primary language away from kids, those kids that really need it are going to take longer to learn English."

Republican political consultant Sal Russo said that whether the battle on this measure is over before it really begins — as the polls suggest — depends on how the campaign is waged.

"The campaign has to be that we want that opportunity to realize the American dream extended to all children. If that's the purpose of the campaign, I think it'll do quite well."

Escalante downplayed any high-profile role he might play as honorary chairman by saying he's "really too old to learn the politics," and plans to stay in the classroom and out of any future television ads.

"First of all, to be a politician you have to lie. I don't think I'm going to be able to do that," Escalante said. "In the classroom, you can be honest with kids."

**Jaime A. Escalante**  
5320 Olive Tree Court  
Granite Bay, California 95746

October 10, 1997

Mr. Ron K. Unz  
*English for the Children*  
555 Bryant St., #371  
Palo Alto, California 94301

Dear Ron:

I am glad to give my strong support to your initiative to provide California's immigrant children with an English-language education in the public schools, and to serve as Honorary Chairman of your campaign.

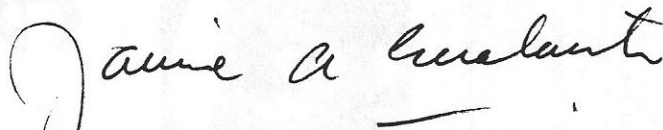
My views on this important educational issue are based on personal experience. As an immigrant from Latin America who arrived to the U.S. at 32 not knowing English, I struggled for several years in menial jobs until I could learn enough English to begin a professional career in this country. I know how difficult it is for an adult to learn a new language, and how important English is to economic advancement in America. It seems a real tragedy that in many cases our public schools are not teaching English to five-or six-year-old immigrant children, who are at an age when they could so easily learn the language.

I also believe that the bilingual education programs found in many California schools are a very poor substitute for English-language instruction. At Garfield H.S. in East LA, where I began my successful Calculus Advanced Placement program, I also worked hard to eliminate most of the school's bilingual education classes, which I felt were holding students back in their academic studies. I feel that my efforts against these misguided programs were an important contribution to the success of my Garfield students.

Although some California politicians seem to support bilingual education for various reasons, my own experiences as a teacher leads me to believe that these programs are a negative factor for most immigrant children, who instead should be taught English while they are young. I also think that most adult immigrants are eager to learn English, and that California would benefit if they were taught English as well.

Thanks for your efforts on this important project.

Sincerely,



Jaime A. Escalante

The  
*English for the Children*

*Campaign*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Latino Leader of Clinton-Gore Campaign Joins Anti-Bilingual Initiative Drive**

Redwood City, CA—Fernando Vega, a long-time leader of Latino Democrats in the San Francisco Peninsula area, today will endorse California's "English for the Children" initiative drive against "bilingual education," and join the campaign as Honorary Chairman for the Peninsula. Mr. Vega, a past City Councilman and School Board Member, had been recruited by the Clinton-Gore campaign in 1992 to lead the regional drive among Latino voters in the Peninsula area. His appointment will be announced Tuesday August 5th at 10:30am outside Hoover Elementary School, a school at which several of his own grandchildren had been placed in non-English "bilingual" programs against the wishes of their own parents.

During the 1970s Mr. Vega played a central role in establishing "bilingual education" programs at Hoover and other schools in his district, but in recent years concluded that the system is a failure and should be ended. "There is no shame in admitting that you once supported a program which you now see doesn't work in practice," declared Mr. Vega, "What is shameful is that so many politicians continue to support a program which they realize does not work and is hurting the education of millions of young children."

"Mr. Vega's public statements reflect the private sentiments of many, many other Latino political leaders," suggested Ron Unz, Chairman of the "English for the Children" campaign, "but most are unwilling to take a stand on an issue perceived as too controversial." Mr. Vega added "I hope that more Latinos and more Democrats will now do what they believe to be right and go public with their views on this bipartisan initiative of such importance to the future of California's Latino population."

The initiative, planned for the June 1998 ballot, would immediately move California's 1.3 million non-English proficient students from the native-language system of "bilingual education" mandated by current state law into an intensive program of "sheltered English immersion". "Bilingual education" would remain an option which parents could specifically request for their children. The initiative also allocates \$50 million per year for ten years to fund adult English literacy programs. Supporters and opponents both agree that the measure would essentially end "bilingual education" in California, and probably spark a move to do the same nationwide.

**English for the Children is a project of One Nation/One California**

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**English for the Children**  
**A Project of One Nation/One California**

To my fellow Californians,

As a committed lifelong Democrat, I have always been proud to be a member of the party which cares about the lives and families of the ordinary working people of our country. As an American of Hispanic ancestry, I was especially proud in 1992, when the Clinton-Gore Campaign asked me to lead their election drive among Hispanics on the Peninsula. The 18,000 Hispanic voters which I helped turn out contributed to Bill Clinton's victory in California, and allowed my party to regain the White House after many years of Republican rule.

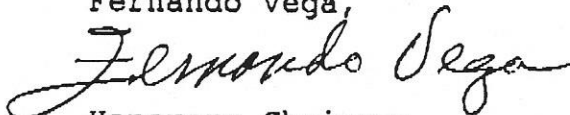
Now, as a Hispanic and as a Democrat, I am very proud to serve as Honorary Chairman of the Peninsula's "English for the Children" initiative campaign against "bilingual education."

I think that I am something of an expert on "bilingual education." All my life, I have fought hard for the equal rights of Hispanic children to receive a good education in the public schools. I fought for better educational programs while I was a private citizen, while I was on the Redwood City school board, and while I was on the Redwood City Council. I helped create our local "bilingual education" program because I believed that it would be best for Hispanic children. But now, after many years of trying, it is obvious that bilingual education just doesn't work and we must end it.

There is no shame in admitting that you once supported a program which you now see doesn't work in practice. What is shameful is that so many politicians and other officials continue to support such a program year after year, even after they see that it has failed to work and that it is harmful to the future of the young children who are in it. Unless young children are taught to read and write English in our schools, they cannot do well in our society, and children who are in "bilingual" programs just don't learn to read and write well.

I hope that all Democrats and Republicans in California who care about the education of young children will join me in helping to end these programs which do so much harm.

Fernando Vega,



Honorary Chairman

# San Mateo County Times

SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA

WEDNESDAY: September 10, 1997

The Peninsula's Hometown Newspaper

## Unlikely ally in English-only clash

Vega mounts campaign to make changes in education system

By Kim Vo  
STAFF WRITER

REDWOOD CITY — Fernando Vega likes to tell tales. About the time he secured college prep classes for his oldest son, or fought for bilingual education in local schools or worked to raise the standing of the Latino community.

Then he tells you he screwed up.

Not on all the battles, but certainly on the bilingual education front. He was simply wrong, Vega says now.

"I saw it as a tool to get to the means. It didn't work," Vega said. "Let's try something else. Let's re-examine it."

A Latino Democrat who *habla español muy*

## Vega: Parent fought for son

Continued from A-1

the Children, a state ballot initiative sponsored by Palo Alto entrepreneur and Republican Ron Unz.



GEORGE WOLF—Staff

Fernando Vega, a former Redwood City school board member and an early advocate of bilingual education, has joined the campaign to eliminate most bilingual classes.

*bien*, Vega is an unlikely proponent of English for

Please see **Vega**, A-11

The initiative calls for teaching all children — regardless of their native tongue — in English.

Parents would have to specially request their children be placed in bilingual classes, a flip-flop of the current system, Unz said.

Vega serves as honorary chair of the Peninsula district for Unz's campaign. A green slate with "English for the Children" written in chalk sits on his dirt yard in Redwood City. Another sign rests on his white station wagon.

He distributes pamphlets and gathers some of the 430,000 signatures the initiative will need to qualify for next June's ballot.

He fields phone calls. Lots of phone calls, not just from interested residents but from local newspapers, the Associated Press and the Boston Globe.

"I'm 73," Vega said. "If I pass this (ballot initiative) it is the biggest gift I give to Latino kids."

Kids lured Vega into the political arena from the start. His oldest son, Oscar, signed up for high school physics, algebra and government in 1964.

He was given general math, wood working and ceramics, Vega said.

Incensed, Vega spoke with the Sequoia High School counselor who assigned Oscar the classes. He was told that college preparatory classes had limited enrollment and since Oscar, a Latino, couldn't afford college it was best to prepare him for a blue-collar life.

Vega fought until his son was allowed into the advanced academic classes and Oscar went on to college. Fernando earned a reputation as a Latino advocate and was eventually appointed to the Redwood City school board in 1969.

During that same time parents rallied to have a bilingual expert for the district's growing Latino population.

"One teacher said, 'They're very nice kids. I want to teach them, but I can't. I don't speak Spanish,'" Vega said.

Vega sided with the parents who argued schools should hire teachers who speak Spanish and English. Nearly two decades later, Vega says it was a mistake.

Children aren't learning English rapidly enough, he said, and that means low-paying jobs in their future.

Nearly 1.4 million California students have only limited proficiency in English, according to the state department of education figures. Each year, only about 6 percent of them, a little more than 89,000, become fluent in English.

The statistics are only slightly better in San Mateo County, where 8 percent of the 19,069 students with limited English skills, about 1,480 students, become fluent each year, according to state figures from March 1997.

Critics like Vega say those figures mean bilingual education has a 92 percent failure rate.

But others argue that throwing all students into classes taught exclusively in English is not the answer.

Students who arrive in America when they're older are often frustrated because they can't even learn math or science until they master English, said Gloria Siguenza, the county's coordinator for support services for English learners.

"Kids who don't speak English, or very little, they're sitting in the classroom and doing nothing. They're lucky to come out of high school and get a job," Siguenza said.

While she agreed that some bilingual programs needed to be reformed, Siguenza believes Unz's proposal to place everyone in English-only classes is oversimplified.