

The storm over bilingual ed

■ A real debate: That's what California needs to help non-English speaking students learn the language

RACISTS out, students in! Bilingual's gonna win!" That was the crowd's chant at a UC-Berkeley debate on Ron Unz's "English for the Children" initiative, which bans bilingual education, except by parental waiver. Most of the public comment consisted of denunciations of Proposition 209 (affirmative action) and Proposition 187 (immigrant bashing).

"English for the Children" has the signatures to qualify for the June ballot.

California could be headed for another bitterly divisive debate that misses the real issues.

I propose some basics for a genuine discussion of what policies might help more students succeed.

Everyone wants children to learn English well — especially their parents — and do well in school. People disagree on the best way to achieve that result, or whether there's one best way in all circumstances.

Nobody thinks it's bad for students to be bilingual and biliterate. People disagree on whether bilingual education is achieving that

goal, or leaving students "limping along in both, masters of neither," as a frustrated bilingual teacher described it to me.

Bilingual educators believe kindergartners may pick up "playground English" quickly, but take five to seven years — some say six to nine years — to master the "academic English" needed to read textbooks and participate in class discussions. Nobody else believes this.

On today's page you'll see columns by Alexander Sapiens, a professor who strongly supports bilingual education, and Lisa Dilles, a long-time bilingual teacher who questions how often the theory is working in reality.

They raise a critical issue.

Bilingual education doesn't work if it isn't done right, research shows. And bilingual education usually *isn't* done right in California. For starters, only a third of supposedly bilingual classes are taught by a trained, truly bilingual teacher, Sapiens estimates.

School officials have been trying to recruit and train more bilingual teachers for 25 years. There are programs to help bilingual aides get through college and qualify as teachers, programs to import teachers from Spain or Mexico (who may not be able to teach in English), lots of waivers.

California can't offer a high-quality

bilingual program to more than a small number of students — perhaps 10 percent of English learners. So what should we do?

I agree with Dilles: Let schools do whatever works — based on measurable student success. But that choice won't be on the ballot.

"English for the Children" has another answer: English learners would be placed in "sheltered English" classes, in which the teacher uses simple English, dramatization, context and other techniques to help students understand lessons. Once they have "a good working knowledge" of English, "normally" within a year, students would transfer to mainstream classes.

It would be fairly easy for parents who prefer bilingual classes to get a waiver for a child 10 or older, harder to do so for a younger child.

Let's talk about whether it's smart for the majority of state voters to pick the best way to teach. Let's hear why pretend bilingual is better for Spanish-speaking elementary students than sheltered English, and why mainstreaming will fail for them but works for kids who speak Vietnamese, Chinese, Farsi or Russian. Let's ask why the state hasn't tracked the achievement of English learners, leaving us with virtually no useful data.

Let's stop shouting worn-out slogans.

Joanne Jacobs is a member of the Mercury News editorial board. You may reach her at 750 Ridder Park Dr., San Jose, CA 95190, by fax at 408-271-3792, or e-mail to JJacobs@sjmercury.com.

■ Is it working? Find new ways to teach to improve achievement

BY LISA DILLES

SINCE 1978, I have been a bilingual classroom teacher, an English as a second language teacher and a bilingual resource specialist in a variety of districts. I have yet to see acceptable, *measurable* outcomes for most children whose initial reading instruction has been in Spanish. I define acceptable as at least 70 percent receiving Cs or better in classes taught in English by sixth or seventh grade.

Bilingual education was an attempt to remedy the high failure rates of immigrant students (usually Spanish-speaking) placed in "sink or swim" classes. We need to ask: Is it working?

It is unconscionable to have bilingual programs in place where only the brightest 10 to 20 percent of students are adequately prepared for academic work in English.

Being a bilingual teacher means running two parallel literacy curricula. It is definitely more work, and it is done with the best of intentions. But there is often a wide gap between good intentions and good outcomes.

Over the years, when Spanish-speaking parents have asked for more English instruction, teachers (including me) have told them their kids should learn in Spanish first. We've said: It takes seven years to become fluent in another language. Your children eventually will learn English and do their schoolwork in English.

Parents heard the theory at a meeting I attended last year. Then a mother stood up and said (in Spanish): "Señor, you are talking about philosophy but *my* family is living it." She said that she was not going to let happen to Juanito what had happened to big brother Jorge. Jorge

had left elementary school reading adequately in Spanish but with only one year of English reading. He was three years below grade level. When he saw the level of writing middle-school teachers expected, he almost dropped out. She wanted her second son to start reading in English as soon as possible to avoid the same near-catastrophe.

I love languages, and speak Spanish, Italian and some French. I tell my students everyone should know at least two languages. I think non-English-speaking students need some help in their first language to get oriented when they start school.

But I have come to believe that my students need to learn English as richly and smoothly and as soon as they can.

Even if bilingual education works in an ideal setting, with highly trained, truly bilingual teachers and excellent English as a second language teachers, can many schools duplicate that? Class-size reduction (which is wonderful) has made the 25-year shortage of bilingual teachers even more acute. If the conditions required for bilingual education to be effective are so hard to achieve, is it a realistic policy?

I'm not endorsing the Unz initiative. I think districts should be allowed to design their own programs for students with limited English skills, and required to measure their outcomes. We must be accountable. If you say your students are doing well, great! Show me the data.

We can use what we now know about second-language acquisition to do a much better job than those old "sink or swim" classes where too many kids sank. But let's move forward and prove we can meet our students' needs.

Lisa Dilles' bilingual second-grade class in Santa Cruz includes eight students who speak English as their first language, and 12 whose native language is Spanish, three of whom are making the transition to English.



San Jose Mercury News

MONDAY
MARCH 16, 1998

Mother tongue-tied

CALIFORNIA'S law mandating bilingual education expired in 1987. So it's not the law anymore, and school districts can't be required to obey it.

That is the common-sense conclusion of

a Sacramento judge, who ruled recently that school districts don't need a state waiver to teach students in English, rather than their native language. There's no law to waive.

In response, the California Board of Education voted unanimously last week that local districts may decide how best to educate students with limited English skills, using any method that develops English fluency "effectively and efficiently." Bilingual education remains an option, but not the preferred option.

"Local school districts will now have the flexibility they need to provide the best English language instruction to their students," Board President Yvonne W. Larsen said in a statement.

Until last week, the debate over bilingual education has focused mainly on the June ballot measure sponsored by software entrepreneur Ron Unz. Proposition 227 would eliminate most bilingual education programs and substitute "structured English immersion" (classes designed for English language learners), with most students moving to mainstream classes in one year. Parents who prefer bilingual education, or other methods, would have to apply for a waiver, citing their child's special needs.

"Preserve local control" is the rallying cry of opponents of the Unz initiative. But they are the same people who now oppose the state board's restoration of local control. Superior Court Judge Ronald B. Robie ruled that native-language instruction may be required "when necessary" to meet students' needs.

The bilingual defenders argue that the court ruling changes nothing, since they believe native-language instruction is always "necessary" for children who aren't fluent in English.

In fact, the state badly needs a sensible policy for educating these stu-

Editorial
The opinion
of the
Mercury
News



dents. But what it needs to do is monitor how well they're actually learning English, instead of monitoring how they're taught.

The Legislature has failed to act for 11 years, allowing education officials to continue to enforce the expired

law, which required districts to offer native-language instruction when it was feasible.

Of 1.4 million "limited English proficient" students, about 30 percent — mostly Spanish-speaking elementary students — now are in bilingual edu-

cation classes taught primarily in their native language. Another 20 percent receive some native-language tutoring from an aide. The rest are in mainstream classes with extra tutoring in English, or in "structured" or "sheltered" English immersion classes designed for limited-English students.

About 20 percent receive no special help. Known as "sink or swim," that method is a violation of federal law, which requires that limited-English students get the help they need to receive an equal education. It doesn't specify how they should be taught, however.

The Legislature could give Californians an alternative to Proposition 227 by passing SB 6 by Sen. Dede Alpert, D-Coronado. It pairs local control with accountability: Students would take a state test measuring English fluency and mastery of academic subjects. The state could intervene only if students weren't making adequate progress.

The Latino Caucus has blocked passage of this bill for two years running, and liberal Democrats are still demanding that SB 6 be amended to require native-language instruction, once again eliminating local control. The bill's chances don't look very bright.

At its April meeting, the board of education will adopt new policies to monitor how programs for limited-English students are meeting students' needs. The board could try to enforce the accountability part of SB 6 as policy. But if the board can't enforce a law that's gone out of existence, it's going to have trouble enforcing a law that never passed.

That will leave voters with a choice between Proposition 227 and the status quo, which bilingual education advocates will defend to the death. If there's no alternative to 227, death will come on Tuesday, June 2.

San Jose Mercury News

PENINSULA EDITION
\$1.50

Serving Northern California Since 1851

SUNDAY
.... MARCH 22, 1998

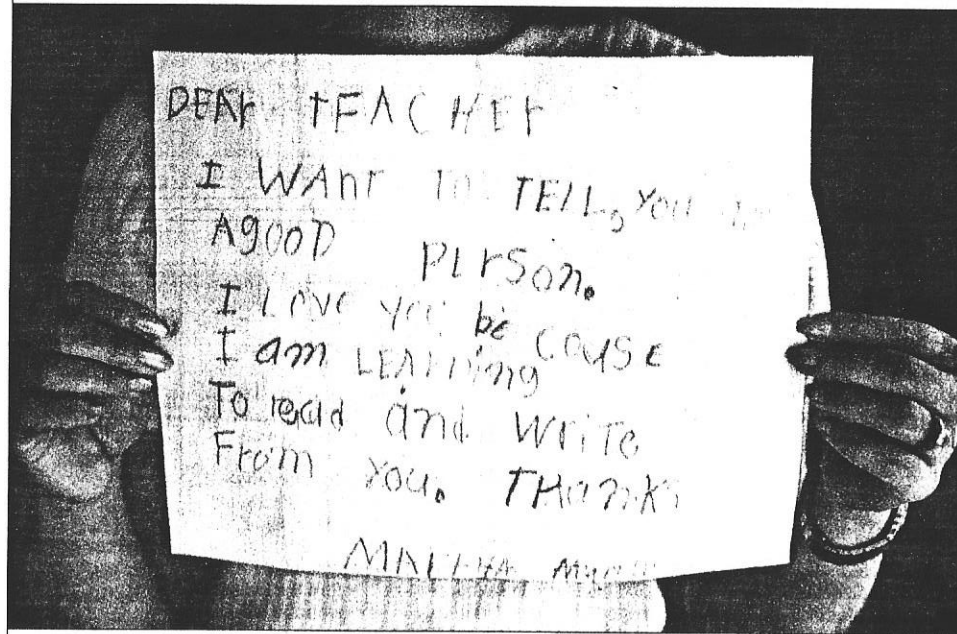
WWW.MERCURYCENTER.COM

ENGLISH INITIATIVE'S SPANISH-SPEAKING ROOTS



THE BILINGUAL DEBATE

How Latino parents' boycott of a Los Angeles school led to a statewide proposal to scrap bilingual education



Alicia Benavides holds up a letter from a student. Benavides, who teaches at Budlong Elementary in Los Angeles, is bilingual but does not support the district's bilingual education program. She teaches most of her first-graders in English, including those who came to school speaking Spanish.

PHOTOS BY JUDITH CALSON

| INSIDE

PHOTOS BY JUDITH CALSON

STORY BY MICHAEL BAZELEY AND LORI ARATANI

GROUND ZERO of the bilingual education revolt is a squat concrete and glass storefront on the edge of Los Angeles' gritty skid row district.

There, in the Las Familias del Pueblo community center, Spanish-speaking garment workers two years ago plotted a campaign to get their children out of mostly Spanish-language classes at nearby Ninth Street Elementary School.

Now they are at the epicenter of a controversy that has rippled across the country, igniting passionate debate among academics, politicians, civil rights groups, parents and teachers. As a result of those parents' rebellion, California voters will decide in less than three months whether to scrap bilingual instruction in public schools.

The parents' motivation was uncomplicated: They wanted their children educated in English, the language of opportunity in the land of opportunity.

"It was important for the parents to unite and get what we want," Hilda Mendez, who kept two of her children out of Ninth Street for the two-week boycott in February 1996, said in Spanish. "We wanted them to learn English, because in this country, that is the language that is spoken. I want my children to be better than me."

The protest might have remained a historical footnote in the continuing tug-of-war over bilingual education were it not for Ron Unz. But when the Silicon Valley millionaire read news accounts of the par-



Susanna Nieva, 10, fixes a stapler while working on her homework after school at Las Familias del Pueblo community center in Los Angeles.

ents' cause, he made it the foundation of Proposition 227 — the statewide initiative to eliminate bilingual education — on the June ballot.

It seems inevitable that the bilingual conflict would start in Southern California. This is where the challenge is the biggest and the stakes are the highest.

Los Angeles County took in more immigrants in 1993 than any state other than
See BILINGUAL, Page 24A

INSIDE

The role of poverty

Researchers say family income and the parents' education level have been found to significantly influence student achievement.
Page 24A

Another rebellion

Orange County districts rebel against bilingual education by seeking waivers from the state Board of Education to teach students mostly in English.
Page 25A

Pressure on schools

A state and national push to hold educators more accountable for student achievement could lead to a boost in performance.
Page 25A

'We wanted them to learn English, because in this country, that is the language that is spoken. I want my children to be better than me.'

HILDA MENDEZ, WHO BOYCOTTED A LOS ANGELES SCHOOL IN PROTEST OF BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

FAMILY INCOME

Poverty plays significant role in classroom performance

BY LORI ARATANI
Mercury News Staff Writer

Bilingual education has been roundly criticized for failing California's children — blamed for high dropout rates among Latino students and for dooming children to failure because they never master English.

But researchers and educators say how well children will do in school is far more complex than just the lessons they receive in the classroom. A strong academic program is crucial, but many other factors, including family income and the parents' education, have been found to significantly influence achievement.

That doesn't mean children who come from poor families cannot succeed, but they do face more obstacles. Studies show they are more likely to move frequently or attend schools with less experienced teachers and lower standards for academic achievement.

One in five California children lives in poverty, according to statistics from the state Department of Education. And Latino children — who make up the vast majority of the state's limited-English-speaking population — are twice as likely to come from poor families than white children are, according to a soon to be published paper by the California Policy Seminar, based at the University of California-Berkeley.

"These are the same kids that if they spoke English, schools would still not be dealing well with them," said UC-Davis Professor Patricia Gandara, one of the authors of the paper. "It's not just



Children in the play yard at Las Familias del Pueblo center in Los Angeles wait after school for their parents to pick them up. Many of the parents are garment workers, as were those who wanted their children taught in English instead of their native Spanish. Their protest led to the initiative to cut bilingual education in public schools.

PHOTOS BY JUDITH CALSON — MERCURY NEWS

'You can't blame it just on bilingual education. Most of it has to do with social class and the poverty they live in. Only a little has to do with their native tongue.'

—Christine Rossell, helped draft initiative

But the inability to speak English is an added burden.

According to Gandara, Latino children tend to move more frequently than their classmates. And since there is no set policy in California for how these children should be educated, a child that begins the year learning in Spanish may end the year in a class where instruction is in English only.

Kathleen LeClair, who teaches first grade at Cesar Chavez School in the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District on San Jose's East Side, has seen firsthand how this can affect student achievement. She has often had students who struggled in her classroom because they had bounced from program to program so often.

And even though many of her students are flourishing in the native language program she teaches, she expects only six of her students to stay long enough to complete their education at Chavez, given the transiency of the school's students.

"We have children who weren't here because their father went to prison that day," added Carol Garcia, principal at San Jose Unified School District's Schallenberger Elementary School. "Kids are dealing with real life situations out there and yet we're expecting them to be normal little students. It has nothing to do with bilingual education."

kids who aren't English speakers. It's children who come from poor homes or from communities at risk; all those groups of kids don't do well in school."

Even critics of bilingual education say the link between family income and academic achievement cannot be ignored.

"You can't blame it just on bilingual education," said Christine Rossell, a professor of political science at Boston University, who helped draft Ron Unz's statewide initiative to eliminate bilingual education. "Most of it has to do with social class and the poverty they live in. Only a little has to do with their native tongue."

Parents see English as kids' key

■ BILINGUAL

from Page 1A

California and New York. And the massive Los Angeles Unified School District — the second largest system in the country — staunchly supports bilingual education as the best way to teach children who lack basic English skills.

More than 430,000 L.A. Unified students — two in three of the district's enrollment — come from homes where English is not the first language. Nearly three in four live in poverty. By contrast, four in 10 of Santa Clara County's 245,000 schoolchildren come from homes where English is not the first language and about three in 10 are impoverished.

School districts in San Diego and Orange counties, too, have been grappling for years with how to best teach similarly burgeoning populations of immigrant students.

Whether these children succeed or fail academically has profound implications for California's economy and welfare system, notes education professor Patricia Gandara of the University of California-Davis.

"California's economy can't survive without these kids," she said. "It can't take on that many children

who are undereducated."

Symbolically, opponents of bilingual education could not have lucked into a better story than the Ninth Street boycott.

In the shadows of downtown L.A.'s gleaming skyscrapers, thousands of immigrant men and women toil away over sewing machines for \$20 to \$40 a day, piecing together designer clothes to fill department store racks. Most don't have time to sort through the philosophical pros and cons of bilingual education.

But they know what they want for their children. And by mid-1995, many were concerned their children were not being exposed to enough English at nearby Ninth Street Elementary School.

In their eyes, the issue was simple. With their low-pay factory jobs,

they had only a tenuous grip on the American Dream. Their children could take the next step toward embracing America's educational and economic possibilities by doing one thing: learning English.

"There's more of a possibility of their reading and going to the university," Genovia Pastor, the mother of three, said in Spanish after her shift ended one evening. "They can get better jobs."

Ninth Street — like many L.A.



THE BILINGUAL DEBATE



Jose Cortez is learning to read in Spanish in first grade at Cahuenga Elementary School in Los Angeles. For years, Cahuenga teachers have taught students English by teaching them in their native language first.

schools — was educating students primarily in Spanish while it slowly introduced them to English. But parents demanded their children be placed in English-language classes — their legal right.

Kids removed from school

By February 1996, when the school district still had not moved their children despite repeated requests, the parents pulled them out of school. After two weeks, the school agreed to place the children in English classes that fall.

The parents' main advocate and adviser during the boycott was the Rev. Alice Callaghan, a soft-spoken Episcopalian priest who watches their children after school at Las Familias del Pueblo community center.

"These garment workers can barely make it," Callaghan said during a recent tour of the nearby sweatshops. "They don't want their kids working in factories, or selling tamales on the street corner or cleaning offices. They want them to be successful lawyers, and they can attain that through learning how to read and write in English."

Even the children prefer English. "It's better to know English," said 10-year-old Sandra Losada, a fifth-grader who switched into English-language classes after the boycott. "We understand everything better now. We can read books and understand the teacher."

SHIFTING EMPHASIS

For students with limited English skills, Los Angeles Unified School District offers a bilingual education program that combines instruction in the student's native language with increasing amounts of English instruction. This is how a student's school days would typically be broken up over the first several years of instruction, according to district guidelines.

	Native English language	English language
First grade	30%	70%
Second grade	35%	65%
Third grade	45%	55%
Fourth grade	80%	20%
Fifth grade	100%	

Source: Los Angeles Unified School District
MERCURY NEWS

stucco houses on the edge of Koreatown, have taught students English by teaching them in their native language first.

Principal likes approach

It's an approach that principal Lloyd Houske and his staff say makes sense. Students feel more comfortable and their inability to speak English doesn't hamper them from learning subjects such as science and math because they are taught those lessons in their native language at the same time they are learning English, Houske said.

Teachers see little benefit in the English-only approach espoused in the Unz initiative. They fear that students now flourishing in Cahuenga's program might founder in all-English classrooms.

L.A. Unified officials are apologetic for the Ninth Street mess, acknowledging an "unfortunate communications breakdown."

But the controversy did nothing to shake the district's faith in its bilingual program. As attacks on bilingual education have intensified statewide in the last year, district officials and thousands of teachers remain committed to the approach.

That commitment is readily apparent at Cahuenga Elementary School. For more than a decade, teachers at the 1,200-student campus, in a neighborhood of plain,

"I think it's very important for students to develop language skills in their primary language," added LEZ. See BILINGUAL, Page 25A

Los Angeles Unified School District

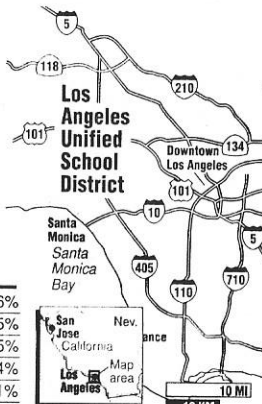
Total students: 666,006 in 1996-97

English spoken at home **35%**
Limited English proficiency **46%**
19%

Reclassified as fluent in English

Languages spoken at home

Spanish	57.6%	Cantonese	0.6%
English	34.9%	Farsi	0.5%
Korean	1.2%	Vietnamese	0.5%
Armenian	1.1%	Russian	0.4%
Pilipino	1.0%	Other	2.1%



Source: Los Angeles Unified School District

MERCURY NEWS

When students are in English-only settings, 'they're not learning anything except English. They can't grasp any of the other concepts.'

ADELINE SHOJI, BILINGUAL COORDINATOR AT CAHUENGA SCHOOL IN LOS ANGELES

L.A. Unified teachers divided on bilingual instruction issue

■ BILINGUAL

from Page 24A

za Irizarry, who teaches first grade at Cahuenga. "Once they are solid in their native language the transition to (English) is smoother."

Districtwide, though, L.A. teachers are split almost down the middle on bilingual instruction. In a close vote last year, 48 percent of the 15,000 teachers who cast ballots said United Teachers of Los Angeles should support Unz's initiative.

L.A. Unified officials are not deterred by the teachers' position. This month, they released an internal study concluding that students in native-language programs such as Cahuenga's fared better than those in mostly English-language classes.

"The study looked at 5,817 students who had remained at the same elementary school from first through fifth grade and gone through either the district's basic bilingual program or an alternative program in which most instruction takes place in English.

How students compare

On English-language reading and math tests administered last year, graduates of the native-language programs performed better than students in the English-language programs, according to the study. In reading, students from the traditional Spanish-English programs scored at the 28th percentile on a national standardized test compared with English-language program students at the 21st percentile. In math, bilingual students tested at the 33rd percentile while English students scored at the 26th percentile.

Critics noted the dismal overall achievement of all students. And they pointed out that the district's small student sample excluded the thousands of children who move



Lupe Velazquez, 8, reads a book in English at Las Familias del Pueblo. A book on educating immigrant children sits nearby on the desk of the Rev. Alice Callaghan, who supported the parents' school boycott.

What really started to get me was kids who were quick and teaching themselves English — and there were plenty of them. And I would ask to get

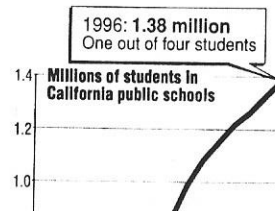
teachers from introducing written English materials to students before tests indicated they were ready.

"What really started to get me was kids who were quick and teaching themselves English — and there were plenty of them," Lasken said. "And I would ask to get them tested out of the program, and it was very difficult."

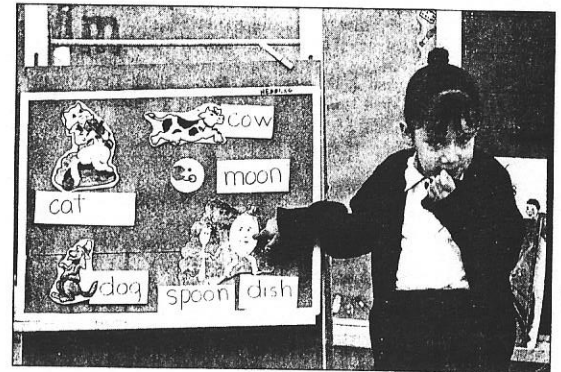
Support for Prop. 227

Many longtime proponents of native-language instruction found themselves in Lasken's camp, and some are saying they intend to vote

Students with limited English proficiency



CHALLENGING THE RULES



JUDITH CALSON — MERCURY NEWS

A kindergartner in Lynn Hollis' class at California Elementary points to the board. Last year, Hollis spoke mostly Spanish in her class.

Orange County districts revolt in different way

BY LORI ARATANI
Mercury News Staff Writer

In the debate over the best way to teach children who speak little or no English, it seems logical that the first school districts to rebel against bilingual education would be in Orange County — an area long known for its conservative politics.

While immigrant parents in Los Angeles were demanding that their children be taught in English, trustees in four Orange County districts were staging a rebellion of their own. All sought waivers from the state Board of Education to teach students predominantly in English.

"(Bilingual education) helps to foster the notion that students can survive in America without really knowing the language," said Bill Lewis, president of the Orange Unified school board.

The county's demographics have shifted rapidly over the last two decades, propelling issues like bilingual education to the forefront, points out Mark Balduassare, a University of California-Irvine

that the state board had no right to require districts to seek waivers, because the California law that required students be taught in their native languages expired in 1987.

Less than a week later, the state Board of Education lifted its requirement that school districts like Orange seek permission for the right to teach non-English speaking children in English.

Those recent actions have alarmed advocates of bilingual education, who fear that districts may no longer feel obligated to teach students in their native language. They say students could be left foundering in classrooms where teachers speak a language they can't fully comprehend.

Proposition 227, the June initiative that would all but eliminate bilingual classes, has prompted more fear among bilingual advocates because it says students are to learn English by being taught in English. However, whether that allows for the use of a student's primary language in class is still up for debate.

Orange County educators believe their program would comply

from school to school. What's more, they say the district downplayed data showing students from bilingual programs were far less likely to be literate in English by fifth grade than students in English-language classes.

Nonetheless, officials say the study shows the district is on the right track.

"We base decisions on sound pedagogy, on both empirical research and research in our own district," said Forrest Ross, district administrator for the elementary language acquisition program. "We've been in this business a long time, and the results show we are making progress."

In 1981, Los Angeles was one of the first California districts to study whether the theories then being re-

lated about bilingual education would work in real schools.

That study, now called Project MORE, continues at 22 of the district's 439 elementary schools and has become the basis for its bilingual policies.

Project MORE teachers undergo more extensive language

training than regular bilingual teachers. Strict guidelines dictate when a student can receive English instruction. And, as much as possible, students are grouped into classes by ability and literacy levels.

Project MORE director Diana Hernandez said these tactics help the district avoid the sloppy applica-

them tested out of the program, and it was very difficult.

Doug Lasken, a teacher at Ramona Elementary School in Hollywood

tion of bilingual theory that has doomed other schools.

"What happens in many schools is that teachers arbitrarily decide when to add English," Hernandez said. "We have a more specific, rigid program. I think we need to retrain teachers in terms of the research and why they need to do things a certain way."

An ongoing district study of Project MORE students shows that graduates of the program perform better than the district as a whole on standardized tests.

Nonetheless, bilingual education continues to invite criticism, especially from teachers.

Last year's teacher referendum on the Unz initiative was the

fourth in union history, all revolving around bilingual education. It was championed by Doug Lasken, a teacher at Ramona Elementary School in Hollywood who has spent 10 years working with Armenian- and Spanish-speaking students.

Lasken said he became frustrated by district rules that prohibited

in favor of Proposition 227.

Ramona teacher Dana Koon said many teachers are frustrated with the district's rigid program.

"I do believe it's easier to teach a child whose family speaks Spanish at home in their native language," said Koon, 52, who has been teaching for 10 years. "But I also believe you should not withhold English from them. It's gone too far in the other direction. They've asked for this Unz thing."

Alicia Benavides is a Mexican-American who was recruited to work with Spanish-speaking students in their native language, but refused, citing philosophical objections to the bilingual program.

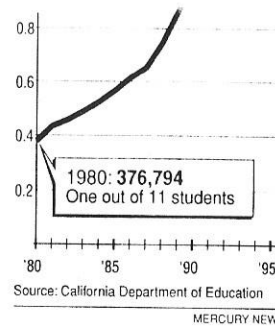
Today, Benavides, 33, teaches 17 of her 20 first-graders at Budlong Elementary in South Central Los Angeles in English, including those who came to school speaking Spanish.

"In theory, if you read (about) this program, you would have your child involved," she said. "But the reality is, many children don't learn English until middle school, and many children are finding that extremely difficult."

Some teachers are bitter

Many veteran teachers, meanwhile, are simply bitter about having to learn a second language, or being asked to go back to school to learn how to work with language-minority students. Others resent the extra money paid to teaching recruits for speaking a second language.

Los Angeles was one of the first California districts to offer financial incentives to bilingual teachers. The \$5,000-a-year stipend is doled out in



installments and is contingent on teachers working with a certain percentage of their students in their native language.

District officials say the stipend is supposed to encourage teachers to use their language skills with the students who most need it.

But critics contend the money encourages teachers to keep students in native language instruction, even if they no longer need it.

"You don't get paid unless you keep them out of English, and there are teachers who do not want to lose the money," Koon said. "The stipend is not designed to produce results."

Such criticism aside, neither Proposition 227 nor the district's bilingual program gets the president of the L.A. teachers union's endorsement.

"My personal opinion is that (the Unz initiative) just replaces one extreme for another," said Day Higuichi. "The real question is how do we provide a high quality education for poor students? How do we raise standards? That's the issue, and it's not being talked about very much right now."

professor who heads an annual survey of Orange County social issues. In 1980, Hispanics made up 14 percent of Orange County's population; by 1996 their proportion had jumped to 27 percent. Asians, who were 4 percent of the population in 1980, were 12 percent in 1996.

"What's going on in Orange County is a clash between the new demographics and the old political profile of Orange County," Baldassare said.

And while school boards are non-partisan, Baldassare argues that the area's traditionally conservative politics still influence the debate.

The Orange County districts could have taken a low-profile route, citing their inability to hire enough trained bilingual teachers and seeking a waiver from the state Department of Education — like many other districts throughout the state have done. Instead trustees sought relief from the state board — a sign that their desire not to offer primary language instruction was based more on philosophy than on practical issues.

Petition ends up in court

Four districts — Orange, Savannah, Westminster and Magnolia — all filed similar petitions. But Orange Unified's January 1997 petition ended up in the courts, triggering a chain of events that could significantly alter the way children who speak little or no English are taught in California.

A coalition of community groups sued the district in July 1997 to block the waiver. Then, last month, a Sacramento Superior Court judge issued a preliminary ruling

with Proposition 227 and the initiative's backers agree, even though teachers and aides still speak and repeat concepts to students in the children's native language.

Change in the classroom

Last year, the walls of Lynn Hollis' kindergarten classroom were covered with posters in Spanish. The shelves were filled with Spanish books and the teacher used mostly Spanish to communicate with her students. But this year, the alphabet is in English and so are the books in her classroom at California Elementary.

During a lesson on the Mother Goose rhyme "Hey Diddle Diddle," Hollis moved back and forth between languages. First, she read the story in English, then repeated it in Spanish. When she introduced words from the story to her students, she said them in both English and Spanish.

"Do you remember what this is?" she asked, holding a dish in her right hand.

"Plato," replied the little boy named David.

"That's right, that's what this is in Spanish," she said. "In English this is a dish."

Hollis said she'll rely on Spanish when she wants to reinforce a concept, as in the exchange with David.

Neil McKinnon, Orange's assistant superintendent for education services, is confident the district is moving in the right direction. The number of students who are reclassified as proficient in English increased slightly in 1997, he points out, and anecdotal evidence suggests students are learning English more quickly.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Making schools responsible for progress could lead to student achievement boost

BY MICHAEL BAZELEY
Mercury News Staff Writer

The state Board of Education's decision two weeks ago to scrap its bilingual education policies left many civil rights groups and educators worried that children who are not fluent in English will be ignored.

But a state and national push to hold educators more accountable for student achievement could soon increase the pressure on schools to do a better job of educating poor and non-English-speaking students — two groups that have historically performed poorly.

Federal law now requires high-poverty schools to show academic progress from year to year. California is developing more rigorous academic standards and a test to determine whether students are meeting them. And state Sen. Dede Alpert, D-San Diego, is sponsoring a bill requiring schools to demonstrate that students with limited English are learning.

"It's all interwoven, and certainly when it comes to English-learners, school districts are going to have to start taking a closer look at them," Alpert consultant Lisa Giroux said.

So far, the most sweeping chang-

es affect Title I schools, the high-poverty campuses responsible for educating many of the students with limited English skills.

Congress revamped the Title I regulations in 1994, with a goal of making federal funding more dependent on student achievement. The new regulations require states to hold poor children to the same academic standards as all other students — not a radical notion, but one that had not taken hold in many high-poverty schools.

In California, that means that 90 percent of the students at Title I schools must be doing grade-level

work within 10 years. Schools where student achievement does not improve could ultimately lose their funding or face other sanctions.

Although the Title I changes took effect in the 1996-97 school year, many changes the state is responsible for making have not happened.

State education officials have completed only half of the new statewide academic standards designed to make course work more challenging. Work has not even begun on the student achievement test intended to accompany those standards.

And there is no system in place allowing the state to intervene if a school's test scores do not improve.

Nonetheless, the new rules are having a "big time" effect in San Jose, said Virginia McQueen, manager of categorical programs for the San Jose Unified School District.

"It's really given us a clear picture," McQueen said. "You look at a school, and you ask, what is it going to take to raise the student achievement? Is it the reading or the math? Where are our weak spots? You have to do a lot of analyses."

To be sure, state and federal regulations by themselves will not guarantee that students get a better education, acknowledged Edith Edwards, principal of McKinley Neighborhood School in Franklin-McKinley School District in San Jose.

"But what I've seen is a real effort to do better," Edwards said. "I think this will have an effect, because schools do not want to be labeled as low-performing. . . . If schools are committed to the program, all students — including those not fluent in English — will benefit."