

TEST SCORES RISE, SURPRISING CRITICS OF BILINGUAL BAN

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RESULTS AFTER TWO YEARS

Gains by California Students Expected to Have an Effect Beyond State's Schools

By JACQUES STEINBERG

OCEANSIDE, Calif., Aug. 17 — Two years after Californians voted to end bilingual education and force a million Spanish-speaking students to immerse themselves in English as if it were a cold bath, those students are improving in reading and other subjects at often striking rates, according to standardized test scores released this week.

Many educators had predicted catastrophe if bilingual classes were dismantled in this state, which is home to one of every 10 of the nation's public school children, many of them native Spanish speakers. But the prophecies have not materialized.

In second grade, for example, the average reading score of a student classified as limited in English increased 9 percentage points over the last two years, to the 28th percentile from the 19th percentile in national rankings, according to the state. In mathematics, the increase in the average score for the same students was 14 points, to the 41st percentile from the 27th.

The results, which represent the first effort to measure the new law's effects, are expected to reach beyond California's borders, most immediately in Arizona, where voters will be presented with a ballot initiative in November asking them whether the state should outlaw bilingual education. The California test scores are also expected to influence Colorado,

where a similar measure narrowly missed getting on the ballot this fall, and in Massachusetts and New York, where antibilingual forces are marshaling.

It is too early to know precisely how much the erasure of bilingual education contributed to the rising scores — class sizes in the second grade have also been reduced over the same period, for example — but the results are remarkable given predictions that scores of Spanish-speaking students would plummet.

Consider the experience of Ken Noonan, who likened the change in his position on bilingual education over the last two years to a religious conversion. Mr. Noonan, who founded the California Association of Bilingual Educators 30 years ago and who is now the school superintendent in this city 35 miles north of San Diego, was among those who warned in 1998 that children newly arrived from Mexico and Central America would stop coming to school if they were not gradually weaned off Spanish in traditional bilingual classes.

Now, he says he was wrong.

"I thought it would hurt kids," Mr. Noonan said of the ballot initiative, which was called Proposition 227. "The exact reverse occurred, totally unexpected by me. The kids began to learn — not pick up, but learn — formal English, oral and written, far more quickly than I ever thought they would.

"You read the research and they tell you it takes seven years," added Mr. Noonan, a Californian whose Mexican mother never learned English. "Here are kids, within nine months in the first year, and they literally learned to read."

As evidence, Mr. Noonan need not



Michael Poche for The New York Times

Rocío Domínguez's son Christian, 7, who spoke no English when he entered school in Oceanside, Calif., nine months ago, can now read children's books and understand his favorite television show, "X-Men."

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Test Scores Rise, Surprising Critics Of Law Against Bilingual Education

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look farther than his own district, where, in a mirror of the state, one of every four students, or more than 5,000, is classified as limited English proficient. Oceanside was among the most diligent school districts in the state in adhering to the new law, and recorded some of the biggest increases.

In the second grade in Oceanside, for example, the average reading score of students initially classified as limited English jumped 19 percentage points over the last two years — to the 32nd percentile from the 13th, according to preliminary state figures. Only in the 10th and 11th grades, in a reflection of the entrenched language problems of teenage Spanish speakers statewide, were the increases below four percentage points.

Oceanside's performance was all the more striking when measured against the nearby district of Vista, where half the limited English speakers — about 2,500 students — were granted waivers by the superintendent to continue in bilingual classes. In nearly every grade, the increases in Oceanside were at least double those in Vista, which is similar in size and economic background to Oceanside.

At the very least, the results so far

Several factors may be able to explain student gains in California.

In California represent a tentative affirmation of the vision of Ron K. Unz. Mr. Unz is the Silicon Valley entrepreneur who almost single-handedly financed and organized the

initiative that has all but eliminated bilingual education in California, in which students were taught math, social studies and science in their native language until they gradually picked up English. (Students who now wish to be taught in such classes must seek a waiver from their districts, on the grounds that they would otherwise be educationally or psychologically harmed by the pace of the English immersion class.)

Mr. Unz, who has played an active role in the Arizona effort, said he had been dismayed to read several years ago that students across California were languishing in bilingual classes for six years or more, routinely failing to graduate. He also found that there was little research that supported bilingual education, which had been developed in Congress in the 1960's, at least in part, as a means to send federal aid to poor Southwestern school districts. Even supporters concede it soon became entrenched as a way to pay the salaries of thousands of bilingual teachers and administrators.

"The test scores these last two years have risen, and risen dramatically," Mr. Unz said in a telephone interview. "Something has gone tremendously right for immigrants being educated in California."

In Oceanside, as in many districts in the state, the elimination of bilingual education has been accompanied by other changes, making its effect hard to gauge with precision. Class sizes in the lower elementary grades have been pared to 20, from more than of 30 two years ago, with an infusion of state aid. For the most intransigent readers, Spanish speakers chief among them, an old-fashioned, sound-it-out, phonics approach to teaching reading has replaced whole language, a more progressive approach that encourages students to use context clues to extract meaning, sometimes at the expense of pronunciation.

With so many variables introduced at once, Kenji Hakuta, a professor of

education at Stanford University, argued that few conclusions about bilingual education could be drawn from the results, other than that "the numbers didn't turn negative," as many had feared. Indeed, Professor Hakuta said that given a new emphasis on testing statewide, some districts are clearly teaching to the exams. Scores are up across the board in nearly all grades, though rarely as sharply as in Oceanside.

He said that districts like Oceanside were posting such sizable gains, in part, because their previous scores had been so abysmally low — and remained so.

While the school districts are required to implement the new law, it is difficult to ascertain to what degree they have been teaching their Spanish-speaking students in English. The law requires only that teachers instruct "overwhelmingly" in English. But that is often easier to do in third grade, when the subject is multiplication, than in 11th grade, where it might be trigonometry. The state has mounted little effort to measure compliance.

Despite his initial, personal opposition to the new law, Mr. Noonan of Oceanside said that he was insistent that his district, in a city of 152,000 whose residents range from migrant farmers to naval officers to dot-com millionaires, would strictly follow the ban and teach Spanish-speaking students exclusively in English.

And thus, Mr. Noonan's district makes an interesting case study.

Though the state permitted districts the discretion to grant waivers, Mr. Noonan took a hard line. Of 5,000 students in the district who, according to a basic skills test, were found to have limited English proficiency, 150, or 3 percent, sought waivers; only 12 were granted.

By comparison, in the nearby district of Vista, where parents supporting bilingual education have created a powerful advocacy group, about one of every two students sought a waiver from the new law, and all such requests were granted.

"Our philosophy," said Dave Cowles, the Vista superintendent, "is that we give the parent the information about the benefits and the downside of the bilingual program, and then let them decide."

But so far, for the first time in recent memory, Oceanside is outpacing its archrival Vista.

In Oceanside, the average score of third graders who primarily speak Spanish improved by 11 percentage points in reading over the last two years, to the 22nd percentile; in Vis-

'Something has gone tremendously right for immigrants.'

ta, the gain was a more modest 5 percentage points, to the 18th percentile.

In fifth grade in Oceanside, limited English speakers gained 10 percentage points in reading, with the average in the 19th percentile; in Vista, there was no increase, the average of limited English speakers staying flat, in the 12th percentile.

"It's premature to comment on which ultimately works better," said Mr. Cowles, the Vista superintendent.

Yet he added, "If these results are indicative of how students learn best, then we have to take them into account when we talk to parents."

In Oceanside, virtually all vestiges of bilingual education have been disassembled, including at Garrison Elementary, a stucco-coated building surrounded by eucalyptus trees, where nearly one of every two students is a native Spanish speaker.

There, Leticia Cortez, a certified bilingual teacher, now teaches mathematics in English to her Spanish-speaking first graders. She resorts to speaking Spanish to a student only if he appears to be in emotional distress, and then only to counsel him, not to instruct.

That was the case with Christian Domínguez, 7, whose broad grin is usually flanked by deep dimples, but who cried for the first two weeks he spent in Ms. Cortez's class, which he entered only days after arriving from Mexico.

"The only thing I could talk in English," he said, "was nothing."

But nine months later, Christian is able to read short books about dinosaurs and the cartoon character Arthur, while understanding what he hears on his favorite television show, "X-Men."

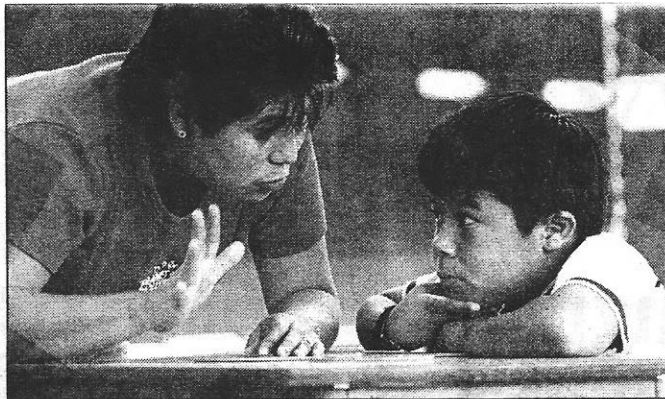
His mother, Rocío, 28, a baby sitter, said, "I'm happy, oh, wow!"

In fact, so much English is spoken by parents and children and teachers in Oceanside that Gabriela Díaz, 8, who is entering the third grade, has experienced an unforeseen consequence of Proposition 227.

"When my friends from Mexico come here," she said, "I don't understand what they're saying."



NO. 1 IN THE USA



Rough at first: Rocio Dominguez tutors her son, Christian, in English.

Students flourish under 'English immersion'

The Nation

4A · MONDAY, AUGUST 28, 2000

Calif.'s bilingual education ban did not have to mean failure

By Scott Bowles
USA TODAY

OCEANSIDE, Calif. — When California voted two years ago to abolish bilingual education in public schools, many officials predicted doom for the state's 1.5 million Spanish-speaking students.

Today, those officials are eating crow — gladly.

New standardized test results show that not only have those students not suffered in English-only classrooms, but their scores increased by more than 50% in some grades since the law passed.

And while a wide gap in test scores still divides students who are new to English and those who are fluent in it, educators admit they are stunned to see how quickly immigrant children adapted.

"Quite frankly, we underestimated the kids," says Ken Noonan, superintendent of the Oceanside Unified School District and founder of the California Association of Bilingual Educators. Noonan, who once fought the bilingual ban, now is one of the staunchest supporters of "English immersion."

Under the state law, all students, including those who don't speak the language, are taught solely in English. Teachers are permitted to speak another language only if a student has chronic difficulty with school work or is having emotional problems in class.

Noonan says he feared that students, many from Mexico and Central America, would fall so far behind in class because of the language barrier that they would stop coming to school. Instead,

they flourished. "We had research that showed it would take kids five to seven years to learn English," Noonan says. "They learned it in nine months."

According to state test results released earlier this month, the percentage of limited English students who scored at or above the 50th percentile rose from 25% last year to 32% this year. Over a two-year span, children in the second grade saw their math scores rise from the 27th percentile in 1998 to the 41st percentile this year.

"The kids are like sponges," says Chiqui Grubic, a first-grade teacher in Oceanside, about 35 miles north of San Diego. "It's tough on some of them at first," she says. "The first couple weeks, when they don't know any English, it can be intimidating. Some of them might cry or want to go home. But it doesn't take them long to catch on. They've surprised all of us."

Many people are watching the children's progress. California, which claims one out of every 10 of the nation's public school students, has become ground zero for the anti-bilingual movement. Arizona will vote in November whether to ban bilingual education, and New York, Colorado and Massachusetts are considering similar measures.

Some critics of the California ban, which was called Proposition 227, aren't ready to give "English immersion" a passing grade. They credit much of the students' success to other changes in California's educational system, including an influx of money, a shift to phonics-based reading and smaller classes.

Still, opponents say they are relieved by the test results.

"It's too early to say that abolishing bilingual education is the answer," says Ramon Garzon, a member of the United Latinos Coalition in Los Angeles. "Two years of test results don't make a trend. But if we're wrong and the kids are doing

well, I'll be the first one to admit it. The kids are the most important thing, not educational philosophy."

The state's anti-bilingual philoso-

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— Chiqui Grubic,
a first-grade teacher
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phy was born four years ago in Silicon Valley, where software developer Ron Unz read a story about a group of Latino parents who were picketing Los Angeles schools because their children were not learning English. "It seemed absurd that children were not learning English in school," Unz, 38, says. "So I started looking at test scores."

Unz says he was stunned to learn that 30 years of federally funded bilingual education — in which students were to be weaned off their native language while learning English — had consistently produced test scores less than half the national norm.

"If a theory doesn't work for 30 years, you throw it out," says Unz, who drafted and nearly single-handedly funded Proposition 227 to victory in 1998. His group, English for the Children, is now waging its campaign in Arizona and plans initiatives in other states.

As its success story, the group points to Oceanside, an eclectic city of 150,000. In Oceanside, as in schools throughout California, about 25% of students are classified

as limited in English proficiency. Though Noonan says he opposed the bilingual ban, "when it became law I wanted our schools to have the best English immersion program in the state."

Parents in California can petition schools to continue bilingual education for their children, but they must prove that an English-only education would harm the child psychologically or educationally. Noonan received 120 waiver requests; he granted 12.

The going was rough at first, teachers and parents admit. Some children crawled under their desks, weeping and frustrated. "My son said he wanted to go back to Mexico," says Rocio Dominguez, whose 7-year-old son, Christian, is about to enter the second grade.

Parents crowded school board meetings to complain. Activists held candlelight vigils outside the schools. But Noonan stayed firm with the English-only program and, after a few months, the complaints turned to cheers.

Veronica Ramos is among the boosters. She enrolled her daughter, also named Veronica, in first grade at Oceanside two years ago, about the same time she began her own adult-education English courses. "She knows more English than I do," the mother laughs.

Eight-year-old Veronica rolls her eyes. "It's easy," she says in fluent English. "I speak English at school and Spanish at home."

She admits, though, that it's changed her relationship with her mom, especially when they go over English studies at home. "Sometimes, I help my mom with the words," she giggles. "That's weird."

► Programs fail test, 14A

Today's debate: Education research

Bilingual education fails test, exposing deeper problem

Our view:

Dollars and lives are wasted on untested programs that flop.

Educators who warned of disastrous consequences from California's ban on bilingual education today find themselves off balance: Children shifted rapidly into regular classes taught in English scored far higher on standardized tests than those allowed to spend more time learning in their native languages.

If the trend continues, as appears likely, it would suggest hundreds of thousands of children in California and elsewhere were hobbled by flawed bilingual programs.

Even more worrisome, however, is the underlying cause, one that affects far more of today's school kids: Teachers and principals lack high-quality research telling them what works and doesn't work in classrooms. As a result, millions of children are subjected to education guesswork instead of benefitting from proven programs.

When medical researchers want to know whether a drug works, they compare outcomes of a group taking the drug to those not taking it. But that type of experiment is rarely done in education.

Bilingual education could have been tested this way. One cluster of schools could have used traditional bilingual education techniques — which have kids straddling the two languages for several years, as California once did. Another could have used English immersion, in which kids are taught English and quickly shifted into regular classrooms, as California does now.

That test was never done. Two years ago the National Academy of Sciences found that just one of the 33 significant studies of bilingual education was a true experiment — and it didn't involve Spanish-speaking children. Yet California was just one of many states that plunged into bilingual education.

California was also the leader of the poorly researched "whole language" reading movement, abandoning phonics in 1987. The result: a downward spiral that leaves California vying with Mississippi for last place in national reading tests.

Sadly, this is typical of education research.

Earlier this year the National Reading Panel culled 100,000 studies on reading in-

Enrollments climb

The number of children with limited English ability enrolled in schools has skyrocketed in recent years.

Year; Enrollment (in millions)

1986	1.6
1987	1.7
1988	1.9
1989	2.2
1990	2.2
1991	2.4
1992	2.7
1993	3.0
1994	3.2
1995	3.2
1996	3.5

Source: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education

By Keith Simmons, USA TODAY

struction, only to discover a mere handful met the minimum quality requirements routine in other disciplines.

And when top education experts were asked which education programs are most in need of medical-style research, the short list included: "Fuzzy" math, in which process counts as much as right answers; mainstreaming special education children into regular classes; eliminating the grouping of children by ability; reducing class sizes if it means hiring less competent teachers; and basing teacher rewards on credentials rather than performance. Yet schools adopted each.

Why the mess? Education colleges employ professors lacking research backgrounds, so the educators they train can't sort the solid from the slippery. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education don't help. Only a fraction of the research money they hand out demands medical-style research.

Even solutions go awry. Three years ago Congress began setting aside several hundred million dollars in grants to encourage schools to adopt highly researched reform models, which number about a dozen. Yet thanks to loose guidelines, schools so far have picked about 300 different models.

Until all this changes, parents, teachers and principals will continue to bump around the dark and children will continue to suffer the consequences.

► Scores favor English way, 4A

OUTLOOK

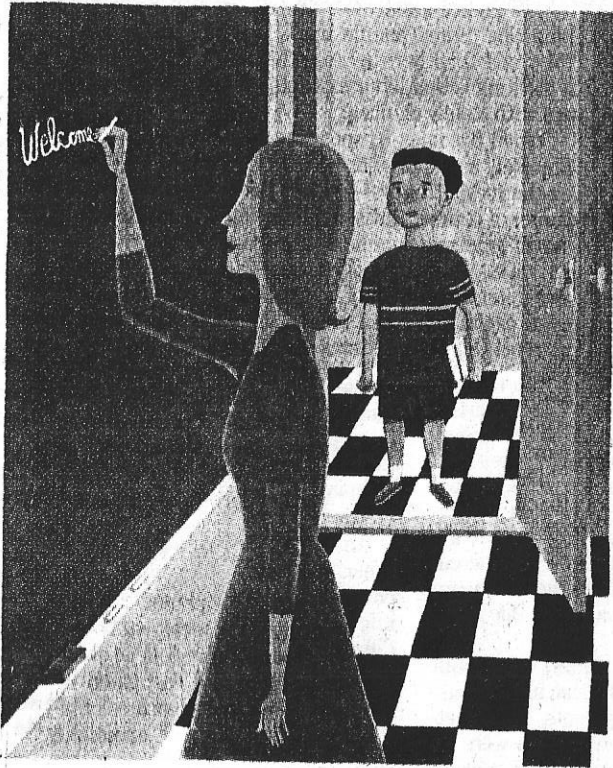
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Close to Home

I Believed That Bilingual Education Was Best . . .

By **KEN NOONAN**

Ivan, a second-grader, sat next to me with a children's book of literature in his lap. Methodically, he ran his index finger along the lines of print and pronounced the words aloud almost flawlessly. Patiently, wanting to finish his assignment, he tolerated my questions designed to test his understanding of what he had read. He understood everything. "So what?" you may think. Shouldn't second-graders be able to read at grade level? But Ivan, the son of Mexican immigrants, had come to school not quite two years earlier, able to speak and understand

Noonan is superintendent of schools in Oceanside, Calif.



BY KATHY OSBORN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

. . . Until The Kids Proved Me Wrong

only Spanish. The book he was reading and my questions were all in English. For 30 years, I worked hard to promote bilingual education as the best way for children like Ivan to become academically successful. Two years ago, I campaigned against California's Proposition 227, the ballot measure to eliminate bilingual education, because I believed that it was going to harm Spanish-speaking students. I was certain that students would be confused in English-only instruction and would be lost in the shuffle. I now realize I was wrong. In June 1998, 61 percent of California voters approved 227, which requires that all students be taught "overwhelmingly" in English and that children who are not proficient in English be taught for at least one year in a structured English-immersion classroom be-

fore being assigned to a mainstream class. Two months later, we began the school year with all classes taught in English. I was nervous, certain that it was going to be a disaster. Since then, however, I've watched Ivan and other recent immigrant children in my district learn to speak and read English faster than I ever thought possible. As a result, I've become convinced that English immersion, not traditional bilingual education, is the path to academic success for children who arrive in our classrooms unable to learn in English. Even before 227, I had begun to question the effectiveness of traditional bilingual education, in which limited speakers of English are assigned to a class

See BILINGUAL, B2, Col. 1

Rethinking Bilingual Education

BILINGUAL, From B1

where they learn to speak, read and write in their home language first. In Oceanside, which is 35 miles north of San Diego, that language is Spanish. Until 1998, a student would remain in Spanish instruction for up to four years, even longer for some. Only after being designated fluent in English would a child's learning in English begin in earnest.

As a former bilingual teacher, administrator, and co-founder of the California Association of Bilingual Educators, I had come to believe that many students remained too long in classes conducted in Spanish, and that, as a result, they lost ground in the development of their English language skills. I believe that this creates a learning gap that is seldom closed.

On my recommendation, the Oceanside School Board adopted a bilingual program reform that would have moved most students from Spanish to English within three years. But before we could implement that change, 227 was passed. At first, I resisted. I tried every way I could to find some way to preserve bilingual instruction. But I could not, I learned after consulting with the school district's lawyers. In the end, we had no choice but to implement 227 fully and immediately. Reluctantly, I made preparations.

At the end of the first year, I was amazed by the results. State tests showed dramatic academic gains for Spanish-speaking students in reading and writing—especially in the early grades, where we had reduced class size to 20 or fewer students and implemented phonics reading instruction. Those changes seemed to have made a difference.

But Proposition 227 has been the catalyst for the dramatic changes in student achievement. Without 227, we would have been teaching these students in Spanish; they would certainly have performed poorly on the state tests, which are administered in English. And we never would have seen how *quickly* and how early they could learn to read English.

Consider this: Two years ago, limited-English second-graders in Oceanside scored at the 13th percentile on a scale of 100. This year, at the same grade, limited-English students scored at the 32nd percentile. A significant difference, I believe, is that these students had been taught only in English.

Skeptics claim that Oceanside's scores are so low that they offer scant proof that English immersion works better than bilingual instruction. Oceanside, with 22,000 students in 24 schools, was the lowest-scoring school district in San Diego County for many years. But that is no longer true. The test results of Spanish-speaking students in other districts have risen as well, but at the primary level, no district has seen in-

creases as dramatic as Oceanside's. For the first time, more than half of our schools are at or above the national average in some categories. In reading, our second grade limited-English students' test scores were almost 40 percentage points below the national average two years ago. Today, they are only 18 points from the national average.

Critics say that 227 is unclear in its description of how students should be taught. Not so, in my opinion. Simply

Soon after Oceanside schools implemented English-immersion instruction, I was invited to speak with some Hispanic students at our local community college about the new approach. I was criticized and castigated by most of the students, all of whom were advocates of bilingual instruction. I explained my concern about the achievement gap that appears to develop between native English speakers and limited-English speakers who are

Now I am convinced that English immersion does work and that it should begin on a student's first day of school. Now I believe that English immersion may be able to reduce or eliminate the gap in achievement.

stated, it requires that all students be taught in English. Parents may request a waiver that would allow them to move their children to a bilingual program. As part of their request, they must list the educational or emotional problems that English immersion would cause their children. The waiver must be approved unless the school staff thinks that it would not be in the child's best interest. A child must spend at least one month in the immersion class before a waiver request can be considered. The district must form a bilingual class when there are 20 or more students with approved waivers at one grade level.

I grew up in Montebello, Calif., in a family where both sides are descended from Irish and Mexican immigrants. My parents, several of my grandparents, my great-grandparents, and all of my aunts and uncles were bilingual in English and Spanish. My sisters and I grew up using both languages interchangeably with our extended family. As a result, I deeply valued bilingualism. And I believed that bilingual education was the best way to achieve this, by preserving the child's native language while teaching him English. That's why I originally opposed 227 as misguided and drastic.

But I was wrong on two counts. First, 227 did not cause the sky to fall in. The children, for the most part, are learning quickly and well. Second, I was wrong in believing that teaching limited-English students to read first in Spanish and later, sometimes much later, in English, would deliver on our promise of academic success. In fact, I have come to believe that transitioning limited-English students to English well after their peers puts those students at an academic disadvantage when it comes to choosing the most challenging courses in high school and college.

taught to read, write and speak Spanish in school first. Two female students said little, but after the meeting adjourned they asked to speak with me privately. We found an empty classroom, and they began to question me about my "gap" theory. I made clear that this was merely my opinion and that little research had been done to support my belief.

An awkward silence followed. Finally one, then the other, spoke. Each, they explained, had come to the United States as the children of Spanish-speaking immigrants, and they had been in bilingual classes in two different school districts (one in Oceanside). Both said they felt less proficient in English than their native English-speaking peers in high school and were struggling in college. They had enjoyed being taught in Spanish in public schools, but both now believed that they had paid a price for the comfort of early Spanish instruction.

They asked me if English immersion would help other students like them. I confessed that I did not know. They apologized for the behavior of their classmates, and we said our goodbyes.

That was two years ago. Now I am convinced that English immersion does work and that it should begin on a student's first day of school. Now I believe that English immersion may be able to reduce or eliminate that gap in achievement. Now I believe that using all of the resources of public education to move these students into the English-speaking mainstream early and quickly is far more important than my former romantic notions that preserving the child's home language should be the ultimate goal of our schools.

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

California Scores

Test results are in, and they say that California's schools have come up with a lesson for us all.

It's now two years since California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 227 to curtail bilingual education and instead favor English immersion in the state's public schools. Liberals greeted the plan with howls of doom. The schoolkids, however, responded by handily learning English—and a host of other subjects. Test results are showing dramatic gains for limited English speakers, with the biggest payoff in the districts that most strictly followed Prop 227.

Bilingual education began with the theory that before immigrant kids can focus on English, they need five or more years in special classes taught mainly in their native languages. The original bilingual program mandate expired in California in 1987. But the program lived on, despite mounting evidence that Latino parents felt it was depriving their kids of vital skills. Neither political party had the nerve to challenge either the special interests—especially the entrenched teachers—of the bilingual lobby or Latino pols who played the race card. Then in 1998, software entrepreneur Ron Unz put a citizen initiative on the ballot to stop the insanity.

The results suggest that, yes, it is sometimes possible for the power of reason—and even the education of children—to triumph over entrenched political interests. Take the case of Ken Noonan, the superintendent of the Oceanside School District, near San Diego. A co-founder of the California Association of Bilingual Educators in the 1970s, he opposed Prop 227 because he feared that compelling students to be taught in English would prompt them to drop out or fall behind in other subjects.

But unlike many other superintendents, Mr. Noonan decided to vigorously enforce the wishes of the voters in passing Prop 227. In his district, students who didn't speak English were put in an intensive, one-year program and then transferred to regular classes, taught in English.

By now, it is districts such as Mr. Noonan's that have posted the strongest increases in test scores for limited-English children. Mr. Noonan now says he was mistaken and that without Prop 227 "we would not have learned how quickly and how well kids can learn English." His district also started a phonics-based reading program, another reform that was opposed for years by the

educational establishment.

Mr. Noonan's district borders Vista Unified, which has similar demographics, but has allowed many of its students to remain in bilingual classes. Vista's test scores actually fell in most subjects last year. As the nearby graph illustrates, the scores of San Jose Unified, the only district in the state that is exempt from Prop 227, also fall behind

those of Oceanside and the rest of the state. Such results are now fueling efforts to reconfigure bilingual education from New York City to Colorado. Arizona will vote this fall on its own version of Prop 227.

The good news here goes even beyond brighter hopes for America's schoolchildren. For decades, it has been taken as a near-axiom of U.S. politics

that liberal ideologues are incapable of changing course, even when faced with crushing evidence that their policies are failing. Welfare has been the most obvious example. The refusal to allow parents to exercise choice and escape failing inner-city schools has been another.

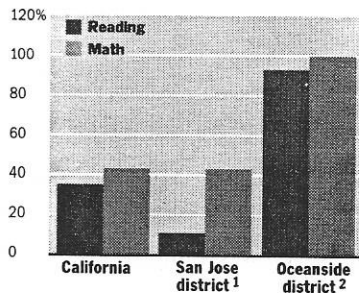
It's not so much that liberals can't recognize problems. Rather, their politics requires them to create a permanent infrastructure around their programs: bilingual teachers, special-ed therapists, social workers. Robert Woodson, a former welfare case worker, calls this infrastructure "the Poverty Pentagon."

Ultimately, the welfare state becomes a source of employment for a lot of liberal foot soldiers who cannot afford to let problems go away. Indeed, the problems must get bigger because their size determines any program's funding and employment levels. This bureaucratic imperative then takes primacy over the program's nominal purpose—children, welfare families, immigrants.

The larger lesson of California's classrooms is that there *are* ways to shake the failing policies of the welfare state, even some of those most deeply entrenched. Recall that in 1996, a reluctant President Clinton signed a bill ending the federal welfare entitlement. That, too, brought liberal prophecies of doom. Instead, welfare rolls have been cut in half and Al Gore sounds as if he invented welfare reform. Given the success of schools enforcing California's Prop 227, it seems to us any smart Presidential contender would be ready to claim he invented that, too.

Encouraging English

Gains in test scores by limited English students, in California, from 1998-2000



¹ Legally exempt from Prop 227

² Strictest application of Prop 227

Source: California STAR Test Scores

JUDGMENT CALLS

THE LESSON OF TOUGH LOVE

It's the same from welfare reform to ending bilingual education: people do best when asked to do more

By ROBERT J. SAMUELSON

WE NOW HAVE THE RESULTS OF A HUGE EXPERIMENT in human nature that teaches a critical lesson about social progress. The lesson emerges from the 1996 welfare reform, the mandated end to bilingual education in California and seven years of school reform in Texas. It is this: if you demand more of people—if you make them more responsible for their own behavior—you will get more from them. Their lives will improve.

What people do for themselves is more lasting and important than what others do for them. This is merely common sense, but it runs counter to the reigning liberal thinking that continues to underpin many social programs. The prevailing assumption has been that the poor are victims who need to be helped. The trouble with this high-profile compassion is that it often ends up advertising the moral superiority of the compassion-givers more than aiding the intended recipients.

Given this thinking, it was hardly surprising that congressional passage of "welfare reform" four years ago prompted loud predictions of social calamity. Families would be thrown out onto the street. Hunger and malnutrition would increase. Child abuse would rise. (The new welfare law encouraged states to move recipients into jobs and set limits—generally no more than five years—on how long most families could remain on welfare.)

The calamity didn't happen. As is now well known, welfare rolls have dropped by more than half from their historical peak of more than 5 million families in early 1994. Of course, there are qualifications. The booming economy explains part of the decline. Many former welfare recipients still depend on government benefits (food stamps, Medicaid) to get by. And many of those who have left welfare remain poor and struggle with personal problems—drugs, broken relationships—that keep them down.

But on balance, lives have improved. Perhaps 50 to 60 percent of former welfare recipients have jobs, report Douglas Besharov and Peter Germanis of the Welfare Reform Academy at the University of Maryland. "There is no evidence [of] substantial increases in homelessness [or of] child abuse and neglect," they write in *Public Interest* magazine. People without jobs often rely on family and friends for support and shelter. People with jobs often surprise themselves, acquiring skills and self-esteem. In some state surveys, 60 to 80 percent of former welfare recipients report that life has gotten better or is no worse than under welfare.

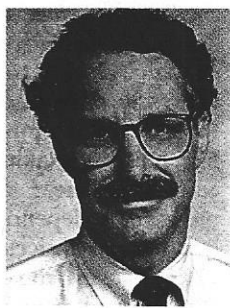
Next, examine California's Proposition 227. Passed in June 1998 by a 61 to 39 percent margin, it banned bilingual education in the state's schools. Educators widely opposed it; so did President Clinton. Prophecies of doom were widespread. Clinton said it

would condemn immigrant children to "intellectual purgatory." The head of the San Francisco School Board said that "this would set our students back 30 years."

What happened? Test scores of children from Spanish-speaking families didn't drop. They rose. In second grade, average reading scores of students with limited English ability have jumped in the past two years from the 19th percentile nationally to the 28th percentile. In math, the same students went from the 27th to the 41st percentile, according to *The New York Times*.

"I thought it would hurt kids," Ken Noonan, superintendent of schools in Ocean-side, a city north of San Diego, told the *Times*. Thirty years ago he helped found the California Association of Bilingual Educators. "The exact reverse occurred, totally unexpected by me," he said. "The kids began to learn—not pick up, but learn—formal English, oral and written, far more quickly than I ever thought they would."

Finally, there's Texas. School reform began in 1993 under Democratic Gov. Ann Richards and continued after George W. Bush's election in 1994. It requires students to pass an exam—called the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills—before graduating.



From 1994 to 1998, the proportion of students passing the exam rose from 53 to 78 percent. Among blacks, the passage rate increased from 31 to 63 percent; among Hispanics, from 39 to 70 percent.

Some scholars and newspaper reports have tried to discredit the gains—probably because they reflect well on Bush. The attacks don't wash. In the magazine *City Journal*, Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute shows that the two main criticisms are unfounded: that cheating and a progressive easing of the tests account for the gains (other standardized tests show similar, though smaller, increases), and that higher dropout rates raised the scores because the worst students left (by Greene's estimates, dropout rates—though still high—have declined). A recent Rand Corporation study of standardized test scores—adjusted by students' economic and social background—found that Texas students had the largest gains of any state. Students are more focused, and teachers are held "accountable," argues Greene.

Which brings us back to the lesson.

All advanced societies, including ours, strive to protect the vulnerable and uplift the downtrodden. The problem is to discriminate between those who truly require help and those who can, with some prodding and perhaps assistance, do for themselves. This is rarely an easy or obvious call. But it is often made more difficult by the needs—psychological, political and even economic—of the people who purport to speak on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged. The impulse is not to make too many demands, because that would seem insensitive and cruel. Worse, if victims stop being victims, what would there be left to do?

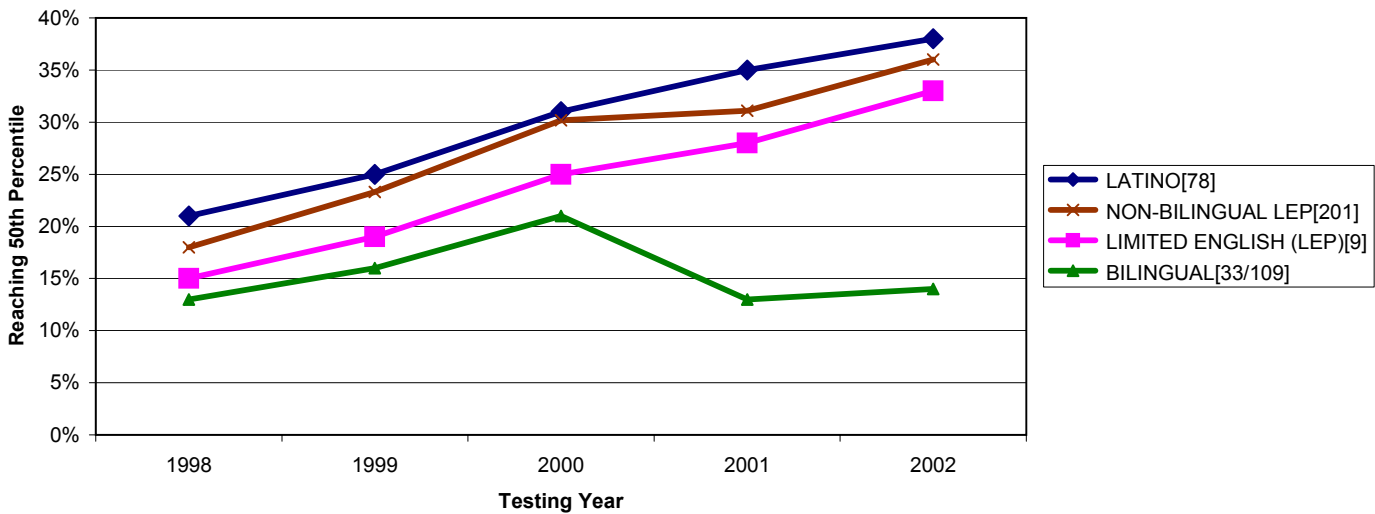
The effect is to subvert personal responsibility. We encourage this when we assign the moral high ground to those who simply shout the loudest for the downtrodden. We give more moral points for rhetoric than results. Never mind that the rhetoric—by emphasizing how much people need help and minimizing their capacity for self-help—often perpetuates the problems that are supposedly under attack.

California 2nd Grade STAR Scores, 1998-2002

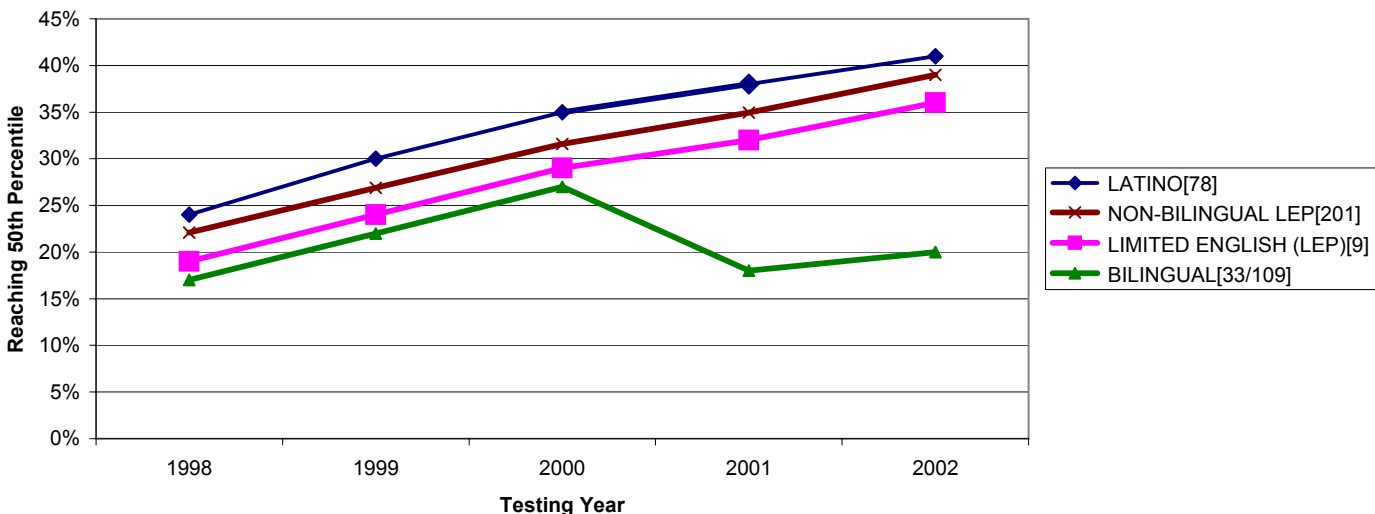
	Reading > 50%					Mathematics > 50%					Language > 50%					Spelling > 50%				
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
ALL STUDENTS[1]	40%	44%	49%	51%	53%	43%	49%	57%	58%	62%	43%	47%	52%	53%	55%	38%	43%	50%	53%	55%
LATINO[78]	21%	25%	31%	35%	38%	27%	35%	42%	46%	51%	24%	30%	35%	38%	41%	21%	28%	35%	39%	43%
LIMITED ENGLISH (LEP)[9]	15%	19%	25%	28%	33%	26%	33%	40%	43%	49%	19%	24%	29%	32%	36%	19%	25%	32%	36%	41%
BILINGUAL[33/109]	13%	16%	21%	13%	14%	24%	32%	37%	37%	41%	17%	22%	27%	18%	20%	16%	22%	28%	15%	16%
NON-BILINGUAL LEP[201]	18%	23%	30%	31%	36%	29%	34%	44%	44%	51%	22%	27%	32%	35%	39%	24%	29%	37%	40%	46%

All the above data was obtained from the statewide demographic STAR testing research files, available from the CA Department of Education at <http://www.eddataonline.com/research/>. All the percentages refer to the fraction of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile. The Limited-English category includes the bilingual and non-bilingual categories, with the numbers for the latter being derived from the former. Finally, prior to 2001, the CA "bilingual" category also included many students in English-oriented programs.

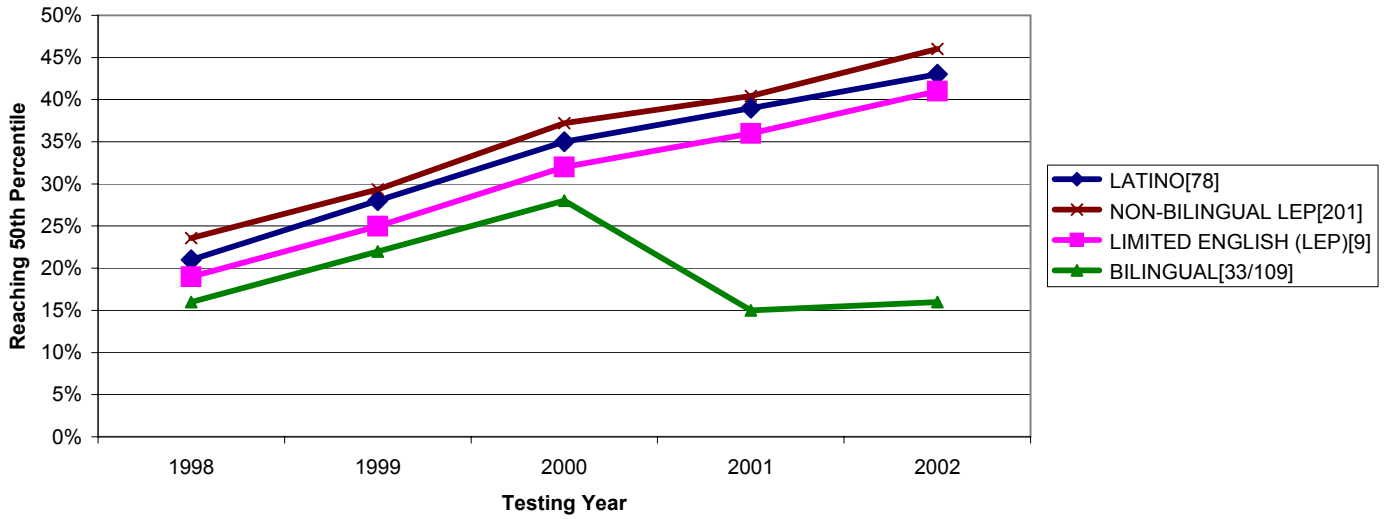
Reading Scores



Language Scores



Spelling Scores



Mathematics Scores

