One Nation INDIVISIBLE

Stories From the Field www.onenationindivisible.org June 2012

# Have We Learned Our Language Lesson?

## *In Spite of Massachusetts' Decade-Old English-Only Law, Two-Way Bilingual Programs Demonstrate Promise and Enjoy Enduring Popularity*

Story by Susan Eaton

Photographs by Gina Chirichigno

Nina and Lauren must decide quickly. Tuesday at the Barbieri Elementary School in Framingham, Massachusetts won't officially begin until the two fourth graders make up their minds.

"English was first yesterday," Lauren reasons.

"Oh right," Nina says, nodding. "OK. Then Spanish. Spanish is first today."

Suppressing nervous laughter, the girls hover over a microphone and begin. Their voices travel from the principal's office into classrooms, corridors, the library and cafeteria. Up on the second floor, first graders stand with hands over hearts. The familiar words flow, sure and clear, through the intercom on the wall.

*Prometo lealtad a la bandera*
*de los Estados Unidos de América. . .*

A few heartbeats later, the Pledge of Allegiance streams from the intercom again. This time it comes through in English.

The morning ritual over, the first graders move from their desks and sit in a half-circle on the floor in front of their teacher, Ana María Chacón. The boys and girls chatter, giggle and fidget. Fragments of English and Spanish float through the air. Chacón settles in a child-size chair and leans forward.

*"Mírame a mí,"* (Look at me) Chacón says in a singsong voice. *"¡Mírame a mí!"* she repeats cheerily, pointing to her eyes. *"Ahora, escuchen,"* (Now, listen) she implores, pointing to her ears. Speaking slowly in Spanish, Chacón explains that this morning, they will be writing captions (in Spanish) for illustrations they had started to draw yesterday. The captions will be miniature stories—*"historias"*—that narrate the drawings.

The children scramble back to their desks. At the start of the school year, Chacón had pushed the desks together making several connected, shared tables designed to encourage conversation and collaboration. A boy named José draws himself gripping the strings of three balloons. *"¡Mis globos!"* (my balloons), he explains. A girl named Katherine sketches several stick figures floating in a pool (*piscina*). Katherine turns to José, who speaks Spanish at home. "I can't remember," she tells him, *"Cómo se dice* (how do you say?) *'swimming' en español?"*

Chacón makes the rounds. *"¡Muy bueno!"* she enthuses over one drawing. She gives the artist, Paige, a thumbs up. She slides over to Katherine and José's table. Chacón kneels down. She picks up Katherine's floating figures. She studies them intently. *"¡Bueno!"* she exclaims again. Katherine beams. Then Chacón pushes her a bit: *"¿Pero, cual es la historia, Katherine?"* But what is the story?

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To hear Spanish in a public classroom in Massachusetts, to find it woven so seamlessly with English as it is at Barbieri, is quite a story in itself, or at least an anomaly. This is because ten years ago, in 2002, Massachusetts became one of three states—Arizona in 2001 and California in 1997 are the others—to effectively ban or greatly restrict bilingual education in its public schools. The new law, enacted by voter referendum, required educators to use an undefined method called "sheltered English immersion" (SEI) to teach English language learners. Under the SEI method, students still learning English are separated from English-fluent peers and taught all subjects exclusively in English, with special supports, until they are fluent enough to move into mainstream English-speaking classrooms.

*"[I]nterest in and support for dual immersion is growing both in Massachusetts and nationally as educators, parents and policymakers see it not only as an effective educational method, but also as a [model of cultural integration in a changing society]."*

Largely overlooked during the ideological battle that led to the still-contested policy was that the Massachusetts law exempted "dual immersion"—known interchangeably as "two-way bilingual"—schools and programs like Barbieri's. In such programs and schools, educators bring students who speak a particular foreign language and native English speakers together and teach all students in both languages, with the goal of producing bilingual, biliterate students. This meant that the handful of schools and programs using this specialized method could keep operating just as they were. (One program in Cambridge teaches in Portuguese and English and another there teaches in Mandarin and English. In all others, Spanish and English are the instructional languages.) As is true of all the state's dual immersion schools and programs, parents choose to put their children in such schools, and there are typically long waiting lists. In the nation at large, it is exceedingly rare that a student would be mandatorily assigned to a dual immersion school.

Ten years after the SEI referendum, interest in and support for dual immersion is growing both in

Massachusetts and nationally as educators, parents and policymakers see it not only as an effective educational method, but also as a dynamic model of ethnic and cultural integration in a rapidly changing society. Ironically, this new nationwide interest in dual immersion comes at the same time that civil rights and educational concerns over English-only laws re-emerge and intensify in Massachusetts. In September 2011 investigators from the U.S. Justice Department found that educators in 275 Massachusetts school districts—this equals 70 percent of districts in the state—had placed English learners in classrooms with inadequately trained teachers. Prior to this, other federal investigations had found violations in the local districts of Boston, Somerville and Worcester. In April 2012 government officials reached a settlement with the Boston Public Schools. It required more teacher training, better evaluation systems and specialized instruction for students learning English.

In contrast, many of the state's dual immersion schools and programs remain stable and popular. This includes Barbieri, the celebrated Amigos School in Cambridge, and two schools in Boston, the Hernandez School (Boston's longstanding model) and the Hurley School. In 2012, the state's Commissioner of Education, Mitchell Chester, visited and then praised Barbieri School, citing it as "a model" for the state and "a model, nationally."

Under the dual immersion/two-way bilingual method, native English speakers and English language learners share their classrooms in all subjects. Each lesson, whether in social studies, math or science, doubles as a language lesson, with students concurrently learning vocabulary and grammar as they learn subject matter. Ideally, about half the students in such programs would be native English speakers and half speakers of the targeted foreign language, which is usually Spanish. Some schools, such as Barbieri, use an "80-20" model in which teachers and students in the early grades speak Spanish 80 percent and English 20 percent of the time. By grade 4 at Barbieri, classes are taught in English half the time and Spanish in the other half. The Amigos School, in Cambridge, uses a 50-50 model, in which teachers and students use both languages in roughly equal amounts in all grades.

As students grow into fluency in two languages, teachers use a lot of visual cues including photographs and drawings. They also act out words and concepts. Barbieri's first grade teacher Ana María Chacón pulls on her ears while requesting that students *"escuchen"* (listen). In reference to a *"claxon"* (horn), she pushes her hand out in front of her and lets out a loud "Ehhh. Beep. Ehh. Beep!"

## Dual Immersion/Two-Way Bilingual

**Goal**: To make English learners and native English speakers biliterate—able to speak, write and read in two languages—while providing all students equal access to subject area curriculum.

**Underlying Theories**: Allowing instruction in students' native language during part of the day allows curriculum to be taught at same depth and quality that other students are experiencing. Bringing culturally diverse students together in situations in which each has equal status spurs motivation and promotes cohesion, community building and cooperation.

**Basic Operation**: A roughly equal number of native English speakers and English language learners come together in a classroom, where a specially trained teacher alternates languages, using both English and the other native language (usually Spanish), to teach all subject areas. These lessons double as language lessons, with students learning vocabulary and grammar through the subject matter curriculum.

Like at Barbieri, the goal of educators at the Amigos School in Cambridge extends far beyond mere second-language acquisition. The ultimate aspiration is biculturalism. A bilingual person can indeed speak two languages, an obviously beneficial, practical skill. But a bicultural person, explains Amigos' long-time principal, Deborah Sercombe, "crosses over into a different culture," using language as a tool for "fostering friendship and working relationships across cultures and ultimately for playing a role in sustaining a peaceful, pluralistic society." This can only be achieved, Sercombe explains, if the status of the Spanish language and the status of Latin cultures are "consciously elevated" within a school.


Deborah Sercombe

"We put the language majority kids in the position where they have to learn something from the Spanish speaking kids," Sercombe explains. "And having students integrated together and being able to see and negotiate that…is at the basis of how you build a socially connected or interconnected group of students, and school community and society."

Each morning, parents and children saunter through Amigos' doors, greeting teachers and administrators with *"Buenos días"* and *"¡Hola!"* and *"¿Cómo está?"* From the Latino mothers, fathers and children, the routine greetings usually flow naturally. For some others, the greetings still sound a bit clumsy, accompanied by a bit of self-conscious laughter.

"People learn early on that in the morning, everyone says *'Buenos días.'* It's important that when anyone walks into our school, they are aware that they are entering a Spanish-speaking environment and entering into a particular culture that is valued here," Sercombe says. "It's a process of traveling a little bit of distance to meet us, to participate in that culture, to learn from whatever discomfort that might bring at first."

In the first month of the school year, Sercombe had peeked in on a Latin dance class offered as an elective. Several of the youngest students sat in the back, arms folded, Sercombe recalled, looking less than enthusiastic about moving their bodies to unfamiliar music.

> *"Part of what makes you uncomfortable in another culture is what's going to bring you closer to understanding what it means to be a bicultural person in this world."*
>
> — Deborah Sercombe, principal, The Amigos School, Cambridge, MA

"I looked in and see kids in there who have never done any Latin dance, maybe have never experienced this music," Sercombe recalls. "…So, we do things that make kids a little bit uncomfortable, but I put it to them: 'Part of what makes you uncomfortable in another culture is what's going to bring you closer to understanding what it means to be a bicultural person in this world.' "

And indeed, on a Friday night in early March, the once hesitant novice dancers Sercombe had looked in on months before strolled with seemingly little trepidation onto the makeshift dance floor at the Amigos School's annual potluck dinner, community party and fundraiser, Noche Caribeña. In pairs, the Salsa dancers spun and twisted sharply to the syncopated beat. Parents, classmates, teachers, brothers and sisters cheered the dancers on. Live musicians sang Latin ballads and pop songs. They strummed guitars

and invited students to accompany them on a conga drum. A long table at the back of the room held dishes from Trinidad, West Africa, the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Mexico. The homemade dishes mingled with boxes from the Pizza Ring ("you ring, we bring") around the corner and with organic chocolate cupcakes from the high-end market down the street.

Sercombe, like Amigos teachers, talks most enthusiastically about activities like Noche Caribeña and other projects that encourage teamwork and social cohesion. Amigos first graders, for example, talk about the meaning of the "Golden Rule"—treating others how they would like to be treated. By second grade, students design and act out a naturalization ceremony.

In between hugs and boisterous greetings and high-fives from students eating lunch in the cafeteria, Sercombe explains that thinking about dual immersion primarily in opposition to or as a comparison point to Massachusetts' still controversial sheltered English immersion program is "sort of missing the point."

"There are other methods for learning and for learning languages and we could debate that all day," Sercombe explains. "To me, though, and I think to all of us here, the questions we ask are not just about how to teach language, how to teach subject areas to get these test scores up. The questions go deeper than that: How do we challenge and engage kids as full participants in a shared community? How do we challenge them academically, all the while moving them to biculturalism? How do we have them meet very high expectations within a context of a healthy, diverse community, as active members of a community with the core value of bringing together students of many backgrounds to practice respect and negotiation for life?"

*The dual immersion model has long been common in the border states of Texas and New Mexico and in regions of California. But more recently it has spread to other states including, most notably, Utah.*

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Evaluations of dual immersion programs in California, Virginia and previous research at the Amigos School show that English language learners gained literacy in English better or as well as students in more traditional schools. Two previous studies of student progress at the Amigos School assessed student proficiency in other subject areas and found that students perform at grade level and often at higher levels than otherwise similar students in a control group. (In 2011, every one of Amigos' eighth graders registered "proficient" or "advanced" in the English language arts category of the state's standardized test. This placed Amigos first among middle schools in the state in this category.) The U.S. Department of Education commissioned one of the most comprehensive studies of dual immersion's effectiveness. Published in 2002 and conducted by

professors Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas, the study analyzed data over 18 years in 23 school districts over 15 states. The dual immersion model, Collier and Thomas concluded, was strongly associated with the closing of the achievement gap between students learning English and native English speakers.

*The more integrated English language learners are with native English speakers, the better English language learners tend to do in school.*

Conducting research on dual immersion, however, is tricky, as it is often complicated by self-selection bias. In other words, the very qualities that propelled a family to choose dual immersion—say, a passion for language and world cultures, motivation, etc.—may very well play a role in a student's success in such a program. Professors Collier and Thomas are in the midst of a large study based in North Carolina where the demographic makeup of dual immersion programs is similar to that of schools that do not use the method. In comparing achievement and attendance rates and behavior of otherwise similar students, Collier and Thomas find that students taught through dual immersion make far more progress (as measured by test scores), have better attendance records and get referred for behavior problems far less frequently. English language learners, English-speaking Latino children, African American students and white students all performed better in dual immersion schools.

"It is quite dramatic," Collier says of the newest findings. "English language learners, particularly, are way outscoring their peers and we are seeing typically that such children are a full grade ahead of their peers not in dual immersion." In North Carolina, African American students tend to score as low on state tests as English language learners do. But, Collier points out, "This is not the case for the African American students in our study of dual immersion programs. This is a method with benefits for all children, from all backgrounds."

Dual immersion schools also enjoy enduring popularity among parents from a variety of racial and economic backgrounds. Under Cambridge's controlled choice policy designed to ensure socioeconomic diversity, parents list schools in order of preference. Consistently, for several years, Amigos is among the top three choices of parents. Every year, at Barbieri, at Boston's schools and the Amigos School, the requests for admission far outnumber the available seats.

"I didn't know anything about the research," says Kristen Jelstrup, whose two sons attend Amigos. Breathless, Jelstrup's first grader, Alex, shows off his robot drawings and then runs back to his friends on the playground after school.

"We had visited other schools and then we came here to Amigos and it was a no-brainer. It just felt right and then my husband and I talked about it and for our kids to graduate fluent in a second language? It was an unbelievable opportunity."

Jelstrup does not speak Spanish. "I do speak Danish," she laughs, "But I think Spanish is a lot more useful in life." She is learning Spanish bit by bit with help from Yanina Hillion, a native of Argentina whose four

children attend Amigos. Hillion offers Spanish classes for parents and also provides advice in how to assist kids with homework and adjust to a bilingual school.

"I have seen a genuine interest among parents to learn Spanish," Hillion says. "There is a completely open attitude and desire to really embrace Latin cultures…. But you know it is challenging. It is not easy to have your child learning in two languages when you do not know one of them. It is a true commitment."


Gazing up at the gathering grey clouds, her palm up, Jelstrup ventures: *"¿Está lloviendo?"* (Is it raining?) Hillion answers, *"Que no llueva hasta dentro de cuarenta y cinco minutos,"* and then, in English, explains: She is not going to allow it to rain for another 45 minutes because she needs her kids to be outside, running around and burning off energy before they head home.

Like Jelstrup, Lisa Downing, who also has two sons at Amigos, praises the school's high academic standards. The mothers agree, however, that they could not have predicted and cannot quantify some of school's most important benefits.

"I do think that the kids here develop an incredible empathy that comes from having to learn a second language and being so immersed with other cultures," Downing says. "Maybe that's because when you have to learn a second language, you do need to take risks, put yourself out there, and go out on a limb."

Second grader Fernando Panepinto speaks Spanish at home but had been exposed to English at his preschool. Fernando's father, Joseph Panepinto, grew up in Puerto Rico, came to the U.S. mainland to attend college and sent his son to Amigos because it offered his family "bilingualism" in the "true sense of the word."

"When I came here from Puerto Rico I was shocked to find out that the idea that a lot of people had of bilingualism was that Spanish speaking people learn English and kind of forget Spanish or move away from it in a fundamental way," he says. "Massachusetts and Cambridge is where my son is growing up and he will always identify with that. But it was important to me and to my wife that he will remain connected to Spanish. That he can go to Puerto Rico, be connected to his family there." That "strong connection," Panepinto believes, is reinforced not only by a Spanish-based curriculum and the culturally diverse group of students but because, he says, the "teaching staff, the administrators and the parents, too—the community" either

come from or "openly, enthusiastically" embrace Latin culture.

Educators in Cambridge, in particular, find it increasingly difficult to attract and enroll native Spanish speakers at Amigos. Educators suspect that this is in part because many first- and second-generation Latino immigrant families are getting priced out of this still mixed-income though generally expensive city. In recent years, Sercombe and others say, Latino families have settled further north, to the nearby predominantly working class, increasingly Latino communities of Revere, Everett and Lynn. Unless local leaders and policymakers commit to preserving and creating affordable housing, encourage immigration and make efforts to retain first- and second-generation immigrants, Sercombe fears that Amigos will continue to be culturally diverse and popular among middle-class and affluent families but will surely "lose something if we cannot maintain that socioeconomic diversity." That, Sercombe says, "would be a huge, huge loss." On the other hand, an increasing share of native Spanish speakers in other Massachusetts cities and towns may provide the necessary demographic mix to build and sustain dual immersion programs in new places.

The share of students from families that earn low incomes ranges considerably among dual immersion schools in the state. At Amigos, for example, about 30 percent of students come from families with incomes low enough to qualify for free and reduced school lunches. At the Hurley School in Boston, 72 percent of students qualify for free lunch and at Barbieri in Framingham, about 60 percent of students do.

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The dual immersion model has long been common in the border states of Texas and New Mexico and in regions of California. But more recently it has spread to other states including, most notably, Utah, where 11 school districts maintain dual immersion programs. Though there is no official accounting of dual immersion programs in the nation, Rosa Molina, executive director of the Two-Way California Association of Bilingual Educators (CABE), which provides technical assistance to two-way bilingual educators, estimates that there are more than 900 of what she defines as "true" dual immersion programs in 46 states, with about 400 in Texas and 300 in California. To give some sense of the method's increased popularity, the Center for Applied Linguistics in 1990 estimated that just 35 two-way immersion programs were operating across the nation. And two decades ago, Molina remembers, only a few dozen educators attended CABE's conference on two-way immersion education. Molina recently counted registrations for this year's June conference and found that more than 900 people had registered. Molina and other experts

caution, though, that it is difficult to determine how many such programs exist because increasingly educators in recent years have started so-called "Spanish" or "Chinese" immersion schools that do not enroll a significant share of native Spanish or Chinese speakers.

"That's not what the original idea of two-way bilingual is. Dual immersion, or two-way bilingual, are programs that bring in and embrace native speakers," Molina explains. "It involves, at its heart, sharing language. When you do not see any other language but English represented in the enrollment, we don't see this as a two-way program."



Echoing Sercombe's concerns, Molina cautions educators against allowing dual immersion to become dominated by middle-class, English-speaking families as its popularity grows. Dual immersion has proven itself as a highly effective method for English language learners, Molina says, urging, "Our policies and how we design these programs should ensure that it is English language learners getting to benefit from this method just as much as English-speaking students who want to learn another language and learn about another culture. At its foundation, dual immersion is about both groups sharing and learning together for mutual benefit."

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The research on the benefits of bilingualism, generally, is increasingly clear. The cognitive neuroscientist Ellen Bialystok of York University in Toronto has conducted some of the most convincing research. In repeated studies, Bialystok finds that bilingual children tend to master letters and numbers more quickly than monolingual children. Also, she finds that children who have been exposed to stories in two languages tend to have advantages as they learn to read. More recently, Bialystok has studied bilingual adults, finding that they tend to be less prone to cognitive decline in their older years and more efficient multi-taskers, likely because using two languages exercises the prefrontal cortex section of the brain.

Meanwhile, outcomes from the restrictive language policies of Arizona, California and Massachusetts, which move away from or else effectively ban bilingual education, have been discouraging at best.

In their edited volume of research studies and research reviews, *Forbidden Language: English Learners and Restrictive Language Policies*, UCLA Professor Patricia Gándara and Northwestern University researcher Megan Hopkins find that contrary to what English-only proponents had promised, the evidence fails to show that English-only policies resulted in improved educational programming or better educational outcomes for English language learners. Gándara and Hopkins recommend increased use of methods and programs such as dual immersion in which students' home languages are respected as assets rather than banned and where English learners are fully incorporated into schools as equals rather than separated from other students.

State officials in Massachusetts have yet to conduct a formal evaluation of the sheltered English immersion method. However, in recent years, a research institute based at the University of Massachusetts and a state-appointed study group issued reports documenting increasing dropout rates among Latino students and the growing number of English language learners

who have been placed in special education since implementation of the English-only law. Another casualty of the ban is that Massachusetts stopped issuing licenses in "bilingual education" and demoted this highly specialized training to an "endorsement." This reduces the likelihood that teacher candidates will opt for training in this area or that schools of education will offer it, making it all the more difficult for principals at dual immersion schools to find qualified bilingual teachers. Both Sercombe and Susan McGilvray-Rivet, principal at Framingham's Barbieri School, cite the lack of qualified teachers as the most significant challenge to sustaining their dual immersion schools over the long term and to expanding dual immersion to other school districts, even when growing shares of Spanish-speaking students would make it sensible and viable.


The inadequate supply of teachers is unfortunate, too, since dual immersion provides a hopeful counterweight to a trend Patricia Gándara of UCLA terms "triple segregation." Research by Gándara and other experts show Latino students disproportionately concentrated and separated by ethnicity, by economic class and by language. Latinos are now the nation's largest "minority" group and are more likely than even African American students to attend often overwhelmed, unstable high poverty schools.

In a recent survey of about 900 Arizona teachers, 85 percent of them said they felt that segregating English learners from English-speaking students in school is harmful to education. Other research indicates that those Arizona teachers have good instincts. For example, in a 2010 study, Russ Rumberger and Loan Tran of the University of California, Santa Barbara analyze data on segregation levels and achievement in 50 states. They conclude that increasing integration of English language learners with native English speakers would be the most effective thing policymakers could do to improve overall achievement of English language learners. Rumberger and Tran find that the degree of segregation within a school explains most of the variation in English language learners' achievement. In other words, the more integrated English language learners are with English speakers, the better the English language learners tend to do in school. Another study by researchers at New York University finds that the strongest predictor of how well an immigrant student will master English is whether that student has a friend who is a native English speaker.

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Deborah Sercombe stands amid students opening lunch boxes, eating sandwiches and munching on chips in the din of the school cafeteria. She offers a simple and obvious, but necessary, observation.

"You enable those friendships, you enable integration by putting kids together," she says. "You put kids together in classrooms, and just like this, right here, you put them together just eating lunch. You get them working together with equal status, throughout the day every day. That's the foundation right there."

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## Information about the Dual Immersion/Two-Way Bilingual Model

The Center for Applied Linguistics

A wealth of information and resources, particularly for educators, related to two-way immersion programs across the nation.

http://www.cal.org/topics/ell/immersion.html

Park City Utah's Dual Immersion Schools

http://www.pcschools.us/index.php?page=299

Dual Language Education of New Mexico

Offers current information and resources on dual immersion for families, educators, advocates and policymakers.

http://www.dlenm.org/

## Selected List of Scholarly Research Cited in this Story

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Karp, F., & Uriarte, M. (2010). *Educational outcomes of English language learners in Massachusetts: A focus on Latino/a students*. Boston, MA: The Gastón Institute.

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## Massachusetts' Public Dual Immersion Schools & Programs

### BOSTON

Joseph J. Hurley School
Rafael Hernandez Two-Way Bilingual School
Paul A. Dever School
Sarah Greenwood School

### BROCKTON

Manthala George Jr. Elementary School

### CAMBRIDGE

Amigos Two-Way Language Immersion

The OLA Program at the King Open School (Portuguese)

The King School, Mandarin Chinese Two-Way Program

### FRAMINGHAM

Barbieri Elementary School (full school)

Walsh Middle School (program)

Framingham High School Two-Way (program)

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