



Ruby Sandoval, with Cayleb Hunter and Larry Sarria, teaches Spanish in her fifth- and sixth-grade dual immersion class.

# Bilingual and Biliterate

*Dual immersion is rewriting the language of success*

By SHERRY POSNICK-GOODWIN

Photos by SCOTT BUSCHMAN and CYNTHIA MENZEL



Ja'Patrick Smith

**BEGINNING IN KINDERGARTEN**, Ja'Patrick Smith was taught in Spanish most of the school day. At first it was confusing and difficult, because his family speaks English. Teachers used pictures and pantomimed so he could learn words and concepts. He felt frustrated and misunderstood, as though he had entered a strange new world.

But now that he's in sixth grade, he can speak, read and write well in both languages. He also feels at home in both cultures. His baby sitter and her family,

who come from Mexico and speak mostly Spanish, have become his second family, sharing cultural celebrations and family vacations with him.

Ja'Patrick's ability to move comfortably between two languages and cultures is a benefit of the dual immersion (DI) program he attends at Victoria Magathan Elementary School in Adelanto. When the program began seven years ago, most parents were skeptical. But times have changed. Now there's a waiting list, and the school has added another kindergarten class to meet demand.



Don Kinslow, fifth-grade teacher at Rosedale Elementary, says dual immersion has helped create a more inclusive environment at the school.



Educator Lourdes Cassetta, center, at Rosedale Elementary, a two-way immersion school that groups native Spanish speakers with native English speakers.

The increasing popularity of DI programs throughout the state reflects an understanding that multilingual skills are an asset that can give students a competitive edge in today's global marketplace. In fact, the California Education for a Global Economy (Ed.G.E.) Initiative, supported by CTA on the November ballot, seeks to solidify this edge by expanding students' access to multilingual education, and allowing teachers, parents and schools more control over the curriculum. (See sidebar, page 28.)

## A GROWING TREND

DI begins in kindergarten, with 90 percent of instruction in a second language and 10 percent in English. English instruction increases gradually; by fourth grade the ratio is 50:50. Schools may vary this formula with a higher percentage of English in the beginning. The goal is to foster biliteracy, so students can speak, read and write fluently in two languages.

Schools throughout California have expanded DI programs to meet the demands of parents, who believe a second language benefits children in a diverse state and a global economy. Over the past decade, the number of DI programs in the U.S. has increased tenfold, notes the U.S. Department of Education. California has

369 dual-language schools, most of them Spanish, according to the California Department of Education (CDE).

"It's definitely becoming a trend in our diverse state of California," comments Elena Fajardo, administrator of the CDE's Language Policy and Leadership Office.

Most of the districts that implemented DI did so fairly recently, and the majority of their programs are in elementary schools. Districts with older DI programs, such as San Francisco and Chico, have created programs at the secondary level, while others are scrambling to create them so students can continue what they've started. Fremont, for example, has a Mandarin DI program in the works for children about to enter middle school.

The programs are also popular with immigrant families who want their children to read and write in their native language — and ethnic families who want their children to maintain their heritage.

After Proposition 227 of 1998 mandated that English learners be taught in English, Latino parents turned to DI programs to replace bilingual education programs that were dismantled. Because they are open to all students and not specifically

"Dual immersion expands children's understanding and acceptance of others. It gives them a perspective of what it's like to be in a different culture without having to leave the country."

—Lourdes Cassetta, Chico Unified Teachers Association

# ¿Cómo estás?







Chiu-Yen Jen, fifth-grade Mandarin teacher at Azeveda Elementary in Fremont, with students Nathan Massoth and Hayden Harrison. She says her students excel not only in Chinese, but in math and English.

English learners, DI programs have flourished. (The Ed.G.E. Initiative would repeal Prop. 227.)

At Magathan Elementary School, many DI enrollees are from Mexico and Latin America, says Ruby Sandoval, who teaches Ja'Patrick's fifth- and sixth-grade combination class.

"For English learners living in a country where English is the main language, a dual immersion program is a way of preserving students' language and culture," says the Adelanto District Teachers Association member.

Adrian Ruiz, a sixth-grader who has been in the program since kindergarten, enjoys being able to converse with his grandparents in Spanish.

"They don't speak English, so without this class, I would not be able to communicate with them," he says.

## RESULTS ARE NOT IMMEDIATE

A Stanford Graduate School of Education study in 2014 echoes findings of earlier studies: Students in English-only classrooms perform better in the short term, but over the long term, DI students catch up to their counterparts and eventually surpass them academically and linguistically. The Stanford study finds that by middle school, students in DI programs score substantially higher than students enrolled in English-only programs.

Research shows other benefits: Bilingualism improves

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students' reasoning skills, attention control, problem-solving skills, and when they're older, the delay of dementia.

"Learning a second language helps to stimulate students' brains," says Sandoval. "In a dual immersion program, students exercise

their brains more, so everything comes easier to them. Even students with learning disabilities do better academically when they learn a second language."

In the rural community of Chico, Rosedale Elementary School's Spanish DI program has helped create a more inclusive environment, say teachers who work there.

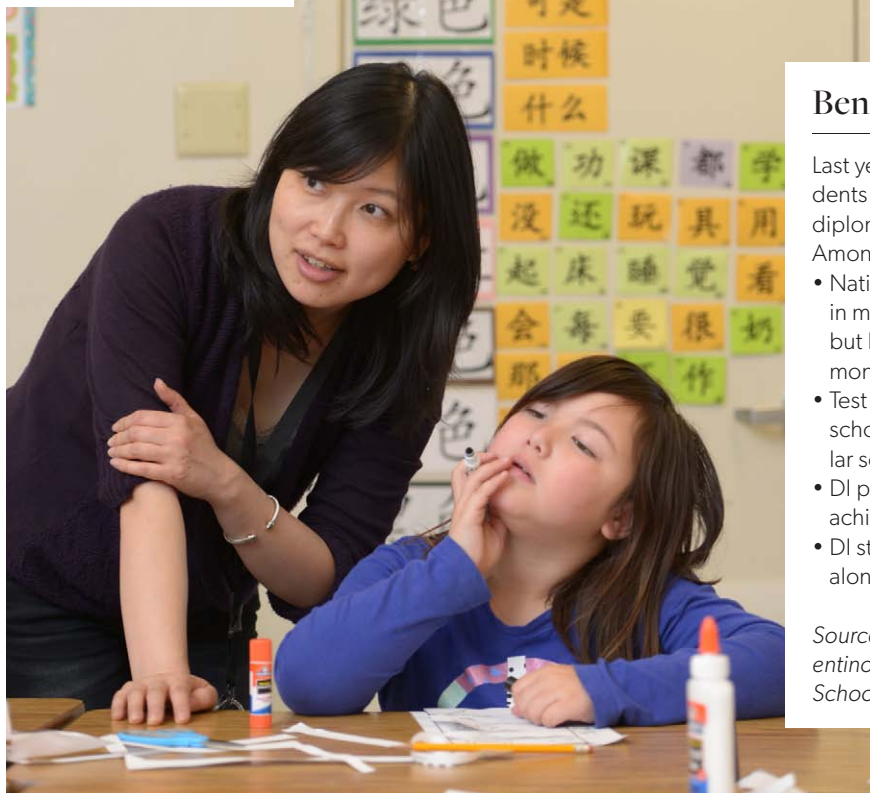
"Typically at schools you have a group of students on one side of the playground and another group from another culture on the other side of the playground," observes Don Kinslow, a fifth-grade teacher and member of the Chico Unified Teachers Association. "But in an immersion program, the students are so intertwined, there aren't factions. There's just one big community."

First-grade teacher Lourdes Cassetta agrees.

"It expands children's understanding and acceptance of others," she says. "And it gives them a perspective of what it's like to be in a different culture without them having to leave the country to see what another culture looks like."

But in the beginning, she admits, it can be difficult.

Azevada second-grade teacher Yi Zeng works with student Bailey Skaggs.



## Benefits of Dual Immersion

Last year, nearly 32,000 California high school students earned the State Seal of Biliteracy on their diplomas — three times the number from 2012. Among the benefits of DI:

- Native English speakers may lag behind peers in monolingual programs in elementary school, but by middle school often equal or exceed monolingual peers' performance.
- Test results show that most dual-language schools outperform other demographically similar schools, locally and statewide.
- DI programs are the most effective in closing the achievement gap.
- DI students develop multicultural competencies along with social skills.

*Sources: PACE Policy Brief, 2015; research by Valentino and Reardon, Stanford University Graduate School of Education, 2014.*

Sometimes DI parents worry that their children aren't verbalizing much in kindergarten, and take them to a doctor. Often, says Cassetta, the children are merely "processing" both languages and it's a bit overwhelming. Eventually, something "clicks" for children, and in most cases, verbalization takes off.

### RIGOROUS AND CHALLENGING

Enrolling in a DI program is a long-term commitment for students, families and teachers — and it is more rigorous than a traditional classroom. And some languages are more difficult than others.

Chinese, which is written with characters and not an alphabet, can be extremely challenging, say Fremont Unified District Teachers Association members who teach Mandarin at Azevada Elementary School. While nearly all of the students are Asian, not all of them are Chinese, and most students don't speak Mandarin at home.

"It was hard in the beginning, and I cried a lot," recalls fifth-grader Dylan Ho. "But it got easier and easier."

"In the beginning, there are a lot of tears," says

kindergarten teacher Jamie Choi. "There are blank stares. So I do a lot of charades. I act everything out. I sing a lot and dance a lot, and we practice lining up and sitting down. Everything is very active. I don't speak in abstract terms; I speak in relation to what they are seeing or doing. In a few months, they begin to understand what I'm saying."

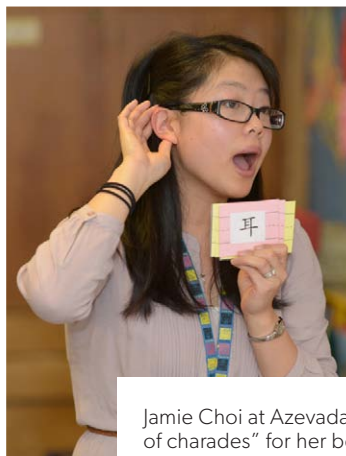
Teachers make learning fun and culturally relevant with holiday celebrations, Chinese food and artwork. But it's not all fun and games.

"Being in a dual immersion program is challenging and difficult," says second-grade teacher Yi Zeng. "Chinese is very different from English and there's no pattern, so they have to memorize all of the characters. When speaking, tones distinguish words. It's very hard to learn as an adult, so these kids are amazing."

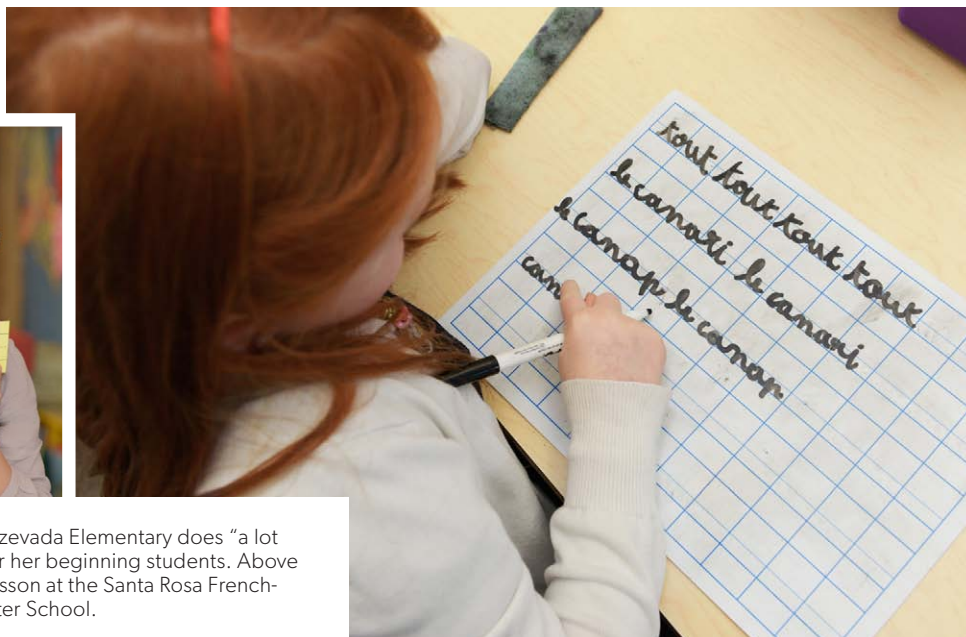
Expectations are set extremely high, says Chiu-Yen Jen, a fifth-grade teacher at the school.

"Our principal tells the parents, 'If you decide to have your child come into this Mandarin program, you and your children must work very hard. It's a big commitment.' I am shocked at their performance. If you didn't





Jamie Choi at Azeveda Elementary does “a lot of charades” for her beginning students. Above right, writing lesson at the Santa Rosa French-American Charter School.



know better, you would think they were native speakers. Their pronunciation and tone is better than many Taiwanese people. They excel not only in Chinese, but math and English. I am very proud of them.”

She is also proud of the parents, who have been extremely supportive with fundraising and volunteer work for the program, providing books, dictionaries and laptops.

### EXTRA WORKLOAD, HIGH TURNOVER

Until recently, teachers in Azeveda Elementary School’s Mandarin DI program had to create their own curriculum. Materials have become available, however, and teachers are using lessons they created along with a new Common Core-aligned program the district purchased.

The situation is not unique: Finding curriculum aligned with the new standards has been a challenge for all DI teachers regardless of language.

“Dual immersion is hard enough dealing with different languages and language levels. Finding materials makes it even more difficult,” says Sandoval, whose school is using a Common Core program translated into Spanish from McGraw-Hill.

Teaching DI is more work for teachers, in general. Members of United Educators of San Francisco who teach in Cantonese and Mandarin DI programs addressed the school board in February to ask for adequate pay, support and training for the extra work that’s required, which includes conducting assessments and writing report cards in both Chinese and English. UESF filed a grievance to compensate teachers for their extra work.

Turnover in some DI programs has been an issue in San Francisco, and in a few cases necessitated relying on substitutes and a paraprofessional to teach Mandarin at Starr King Elementary School, which has angered parents. The high turnover rate is likely due in part to average salaries that are lower than in neighboring cities, and the city’s higher cost of living.

Hiring qualified DI teachers in San Francisco and similar areas is hard for those reasons. Also, there is fierce competition for Mandarin teachers in particular because there are fewer qualified to teach

## Giving Students the Ed.G.E.

The California Education for a Global Economy (Ed.G.E.) Initiative, on the November 2016 ballot, expands multilingual education programs to better prepare students for college and careers in a global economy (see [preparestudents.org](http://preparestudents.org)). Ed.G.E. would:

- Overturn Proposition 227 (1998), which mandated English-only education.
- Allow school districts, together with language experts and parents, to determine the best instruction methods and language acquisition programs to implement.
- Provide all parents with the choice to have their children educated to high standards in English and one or more additional languages, and encourage local schools to provide opportunities for native English-speaking pupils to be instructed in another language.
- Allow parents to request school districts to provide multilingual programs.





in California schools compared with, for example, Spanish-language teachers. And there's an increasing number of schools offering Mandarin classes, including private schools.

High turnover is not unusual in DI programs, say educators.

At the Santa Rosa French-American Charter School, teachers are brought in from France to meet the demand, and there is constant turnover because they are on three-year visas.

"It's not enough time," says Bertrand Le Rebours, a fourth-grade teacher in his third year at the school.

The Santa Rosa Teachers Association (SRTA) member is from the south of France, and taught French in Dubai for eight years.

"I like this school and culture," says Le Rebours. "We try to give these kids the heart and spirit of French culture. We are trying to open their minds and give them a broader understanding of the world."

## EXPANDING HORIZONS, OPPORTUNITIES

Cindy Beurtheret, a teacher at the school since it opened in 2012, loves the European environment — and seeing how quickly students adapt. She comments that in Europe, students are usually taught a second and third language and are expected to be fluent, unlike Americans, who expect people from other countries to know English. Some of the school's youngsters have traveled to Europe and translated for their parents.

"I didn't learn French until I was in high school, and it took me a long time to become fluent," says the SRTA member, who is American. "I love seeing students age 6 and 7 speaking and understanding French."

Beurtheret has a big secret: Her first-grade students don't have the slightest idea that she speaks English. That's because she only communicates with them in French. Sometimes students feel sorry for her, so they volunteer to



Students of Cindy Beurtheret, who teaches first grade at Santa Rosa French-American, think she does not know English.

"It's exciting to know that students will have a big advantage when they venture out into the job market. They will discover many career opportunities are open to them."

—Cindy Beurtheret,  
*Santa Rosa Teachers Association*

act as interpreters when visitors come. The ruse is a common practice in DI programs.

The pre-K–8 school, one of three in the state with French DI programs, has a chef who creates cuisine such as crepes and fisherman stew. Students enjoy a midday break of 55 minutes, allowing for lunch at a leisurely pace instead of gulping American-style.

The school is trying to "harmonize" both the Common Core and curriculum used by schools in France. It's an ongoing challenge,

even though they are similar, especially in math. Students also study French history.

The students were hit emotionally when terrorists attacked Paris. "There's a lot of empathy," says Beurtheret. "In November, we did a minute of silence in memory of all those who were killed in Paris. It was a very sad day for our school."

When students reach seventh grade, they study Mandarin as a third language. Beurtheret believes being trilingual will give students even more opportunities.

"It's very exciting to know that students will have a big advantage when they venture out into the job market. They will discover many, many career opportunities are open to them."

But for students, it's more about the present.

"I like the meals and being with my friends," says fourth-grader Liliana Lanvin. "And it's fun being able to talk to each other in another language." ■

Tout va bien.