



Meeting the Challenges of No Child Left Behind in U.S. Immersion Education

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Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), schools across the nation have been working hard to comply with the accountability requirements that the law requires. In fact, I doubt there is a teacher in the U.S. who has not attended at least several meetings where the topic had something to do with NCLB and accountability. The discourse has changed in schools and new vocabulary has been adopted into the lexicon of educators. It is common to hear teachers or administrators talking about NCLB, comprehensive assessments, or AYP (adequate yearly progress). In addition to NCLB requirements, many states have additional laws such as English-only requirements that add additional layers to the complicated nature of educational accountability.

So, how does immersion education fit into state accountability systems?

First, immersion programs in the public schools need to take part in statewide assessments for accountability purposes. Under NCLB, states are required to measure student achievement on established content standards that have been determined at the state level. Achievement in the areas of math, language arts (reading and sometimes writing), and science must be measured for all students at various points throughout grades three to twelve. Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, achievement in math and language arts must be assessed every year in grades three through eight and at least once during grades ten to twelve. Beginning in the school year 2007-2008, achievement in science must be measured at three points throughout grades three to twelve.

In addition to the content assessments, English language proficiency must be measured each year for all students with limited English proficiency (or English language learners). Like the content standards, English language proficiency standards are determined by each state. English language learners who are in two-way immersion programs must be assessed in their English proficiency just like all non-English-speaking students.

While research has been done on the impact of statewide testing on English language learners and students with disabilities in general (Anderson, 2004; Nelson, 2002; Thompson & Thurlow, 2003) as well as on the achievement of immersion students on standardized measures (see the article by Kathryn Lindholm-Leary below), little research has been done on how immersion programs have been impacted by NCLB and state-level educational accountability legislation (for a review of a recently completed dissertation study on this topic, look for next fall's November issue of the ACIE Newsletter).

To begin a discussion of NCLB's impact on immersion education, a panel of immersion educators and researchers from across the United States took part in a symposium at the Pathways to Bilingualism conference held in Minneapolis in October 2004. The panel members shared data and experiences and explored the different ways their states are meeting the challenges of including immersion students in statewide accountability systems.

The panelists were asked to consider these questions:

- 1) How are students in immersion schools included in statewide testing?
- 2) Are immersion students allowed to take state assessments in a language other than English or with linguistic accommodations?
- 3) How are immersion students performing on the tests?
- 4) What issues of accessibility do immersion educators deal with in terms of statewide testing?
- 5) Are immersion educators in the state familiar with the options their students may have in participating in these assessments?
- 6) How are assessments being created in immersion languages?
- 7) How do new teacher quality requirements affect immersion teachers and what they do?
- 8) How do immersion programs, especially those who teach exclusively in the immersion language in the early grades, handle the priorities given to English language arts under NCLB?

Because assessments are currently being implemented and data on the impact of these assessments is still being collected, the answers to all of these questions are not yet apparent. However, this symposium produced an important discussion on these issues. The following pieces are summaries of presentations by four different practitioners or researchers on these issues. The authors represent immersion programs in California, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Texas.

It is our hope that further discussion of these issues will take place with input from educators working in different immersion contexts across the U.S. If you have data on NCLB's impact on your program or would like to share how your program is meeting the challenges of NCLB requirements, please contact me at ande1819@umn.edu.

It is through continued dialogue on these issues that the bridge between policy research and practice in immersion contexts can be built.

The Impact of No Child Left Behind in California

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Possibly the greatest obstacle with the current NCLB requirements in California, and other states, is that it pressures schools to demonstrate the academic success of their ELL students at early grade levels. Yet, a recent synthesis of the empirical research on English language learners (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian, in press; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, in press) concluded that ELLs who received some specialized program (bilingual or English as a second language education) were able to catch up to, and in some studies surpass, the achievement levels of their ELL peers and their English-speaking peers who were educated in English-only mainstream classrooms – but not until late elementary or middle school. These findings indicate further that ELLs who participated in programs that provided extended instruction through the medium of the students' first language (i.e., two-way immersion and late-exit programs) outperformed students who received short-term instruction through their first language (i.e., early-exit and transitional bilingual education (TBE) programs).

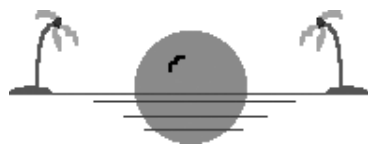
In California, where we also have legislation requiring instruction through the medium of English (Proposition 227), there is the schizophrenic attitude that our ELLs need to learn English as quickly as possible, but, on the other hand, the recognition that bilingualism is an asset. Because of this recognition of the importance of bilingualism, many English-speaking parents have advocated for two-way immersion programs¹. California has the largest number of two-way immersion programs in the country—about 200 such programs (www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/ip/ap/directory.asp).

A variety of studies have examined the bilingual proficiency, academic achievement, and attitudinal outcomes of students in two-way programs. Most of this research comprises students in Spanish/English programs, but there are a few reports that present the outcomes of Chinese and Korean program students as well. My research (e.g., Lindholm-Leary, 2001, 2003, 2005) with students enrolled in two-way immersion (TWI) programs in California is consistent with research in other states in showing that:

- By fifth or sixth grade, almost all ELL and native English-speaking students who had attended a two-way immersion program since kindergarten or first grade were rated as proficient in both languages. In addition, at one high school site, almost all of the students who took the Spanish Advanced Placement test scored high enough for Advanced Placement credit.
- Both ELLs and native English speakers scored at to well above grade level measured in both languages by middle school; and they performed at comparable or superior levels compared to same-language comparison peers. These results extend to studies of Chinese and Korean TWI program students as well.
- In studies of secondary students who had been in a TWI program in elementary school, results with both 90:10 and 50:50 programs showed that students had positive attitudes toward school and the TWI program. Most students believed that learning through two languages helped them learn to think better, made them smarter, and helped them do better in school. Students, especially Hispanics, felt valued in the TWI program, were glad they participated in it, and would recommend it to other students. Most students agreed (and Hispanic students strongly agreed) that the TWI program challenged them to do better in school, gave them more confidence to do well in school, and gave them a better education.

Immersion in the Hawaiian Context

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The Papahana Kaiapuni Hawai'i (PKH), Hawaiian Language Immersion Program, is a special instructional program offered in selected public schools where children, for the most part native speakers of English, are taught through the medium of the Hawaiian language. The program provides an important means for students to acquire Hawaiian language proficiency through complete immersion in self-contained school or program-within-a-school settings for elementary and secondary students. Instruction in all content areas in Hawaiian language immersion schools is conducted exclusively in Hawaiian from kindergarten through Grade 4. Beginning in Grade 5, students receive a minimum of one hour of instruction in English. Students in Papahana Kaiapuni Hawaii are expected to meet the same educational standards as are students in the English-medium program.

Under the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) states are required to measure student progress in reading, math and science. They must also test 95% of a school's student body, including those in identified sub-groups regardless of their program of study. Prior to NCLB Hawaiian immersion students in grades K-5 were exempt from participating in statewide testing using a norm-referenced standardized test given in English. Since the NCLB law was passed, however, PKH student progress must be measured in the identified areas. One of the most obvious concerns regarding accountability under NCLB for PKH is finding an appropriate tool for assessing student progress in light of the mismatch between language of instruction and language of assessment. In order to meet the NCLB mandate the State of Hawaii Department of Education (DOE) presented a plan to the Federal Department of Education that resulted in the translation of the English-medium tests used under the Hawaii State Assessment system (a mix of SAT and Hawaii Standards-based items).

Wanting to identify possible areas of difficulty PKH teachers worked with Hawaii DOE program specialists to do a trial translation of some standards-based test items. The trial translation raised some concerns about the translation process itself. It became obvious that there would be problems translating reading passages, especially poetry or pieces that included English idiomatic or figurative language. The PKH teachers also recognized potential issues with the comparative length and relative complexity of the translated piece compared to the original English piece. The test questions related to the reading passages that had to do with grammar, parts of words (like prefixes and suffixes), words whose meanings would need to be derived from context would all be problematic to translate and parallel questions would have to be created.

The PKH teachers also realized, based on their experience with the test translation process, that the translators must be highly skilled Hawaiian language writers who were familiar with the vocabulary being used in the PKH classroom. In fact, the teachers and state staff recommended that original items be created in Hawaiian to assess the same standards at the same level as the English items. The decision was made to do a translation-back-translation model. This model uses one translator to take a test item in English and translate it to Hawaiian. The second translator edits the original translation and creates an English translation of the Hawaiian piece. In the end, the two English versions should be essentially the same, thus assuring fidelity to the meaning of the original English item.

The first translation effort was a grade 3 reading test. Subsequently, the grade three math and grade four reading and math tests were translated along with the directions for administering the test. The Hawaii DOE specialists participated in the translation process by identifying appropriate translators, by seeking feedback regarding the translated material from PKH teachers, and by communicating concerns to Hawaii test development specialists and the translators themselves. However, when the grade 3 pilot translated reading test was administered the same issues identified through the first trial translation resurfaced among PKH teachers who administered the test. There was a general feeling that the test was too difficult for PKH students despite the fact that the translators created a very high quality, accurate Hawaiian version of the test. To be fair, English-medium teachers also think the Hawaii tests are too difficult for their students.

The need to seek an alternate instrument to measure PKH student progress became even more obvious as the subsequent translations of the grade 3 and 4 tests were administered this year. Because the PKH is a program within a larger English-medium school, the entire school, not just the PKH classes, are impacted by poor test scores that are used to measure adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB. While there is no definitive study of comparative progress between English and Hawaiian-medium students, there are obvious problems with using a translated version of the test and maintaining the same high stakes consequences for schools. Fortunately, a re-examination of NCLB requirements by the State of Hawaii Test Advisory Committee and the experience of PKH teachers, students and state staff in using a translated version of the test, may lead to a more appropriate accountability solution in the future.

Starting this summer (2005) work will begin on designing an alternate assessment portfolio system for Papahana Kaiapuni Hawaii program students. The premise is that student evidence (work) will be collected and adjudicated to provide scores (comparable to Hawaii State Assessment [HSA] test scores) to indicate PKH student progress in reading, math and science. The parameters for the student work collection will be provided by the benchmarks assessed in the HSA tests. The portfolio would be designed to guide the collection of student work, perhaps by providing prompts, reading passages, problems or situations to drive student response. These responses, which may take various forms, would then be scored with the same rubrics used to score the HSA tests. The student scores should match with scores derived from various test items and may be used in place of HSA scores.

This alternate form of assessment, which is supported by NCLB, will provide: 1) accurate data regarding PKH student progress relative to the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards in reading, math and science, 2) the opportunity for PKH teachers to be involved in systematic and consistent professional development supportive of the implementation of the alternate portfolio assessment, and 3) valuable information regarding the use of alternate forms of assessment for measuring student progress which may impact the use of such alternate forms with other sub-groups. Ultimately, the goal of all our efforts should be to support student academic achievement regardless of the language used to educate them. Current efforts to fairly assess Papahana Kaiapuni Hawai'i Hawaiian immersion students will result in valuable lessons to inform both Hawaiian language immersion education development in Hawaii, and immersion education efforts nationwide.

Foreign Language Immersion Programs in Louisiana

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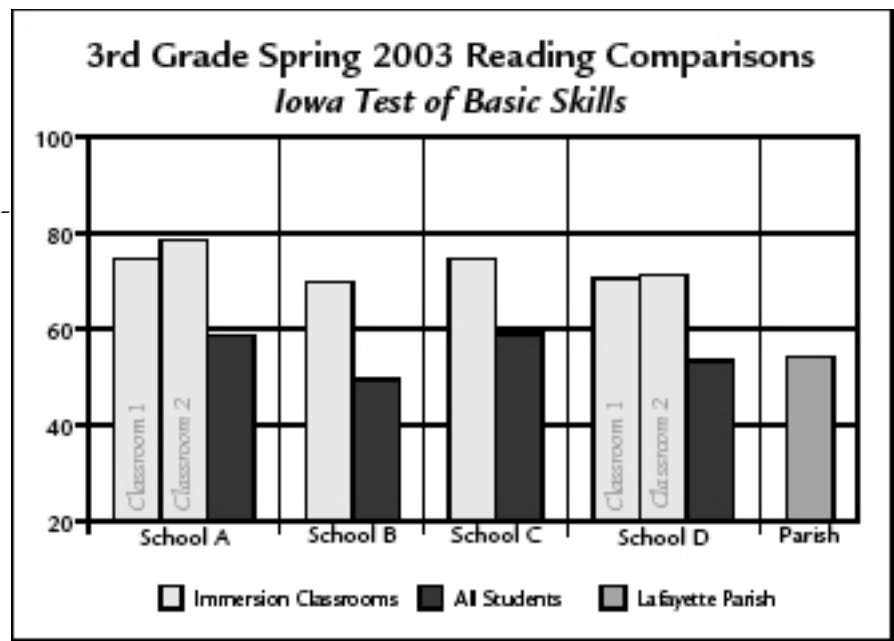


Foreign Language Immersion Programs in Louisiana educate close to 3,000 students in thirty schools. All programs offer partial immersion, which means that students have between 90-120 minutes of English language arts instruction per day starting in Kindergarten. Literacy instruction in English starts in Kindergarten on day one, and programs introduce literacy in French about the middle of the Kindergarten year. Our concerns about NCLB are three-fold: Testing our students' academic progress in the accountability era, proving our staff to be Highly Qualified Teachers, and promoting the credibility of our programs in regard to NCLB standards.

Louisiana is using two standardized measures of testing. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is given at various grade levels (depending on the school district choice) and the Louisiana high-stakes test, LEAP (Louisiana Educational Academic Performance), is administered at grades 4 and 8 in elementary schools. Testing policy for these tests is the same: there are no accommodations given to immersion students. Tests are in English and the students are considered regular education students and must take the tests in English. It is our responsibility to see that they are able to transfer the skills, and especially the vocabulary, they learn in the immersion language into English. Local performance comparisons show that immersion students on average score as high as or higher than non-immersion peers (see chart for an example at 3rd grade).

This finding is the best advertisement for our programs. However, administrators are working with the State Department of Education in order to identify immersion students at the state level when taking these tests so more precise research can be done on this unique population.

It is interesting to note that the state does not require any testing of the students' proficiency level in the immersion language. School districts that



have decided to monitor progress with various foreign language testing measures have done so on a voluntary basis. Sadly, except for foreign language supervisors, no administrator is actually much interested in this aspect of the program.

Regarding the requirement for Highly Qualified Teachers in NCLB, the Louisiana Department of Education has reached a solution that seems adequate. In the state, foreign language immersion teachers come from two sources. Some are local teachers with local certifications, which put them at the same level as any other teacher in the state. For those teachers the only concern is to verify their fluency level in the immersion language, which is done independently by each school system. However, many immersion teachers are foreign born, coming to our system as Foreign Associate Teachers under a J1 visa given to them by CODOFIL (Council for the Development of French In Louisiana)², a government agency. Under NCLB, requirements for hiring have become more demanding. CODOFIL, with verification from the State Department of Education, only recruits teachers with the equivalent of a Bachelor degree, an Elementary Certification in their country of origin (or appropriate subject), and a minimum of 3 years experience. Once they are in Louisiana, they are granted a special certification valid for 3 years and renewable once, which identifies them as Highly Qualified. After 6 years, if they wish to remain in Louisiana, they are required to take the Praxis exam.

Our third concern is credibility in an era where most administrators only worry about ‘Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic’ and all evaluations are based on standardized tests scores. Even though immersion scores are on average higher than those of non-immersion students, many believe that it is due to the fact that our programs are elitist and handpick students, which is not the case. In order to be recognized as a valuable academic program, we have to be sometimes “more royalist than the king,” and follow NCLB requirements to the letter of the law. For example, we have addressed language arts issues by closely matching the immersion language arts curriculum to the English language arts curriculum, and consolidating grade-level instruction to show clear academic progression. Our main concern as immersion educators however remains instructional time spent in each language. Following an early partial immersion model, we have established a minimum of 210 minutes of daily instruction in the immersion language. Some districts still have difficulty maintaining this minimum. As pressure to perform well on NCLB-mandated tests administered in English mounts, French language time may decrease.

NCLB has made it harder for our programs to survive because of unfounded administrative fear of poor test results. It has also made it easier in some ways. NCLB is providing momentum and inspiring focused initiatives to convince opponents using evidence from testing that immersion is a valuable and effective way not only to teach a second language to children, but also simply to teach.

Meeting NCLB Challenges in Texas

Mary Lester Zeigler, Assistant Superintendent, Alamo Heights ISD, San Antonio, TX



Founded in 1909, the Alamo Heights Independent School District (AHISD) is a mid-size suburban school district nestled in the heart of San Antonio, Texas. The five schools—1 high school, 1 middle school, two elementary schools, and one early childhood campus—serve approximately 4500 students in grades PK-12 and represent students from parts of four municipalities—Alamo Heights, Olmos Park, Terrell Hills, and San Antonio.

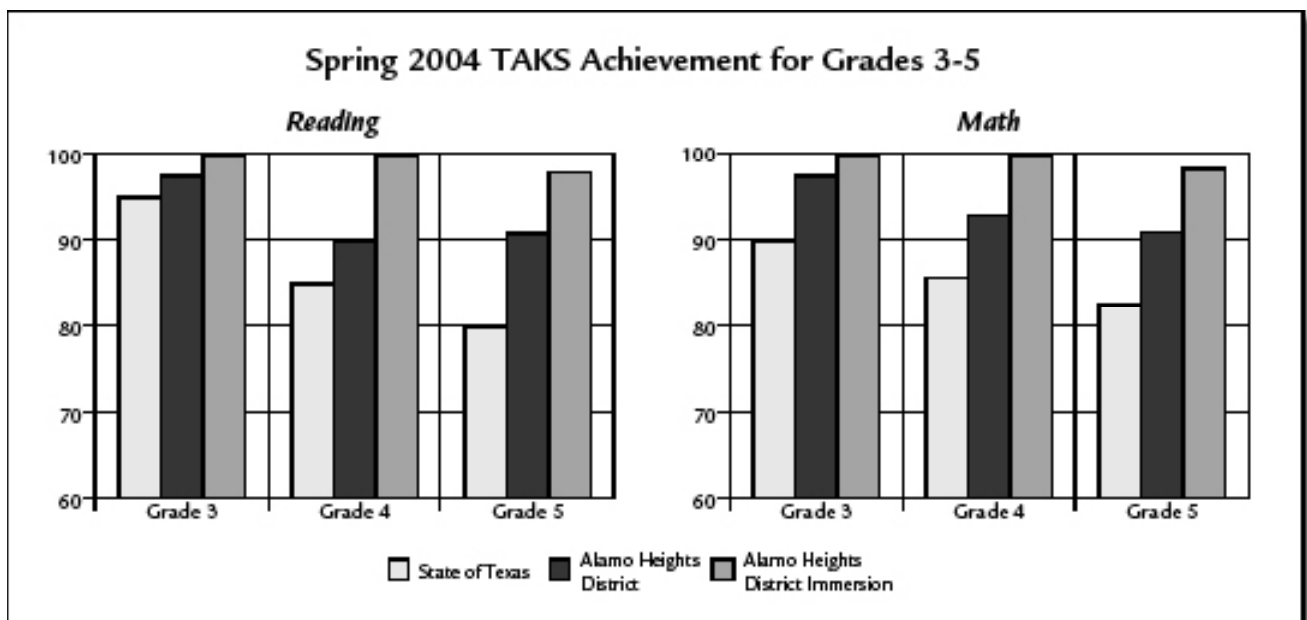
AHISD has many distinctive characteristics. First and foremost, Alamo Heights is known for its tradition of excellence. The schools, students, parents, and communities are united in their support of the school system. This partnership enhances the many accomplishments of the students. Over 90% of the district’s graduating seniors pursue higher education opportunities. SAT and ACT scores earned by AHISD students far exceed the state and national averages. Likewise, student performance

on Advanced Placement (AP) exams is exceptional. In 2004 the College Board identified 87 AP Scholars for their achievement on the AP exams. District demographics reflect a very diverse student population—68% Anglo and 32% minorities. Over 22% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged. This diversity contributes to the many accomplishments of the district.

AHISD's Spanish Immersion Program was established in the fall of 1998. The oldest students are currently in seventh grade. The immersion offerings will be extended through high school as students progress through the system. The program is designed for English-speaking students who wish to become fluent in Spanish. Students are chosen by a lottery system and enter the program in first grade. The curriculum for language arts/reading, mathematics, science and social studies is delivered entirely in Spanish in first grade and until midyear of second grade. English is introduced in the spring semester of second grade. English language arts is taught for approximately one hour a day in grades 3-5. Students are expected to continue in the program until fifth grade. At the secondary level, students may take one or two classes in the second language.

The major obstacle faced by the AHISD Spanish Immersion Program has been the hiring of teachers. There are many applicants who are "highly qualified" according to NCLB guidelines. Nevertheless, securing master teachers who are fluent in Spanish, committed to the immersion philosophy, and are a match for the community is challenging.

The NCLB requirement for uniform testing measures has not negatively impacted the program. Texas required testing of all students enrolled in public schools long before the NCLB regulations were implemented. (Some type of state testing has been in place for over 25 years.) Immersion students take the state criterion-referenced exams (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Grades 3-5), an abilities test (Cogat, grades 2, 3, 5) and a norm-referenced test (Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), grades 2, 3, 5) in English. Historically they outperform their counterparts in the regular classrooms. The charts below reflect their performance on the state-mandated exams.



In 2004 an AHISD administrator, Dr. Cordell Jones, evaluated the Spanish Immersion program as his dissertation project. Using data from 1999-2003, the study compared the performance of the district's 168 Spanish immersion students to 832 Non-Spanish immersion students and confirmed that the Spanish immersion students outperformed their comparison groups at every grade level. It also confirmed that the Spanish immersion economically-disadvantaged students' achievement was

higher than non-Spanish immersion economically disadvantaged students. Another important finding was that the Spanish immersion students showed no significant dip in their first language.

The AHISD Spanish Immersion offering is one of the most popular offerings in the district and is known throughout the city and state as an exemplary program. Many private school students enroll in the district to be eligible for the lottery. The immersion students develop their second language fluency at a time when brain development is best suited for learning another language. Their academic performance outpaces their counterparts in regular classes. Although hiring qualified teachers who meet all the requirements established by the district is difficult, the end result is an outstanding program for AHISD students.

Footnotes

¹ Two-way, also called dual language, immersion education integrates native English speakers and English language learners for academic instruction that is presented separately through two languages. For both groups of students, one of the languages is their native language and one is a second language.

² For a description of CODOFIL see “Immersion Advocacy and the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana” in the February, 2003 ACIE Newsletter.

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