

## Trustee Talk



### Central Elementary students expand their world by learning a new language

By President Alfredo Andrade, Banning Unified School District, Trustee Area #2

When we teach our students to be proficient in Spanish and English, we're enhancing their academic abilities, enriching their career options, and encouraging cultural understanding.

At Central Elementary School, our dual-language immersion program in Spanish and English has helped thousands of students acquire a second language while maintaining their primary language. We believe many of our students will be able to read, write, and speak a second language by the time they graduate from high school, said Principal Marcia Cole-Fijabi.

As the child of farmworkers, I was put in classes to improve my English until middle school, I know the importance of our District's dual-language immersion program. I believe that our efforts will help generations of students achieve their full potential.

<http://www.banning.k12.ca.us/District-Administration/School-Board/Alfredo-Andrade-President/index.html>

#### Immersed in language

So let's explore the dual language immersion program at Central Elementary and exactly how it works.

It's an enrichment language program where parents voluntarily enroll their children. The youngsters must be in transitional kindergarten, kindergarten or first grade. In our transitional kindergarten program at the Florida Street Discovery Center, youngsters begin by learning Spanish.

Central Elementary is a designated school for the District's dual immersion program. And so eligible youngsters from throughout the District may enroll in our program. Students are selected for the dual immersion program based on several factors. Some of these include an oral test in their primary language, students who have a sibling in the program, and the date their application was filed. Dual immersion classes have a balance of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students.

Parents must make a five-to-seven-year commitment to dual immersion on behalf of their children. It's a very popular program and there is currently a waiting list to sign up.

#### Deep dive into dual-language immersion

At Central Elementary, half of our students are enrolled in dual immersion and teachers of dual immersion have their Spanish

language credential. Most of our classes have about a 50-50 mixture of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students.

In dual-language immersion programs, school districts first choose a primary language for instruction. In Banning Unified, we chose Spanish. In kindergarten and first grade, 90 percent of our instruction is in Spanish; 10 percent is in English. Research shows that English learners in dual-immersion programs like Banning Unified's score as well or better on English exams compared to their English only peers.

By the fourth and fifth grade, classroom instruction in Spanish and English is 50/50 at Central Elementary School.

### **Measuring success**

Banning Unified believes in measuring the results of our efforts, especially in dual-language immersion.

Our students are tested for language proficiency in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. They're challenged to write essays in Spanish and English. At Banning High School, dual immersion students take Advanced Placement courses in Spanish. They also take classes in Spanish at the Banning campus of Mt. San Jacinto College. By graduation, many students will earn multi-literacy seals offered by the Banning Unified School District, the Riverside County Office of Education and the State of California. The State seal goes on a student's high school diploma.

We know the distinct advantages of being bilingual from 50 years of research collected by the *Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition* at the University of

Minnesota. Because speaking a second language has cognitive benefits, bilingual students excel at problem-solving, creative thinking when many possibilities are involved, and listening because of their enhanced sensitivity to verbal and non-verbal cues.

As the Center concluded, "Becoming bilingual leads to new ways of conceptualizing yourself and others. It expands your worldview, so that you not only know more, you know *differently*."

If you want to expand your child's world and opportunities, whether they speak Spanish or English, it's time to explore dual-language immersion at Central Elementary School. And just a reminder ... the fall semester begins Aug. 7!