

# Parents' Decisions About Bilingual Program Models

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## Abstract

After Proposition 227 took effect in California, one city on the border of Mexico still had 48% of its parents choosing bilingual education for their children in kindergarten and first grade. Survey results provide some insight into some of the reasons parents selected one of three programmatic options (bilingual, structured English immersion, and English-only classroom settings) for their children. It also provides information regarding the background of the parents as well as their perception of how well their children are achieving in each type of classroom.

## Introduction

The Calexico Unified School District is located in southern California. It borders the city of Mexicali, Mexico, and has a rich cultural and linguistic mix of traditions. It has received much attention over the last few years due to its success with bilingual programs. In 1994, the National Association for Bilingual Education granted it the "Outstanding School District" award recognizing the district's successes in bilingual education. It was the first time such an award, usually reserved for single schools, had been given to an entire district. The California Association for Bilingual Education has also individually recognized four Calexico schools for distinction in the field of bilingual education. They are Rockwood Elementary, Dool Elementary, Mains Elementary, and Calexico High School. *Hispanic Magazine* also awarded a "National Exceptional School Award" to Calexico High School in October of 1993. In addition to awards, the school district has been recognized and/or featured by the *Los Angeles Times*, CNN, Univision, KNBC, Education Week, ACSA, Senator Hatch's Committee on Minority Affairs, Mike Rose's "Life on the Boundary," and *Vista Magazine*. School districts from throughout the United States look to Calexico for guidance as they try to improve or start up their own programs serving English

language learners (ELLs). Many representatives from school districts from across the United States have either visited or asked for information about the implementation of bilingual programs in Calexico. Some visitors have attributed their interest in learning about Calexico from positive features that have been run in the media through such programs as Univision and CNN.

The media has often sought out Calexico when discussing educational issues of minority students and students who are ELLs because of its track record with achievement for these students. Looking at indicators such as graduation rates and percentages of students who go on to college, Calexico Unified has shown that it is possible to educate this population and hold expectations that they will do well academically. These indicators confirm that. The dropout rates (CBEDS, 1997) for Calexico (2.2%) are substantially less than for Hispanic students statewide (3.4%). Having significantly reduced dropout rates and higher college-bound numbers of graduates as compared to districts in California that have fewer ELLs has attracted the attention of both educators from other districts as well as the media.

The district has, for a long time, been mindful of the progress made by English language learners. English language acquisition is certainly something the district looks at as a measure of their success with bilingual education, but there is much more to consider. Overall academic achievement of students who are still considered limited English proficient (LEP) receives as much attention in Calexico as does that of other students. Several indicators have been used to track this progress. These include dropout rates, standardized achievement test results, criterion-referenced test results, retention rates, and attendance.

As the district continued to explore ways to improve instruction for all of its students, a proposition was being circulated in California that would come to change the way instruction would be delivered to English learners, Proposition 227.

### **Results of Proposition 227 Implementation**

In June of 1998, California voters approved Proposition 227. Primarily authored by Ron Unz, a businessman from California, this measure included provisions for limited English proficient students to spend one year in a structured English immersion program. After one year in this setting, where instruction must be mostly in English, the students are transferred to English-only or mainstream classrooms where no specific instructional modifications are required of teachers even if students are still not proficient in English.

The measure also included provisions for parents to sign waivers if they wanted their children to participate in more traditional bilingual programs. One such program is the transitional bilingual education model where English is taught and other academic subjects such as math, science, and social studies

are first taught in the student's native language and gradually transferred to English as they acquire more proficiency in English. Schools that had at least 20 waivers signed had to implement bilingual education models using bilingual education methodologies permitted by law. Proposition 227 also set a figure of \$50 million to be spent to teach English to parents of LEP students. Educators found negligent in implementing this law could be prosecuted. Finally, there was another provision stating that students who were over the age of 10 and were fluent in English could continue to participate in bilingual programs without the need for parents to sign waivers.

During the summer of 1998, school districts scrambled to make sense of the new law and gear up for implementation in the fall of that year. School districts interpreted the new law in a variety of ways. For example, some interpreted the mandate to teach mostly in English to mean that 60% of the instructional day would be in English while the remaining 40% would be in Spanish. Others interpreted it to mean that students would be fully immersed in English instruction and therefore no native language would be used at all. In Calexico, the school board voted to have instruction in this setting be a 95/5 ratio, or 95% of all instruction in English and 5% in Spanish. While the School Board had been supportive of its bilingual programs, it now recognized the need to respond to the new law. Administrators spent the summer of 1998 planning for the implementation of new programs intended to address the new state guidelines as well as provide students with the best possible educational environment. The administration sought input from classroom teachers. A 25-page document was developed which formed the prototype for the different program options. The program designs included three models of education for ELLs: (a) transitional, (b) structured English immersion, and (c) mainstream English. In addition, training prototypes were designed specifically to provide training for parents regarding the new law and program options.

### Transitional Bilingual Programs

These programs were already in place prior to the implementation of Proposition 227. In Calexico, this model had started out in the 70s as an early-exit model with students being transitioned from native language instruction to English within a very short time, usually less than three years. Throughout the 80s and 90s, it had been modified to allow students to remain in the program a bit longer. It consists of a late transitional bilingual education model, one in which students are taught English, and the native language of the students (in this case, Spanish) is used for academic instructional purposes (math, science, social studies) and is gradually replaced with English instruction as the student becomes increasingly proficient in English. In addition, English Language Development (ELD) was taught in increasing amounts from kindergarten to the fourth grade. Most students entering this program in

kindergarten were fully transitioned in the fourth grade. Once in mainstream classrooms, students were still provided with support as necessary and as teachers were able to provide it, be it with facilitation of cognitive development through the use of the native language or through second language strategies such as text modification.

This program was considered by the district prior to the implementation of Proposition 227 to be the most successful for ELLs. Anecdotal reports from administrators in the district indicate that the reason for this change was what they saw as an improved overall academic achievement among students who were allowed to develop a solid base in literacy in their primary language and then were allowed to transfer to English as they acquired greater proficiency. Previously, the focus had been placed on the development of English skills at the expense of literacy development. This appeared to result in delayed skill development in literacy and lower achievement levels overall. This program was left intact for those students whose parents signed a waiver from the structured English or mainstream English programs.

### Structured English Immersion Programs

These programs were implemented as a result of Proposition 227. This instructional model reflected the measure's intent to have most instruction delivered in English. Callexico developed a model that mandated that 95% of instructional time be in English. Teachers could use Spanish for 5% of their instructional time. Spanish was primarily used to facilitate understanding of a concept or a vocabulary word or phrase that needed translation. Because 5% of instructional time was limited and did not allow sufficient time for full instruction in any one subject, most teachers opted to use this time to either facilitate the learning of a concept through a quick translation or through ongoing, but limited, facilitation of Spanish when the teacher felt that the students hadn't understood some directions, assignments, or concepts. Strategies for teaching content are different in this class from those used in an English-only classroom. Parents did not have to sign a waiver if they wanted their children placed in this program. They only had to make their wishes known. Teachers were still responsible to teach the entire curriculum at the appropriate grade level, even when instructional modifications were required to make instruction more comprehensible to students.

## Mainstream English Programs

This model is an English-only model of instruction, one in which teachers are not required to make special modifications in their teaching for ELL students. To the extent that every teacher is responsible for the education of each child in his or her classroom, it is expected that teachers in mainstream classrooms would make every effort to reach all students. Many of these teachers have had some preparation and training in working with ELLs. The reality of these situations is that such efforts may not always be sufficient to truly engage all ELL students in the educational process by making instruction comprehensible. This is often not for lack of effort on the part of teachers but because teachers may need further training in the use of specific strategies or just due to the complexity of dealing with various levels of language proficiency, varying learning styles, and curricular demands.

According to Alexander Sapiens (1999), the key to parents making choices that are educationally solid for their children depends on the school districts providing adequate information about these options. This was done in Calexico in the summer of 1998.

This study looks at the parents of students entering kindergarten and first grade who had to make decisions regarding placements for their children. The following reports some of the reasons parents gave for choosing a bilingual, an SEL, or a mainstream placement for their children.

In light of these changes, it became of interest to this researcher and to the school district to track the progress that students would make in each type of setting. A long-term study has been started to determine the level of academic achievement, including achievement in English, within each type of program. Intended to take at least five years, this study is currently in its second year.

## Background

In 1997-1998, the Calexico Unified School District served a total of 7,258 students in grades K-12. The student population of 97.5% Hispanic far outnumbers the average California Hispanic population of 40.5%. Of the total district population, 74.2% were designated as limited English proficient (LEP), which surpasses the state average of 24.6%. Calexico serves a large Hispanic population, yet it has the distinction of having lower high school dropout rates (2.2%) than the state average (3.4%) for Hispanic students. The 4-year projected dropout rate is 10% for Hispanics in Calexico, much lower than the state rate of 16.3%. Table 1 indicates demographics for Calexico and compares these with statistics from the state of California.

Table 1

*Demographics for Calexico Compared to California: 1997-98*

<b>Student Enrollment</b>	<b>Calexico Unified</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Hispanic Enrollment	97.5%	40.5%
Total LEP Enrollment	74.2%	24.6%
Total Free/Reduced Lunch	82.5%	47.4%
Graduation Rates for Hispanics	95.3%	31.0%
Total Dropout Rates (1 year*)	2.6%	4.1%
Total Dropout Rates (4 year*)	10.0%	16.3%

Source: Calexico Unified School District, 1999; California Department of Education, 1998

The district has also been shown to have statistics for Hispanic dropouts that, while still considered unacceptable by the district, are much lower than those for the same group at the state level. For example, in 1992 the rate for Calexico was 14.8% compared with 28% for California.

The California State Department of Education also reports general dropout rates per district and compares them to state averages as presented in Table 2:

Table 2

*Dropout Rates for Calexico Compared to California: 1997-98*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Dropout Rates: State Average</b>	<b>Dropout Rates: Calexico Unified</b>
91-92	5.2	4.6
92-93	5.0	4.5
93-94	4.9	2.9
94-95	4.4	2.4
95-96	3.9	2.8
96-97	3.4	2.2

Source: Calexico Unified School District, 1999

Not only is Calexico's dropout rate lower than state averages, but the rate of enrollment for their students in post-secondary education is also high. As outlined in "California and the West" in the *CABE Newsletter* (July/August, 1991, Vol. 14, No. 1):

"Two-thirds of the 1990 Calexico High graduates went on to either a community college or a four-year university." Much of the credit for Calexico's success is given to the district's extensive bilingual program—built around the premise that students learn best in their native tongue. Dennis Parker is manager of the Office of Instructional Strategies at the [state] department and has worked as a state consultant to the Calexico schools from 1981 to 1986. He sees two main reasons Calexico's bilingual program succeeds where others fail. "First, they have more instruction in Spanish than other bilingual programs, as high as 80% in the early grades," Parker said. "After they become fluent in English, they still receive instruction in Spanish 15% to 20% of the day in their classes. Second, English is introduced gradually, and to make it more comprehensible they use more pictures, more hands-on activities." (p. 2).

Situated on the border with Mexicali, Mexico, Calexico is a gateway to immigrants who have entered the country. Being so close to the border, it maintains some of the traits of border towns where people are more likely to maintain their mother tongue and customs for a longer period of time. This results in a community where many still speak Spanish as their primary language even if they are not first-generation immigrants. The promise of employment continues to lure immigrants to this area.

Unemployment rates, however, are high for families in Calexico as compared to other cities throughout the state. Being in an agricultural region, much of the employment is seasonal. There are months when unemployment reaches 30%. The school district has a free/reduced lunch percent of 82.5% of the overall population as compared to 47.4% average at the state level.

### Preparing Teachers

The district provided in-service training to teachers who would be responsible for SEI instruction. Teachers working in transitional bilingual models already were experienced, well prepared, and properly credentialed. Most of the teachers working in mainstream English classrooms had received training, a credential or certificate with an emphasis on cross-cultural, language, and academic development (CLAD) as required in California. These teachers also have many opportunities provided by the district to further their training to work with LEP students through support to attend conferences and other

professional development opportunities. Teachers who would work in SEI classrooms, while holding credentials as the other groups of teachers, now needed further development in the unfamiliar instructional methodology and pedagogy to support their efforts. Training was provided by the school district. Teachers met for one full day of training where a general presentation was conducted. Program prototypes were explained. There were then breakout groups that were facilitated by building administrators. During this time, teachers looked at the results of the implementation of these prototypes for their specific grade levels. As the year got underway, the local university, San Diego State University - Imperial Valley Campus, also provided training on effective strategies for SEI classrooms. Teachers were given the opportunity to receive university credit for this training.

### Informing Parents

Parent outreach and involvement in the Calexico Unified School District is higher than in many other districts. Administrators have often been invited to speak at conferences and other venues on their success in involving parents in the decision-making process of their children's education. Much effort goes into keeping parents informed and having parents actively involved in the schools. One indicator of this level of involvement is their participation in training in drug and gang awareness for all parents of sixth graders and literacy awareness for all parents of kindergarten students. Parents have expressed their wishes to have these activities mandated for every parent; in fact, there is an impressive average attendance rate of more than 90% at these sessions. The district facilitates attendance at these K- and sixth-grade training sessions by allowing parents to attend any session that is offered at any of the six elementary schools rather than insisting that they attend only the school of their child's enrollment. Parents are provided with a calendar of all dates, places, and times of all training sessions and they sign in at their preferred site.

This involvement and awareness by parents is not accomplished merely by the efforts of the school district. It is also very much fostered by the individual schools. With leadership from the district, principals offer many activities that bring parents to the schools for various events. These are often used for multiple purposes. That is, they can come for an open house meeting, but they receive information at the same time about projects or events/activities that are taking place during that time. For the purpose of informing parents of the implementation of the new law, special meetings for parents were arranged. These meetings were conducted in English and in Spanish at all elementary schools.

During the summer of 1998, the Calexico Unified School District administrative team used the packets of information regarding the new program prototypes to inform parents of their options. These packets included specific elements of each of the program models offered, as well as some information about the meaning of each and their relationship to the proficiency of students.



Principals set up informational sessions with parents at each of the school sites and used the informational packet to convey to parents any changes that their children might face as a result of the new law. Also, the school district's responsibility in educating their children was emphasized to parents. That is, the district recognizes its responsibility to provide a quality education to all of its students regardless of programs or models chosen. This commitment was conveyed to parents. Finally, the parents' responsibility in choosing a program model for their children, should they be designated as LEP, was also explained.

Attendance was high at these meetings and principals reported that parents asked good questions after each session was conducted. At that point, parents who opted to enroll their child in a transitional bilingual education model signed waivers, and classes were formed based on parents' wishes.

### Parents Choose

After attending these informational meetings, 48% of all parents opted to place their children in bilingual classrooms for kindergarten. For kindergarten and Grade 1, the combined total was 50% for bilingual placements, 28.6% in SEI settings, and 21.4% in mainstream classrooms. The number of classrooms set up for kindergarten and first grade in all six schools in Calexico was as shown in Table 3:

Table 3

*Number of Classrooms (Grades K & 1) by Model*

<b>School</b>	<b>Bilingual</b>	<b>SEI</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>Total</b>
Jefferson	6	1	4	11
Rockwood	4	4	2	10
Dool	5	2	2	9
Mains	4	1	2	7
Kennedy Gardens	4	3	0	7
B. Charles	5	5	2	12
Total	28	16	12	56

Source: Calexico Unified School District, 1999

During the 1998-1999 academic year, there were a total of 1,076 students enrolled in kindergarten and first grade in the Calexico School District. Table 4 indicates the enrollment by grade.

Table 4

*Number of Students Enrolled by Grade and Model*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Bilingual</b>	<b>SEI</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>Total</b>
Kindergarten	239	164	95	498
Grade 1	300	140	138	578
Total	539	304	233	1,076

In grades K and 1, there were a total of 843 students enrolled in either a transitional bilingual education model or a structured English immersion model. All of them were identified as limited English proficient (LEP). In addition, many of the students enrolled in a mainstream setting (of a total of 233 students) were also identified as LEP.

### **The Study**

There has been little research on parent choice in bilingual educational models in low income, border communities. Since the passage of Proposition 227 and similar initiatives in other states, parent motivation on bilingual program choice becomes of great importance. This study was designed to determine if there were trends between the educational model parents choose for their children and parental demographic factors. A parent survey was developed and conducted via the telephone to gather information about the parents' place of birth and, if they were born outside the United States, their reason for immigrating. The first set of survey questions was designed to determine whether recent immigrants' views toward bilingual education programs differ from parents who had been born and raised in this border community. Additionally, parents were queried about the use of Spanish and English in the home to determine if language use impacted program choice. Parental educational levels were also collected. Data from all of these categories were analyzed relative to the educational model each parent selected. The study further explored parent satisfaction level with their child's academic performance within their chosen model.

## Procedure

### *Parent survey*

A survey was developed at the local university to inform educators as to the reasons parents selected one program model over another. In addition, the survey collected information about the background of parents and the language(s) spoken in the home. Survey questions were designed to be used during a telephone interview. These were conducted in April of 1999, approximately seven months after parents had made their selection of a program model for their children. In questions 1-8, parents were given responses from which they could choose. In questions 9-13, parents were asked to provide open responses. In these questions, the researchers did not wish to have parents' responses skewed by leading the parents through pre-developed sets of responses. Appendix A provides the complete list of questions asked.

Parents were randomly selected from the class lists provided by the school district. Every fifth name appearing on that list was targeted for an interview. If the targeted household did not have a telephone number listed, then the sixth name was selected. Information was available for five of Calexico's six elementary schools. This process identified 210 parents for interviews. The school district sent letters to the homes of all 210 parents informing them of the interview and notifying them that they had the right to refuse to participate. All 210 parents were called. However, only 100 were reached by telephone in the time allotted for the survey. Parents contacted were cooperative and participated readily. Parents reached had selected one of the three models (bilingual, structured English immersion, and mainstream for their child(ren). The breakdown was as indicated by Table 5:

Table 5

### *Total Number of Parents Contacted*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Bilingual</b>	<b>SEI</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>Total</b>
Kindergarten	16	14	15	45
Grade 1	36	9	10	55
Total	52	23	25	100

The number of parents reached represents a total percentage of the student population in each of the program models. The largest numbers of parents interviewed were those with children in the mainstream programs (10.7%); this was followed by parents with children in bilingual classrooms (9.6%) and SEI programs (7.5%).

## Findings

### Parents' Birthplace

The parent population was relatively stable as nearly 70% of parents live within 30 miles of where they were born. The majority of parents surveyed (73%) were born in Mexico with two-thirds of those coming from Mexicali, Calexico's sister city. The remaining parents (27%) were born in the United States, and the vast majority of these were born in or around Calexico.

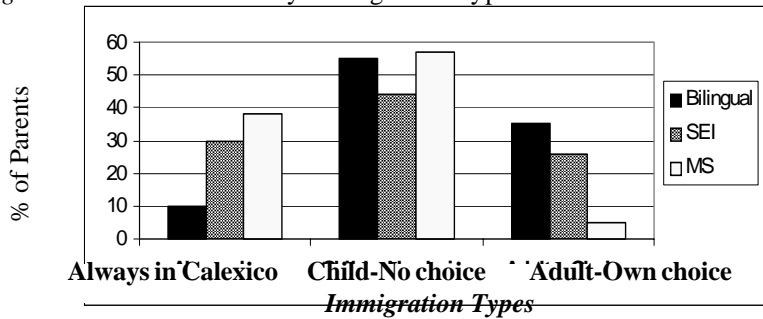
Data showed that of the parents who had children designated as limited English proficient and who chose bilingual programs, 84.6% were born in Mexico while 15.4% were born in the United States. Of those parents electing SEI programs, 66% were born in Mexico while 34% were born in the United States. Finally, of those parents placing their children in monolingual English classrooms, 56% were born in Mexico and 44% were born in the United States. The higher the percentage of parents born in the United States, the higher the rate of placement is in program prototypes that offer more instruction in English. That is, there is a higher proportion of parents who were born outside of the United States placing their children in bilingual programs; and, conversely, parents born in the United States were more likely to place their children in monolingual English classrooms.

### Time of Immigration

Calexico was the birthplace of only 19.8% of the parents interviewed. All the other parents were asked their reasons for moving to the Imperial Valley and, specifically, Calexico, to determine whether their motivation for coming to Calexico was related to the type of instructional setting they chose.

Their responses were grouped as follows: (a) those who have always lived in Calexico because they were born there; (b) those who immigrated as children and therefore had no choice in that decision; and (c) those who came to the United States as adults and therefore of their own choosing. The highest percentage of parents choosing a specific program type was always the group who had immigrated as children. In each case, the number was relatively close to half of all parents within each category. This suggests a fairly even distribution of parents among all program types. Parents who had immigrated as adults were not very likely, however, to place their children in mainstream programs (5%). Also, 10% of all parents surveyed born in Calexico opted to place their children in bilingual programs. Figure 1 indicates parent choices according to immigration type.

Figure 1. Parent choices by immigration type.



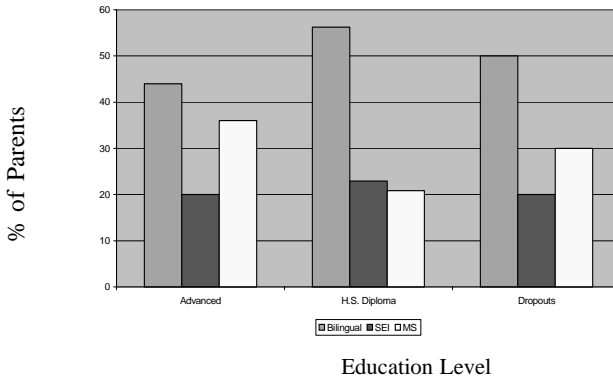
### Parent Educational Level

The educational preparation of parents has been shown to have a significant impact on their child's academic achievement (Fabros, 1999; Vann, 1999; Manzo, 1999):

The majority of parents had completed high school. Of all parents choosing bilingual programs, 61.5% had a high school diploma. Of those who chose an SEI setting, 52.1% had completed high school. The percentage continued to decline as parents who selected a mainstream placement numbered only 44%. The least educated parents tended to choose mainstream placements more often than bilingual or SEI placements. Parents who were most highly educated chose bilingual programs more often than SEI or mainstream placements.

Parents from each of the three groups (advanced education, high school diploma, and school dropouts) chose placements in bilingual programs more often than any other type of program. The "advanced" group (all who went beyond a high school diploma) then chose a mainstream placement more often than an SEI placement. For those parents who completed high school, the order of preference was bilingual, SEI, and then mainstream programs. For dropouts, we see a similar pattern to the "advanced" group in that bilingual programs were chosen most often; this was followed by mainstream and then SEI programs. Figure 2 references the program by parent education level.

Figure 2. Program choice by parent education level.



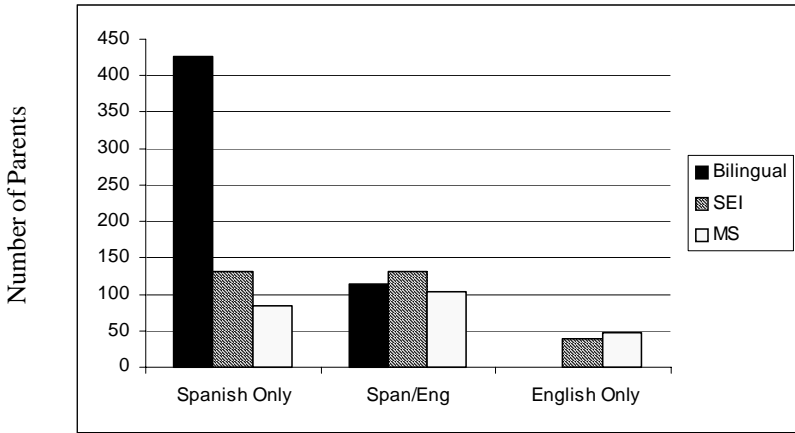
### Languages Spoken at Home

Survey results demonstrate the dominance of the Spanish language in the community. Only 8% of the homes used English as the sole language of communication in the home. Most parents of students designated limited English proficient who enroll their children in bilingual or structured English immersion (SEI) programs report speaking mostly Spanish at home. Seventy-nine percent of parents enrolling their children in bilingual programs reported speaking only Spanish at home and 21% reported speaking both Spanish and English. None reported speaking only in English. Of the parents electing SEI classes, 43% speak only Spanish at home, 43% speak both English and Spanish, and 13% speak only English. Of the parents whose children were designated limited English proficient and chose not to place them in bilingual or SEI programs, 36% report speaking only Spanish, 44% speak both Spanish and English, and 20% speak only English.

When asked about language use at home among adults, 79% of parents with children in bilingual classrooms reported using Spanish and 21% reported using both Spanish and English. Of those with children in SEI classrooms, 43.5% used Spanish, 13% used English, and 43.5% used both English and Spanish. Of those with children in monolingual English classes, 36% used Spanish at home, 20% used English, and 44% used both.

The study results (see Figure 3) showed that parents who only used Spanish at home strongly preferred to place their children in the bilingual model. Those who used English at home chose the mainstream model. In homes where both English and Spanish were spoken, the distribution among programs was more even, though a preference was shown for the SEI model.

Figure 3. Model choice by home language use.

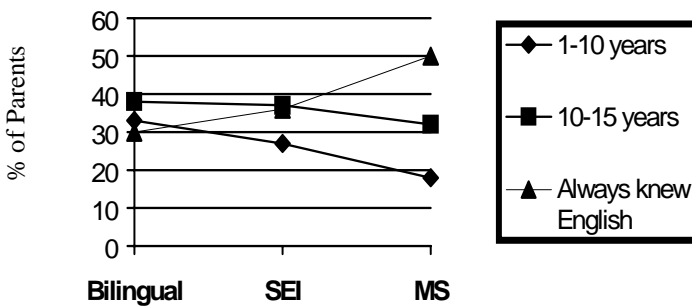


Language use at home

Source: Calexico Unified School District, 1999

Parents who indicated that they spoke English as their second language also reported on the amount of time they have known or studied English.

Figure 4. Amount of time parents have known English.



Source: Calexico Unified School District, 1999

Of the parents with children in bilingual programs, 33% indicated that they have known English somewhere between 1 and 10 years, 38% from 10 to 15 years or more, and another 30% recall always having known English. Percentages were similar for parents electing SEI classrooms: 27% for 1 to 10 years; 37% from 10 to 15 years or more; and 36% who always knew it. The numbers of parents who indicated always having known English are much higher for those placed in monolingual English classrooms. A total of 50% had always known English and 32% knew it or learned it between 10 and 15 years or more, while only 18% had known it for only 1 to 10 years. Parents who have known English the longest tended to place their children in English-only classrooms more often than in SEI or bilingual classrooms.

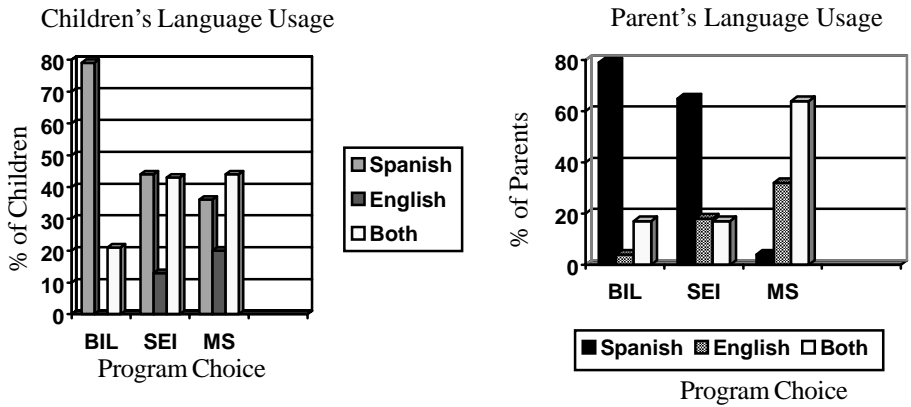
Being able to speak a language is but one indicator of the parental profile. It is also important to consider the overall competency of language that parents feel they have. In order to gauge this to some degree, parents were asked if they were most comfortable reading and writing in English, Spanish, or both. The majority of parents who placed their children in bilingual programs (87%) felt they were stronger in Spanish, while 8% felt they were stronger in English and 6% reported being comfortable in both. Of the parents placing their children in SEI classrooms, 48% felt strongest in Spanish, with 39% feeling stronger in English and 13% in both. For those in monolingual English classrooms, 48% reported feeling stronger in Spanish, 48% in English, and only 4% in both. This means that all groups, regardless of placement, felt they could handle reading and writing best in Spanish.

It was also important to look at language use of the children in the home. Of those in bilingual classes, the majority (79%) speaks Spanish at home while 4% speak English, and 17% speak both. Percentages begin to shift for those in SEI classrooms, with 65% speaking Spanish, 17.5% speaking English, and another 17.5% speaking both. For those in monolingual English classrooms, only 4% speak Spanish, 32% speak English, and a total of 64% speak both English and Spanish.

An interesting comparison can be made between the children's language usage and that of the parents (Figure 5). Patterns of usage among parents closely mirror those of their children with the exception of those who reported using both languages themselves while their children appear to use both languages less than they do.



Figure 5. Children's language usage/parents' language usage.



A linguistic profile of children would not be complete without looking at the interaction of the students with siblings. In this case, of the children in bilingual programs, 81% had siblings at home while 19% did not. Of these, 68% were reported to speak only Spanish with siblings while 5% spoke only English and 27% spoke both English and Spanish. Of the children in SEI programs, 83% had siblings and 17% did not. Of the 83% who did, only 16% spoke Spanish while 21% spoke English and a total of 63% spoke both. Finally, of the children in monolingual English classrooms, 80% had siblings and 20% did not. Of these, only 10% spoke Spanish at home, 40% spoke English, and 50% spoke both Spanish and English.

### Reasons for Selecting Program Type

In order not to sway parents into making decisions based on preconceived responses, the interviews conducted allowed parents to express their views and provide their own reasons for selecting a placement in either a bilingual, an SEI, or a mainstream classroom. Their answers were varied and provided insight into the parents' thinking and involvement with their child's educational program. Table 6 provides a synthesis of responses.

Results are presented here in terms of percentages. The majority of the parents who chose bilingual placements did so because they felt their children's linguistic skills were strongest in Spanish. The next most important reason given was their wish to have their child learn both Spanish and English, and the third, their ability to help their children with homework, the assumption being that homework would be done in Spanish.

Table 6  
*Parent's Reasons For Choosing Program Model (%)*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Bilingual</b>	<b>SEI</b>	<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>Total</b>
Better comprehension	4	0	0	4
Help child with homework	16.3	0	0	16.3
Spanish is stronger language	30.6	0	2.1	32.7
To learn both languages	20.4	0	0	20.4
No room in English class	2	0	0	2
Improve child's Spanish	10.2	0	0	10.2
To learn English	4	63	21.4	88.4
Ready to learn English	0	0	7.1	7.1
Easier transition	6.1	0	0	6.1
Difficult to learn English	2	0	0	2
Student got behind	2	0	0	2
Placed there	2	5	0	7
Comfortable with English	0	11	0	11
English is stronger language	0	21	57.1	78.1
Teach Spanish at home	0	0	7.1	7.1

Of the parents opting for SEI programs, 63% chose the program so that their children could learn English. Only 21% placed them in SEI programs because they felt it was their child's strongest language. It is important to note that the parents' perception here is not in alignment with the school's findings that assessed the same children in both English and Spanish and determined that the children were considered to be limited English proficient.

The majority of parents who placed their children in monolingual English classrooms (57.1%) did so because they felt that their child was stronger in English than in Spanish. In addition, 21.4% chose it for their belief that the child would learn more English there.

## Academic Improvement Noted

The last question of the survey intended to gauge the satisfaction or dissatisfaction on the part of parents with the education of their children and to note specifically what areas of improvement they had noticed. Table 7 indicates results for the categories provided by parents according to each subject category to be improved.

Table 7

*Parent Indications (%) of Curricular Areas Parents Felt Had Improved*

<b>Area of Student Improvement</b>	<b>Bilingual</b>	<b>SEI</b>	<b>MS</b>
Reading	51	27	60
Writing	27	13	20
Spelling	27	60	40
English	20	60	30
Spanish	7	2	0
Attitude	7	0	10
Behavior	12	20	20
Math	27	2	10
Reading in English	10	13	20
Writing in English	2	2	10
Speaking English	15	20	20
Speaking Spanish	5	0	0
Reading Spanish	2	0	0

Parents with children in bilingual (instruction in Spanish) and mainstream classrooms (instruction in English) seemed more satisfied with improvements made in the area of reading (51% and 60%). This means that 60% of parents with children in mainstream classrooms had noted and were satisfied with improvements made by their children in the area of reading. By contrast, only 27% of those in SEI classrooms (instruction in reading in English as well) noted improvement. The same holds true in the area of writing. In spelling and in

English the highest percentage of parents to note improvement was from those with children in SEI classrooms. A total of 7% of all parents noted improvement in their child's Spanish for those in bilingual classes. While most instruction in SEI classrooms is in English, 2% of the parents still noted improvement there as well.

A higher percentage of parents in bilingual classrooms reported improvement in the area of mathematics. Parents also indicated that behavior had improved in every type of classroom. These percentages were higher in SEI and mainstream classrooms with 25% in each and only 12% in bilingual classrooms.

Parents also noted improvement in their child's development of English skills, and in speaking, reading, and writing. In reading, the highest percentage of parents reporting was those from mainstream classrooms. The same holds true for writing. When considering speaking abilities, 20% of the parents each from mainstream and SEI classrooms reported improvement. Interestingly, 15% from bilingual classrooms also reported improvement in this area.

### **Implications of the Study**

The following are the general trends and implications derived from the study:

1. The longer parents had been in the United States, the more likely they were to place their children in mainstream classrooms. The more recent immigrant parents tended to prefer to have their children's primary language supported and built upon in school during the initial years of instruction. Districts serving recent immigrants in border communities should provide parents with a variety of educational models from which to choose, including bilingual models that support and promote the primary language while teaching English. Parents need to be well informed about all educational models available and the design and goals of each.
2. The higher the level of parent education, the more likely parents are to choose bilingual program models while the least educated parents tended to choose the mainstream over either the SEI or bilingual model. This finding implies that students who have the least amount of academic support at home face the greatest challenge at school. They are placed in a setting where both the content and language of instruction are likely difficult to understand. They have the parents who are least able to help with either. School districts should provide a high level of academic and linguistic support for students in this category.

3. Parents tended to choose the educational model that matches the language pattern of the home. For example, homes where only Spanish was spoken strongly preferred to have their children placed in the bilingual program. While preferences were less dramatic in homes where some English was used, each group chose the model that most closely mirrored the language patterns used at home. Parents choosing the bilingual model selected the model because: (a) Spanish is their children's strongest language facilitating their transition to school and academic learning; (b) they wanted their children to maintain and improve their Spanish while developing their English skills; and (c) they wanted to be able to help their children with homework.

## **Conclusion**

The study found that the longer the parents are in the United States, the more inclined they are to place their children in programs with little or no English support. Also, parents tended to place their children in settings that mirrored the language patterns used in the home. In addition, the higher the parent's level of education, the more likely they were to place their children in bilingual programs where home language support was available. This study resulted in the identification of another area of need for further investigation. Given some of the discussions generated by Proposition 227, there is an interest in determining which program prototype may hold the greatest potential for success. As a result of this interest, a follow-up study will be conducted to examine the achievement for bilingual students. The achievement of students who began school in the first year after passage of Proposition 227 is being monitored and tracked over a period of five years in an effort to gauge success within each of the three types of programs. A variety of both quantitative and qualitative measures will be used to evaluate student success over time. The hope is that every child will experience success regardless of program type, but whatever the findings show should inform the field as to the benefits of each.

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**Appendix A**  
**Interview Questions for Parents of Kindergarten  
and First-Grade Students**

1. What language(s) is/are spoken at home by the adults? English; Spanish; Both
2. If English is not the primary language but you do speak English, how long ago did you learn English? 1-5 years; 5-10 years; 10-15 years; 15 or more years; Did not learn English
3. When you read and write, which language is most comfortable for you? English; Spanish; Both
4. What language does your child speak at home? English; Spanish; Both
5. Are there any other children in the home? Yes; No
6. If yes, which language does your child primarily speak with siblings? English; Spanish; Both; Do not have siblings
7. Which language does your child speak with his/her friends? English; Spanish; Both
8. Were you born in the Imperial Valley? Yes; No
9. If not, where were you born? Mexicali; Elsewhere in Mexico; Elsewhere in U.S.
10. For what reason did you/or your family move to the Imperial Valley?
  - Immigrated
  - Parents Moved
  - Immigrated
  - Better Education
  - Better Opportunities
  - Work
  - Child Citizenship
  - Became Legal Citizen
  - Bought Property
  - No Response
11. What level of education have you completed?
12. What is the main reason that you placed your child in a Bilingual, SEI, or Mainstream English classroom?
13. Do you feel that your child has shown any academic improvement since the beginning of this year? What has been that improvement?