

Bilingual classes gaining support

HOLA, which teaches English, Spanish in a city school, doesn't prioritize either

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For a third-grader, learning fractions is hard enough. Doing it in two languages is an even stiffer challenge. And then, on top of it all: *"Trabajadores independientes,"*

teacher Tucker Ruderman announced. "Independent workers" — no collaboration allowed.

"Ugh!" one of his native English speakers cried out in frustration. It wasn't a sound that properly belongs to either English or Spanish, but the fact that an 8-year-old knows enough Spanish to follow classroom instructions, and to occasionally find them deeply unfair, shows the success of the HOLA program at School 12 in Rochester.

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Kidielys Diaz, from Puerto Rico, a kindergarten student at School 12, works with teacher Rachel Reff as part of a bilingual program for

Kidielys Diaz, from Puerto Rico, a kindergarten student at School 12, works with teacher Rachel Reff as part of a bilingual program for grades K-6 in the Rochester School District — parents are asking the district to expand the program through eighth grade. Below: Glori Limbu, from Nepal, also a kindergarten student at School 12, shows off her assigned work as part of the program.

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HOLA

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Many Rochester schools have bilingual programs in which nonnative English speakers receive some instruction in their native language, but those classes are often viewed as a means of getting them toward English proficiency.

The HOLA program is different. It's a duallanguage program that gives neither language priority. Some of its 180 or so students are native speakers of Spanish, some of English. They're taught in one language one day and the other the next, with the goal of developing competency in both by sixth grade. "It stresses that they become literate in both languages," said Vicki Robertson, who has a fifth-grader in the program and an eighthgrader who graduated from it. "It really values Spanish for Spanish *and* English speakers. That's something different in this country." Its international appeal and success as an enrichment pathway is leading to calls for expansion in multiple directions.

The Rochester School District suggested HOLA, and a similar program at School 33, as a target for a state integration grant. It seems suburban students will soon have an opportunity to study in select Rochester schools, and the district believes the dual-language programs would be attractive to some of those families.

At the same time, parents of current HOLA students are pressing for the program to stretch into grades 7 and 8. School 12 is currently located at the Jefferson campus while its building on South Avenue is being renovated in time for the 2016-17 school year. The school will expand then to K-8, and parents want HOLA to expand with it. Some of the students are nearly fluent in both languages when they finish sixth grade. When they move on to high school the next year, though, there are no programs that suit their language skills or challenge them to keep improving.

"These kids have so much interest and so much potential, then the district doesn't have anything for them," Robertson said. When her son got to seventh grade at Wilson Foundation Academy, for example, he took eighth-grade Spanish and found it unchallenging.

The parents hope the additional two years would help build students' grammatical understanding of both languages. It also would provide a better bridge to advanced language classes available in grades 9-12 at some schools in the district.

Spokesman Chip Partner said the district is open to the idea of expanding the program when School 12 moves back into its building. It is trying to set up a meeting with parents in the next few weeks. School board members said it's worth considering, at least preliminarily.

"If the program's already working and it doesn't need to be lifted off the ground, it seems like a good idea," Melisza Campos said.

HOLA kindergartners spend the first half of the year hearing teachers speak in both languages, with interpretation. The interpretation is largely removed in the second half of the year, kindergarten teacher Melissa Quintana said, forcing near-full immersion. In first grade, they start getting homework in both languages. In third grade, they focus more on bilingual reading and writing, including learning science, math and other subject matters in both languages. Carl Almer has children in fourth grade and kindergarten. He is a native Spanish speaker and his wife is fluent in French, so the program reinforces the multilingual nature of the family.

His older daughter is usually shy about speaking Spanish at home, for instance, but was able to use it with her grandmother during a recent family trip to California. "I took French in high school, and by the time I was done, I could hardly hold a conversation," Almer said. "Having the dual language, not just Spanish as a subject, is very important." The program forces parents to expand their boundaries as well. They host movie nights with dubbed films and set up play-dates with families who speak the opposite language. Rachel Larson has a second-grade daughter and a fourth-grade son in the program. The boy was adopted from Colombia after first grade but was illiterate in Spanish — and completely unexposed to English — when he arrived. Now, he's at grade level in both. Her American-born daughter, meanwhile, recently co-wrote a Spanish poem with a Spanish-dominant classmate and recited it at an assembly. The Latina girl did the opposite in English.

"They learn they're really different from other kids in the world, and they need to learn how to communicate and get along and cooperate," Larson said. "That's not something I can teach them growing up in a white middle-class family. ... For them to have to start thinking and working out those challenges now will make them great citizens of the world."

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Milissa Quintana, a kindergarten teacher at School 12, works with students as part of a bilingual program for grades K-6 in the Rochester School District.

JAMIE [GERMANO/@JGERMANO1/STAFF](mailto:JGERMANO1@STAFF) PHOTOGRAPHER **The parents hope the extra two years would help build grammatical understanding of both languages, and also provide a better bridge to advanced language classes.**