More than half of the Chicago area’s non-English-speaking students now live in the suburbs. CPS and surrounding school districts are struggling with the same lesson: teaching children sufficient English skills before the middle grades, when academics get harder.
Dual language for all students

By Lorraine Forte
Editor-in-Chief

Back in July, Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced the creation of a city Office of New Americans intended to, in his words, “make Chicago the most immigrant-friendly city in the world.”

Indeed, immigration continues to change the face of Chicago and the metro area. In the city, one in five residents is foreign-born, according to census data, and 12 percent of students are English-language learners. In the suburbs, the ELL population has doubled in a quarter of school districts, and educators are grappling with how to educate these students at a time when state dollars are shrinking.

The problem was apparent when Associate Editor Rebecca Harris reviewed Illinois State Board of Education audits of bilingual programs. As she reports in this issue of Catalyst In Depth, all of the districts audited in the Chicago metro area were found to be in violation of the state’s bilingual education law. (The state audits districts on a rotating basis.)

Perhaps more surprising, these dismal results aren’t unusual, state officials say—in fact, it’s routine for districts to be out of compliance.

In part, that’s because of Illinois’ strong law on bilingual education. For one, Illinois is one of just a handful of states to require that students be taught in their native language by certified bilingual teachers, with an increasing percentage of instruction in English as students learn the language. But failure to provide enough native-language instruction was among the most common problems cited by state auditors.

A state-appointed task force is recommending changes that would ease the law’s requirements on native-language instruction. But their recommendations could be controversial, and are somewhat counter to what experts recommend for children.

Judy Yturriago, a Northeastern Illinois University professor and former head of Evanston’s bilingual education program, pointed out to Harris that “most principals and policy makers do not understand first- and second-language acquisition. They don’t understand the role of primary language. They don’t understand that children who are proficient in the primary language will do better later on.”

Nothing in education is simple. But there is a guiding principle that could help solve the puzzle and better educate all students: Require every student to have at least basic proficiency in two languages to graduate from high school. Non-English-speakers would learn English but become literate in their native language as well. English-speaking students would have to learn a foreign language—something that students in other countries routinely do.

Illinois is one of a minority of states that, according to Education Week, does not use international comparisons to inform its education reform efforts. That doesn’t bode well. For students to thrive economically and socially, they need to be prepared to work and live in a multicultural, multilingual world.

Foreign-language coursework is now only an option under Illinois graduation requirements. One way for Illinois to bring its schools more in line with those in higher-performing countries—in fact, in higher-achieving districts elsewhere in the U.S.—would be to institute stronger language programs.

* * *

ASSOCIATE EDITOR REBECCA HARRIS began reporting this issue of Catalyst In Depth several months ago. She and Deputy Editor Sarah Karp are already hard at work on upcoming issues. Every issue takes several months of data analysis and on-the-ground, inside-schools reporting. That investment of time takes money, but the end result is the award-winning quarterly publication that is our hallmark.

Despite the cost, Catalyst Chicago provides free Catalyst In Depth subscriptions to members of Chicago’s local school councils. We post all of our stories on the web—also free. That’s because we are committed to providing high-quality education journalism to the public as a whole, not just the leaders at the top.

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Caught between two languages

Research shows that Latinos who remain in bilingual programs long term risk falling behind in the middle grades and failing once they reach high school. CPS is taking long-awaited steps to launch dual-language programs, a strategy that is gaining steam nationally to help students become proficient in their native language and in English.

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8 Shifting landscapes
A wave of English-language learners has hit suburban schools, and the reading achievement gap between Latino and white students is in double digits in some districts.

11 State may ease bilingual ed rules
Illinois is one of a handful of states that requires teaching students in their native language. But the rules on bilingual programs could change under a state task force’s recommendations.

ON THE COVER:
A 7th-grade student in Elizabeth Carrillo’s English class at Sawyer Elementary uses an English-Spanish dictionary to get a better understanding of the text. In addition to learning in two languages, middle-grades bilingual students must master increasingly difficult academic content. [Photo by Cristina Rutter]

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ON THE WEB
A pilot program based on an initiative from Chula Vista, Calif., helps bilingual teachers by providing structured, grade-level lessons for English instruction—something that is often missing from schools with large numbers of ELL students. www.catalyst-chicago.org.
Caught between two languages

In CPS, 12 percent of English-language learners are in the middle grades, and many are at risk of failing in high school. Why? Middle-grades bilingual students present two challenges to schools: teaching adequate English as well as increasingly tough academic content.

By Rebecca Harris

As her 7th-grade students bury their noses in the book “Parrot in the Oven,” teacher Elizabeth Carrillo asks a comprehension question that is written in two languages on an overhead projector.

“What happened before, that made [one of the characters] think that?” Carrillo asks. “¿Qué pasó antes en el libro?”

Carrillo, who’s teaching a lesson on inferences, has written the definition of the word on the overhead, with a formula—in English and Spanish—for drawing inferences by combining what the text states with their prior knowledge.

The class uses a mix of English and Spanish editions of the book. Carrillo explains that she needs to use both versions because her students’ literacy skills vary widely. Her biggest challenge: students who are “not literate, really, in English or Spanish.”

Carrillo’s class at Sawyer Elementary illustrates one of the challenges to educating English-language learners: ensuring that students become literate in their native language—something that experts say is important for their success in English and other subjects—and learn sufficient English skills before they enter the middle grades, a critical transition point because of the increasingly difficult academic content that students are expected to master in English.

While CPS’ bilingual programs have fallen short in quality, most English-language learners do make the leap out of bilingual education by the 3rd grade. But of the nearly 64,000 bilingual students in CPS, 12 percent—about 7,400—are in the middle grades and have been in bilingual education since their early school years. (A small number of these middle-grades students are new immigrants.)

Research shows that these long-term bilingual students are more likely to fall behind their peers in high school.

Julia Gwynne, who is working on a study of English-language learners for the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, says that Latino students who are long-term English-language learners—who were placed in the program before 6th grade and were still in it in 9th grade—have worse odds of succeeding in high school compared to their peers who transitioned out several years earlier.

“They have the lowest course grades, highest number of course failures, the highest number of absences, and the lowest on-track rates,” Gwynne says. The absences add up to nearly two weeks of school per semester.
Sawyer Elementary teacher Elizabeth Carrillo helps 7th-grader Hassuby Castillo in a combined bilingual and general education English class. [Photo by Cristina Rutter]

These students are also more likely to be in special education, according to state data. (Nationally, the Working Group on ELL Policy, a group of well-known bilingual education researchers, noted that some districts over-identify bilingual students for special education services, while others tend to under-identify them.)

Many schools nationwide lack the resources to teach these students, including teachers with the right training. In California, bilingual teachers are more likely to lack full teaching credentials, according to the WestEd report “What Are We Doing to Middle School English Learners?”

If current trends in population and achievement continue, up to one-quarter of all U.S. students may fail to become proficient enough in English to succeed in school before they graduate—or worse, drop out—of high school, says Arizona State University bilingual education expert Eugene García, who is vice president for education partnerships at the school.

AT SAWYER, A HANDFUL OF STUDENTS in each of Carrillo’s five 7th-grade classes are still in the bilingual program; the rest are former English learners and general education students. But Carrillo points out that her bilingual education coursework did little to help prepare her to teach them. The classes focused mostly on the philosophy and theory of bilingual education, and not enough on practical teaching strategies.

“You have so many different challenges with students—some of them coming in at different ages and with different background knowledge,” Carrillo says.

Bilingual teacher Nina Garcia says it’s a constant challenge to find Spanish-language materials that are at the appropriate level for middle-grades students. “A lot of stuff, we have to look online ourselves [to find],” she says. “More resources, listening centers—we have to write our own grants to get those things.”

Many middle-schoolers struggle because they did not develop adequate literacy skills in their primary language. This can happen when principals and administrators don’t understand language acquisition or the value of bilingual education, says Judy Yturriago, who directed Evanston’s bilingual and early childhood programs for five years and is the president of the Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education.

One principal who swears by increased native-language instruction is Peck Elementary’s Okab Hassan, who says switching from English immersion to native language instruction has helped turn around the school’s test scores. (Peck rates at Level 1 on the CPS performance policy.)

“If we build that foundation, the learning process just gets rolling,” explains Angel Aguirre, the school’s bilingual lead teacher. “[Where] fidelity to the program is there, it’s working.”

However, a few of Peck’s middle-grades bilingual students—many of them in special educa-
Filling the Teacher Gap

Because of a long-standing shortage of bilingual teachers, the state’s Type 29 Transitional Bilingual Certificate allows school districts to hire teachers who have passed a language proficiency test and have a bachelor’s degree but might not yet have a teaching certificate. They can teach for up to eight years before they must finish their certification coursework. Currently, about 2,400 such teachers are working in Illinois.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>TYPE 29 TEACHERS</th>
<th>SHARE OF TYPE 29 STATEWIDE</th>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plainfield District 202</td>
<td>41</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Catalyst Chicago analysis of Illinois State Board of Education data

Marshall Middle School bilingual students Michelle Garcia (left) and Jasmine Coss work on an assignment. There are nearly 7,400 middle-grades bilingual students in CPS. Research shows that Latino students who stay in bilingual education for many years are more likely to drop out in high school. [Photo by Cristina Rutter]

...tion—still need extra help. But the overcrowded school, which has 1,600 students, lacks adequate space for pull-out instruction and must accommodate students in hallways and closets.

Fourth-grade teacher Christine Benson, a Chicago Teaching Fellows member who works at Patrick Henry Elementary, says that she sometimes sees her students caught between two languages—not fluent in either.

“Fourth grade is sort of their last shot at having true bilingual support,” she notes. “The problem is it’s difficult to even use Spanish instruction because a lot of them don’t have the academic language in English and don’t have it in Spanish either.”

For instance, during a recent lesson, not only did many students lack academic vocabulary words like “patella,” several did not even know the word “knee” in Spanish. Such a scenario can set students up for disaster as they head into the middle grades with language skills that are far below grade level.

Experts say there are two other keys: rigorous English instruction and strong academic content.

Otherwise, says Eugene Garcia, vice president for education partnerships at Arizona State University, you end up with “students who haven’t acquired the academic content to do well in English, or even in Spanish. It’s going to take more resources.”

Summer school and extended school day opportunities, though expensive, can help such students catch up, he says. Even in these settings, challenging academics are key. “Don’t just re-do what you did in 6th grade,” he says.

Garcia says that if students don’t become English-proficient in the middle grades, there is sometimes little that can be done to help them become proficient in academic English.

“Programs that serve the youngest kids are the most promising,” he says. “The only place we know we can eliminate the achievement gap is before kindergarten.”

Diane August, a researcher at the Center for Applied Linguistics, advocates having middle-grades teachers use both English and content area standards in their lesson designs, making sure to hit both at the same time.

For example: A lesson about the Gettysburg Address might need to include extra background knowledge on the U.S. Civil War (if students are new arrivals to the country). Students can read the address in both languages to pick out cognates, words that are similar in both English and Spanish. Margin notes can explain what...
the most challenging words mean. And teachers can provide students with fill-in-the-blank “sentence frames” to help them answer comprehension questions in complete sentences.

Jennifer Himmel, another researcher from the center, says that vocabulary can be a significant stumbling block in the middle grades.

Too often, teachers focus on highly technical words instead of more common academic words, the “connective tissue” of language. And once instruction has transitioned out of students’ native language, teachers may no longer point out cognates—words that are the same in Spanish and English—which are often a gateway to more advanced vocabulary.

What’s more, the level of vocabulary required increases greatly just as students hit 4th grade—which is often when instruction is transitioned from some native language and some English classes, to English only.

Cognizant of these issues, Edwards Elementary Principal Judith Sauri has embarked on an experiment: making all her school’s students, many of whom are current and former English-language learners, take Spanish foreign-language classes once they hit the middle grades.

It helps meet the requirements of the school’s International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, and it also adds up to extra literacy time for her students.

“My kids are lost in 4th and 5th grade because there’s no Spanish,” Sauri says, including students who have tested out of the bilingual program. Bringing Spanish back in the middle grades helps them gain a foothold.

ILLINOIS IS ONE OF ONLY A FEW STATES to require that non-English-speaking students be taught in their native language, with an increasing percentage of instruction in English as students gain proficiency. But a proposal from a state task force would essentially ease the native-language requirement (see story on page 11).

In 2008, a state compliance audit found serious problems with CPS programs, sparking the district to push schools to incorporate more native-language instruction. (School districts are audited on a rotating basis; CPS was audited again in fall 2011 but those results are not yet available.)

Now, under the helm of CEO Jean-Claude Brizard, there are signs that the district will begin to push for a dual-language approach. It’s a strategy that is gaining traction across the country.

A dual-language program combines academic instruction in a student’s native language and in English, so students are taught in both languages, says Leo Gómez, a University of Texas-Pan American professor of bilingual-bicultural education who serves on the board of the National Association for Bilingual Education.

“Dual language eliminates debate on more English or less English with its focus on both,” Gómez explains. “That’s what’s happening more and more, as [school districts] seek answers to closing the academic gap.”

Students learn academics “and they have much more success as they continue in school,” he adds.

In California, a 1998 law that eliminated bilingual education and put the focus on English immersion has had negative results, with the achievement of English-language learners plummeting, says Gómez. Now the state is considering a dual-language strategy.

Texas has embraced it too, and now almost one of every two schools in the state has a dual-language program, he notes. Texas, along with New York and New Mexico, are leaders in adopting the model.

Many schools in Chicago are interested in dual language, according to CPS spokesman Frank Shuftan, and CPS is in the process of adopting official quality review criteria for dual-language programs, as well as a handbook, resource guides, and planning tools for new programs. “Many schools have expressed interest to explore this possibility, or have reached out to actively start the planning process,” he notes.

CPS is also encouraging schools to increase programs that help students develop their native language, because of “the positive academic, social and cultural benefits for students who maintain higher levels of language and literacy development in their first language while learning a second language,” Shuftan says.

Recent hiring is another sign of the shift. Olivia Mulcahy, previously in charge of dual-language programs, now heads the entire Department of Language and Cultural Education. And some of the 19 school networks have hired new bilingual instructional leaders, whose job is to restructure and improve programs.

High-quality dual-language programs will not spring up overnight at every school that enrolls ELL students. But the model could make headway with the biggest problem Carrillo encounters: students who are not literate in their native language or in English.

Carrillo explains that one contributing factor is the push, by some schools and teachers, to teach young children only in English before they know how to read or write in their native language—something that would not occur in a true dual-language program.

Gómez points out the social benefits of dual language. “We’re a country that values bilingualism. We just don’t know how to get there,” he says. “We require kids to take foreign language in high school, yet we have been focused on removing native language of children. As a country, we’re beginning to realize you develop a bilingual society through the educational system—and it must be an integrated process.”

Tell us what you think. Go to www.catalyst-chicago.org to leave a comment, or email rharris@catalyst-chicago.org.
Shifting landscape

Since 2005, the number of English-language learners has doubled in a quarter of suburban school districts, creating a challenge during a time of shrinking state dollars.

By Rebecca Harris

Super Mercado La Pequeña could be smack in the middle of Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood. Takis, the brand-name of a corn tortilla snack popular in Mexico, are among the items stocked on the shelves. Hand-lettered signs in the large storefront window advertise “Tamales,” “Carnitas” and “Barbacoa” for sale. The freezer section stocks popular Mexican ice cream coa for sale. The store's logo is in red and green, on a white background—the colors of the Mexican flag.

But this market isn’t in Pilsen—it’s in the outer reaches of suburbia in Plainfield. Here, in the aftermath of a devastating 1990 tornado, corn fields gave way to subdivisions where Latinos and other immigrants, as well as African Americans, have moved in record numbers. The subdivisions are surrounded by rock quarries and industrial plants, but it’s easy to see why the area attracted so many newcomers looking to make a fresh start: The homes are affordable, with spacious yards and large ponds nearby that are often filled with geese.

Plainfield’s demographic shift isn’t unusual. Indeed, data from the 2010 U.S. Census show that a majority of the state’s Latinos—52 percent—now live in the Chicago suburbs. Just 38 percent live in the city. In Will County, where Plainfield is located, and in neighboring Kendall County, the percentage of Latino residents has roughly doubled in the last decade.

The shift has brought a sea change—and new challenges—to suburban schools that must educate a growing number of students whose native language is not English. Since 2005, a quarter of suburban school districts have seen their numbers of English-language learners double. In Plainfield School District 202, they have tripled.

Suburban districts are trying out different strategies, with varying degrees of success, to help these students become proficient in English and also teach higher-level academic content. Plainfield School District 202, for example, still hasn’t trained all of its teachers in its middle-grades strategy. And many districts still have difficulty finding certified bilingual teachers, although the long-standing statewide shortage has eased in recent years.

According to the results of the state’s ISAT, English-language learners in many suburban districts are struggling academically. Judy Yturriago, president of the Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education and former head of the bilingual program in Evanston schools, calls suburban school performance in this area “spotty.”

In four of the 10 suburban districts with the highest percentages of ELL students, reading scores of 8th-grade Latinos lag far behind scores of white students, with achievement gaps of between 17 and 23 percentage points, according to a Catalyst Chicago analysis of 2011 ISAT scores.

In high school, the gap may well increase as students tackle more complex academic content that requires high levels of English literacy. Aurora East District 131 has a staggering 45-point gap between the percentage of white and Latino students who met state standards on the reading section of the Prairie State exam. (Aurora East District 131 is the only one of the 10 districts that includes high school students.)

But, Yturriago says, there are some bright spots. “Wherever you have dual-language programs, the kids are doing really well,” she notes. Dual language—something of a “gold standard” for teaching language acquisition—aims to build students’ literacy in their native language as well as in English.

Yturriago cites Evanston District 65 (her former district), North Shore District 112 in Highland Park, and School District 54 in Schaumburg as models of how to implement dual-language programs. In all three districts, at least 80 percent of Latino 8th-grade students met state reading standards on the 2011 ISAT reading test.

Money, too, is an ongoing concern. While the enrollment of ELL students in the state is increasing—including the number of students who speak other languages besides Spanish—the pot of state bilingual dollars is shrinking.

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH, MIXED ACADEMICS

In suburban Cook, DuPage, Will, Lake, McHenry and Kane counties, 77 districts—more than a quarter of all collar-county districts—have seen the population of English-language learners more than double since 2005. Five more districts that had no ELL students in 2005 now have at least 5 percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE-PT INCREASE IN ELL</th>
<th>MET OR EXCEEDED ISAT STANDARDS</th>
<th>SCORED 5+ ON ACCESS TEST</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lincoln Elementary SD 156</td>
<td>Cook</td>
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<td>Richland SD 88a</td>
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<td>48%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maywood-Melrose Park-Broadview SD 89</td>
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Note: ISAT scores are for reading only; ACCESS scores are for 3rd grade only. Source: Illinois Interactive Report Card, Illinois State Board of Education.
In Elgin, a class action lawsuit has been in the courts for more than six years, alleging that bilingual students were segregated, weren’t given enough support after transitioning out of bilingual programs, and were kept in overcrowded classes. The Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund has lawyers working on the lawsuit, along with other groups.

Alonzo Rivas, regional counsel in the Midwest office of MALDEF, says other lawsuits could be filed against other districts. Rivas says his office is investigating several complaints from suburban bilingual teachers who charge that bilingual classrooms are overcrowded, that administrators tell them not to offer native-language instruction—and that students who need to be in bilingual education are placed in regular classes.

If parents in the districts want to move forward, the lawsuits could be filed, Rivas says. But so far, many are hesitant. “They’re afraid that the district may retaliate against their children,” he says. “Some of them are also afraid because of their immigration status in this country.”

Elgin Superintendent Jose Torres (formerly an area officer in Chicago Public Schools), who was hired since the events at issue in the existing lawsuit, has instituted a dual-language approach for all bilingual kindergarteners and 1st- and 2nd-grade students. As the students get older, the program will add one grade level per year. Some Elgin schools also include English-speaking students to teach them Spanish.

In kindergarten, students get 80 percent of their instruction in Spanish; that percentage declines each year to reach 50 percent in 3rd through 8th grade. Using this approach helps shore up the literacy skills of native Spanish-speaking students and creates a stronger foundation for learning advanced academic content since they are taught basic concepts in their first language.

The strategy is evident in Filiberta Sachanski’s 1st-grade class at Hillcrest Elementary, as students work on math problems. “Llevar las cuentas con la calculadora,” the overhead reads, meaning, “Solve the problems with the calculator.”

Students are using a grid of numbers from 1 to 50—the “calculator”—to learn about subtraction, and they are doing so in an environment rich in academic Spanish vocabulary.

A bulletin board lists some of the transition words that students will need for academic writing in Spanish, such as principio, primero, segundo, luego, en medio, después, por lo tanto, sin embargo—meaning, beginning, first, second, later, in the middle, after, therefore, nevertheless.

Sachanski’s speech is rapid and her enthusiasm is contagious. The children cheer when they count on the number grid and arrive at number 6, which is key to the subtraction problem they are working on.

The district has a “curriculum alignment plan” that maps out how much time is spent on Spanish and English and in which subjects.

“If it’s Spanish time, it’s Spanish time, and all students are speaking Spanish,” says Hillcrest Principal Jennifer Tallitsch.

In Cicero, recent efforts to start a similar program fell short because of poor implementation. District officials failed to fully explain the philosophy behind the program to teachers, or even to many prin-
Cicero must now choose between two approaches. One is to try and reboot the dual-language program, despite the problems, because of the benefit to students in developing fluency and literacy in two languages. The second choice is to transition students out of bilingual classes more quickly and start before-school or after-school programs that allow students to maintain their Spanish.

The ability to speak two languages “should be seen as a plus [with] lots of advantages later in life,” says Illyse Leland, the district’s director of English-language learner programs. “But on the other hand, our goal as a public school is to teach the children English, not to maintain the native language [though] we are trying to figure out a way that we can.”

PLAINFIELD DISTRICT 202 is also considering the possibility of starting a dual-language program.

Currently, the district offers a transitional program that aims to move students into English classes, with native language instruction for students in kindergarten through 5th grade and for older students who need the support. When students take content-area classes taught in English, a strategy called sheltered instruction allows them to be integrated into classes with native English speakers.

Parent Carmen Avalos, who moved to Plainfield from Bolingbrook five years ago when the family purchased a house, says her 11-year-old son, Jesus, struggled before his school started a bilingual program. But when it began, “his grades went up,” she says through a translator.

“For me, the program is complete because when my daughter goes to the Spanish classroom, she is taught the same [material],” as the English-speaking students, Avalos says.

But she adds that parents also believe a dual-language program—part of a proposed five-year strategic plan that the school board hasn’t voted on yet—would be beneficial.

On a fall day, in a 7th-grade science class at Timber Ridge Middle School in Plainfield, teacher Tina Trabold uses sheltered instruction techniques. Her students read out loud the goals for the class period, which include explaining how and why organisms are classified. Trabold has students read the goals out loud to make sure that her English-language learners understand the lesson.

In Plainfield, sheltered instruction is used in the middle grades and in high school when students know enough English to be in regular classes but need extra support. Many districts have turned to sheltered instruction because the teacher doesn’t have to be bilingual and some research suggests it can improve student learning. But the strategy requires significant planning by teachers, especially as the students get older and the academic content gets increasingly difficult.

In Trabold’s class, students are told to write down how classification could be used to organize a clothes closet. The goal is to connect the lesson to students’ previous experiences “so it’s more meaningful to them,” says Linda Hoste, the district’s director of English-language learner programs.

Next, to provide an opportunity to speak English, the students share
their examples with a partner. Trabold then calls on students to share their examples out loud. “By the time of the year, like seasons,” one boy says. “By, like, how long the sleeves are,” says another.

The students read aloud an article about how skunk identification has changed over the years and—to share their examples out loud. “By, like, how long the time of the year, like seasons,” says another. “The sleeves are,” says another. “One boy says. “By, like, how long

Trabold then calls on students to share their examples with a partner. The class moves quickly. Trabold leads them in several exercises, such as creating a key for identifying shoes. At each point, the activities provide opportunity for the students to practice using English. During a vocabulary exercise, students are asked to define the words “dichotomous,” “taxonomy,” and “classification” for their partners.

“This is increasing their opportunities to interact,” Hoste says. “For a lot of them, this is their only opportunity to speak English.”

Researcher Diane August, who helped design the sheltered instruction program used in Plainfield, points out that lesson planning is difficult, particularly in the upper grades because of the more sophisticated academic content. Many teachers need pre-made curricula, she says.

ONE REASON THAT SCHOOL DISTRICTS turn to sheltered instruction is the difficulty in finding certified bilingual teachers.

Roger Prosise, the superintendent of Diamond Lake School District in Mundelein, says that his district struggled with that problem, as the percentage of ELL students tripled over the past decade. At one point, Prosise even sent staff to Spain to recruit teachers.

When that didn’t work, he had teachers switch to a sheltered model, limiting instruction in Spanish unless a student needed it for clarification.

Prosise, though, ran into problems because of the state requirement that students receive instruction in their native language.

Prosise believed he had verbal approval from the Illinois State Board of Education, and points out that the district received special recognition from the state for its test score gains. But when it came time for a spring 2007 compliance review, the state told Prosise that he had to change the program because it did not provide enough native language instruction.

In a worst-case scenario, districts that are not in compliance could lose their state bilingual money. After some back-and-forth, Prosise says, the district’s money and the program remained intact. But now, the district asks parents to sign waivers opting out of bilingual education, although it’s not clear whether such a request is legal.

**State may ease bilingual ed rules**

Of the 58 suburban school districts visited by state monitors in the past three years, not one district met all of Illinois’ tough education requirements for English-language learners, and nearly 40 percent—22 districts—failed to provide a bilingual program for all the students who qualified for it.

These dismal results are not new or unusual, says Reyna Hernandez, assistant superintendent of the Center for Language and Early Childhood Development at the Illinois State Board of Education. Hernandez noted that, over at least the past decade, it has been relatively routine for most districts to be found out of compliance in at least one area.

Non-compliance could result in school districts being stripped of state money for state bilingual education, but districts are given multiple chances to correct problems, and that has not happened in recent memory.

Illinois has one of the strongest bilingual education laws in the country and is one of only a few states that require native-language instruction taught by certified bilingual teachers. However, these rules may soon get less stringent. A state-appointed task force has recommended changes that are likely to be controversial and would reduce the number of schools required to have certified bilingual teachers and allow some to provide far less native-language instruction.

State officials recognize that some school districts are in a bind, with rapidly growing enrollment of English-language learners and fewer state dollars to pay for bilingual programs. The number of ELL students in Illinois increased 10 percent from 2009 to 2011, state data show, while state money for bilingual education fell by 16 percent.

“There is a lot of hardship to comply,” Hernandez says. The state's money is only meant to be supplemental and districts should use their general funding to address the education of ELLs, she adds.

Last year, the Illinois General Assembly appointed a task force to look into whether the rules on native-language teaching should be relaxed. In its December 2011 report, the group—comprised mostly of administrators, bilingual program directors and district superintendents—recommended changing the trigger for requiring students to be taught by a certified bilingual teacher.

Currently, schools with 20 or more students who speak the same native language must offer anyone who is just starting to learn English—even if it’s only one student—a “full-time” bilingual program, with all academic subjects taught in the student’s native language by a certified bilingual teacher. More advanced students can be placed into a “part-time” program, which may be mostly in English.

Under the report’s recommendations, districts would find it easier to comply with the mandate. Schools would not have to provide a full-time program until they had 20 new English learners in the same or consecutive primary grades, 60 students in middle grades and 75 in high school.

Adequate native-language instruction is critical to developing grade-level literacy skills in a students’ native language, says Judy Yturriago, a Northeastern Illinois University professor and president of the Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education.

“Most principals and policy makers do not understand first- and second-language acquisition,” Yturriago says. “They don’t understand the role of primary language. They don’t understand that children who are proficient in the primary language will do better later on.”

**VIOLATIONS OF BILINGUAL LAW**

Of the 58 suburban school districts in the six-county metro area (Cook, Lake, DuPage, Kane, McHenry, and Will) that were visited by state monitors since fall 2008, none were in full compliance with state laws on bilingual education. Officials say this finding is similar to previous rounds of monitoring. Along with the most common violations below, other violations include moving students out of bilingual programs too early and providing sub-standard facilities for bilingual students.

**Districts in violation for...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violation</th>
<th>Number of Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having schools that were required but failed to create bilingual programs</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing to monitor performance of former bilingual students for two years</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having teachers who lack the required bilingual or subject area endorsements</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing to annually assess English proficiency</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing to place students into bilingual or English as a Second Language programs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Catalyst Chicago analysis of Illinois State Board of Education data

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