

## NATIVE EDUCATION

# Teaching the Whole Child: Language Immersion and Student Achievement

Teresa L. Mccarty • September 1, 2014

As Congress considers two bills to support Native American language immersion, including the Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act, it is time to take stock. What does research say about the impact of Native-language immersion on Native students' academic achievement? We now have 30 years—more than a generation—of data on Native-language immersion in the U.S. and beyond.

But first, what do we mean by Native-language immersion? It may be easier to begin with what immersion is *not*. Native-language immersion is not simply “Native language instruction.” It is not a pullout program or a 50-minute class. Native-language immersion is not *submersion*, a method that compels students to learn a second language at the expense of their mother tongue.

Native-language immersion is voluntary; parents often participate in immersion themselves to support their children's language learning at home. Native-language immersion is additive, building on students' first-language abilities as a foundation for learning the Native language as a second language. Native-language immersion is full-day or most-of-the-day teaching and learning in the Native language, often complemented by after-school and summer programs. Native-language immersion systematically incorporates Native cultural content and culturally appropriate ways of teaching and learning. Most important, Native-language immersion not only engages students in learning the Native language, but also math, science, social studies, music, art, and even English *through* that language. In other words, Native-language immersion is a whole program that cultivates what language researcher Fred Genessee calls “the whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community.”

Hawaiian language immersion provides the most dramatic example of the success of such a program. From a situation in the early 1980s in which fewer than 50 children spoke Hawaiian, Hawaiian-medium schooling has produced 4,000 children assessed as fluent speakers of Hawaiian. These changes have come in tandem with impressive academic gains for historically underserved Native Hawaiian students. In a 2012 issue of the *Journal of American Indian Education (JAIE)*, Professor William Wilson of the University of Hawai'i Hilo reports on the P-12 Nʻwahʻokalaniʻpuʻu (Nʻwahʻ) School, which boasts a 100 percent high school graduation and 80 percent college attendance rate. Although English is not introduced until grade 5, Nʻwahʻ produces graduates who are college-, career-, and civic life-ready for English-dominant settings.

On the Navajo Nation, the Window Rock Unified School District (WRUSD) has run a voluntary Navajo immersion program since 1986. Reporting on the program's first 10 years, Agnes and Wayne Holm note that immersion students performed as well on local tests of English as their non-immersion peers, and better in English writing and math. Now a whole-school program called Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'ólta', immersion in WRUSD continues to demonstrate student achievement outcomes equivalent or better than those of English-medium schools serving Navajo students.

Between 2009 and 2011, I conducted a study of Navajo immersion at the K-5 Puente de Hózhó (Bridge of Beauty or PdH) Public Magnet School in Flagstaff, Arizona. Part of the national Promising Practices study led by Professor Bryan Brayboy of Arizona State University, the PdH study responded to Executive Order 13336's call for research on the role of Native languages and cultures in American Indian/Alaska Native student achievement. On state-required tests, PdH students equaled or surpassed their Native peers in English mainstream schools. In recent years, PdH has ranked among the district's top-performing schools. Equally important, the study showed that Navajo immersion brought parents and elders into the program, reinforcing intergenerational ties.

These are but a few examples of Native-language immersion programs demonstrating success:

Akwesasne (Mohawk) Freedom School in upstate New York

Ayaprun Elitnaurvik Yup'ik Immersion School in Bethel, Alaska

Cherokee Immersion Charter School in Tahlequah, Oklahoma

Cuts Wood (Blackfeet) Academy in Browning, Montana

Native American Community Academy (Lakota, Navajo, Tiwa) in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Waadookodaading (Ojibwe) Language Immersion School in Hayward, Wisconsin

While individual program data are informative, equally revelatory are national data. In a 2005 government-commissioned study of best practices in immersion schooling in New Zealand, Professor Stephen May and his associates at the University of Waikato found that Māori-medium programs in which 81 to 100 percent of instruction took place in Māori—called Level 1 programs—produced the strongest academic gains. The researchers attributed this to the well established “language interdependence principle”: The stronger a child becomes in Māori, the more likely s/he is to be successful in English. This also means that immersion requires several years to demonstrate optimal results; students who participated in Level 1 immersion for 6 to 8 years reaped the greatest linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and academic benefits.

In the Promising Practices study, we found that strong Native language and culture programs (equivalent to Māori Level 1) produced the greatest academic benefits, and benefits were cumulative. Therefore, programs need to be long-term. Long-term programs that begin with 90 to 100 percent of instructional time in the Native language and provide high-quality English instruction by the end of the program promote high levels of language acquisition and academic achievement.

Overall, what do three decades of research show? Close examination of the data confirms the benefits of well-implemented immersion in promoting students' language acquisition, enhanced test performance, increased school retention and graduation rates, college entry, and more diffuse but important outcomes such as parent involvement and cultural pride.

These are not the only goals of these programs, of course, as they are rooted in Native peoples' inherent and constitutionally and internationally recognized rights to sovereignty and self-determination. Further, Native-language immersion is a positive influence on diversity and equity in schools and society. More research is needed, but the evidence to date strongly indicates that Native-language immersion significantly benefits Native students.

Children get one chance at their P-12 education, and it serves them for life. They deserve the opportunities and academic benefits that Native-language immersion provides.

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# Demand high for dual immersion programs in Utah

By Melinda Rogers The Salt Lake Tribune

Published August 4, 2012 7:48 am

**Education • Utah a leader nationwide in number of Chinese language programs offered at elementaries.**



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**Riverton •** It's only the second week of school, but first-graders at Foothills Elementary in Riverton can count to five in Chinese.

They can stand up and sit down when teacher Pei Chi Chang commands them in her native language. And when visitors peek into the classroom, students offer an enthusiastic "Ni hao!" instead of the English "Hello."

"As you can see, they can already follow simple orders like 'sit down for me, please,' " said Chang, who arrived in Utah two weeks ago from Taiwan to teach in one of the Jordan School District's 10 dual immersion language programs.

"To learn a language at an early age is always good, especially when learning the pronunciation part. We know that China is a very powerful country and Chinese is a tool. I'm hopeful in the future the kids can use Chinese as a tool to get them anywhere."

Chang's beliefs are emblematic of a philosophy held by Utah parents, who are increasingly enrolling their children in dual immersion programs offered at 78 elementary schools statewide.

This year, approximately 14,000 children will start school in dual immersion programs in Utah, taught in Spanish, French and Chinese. Portuguese will be offered for the first time in 2012, provided by programs at three elementary schools in the Alpine, Murray and Provo school districts.

Demand is greater than the number of chairs open for students, said Gregg Roberts, world-language specialist and dual language-immersion specialist at the Utah State Office of Education.

The Jordan School District has expanded its dual immersion programs to 10, with waiting lists at several schools.

Roberts attributes the interest to the savviness of parents, who know there are economic benefits for people who can speak another language.

State Superintendent Larry Shumway has set a goal to have 30,000 students enrolled in dual immersion programs at 100 elementary schools by 2015, Roberts added.

To prepare students for future jobs, "We must educate students who are multi-lingual and globally confident," Roberts said. "It takes many, many years of hard work to learn a language at a business-quality level."

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A new kind of school day • Students are taught entirely in the new language they are learning for half the day. The second half is spent learning in English.

While hearing a foreign language can be bewildering and a little scary for a 7-year-old on the first day of school, students need to look no further than their counterparts down the hall to see just how quickly fluency can emerge.

At Foothills Elementary, first-graders in Chang's class learned how to ask for a drink of water on Wednesday.

Third-graders in Yufang Huang's class were spouting new vocabulary words and reading aloud from worksheets and books written exclusively in Chinese.

"They can do a lot," said Huang, who like Chang arrived in Utah from Taiwan through a program designed to recruit language teachers. "With Chinese, their whole world will change. They make friends in different cultures; it boosts their confidence."

Nationwide, there are Chinese programs at 75 elementary schools, and a third are in Utah, Roberts said.

He credits former Gov. Jon Huntsman, also a former U.S. ambassador to China, with touting the importance of learning about Chinese language and culture.

Many students enrolled in Chinese dual immersion programs were at Utah Valley University this week for a two-day camp, where they dined on Chinese food and enjoyed cultural activities. Students mingled with like-minded children and teachers, including educators from abroad who have relocated to Utah to help meet the need for language instructors.

In the Jordan School District, three guest teachers recently arrived from Taiwan and another three from France will teach after they obtain a one to three-year visa, said Carolyn Gough, the district's world language consultant.

The teachers live with American host families while they do tasks such as finding an apartment, car and setting up a bank account.

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More programs ahead? • Only 125 first-graders were enrolled in dual immersion programs in the Jordan School District in 2008, the first year they were offered.

This year, 600 district first-graders are enrolled in 10 programs — five Spanish, four Chinese, and one French. Welby Elementary in South Jordan and Herriman Elementary are offering programs for the first time this year.

Gough predicts the number of programs will grow.

"A person who knows a second language is always going to be able to get a job or interact with another culture," said Gough. "We have a lot of culturally sensitive people in Utah. Whether they spoke a second language themselves, were a native speaker of another language or came to learn a language through church service ... they recognize the value of a second language."

To help add Portuguese programs, the state received grants from the Department of Defense, which has identified it as a language needed to communicate in Brazil and many African countries.

Utah is home to about 30,000 people fluent in Portuguese, Roberts said, including 15,000 people from Brazil and another 15,000 people who learned the language while serving a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

With Brazil one of the top LDS missionary destinations, the community is interested in children learning Portuguese, Roberts said.

A second language will benefit children in the future, said Barbara Yost, principal at Foothills Elementary.

"By January, they'll be talking and writing," she said, pointing to Chang's first-graders, who were on day five of learning Chinese Wednesday. "It's a huge advantage for our community."

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How dual immersion programs get their start

Dual immersion language programs are driven by parent requests, first made to school community councils. They are considered by school and then district administrators.

Officials must weigh factors that include where students will attend middle and high school programs.

The state will consider new programs as ideas are presented by school districts, said Gregg Roberts, dual language immersion specialist at the Utah State Office of Education.

Last spring, low interest scuttled a plan to offer a German program in Provo, Roberts said.



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Education Week's blogs > Learning the Language

## Bilingual School Staff Who Want to Teach Face Bureaucratic, Financial Barriers

By Corey Mitchell on January 24, 2017 11:50 AM

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Multilingual paraprofessionals—an untapped talent pool that could help address the nation's shortage of bilingual K-12 educators—face bureaucratic, financial, and linguistic barriers that make it tough to earn teaching credentials, a new report concludes.

According to the study from New America's Dual Language Learners National Work Group, more than 30 states and the District of Columbia have reported shortages of bilingual, dual immersion, and English-as-a-second-language teachers. As districts try to meet the needs of their increasingly diverse schools, the demand for these educators has become crucial: an estimated **10 percent of public school K-12 students are English-language learners.**

New America released the report, "Teacher Talent Untapped: Multilingual Paraprofessionals Speak About the Barriers to Entering the Profession," roughly six months after unveiling a study that outlined how the paraprofessionals could help address the shortage.

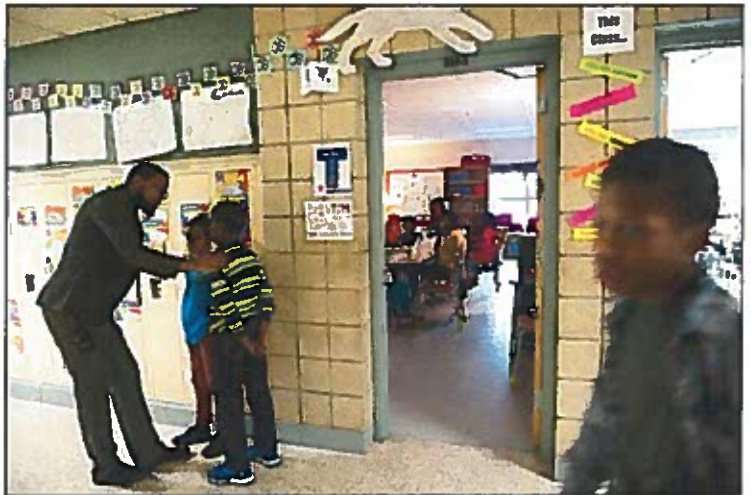
The 42-page paper shares the stories and struggles of paraprofessionals in Minneapolis, Orange County, Calif., San Antonio, Seattle, and the District of Columbia who are prime candidates to fill these vacancies, but can't.

With job titles like paraeducator, teaching assistant, and instructional aide, the educators spoke of facing obstacles such as rigid teacher licensure standards and low pay, which makes it tough to afford the cost of going back to school.

Not content to just lament, the educators also offered potential solutions to the problem, including making teaching exams available in languages other than English and developing alternative teacher licensure programs.

To continue the work on this topic, New America intends to study grow-your-own programs in two metropolitan areas—Minnesota's Twin Cities and Seattle— they visited in this study to "learn more about their design, implementation, challenges, and outcomes."

Here's a look at the study:



[Teacher Talent Untapped](#) by [corey\\_c\\_mitchell](#) on Scribd

