Dual Language Immersion in Central Wisconsin: a Paradox

School District of Abbotsford
Abbotsford, WI
Demographics/Challenges

Why does Abbotsford consider itself “a Paradox”?  

• 4K – 12 made up of 745 students  
• 53% of the student population is Hispanic  
• 39% of 745 students enrolled are identified as English Learners  
• 12.3% or 99 students enrolled are identified with a disability  
• 73.4% or 547 students are economically disadvantaged
History Lesson

In 1996 the first Hispanics showed up in Abbotsford and the surrounding areas. Prior to 1996, Abbotsford was predominantly Caucasian and considered a farming community. In 2006, Abbotsford High School was approximately 10% Hispanic, while the Elementary burgeoned to 20% Hispanic.

Since then the quantity of farms has decreased significantly, industry has grown, specifically Abbyland Foods, and the Hispanic population has blossomed to its current levels to change the culture of our small rural community.
A Story

Last Spring, a story was printed in the Wausau Daily Herald entitled “Hispanic Immigration Transformed Abbotsford.” The main character of the story, José Olvera, recounts that immigration has always been a part of Abbotsford’s story, much longer than concession-stand hot dogs or foul balls. You see, José once played baseball for the Abbotsford Falcon’s team. The difference in his mind is simple; prior to 1996 the vast majority of immigrants to Abbotsford were from northern Europe whereas the newer residents in the most recent wave of immigration originate from Mexico, now making up about 25% of the total population of Abbotsford’s 2,310 residents.
In 1911, newcomers to Abbotsford sported surnames such as Berg, Olsen, and Meyers, whereas today names such as Aguilera, Olvera, and Herrera dominate the scene. When José joined the high school baseball team he was only one of two Hispanics on the team. He recounts that his prowess as a baseball player gradually provided, for him at least, credibility with the white students. Fast forward and by the late 90’s and early 2000’s small family farms moved to large businesses milking thousands of cows. These larger farms needed low-cost labor thereby attracting more Hispanic workers who were eager to take those jobs and gain a toehold in America. In the year 2000, only 39 people identified themselves as Hispanic, or about 2% of Abbotsford’s population. However, by 2016, over 550 residents identified themselves as Hispanic. The main reason for the influx of Hispanic immigrants was simple according to José’s parents who moved to Abbotsford, “We are here to follow and get our dreams. We are all here to be someone in life.”
What have we done in response?

- In 2009 Abbotsford High School implemented a Heritage Speakers class;
- In 2016 the School District of Abbotsford doubled the quantity of bilingual assistants from two to four;
- In 2017-2019 the School District has tripled the quantity of bilingual assistants from four to 12;
- In 2017 the Board of Education approved the Seal of Biliteracy which recognizes students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages;
- In 2018 the Board of Education approved Dual Language Immersion programming for one section at the grade levels of 4K, K, and grade 2 by hiring two dual language teachers;
- In 2019 the Board of Education approved Dual Language Immersion programming for one section at grade levels K-5 and hired an additional bilingual teacher;
- In 2018 the Board of Education approved the purchase of a K-12 ELA curriculum that provided a Spanish parallel component meeting the needs of our growing EL population.
An Evolution of Growth and Ongoing Response

The growth of our EL population requires our approach to remain flexible or nimble. This ‘nimbleness’ forces us to consider:

- How do we identify students with disabilities?
- When considering curriculum revisions or new purchases, how do we meet the needs of our EL population?
- When communicating with parents and community members, are we prepared for providing language accommodations?
- When seeking new staff or additional staffing, do we make ‘bilingual’ abilities a priority?
- How do we continue to pursue equity when considering our diverse population?
Why? Bilingual and biliterate individuals experience cognitive, academic, social, and economic advantages.

What the research says:
• Cognitive benefits include better attention, switching between tasks, less cognitive decline later in life.
• Social benefits include personal and community connections between language groups.
• Economic benefits include the potential for more and higher-paying jobs in multinational locations.
Academic Benefits

DATA:
• Portland Public School students randomly assigned to DLI outperformed their peers on state accountability tests in reading by 13 percent of a standard deviation in grade 5 and by 22 percent of a standard deviation in grade 8. They scored the same as peers in math and science.
• PPS English learners whose native language matched the partner language, were as high as 14 percentage points more likely to have reached English proficiency in sixth grade.
• A study of 18,000 San Francisco Unified School District students found that by 8th grade English learners in dual immersion programs score .2 standard deviations above peers on ELA exams.
• Thomas & Collier found Dual Language Immersion to be the only way to close academic gaps among all 56 Houston elementary schools.
Thomas & Collier
Houston Independent School District

Best Practices Learned from Other Districts:
The Studies

- Cognitive Benefits: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3583091/
- Social Benefits: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/bilingualism-language-and-cognition/article/bilinguals-social-flexibility/BCE874F6A5B00DEB932FCF078C704D40/core-reader
- Portland Public Schools: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9903.html
Abbotsford’s Dual Language Immersion Model

Based on Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education

Staffing: 3 bilingual teachers, 3 program bilingual aides
  • Classroom Space: teachers share classrooms
  • Student Numbers: ⅓, ⅓, ⅓ target for each DL classroom

In non-DL classrooms bilingual aides provide push-in EL assistance.
Abbotsford’s Programming – How?

The Requirement for Bilingual-Bicultural Education Programming:

- Wisconsin Statute 115.97
- Bilingual-bicultural education programs are required
  - # of students
  - Grade level
  - Which language / per language
Positives and Ongoing Challenges

4K story
• It’s not behavior, its language;
• 2 to 5 days a week;
• curriculum aligned; and
• learning center based

We have seen on average a point growth in PALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Subgroup</th>
<th>Group By</th>
<th>Count of Students</th>
<th>Maximum Possible</th>
<th>Benchmark Score</th>
<th>Average Score 17-18</th>
<th>Average Score 18-19</th>
<th>Growth by score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name Writing</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet Recognition - Uppercase</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Sound Awareness</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print and Word Awareness</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Awareness</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positives and Ongoing Challenges

Math: Abby staff expresses need for materials in English and Spanish for multiple levels
- Math Expressions 2018
- ELA 2019
- General Education
- Dual Language
- Special Education
- Bilingual Aide support
Positives and Ongoing Challenges

Standards-based report card: a focus on “what” is important
  • Translated report card available in English and Spanish

Challenges:
  • Bilingually normed tests are needed
  • Newcomers require formalized processes
  • Getting the advanced grades from 0 to on grade level requires an agile response
¡Nuestros corazones laten en 2 idiomas!
Dual Language Immersion in Central Wisconsin – a Paradox

Questions?