



TRANSCRIPT

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Title: Multilingual Education

The leaders of our schools must seriously think through the advantages for students to be multilingual and multiliterate. Studies have shown that there is a linear correlation between multilingualism and student grades. Students who speak more than one language and are fluent do better in school and have stronger college admissions test scores than those who are not. Moreover, according to the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, they have the skills that colleges and universities are seeking.

They are more apt to pursue higher education and complete a college degree than students who are monolingual. Nationally, there are over 4.4 million students in our public K-12 schools who are learning English as a second language and this number is growing. These students must be encouraged to not only learn English but retain their primary language. This will help them as they move through life. Currently, only 20% of the United States population speaks a second language in addition to English whereas 55% of the population in Europe speak a second language. In Holland, the number soars to 95%.

In China, students in the regular programs are required to learn English beginning in the second grade. Some have even reasoned that China could be called the largest English speaking country in the world. In California and in Orange County, there are over several dozen languages spoken in our communities. Spanish and Vietnamese are the two largest. However, other languages like Mandarin Chinese and Farsi are growing rapidly.

In the United States, the fastest growing AP language course is Chinese Language and Culture. On the practical side, knowing more than one language will increase a student's chances for finding employment. Multilingual and multiliterate people are being sought by most major businesses and not for profit organizations around the world.

Since the world has shrunk, students are now facing a global market and as future entrepreneurs, their chances for success will be greatly enhanced by their ability to speak not only English but a second language. In Orange County, over one quarter of our students are English learners and a number of them are participating in dual immersion classrooms. These students are being taught core concepts in two languages. This process of instruction while challenging is helping students to become more fluent in English than their counterparts in regular programs or those simply receiving primary language instruction.

Contrary to popular opinion, the human mind is more than able to learn multiple languages at the same time. However, it requires superlative teaching and higher learner motivation and interaction but it's worth the effort. For example, I have seen Spanish speaking kindergarten students whose parents only speak Spanish and are at the poverty level learn English and Mandarin Chinese at the same time while retaining their Spanish.

It is remarkable to see students advance through school with three different languages. These are not prodigies but regular students. Therefore, the Orange County Department of Education under the leadership of our services for English learners and specialized instruction are leading the charge to help our students become multilingual and multiliterate.

I predict in time these numbers will grow and imbue the education of our students enabling them to become not only leaders in our county, state and country but globally.

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