



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
2/17/23

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RECLASSIFICATION EVENT CELEBRATES ADVANTAGES OF MULTILINGUALISM, DEBUNKS NOTION THAT EL STUDENTS ARE PLAYING CATCH-UP

Buena Park, CA — The Celebration of Multilingual Learners at the Elhers Community Center on February 16, 2023 might have looked like an ordinary graduation, as students gathered with their families to mark their official reclassification from English Language Learner to Fully English Proficient or multilingual students. But really, this event signified a critical shift in the educational landscape – a graduation from the age-old “deficit thinking” about EL students to the recognition that in fact, bilingual students have significant advantages.

“When your child started school, they were speaking a language other than English,” said Michelle Centeno, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, to the gathering of parents who had the option of simultaneous translation in three languages. “Now, they speak a second language – English. What a gift and an asset to know two languages, to relate to other cultures, to have a future advantage in the workplace. Our students here really are heroes.”

Her characterization of these students is not hyperbole. Through the support of the schools and educators, they developed their language skills while learning content at the same time — math, science, history, and language arts. To be reclassified from ELL, they had to achieve proficiency on state and district tests, earn strong grades, and pass a review by their teachers, administrators, and parents. Ms. Centeno’s words represent a shift from the belief that EL students are working from a deficit – an emphasis on what the students do not know -- to the realization that in fact, these students already know one complete language and are working on their second or third.

It is no surprise, then, that reclassified English Language Learners typically do extremely well. Beverly Chang Bolicek, an ELD teacher in the district, uses the analogy of the new Buena Park Middle School drumline’s recent performance titled “Left Brain/Right Brain” —of which more than half the performers were English language learners— to explain the benefits of multilingualism. The drumline represents the percussion of the left brain and the right brain, with the left side functioning as the hub of language processing and the right side playing a

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critical role in identifying the basic sounds of the language. Children use both hemispheres of the brain to learn a language, and this process strengthens the brain and creates a higher density of neurons and synapses. Multilingual students also have a greater capacity to switch from one task to another, the way their brains learn to switch from one language to another. This learned agility gives them an advantage when it comes to executive function, memory, time management and more.

“Speaking a language other than English is not a strike against us, as some may think, but rather the very essence of who we are,” says Chang Bolicek.

In addition, multilingual students maintain a connection, a belonging, with others who speak their home language and share their home culture. Hector Martinez, a high school student and another speaker at the Reclassification Ceremony, shared a little about his own journey at the event. “Speaking two languages kind of gets me closer not just to my friends, but to my family. I can tell them stories and I can help them.” He also found multilingualism to be a big advantage when it came to employment options and travel.

Dr. Yvette Cantu, Chief Academic Officer for the Buena Park School District, wrapped up the evening with a send-off: “Congratulations! You are now classified as multilingual. We are so excited to hear that our students are not just learning, they are thriving. And their voices will be magnified across our district.” Her words capture the very essence of what this ceremony really means for these students and for their community.

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Emery student Carolyn Navarro-Mendoza with Interim Superintendent Dr. Yvette Cantu



Buena Park Middle School student Jayden Ariz-Mendez



Gilbert student Erick Sanchez



Corey student Ulises Pedroza