Doubling down

Dual language programs are exploding in popularity across Bexar County. Wait lists number in the hundreds. But some of these programs fac

By Alia Malik Photos by Billy Calzada

Stefani Vanegas Martinez, who is from Nicaragua, studies English and Spanish skills with her mother, Maria Martinez, at Mark Twain Dual Language Academy.

Leer en Español.

In a fourth grade math class at Hartman Elementary School, Luis Fabela was drowning in words he didn't understand.

Luis grew up speaking English, but his teacher, Silvestre Silguero, was communicating only in Spanish that week. Luis' class was a blend of nati and native Spanish speakers. Together, each group was learning the other's language, with the goal of becoming bilingual while also mastering a

case, math.

ABOUT THIS STORY

The growing number of English-Spanish dual language programs in the San Antonio region prompted Express-News education writer Alia Malik to find out more about that teaching m journalist Billy Calzada, both of whom are bilingual, observed students and teachers in classrooms and visited some of the students' families to learn about their language heritage. Data into Texas Education Agency records about dual language students and built a data explorer for analyzing trends about school performance.

Luis shared a table with a Venezuelan immigrant named Diego Carmona and two other students.

"Where is the number going to go? Tell us why," Silguero said in Spanish during a lesson about decimals.

Luis and two other English-speaking boys turned to Diego for help. "What's that mean?" they asked.

Diego translated for them, adding: "Say how you know."

Dual language classes, such as this one in the Judson Independent School District, are exploding in popularity across Bexar County. More than were enrolled in dual language programs in the county's four largest school districts during the last school year, 62 percent more than the year l swelled in almost every district. Waiting lists at some schools number in the hundreds.



Diego Carmona, left, a student whose primary language is Spanish, and classmate Luis Fabela, whose primary language is English, work on an assignment in their dual language class taught by m Silvestre Silguero at Hartman Elementary School in 2018. (Billy Calzada | Express News)

Before dual language came to San Antonio, bilingual education was limited to Spanish-speaking students, who were introduced to a little more until all their classes were in English. Dual language is a type of bilingual education, broadened to include English-speaking students, that conti languages.

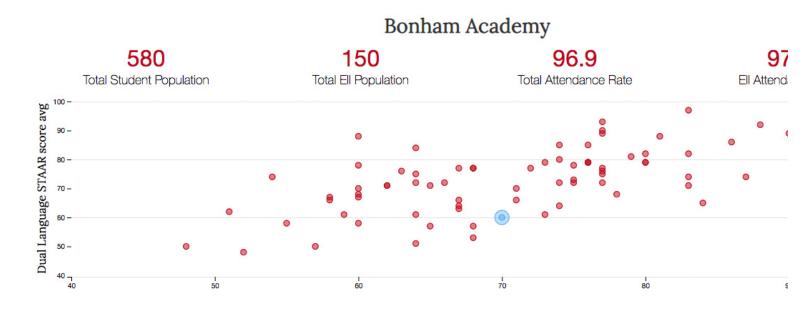
School administrators pitch dual language instruction as a way for Spanish-speaking students to learn English and improve their native language time. English-speaking students, on the other hand, are taking the dual language route because their parents see economic and intellectual valu bilingual.

Learning two languages at once can improve brain flexibility, creativity, focus, problem-solving skills, attention to detail and the chances of care economy, experts and researchers say. Students who are exposed early to Spanish learn Greco-Latin roots that allow them to build a more comp Mario Ferrón, former dual language director for San Antonio ISD.

The popularity of dual language has helped schools that add the programs attract and retain English-speaking families who might otherwise op

charter campuses. The demand has generated wait lists in school districts fighting declining enrollment.

Click the image below to explore dual language student performance in schools throughout the San Antonio area.



In two years, SAISD expanded the number of its schools with dual language programs from two to 45. Then, this fall, another middle school and schools added dual language classes this year.

One of the city's most renowned dual language schools, SAISD's James Bonham Academy, enrolls about 580 students. The number of English's waiting list over the summer: 476.

At Mark Twain Dual Language Academy, the city's first school to go 100 percent dual language, the projected enrollment for this year is at least summer waiting list were 602 English speakers.

Such numbers are astonishing to those familiar with the history of education in San Antonio. Not many decades ago, students who spoke Spanis punished in school, and many Spanish-speaking parents didn't see the value in passing their language down.

Today, San Antonio is nearly two-thirds Hispanic, but the percentage of area Hispanics who speak Spanish has been declining, according to the Center. The rise of dual language education could change that.

"It could actually be an attraction to big companies." "If these programs are implemented correctly, you're going to have a lot of l biliterate people in this city," said Claudia Garcia, former bilingual program Central ISD and now an assistant professor of teacher education at the Univ

San Antonio. "It could actually be an attraction to big companies."

That depends as much on immigrant children like Diego as it does on English-speaking families willing to sign on.

s dual language programs soar in San Antonio schools, growing pains ensue - San Antonio Express-News	9/24/19, 7:29 PM
A fourth grade student does his homework in the dual language program at Bonham Academy, an SAISD school in Southtown that is well-known throughout the city, with his wait list. (Ronald Cortes Express-News)	ındreds of students on
Young teachers	
For Diego, now 10, dual language classes were more a necessity than an option. Neither he nor his mother, Raquel Garcia, spo	ke English when

four years ago.

After three years at Hartman, he had learned enough English to help his classmates and his mother, who started taking English classes at San A hopes to find work as a pharmacist again, her profession in Venezuela. Diego often translates for his mother in stores and on errands.

"I know that I have to go like a little turtle with the language and everything," Garcia said in Spanish.

Reading a book in English to his mom one afternoon, Diego blanked on the Spanish word for "fox." She didn't know the word in English.

"No hablo inglés," Garcia sighed.

"I'll teach you," Diego said in Spanish.

When the family moved to another part of the city, Diego had to transfer schools. All of his classes are now in English, but his mom has him rea Spanish at home. He needs to become bilingual, Garcia said, so he can work for international companies, or practice his chosen career in more has struggled to do.

"It's very important to know two languages," she said in Spanish.



Diego, now a fifth grader at Bulverde Creek Elementary School, immigrated from Venezuela four years ago with his mother. He spoke only Spanish at first, but his English improved after he enrolled at Hartman Elementary School. (Billy Calzada | Express News)

In the Fabela family, Luis, 11, also took on the role of teacher for his parents as he learned more Spanish. His grandfather speaks mostly Spanisl Luis Fabela Sr., picked up enough to translate for customers at the car dealership where he works as a technician.

By the time Luis Jr. and his younger brother were born, Spanish had fallen out of the family.

His mother, Tanaya Fabela, works in banking. When she answers a call from a Spanish-speaking customer, she can only say, "Un momento," ar worker who speaks Spanish.

When Luis Jr. turned 4, his parents enrolled him in a private preschool that happened to have a dual language program. They liked it so much t to continue at Hartman.

Doubling down with dual language school work

In the first grade, Luis Jr. would come home crying, his parents said.

"I don't understand what they're saying, but they keep speaking to me in that language," he'd sob.

But they wanted him to learn so he could speak with his grandfather and have better career prospects.

Tanaya Fabela started using her son's homework to teach herself Spanish.

One afternoon, Luis Jr. practiced his Spanish vocabulary with his parents, who read the words on flash cards.

"Nunca," his mother said. Luis Jr. was stumped.

His father put it in a sentence. "Nunca me haces caso, señor." Now his son and wife were both confused.

"Never," he explained. "You never listen to me."

The example resonated with Tanaya Fabela. "Oh yeah," she said. "I'm going to learn that sentence."





This school year, Luis Jr. transferred to Northside ISD's Ellison Elementary, where there isn't yet a dual language program for fifth graders like class with a slight majority of students who speak Spanish at home and are receiving transitional bilingual education. Roughly 20 percent of the Spanish, said Principal Julie Meneses. Luis Jr. and the rest of the students learn totally in English, but the teacher sometimes speaks or reads to Spanish, Meneses said.

"We kind of started underground dual language here," she said.

Luis Jr. continues to speak basic Spanish at home, his mother said.

"I still think it's something that he needs to work on," she said. "In 10, 15 years, that will be an asset to him."

His 2-year-old brother, Luke, will join a day care dual language program next year.



Luis Fabela, center, dances with classmates in fifth grade classroom at Ellison Elementary School. Luis transferred earlier this year to Ellison, where the dual language program hasn't yet reached fi a class with bilingual students so he'd continue to learn Spanish.

(Billy Calzada | Express News)

Dos senderos

Many Bexar County school districts with dual language rely, at least to some extent, on research by Wayne Thomas, professor emeritus of evalu methodology, and Virginia Collier, professor emerita of bilingual, multicultural and English as a Second Language education, both from George Virginia.

They studied the academic performance of millions of students across the U.S. over more than three decades and found that those who begin du kindergarten, whether their first language is Spanish or English, start outperforming their mainstream peers on standardized reading tests by n

As Bexar County school leaders open dual language programs on dozens of campuses, all they can do until the students reach middle school is t research and hope the venture will result in higher student performance.

Thomas and Collier recommend dual language programs begin with 90 percent of instructional time in Spanish and 10 percent in English durir kindergarten. Then, the amount of English increases slightly every year until fourth or fifth grade, when half of students' core instruction is in E Spanish.

Balancing languages

Students in local two-way dual language programs are taught in Spanish and English. Media: Mike Fisher

Some school districts follow that but start with 80 percent of the day in Spanish; others start at half and half.

They often achieve the balance by teaching language arts in Spanish and English. Each of the other core subjects — math, science and social stuall year in the same language, whether Spanish or English. At Hartman, teachers switched languages weekly in all core subjects.

English speakers generally have to enroll in a dual language program no later than second grade or they will miss the chance to build enough of Spanish. Most school districts let Spanish-speaking students enter dual language at any age, on the assumption that improving their native lang simultaneously speed their progress in English.

The most common model in San Antonio aims for classrooms to have an equal number of Spanish speakers and English speakers. That way the each other as Diego and Luis did.

That's called two-way dual language, or in Spanish, doble sendero.

Study: Dual language made the different

For more than 30 years, researchers Wayne Thomas and Virginia (analyzed standardized test scores for millions of U.S. students wh language wasn't English to determine which educational program most effective for reading. They found two-way dual language stu scored the highest on average by the 11th grade, even higher than r English speakers who were not in dual language. Here are descript the various programs.



Source: Wayne P. Thomas, professor emeritus/George Mason University

Mike Fishe

Study: Dual language made the difference (Mike Fisher/ Staff Artist | San Antonio Express-News)

A leap of faith

When Lynn Wilson heard that Roan Forest Elementary, the neighborhood school, would add a dual language program the same year her young would enter kindergarten, she was curious.

Wilson has a master's degree in education and was a teacher and assistant principal in three states before the family moved to San Antonio. She research by Thomas and Collier and others and came away convinced of the benefits of dual language for brain development.

Wilson and her husband, Mark Wilson, speak only English. He is vice president of Latin America for Marathon Petroleum Corp. Everyone else (Spanish.

At first, he resisted enrolling Carli in dual language.

"I was the biggest skeptical person there was," he said. "I'm not a big person that likes change."

In the end, he deferred to his wife.

He would soon regret it and Lynn Wilson would question her decision many times while Carli was in kindergarten and first grade. She started s percent of her day taught in Spanish. She struggled to understand and did poorly on tests.



Carli Wilson, right, is a dual language student at Lopez Middle School. She is the only Spanish speaker in her family and often translates emails for her father's work. (Billy Calzada | Express News)

"Why can't I just learn in English like everybody else?" she'd say, tearfully.

"We did a lot of soul-searching," Mark Wilson said. "Kindergarten's supposed to be easy."

Lynn Wilson would open her iPad and use Google Translate to decipher Carli's homework. Both parents tried to learn Spanish from Rosetta Stc courses. They enlisted the help of a Spanish-speaking neighbor.

"It's very weird not to know how to help your kindergartener or first-grader do their homework," Lynn Wilson said. Concerned, she met repeate teacher and a North East ISD bilingual specialist.

"It's going to work," Lynn Wilson remembers them saying. "Carli's got it. She can do it."

"I'm trusting you," she told them.

RELATED



Twain Middle to become Bexar's first dual-language-only public



New Mexico student wins National Spanish Spelling Bee in San



San Antonio praised as national model for bilingual education

Once Carli learned to read in Spanish, reading in English came easily. By second grade, the tears stopped.

By fourth or fifth grade, she'd grown so proficient in Spanish that her brother would call from Baylor University for help with his assignments.

When it came time to enroll in middle school, Carli almost didn't continue in dual language. Her family lives in the gated Evans Ranch subdivis to go to Lopez Middle School, 6 miles away, where she didn't know anyone, instead of her neighborhood school.

Yet, Carli didn't want to forget Spanish. A visit to Lopez allayed the family's doubts.

Now 13, Carli said reading is one of her strengths in both languages. Of the seven students in her Advanced Placement Spanish language arts clatwo others are native English speakers.

Carli, who has always made the honor roll, thinks dual language has helped in all her subjects. When she doesn't know what something means, Spanish word or the Latin root.

She even speaks Spanish in her sleep.

Carli is confident being bilingual will boost her college prospects and help her land jobs. She could go to MacArthur High School next fall for du plans to go to her neighborhood high school, Johnson, and study French or Italian, other Romance languages that she thinks will keep her from She'll keep her Spanish sharp by speaking with the family's housekeeper and her mother's friends.

"I don't think she'll lose Spanish," her mother said, "because she's right here in this environment, in San Antonio. I think. I hope."



Carli explains a lesson as teacher Rocío Ocón watches at Lopez. (Billy Calzada | Express News)

The language of success

Spanish wasn't always such a sought-after language in San Antonio.

"For decades, we have been indoctrinating the idea that English is the language of success," Ferrón said. "Many parents are sacrificing their chil development in the name of developing English."

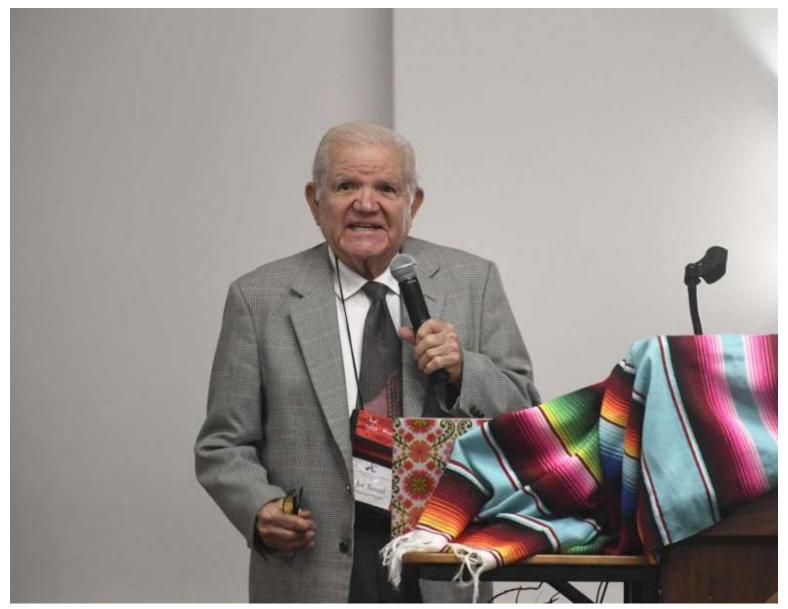
Joe Bernal grew up in a Spanish-speaking home on the heavily Latino West Side and taught from 1954 to 1964 at SAISD's Crockett Elementary

In those days, teachers were told to punish students for speaking Spanish in the classroom, recalled Bernal, 92. Some even prohibited Spanish (

"There were a lot of teachers who looked down on speaking Spanish." "There were a lot of teachers who looked down on spea said. "They were mean about it, and it wasn't somethin mean about."

He thought the ban was unfair. "You're denying the language of your parents, of your grandparents, and there's no reason for it," he said.

If Bernal heard Spanish in class, he would make the offending student stand up and tell a joke in English. He ordered students to nudge friends Spanish.



Joe Bernal, formerly a state legislator and member of the State Board of Education, was a teacher at Crockett Elementary School on the West Side in the 1950s and 1960s. The policy then was to Spanish in class.

By the time he left teaching in 1964 to become a state representative, Bernal said, the teachers and their superiors found out they had misinterp said English would be the only language of instruction.

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Bilingual Education Act in 1968, which recommended teaching some academic subjects in students' nathey could grasp the content while developing English skills.

"Transitional bilingual" programs emerged for students who didn't speak English. Dozens of San Antonio schools still offer those programs, altl districts are working to replace them with dual language.

For many students, transitional bilingual programs fall short. Spanish-language instruction of the core curriculum phases out between the third early for the students to become bilingual. And according to Thomas and Collier's research, the academic gap has never closed between student bilingual programs and their mainstream English-speaking peers.

Alongside transitional bilingual programs, the first dual language classes formed in the 1960s in heavily Latino communities where parents war maintain Spanish as they learned English, according to Kate Menken, a linguistics professor at City University of New York - Queens College. O adopters was Laredo. Schools in San Antonio began offering dual language — sometimes in place of transitional bilingual education — decades educators heard about the research extolling it.

More than 50 years after Bernal's students were punished for speaking Spanish, children in San Antonio can win prizes for it.



Katherine Hernandez, representing North East Independent School District, correctly spells the word "horcajadas" in the ninth round of the 2018 National Spanish Spelling Bee at the McAllister Fine College. Katherine, who immigrated El Salvador, now goes to MacArthur High School, which has a dual language program.

Katherine Hernandez, 14, won a Spanish spelling bee at Garner Middle School in North East ISD last year and later advanced to the National S_I at San Antonio College. She spelled for hours, acing words like "descalcificación" — decalcification — and "horcajadas," an adverb meaning mor

She bowed out in the 10th round when she misspelled Devanagari, a Sanskrit script.

For Katherine, a ninth grader who moved to San Antonio three years ago when her family fled threats of violence in El Salvador, winning Spanisher self-confidence to learn and communicate in both languages.

When NEISD recommended Katherine enter the dual language program, her mother, Wendy Diaz, was thrilled. She had expected her children English-only classes and was worried the language barrier would discourage them.

"At first it was hard," Katherine said in Spanish.

She made friends at school but, too insecure to try English, spoke to them in Spanish.

Her friends pushed her and within six months, she was comfortable speaking both languages.

"I'm proud of how far I've come," Katherine said.



Katherine was uncomfortable speaking English when she started the dual language program at Garner Middle School, but her spelling bee success boosted her confidence in both languages.

Modified goals

The most populous area school district, Northside, offered dual language at two elementary schools in 2001. Now it's available at 16 of its 79 ele

To maintain balance, the number of Spanish speakers determines the overall slots, said Victor Raga, director of bilingual and ESL education. A exists in North East ISD, said Alicia Alvarez-Calderon, director of bilingual and ESL programs there. North East has 16 elementary schools, five one high school — MacArthur — with dual language classes.

But if any one school exemplifies the change in language learning in San Antonio, it is the 126-year-old Bonham Academy, an SAISD campus.

Located in the King William and Lavaca neighborhoods, the pre-K through eighth grade school once served the German immigrant families who

The school introduced dual language in 1995 to help Spanish-speaking children.

"It was right on the cusp of the dual language movement," said William Webber, a former principal.

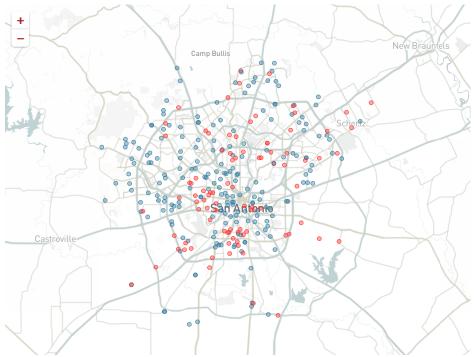
Bexar County schools with dual language and English learner (EL) programs

Each circle represents a Bexar County school with an EL or dual language program. Click the checkbox to see only dual language schools. Zoom in and click on any school in the map for STAAR performance information.

See only dual language schools

Oual language schools

O All schools with EL programs



Note: In compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a STAAR score of -1 is recorded when a program contains fewer than five test, takers

Source: Texas Education Agency

Credit: Luke Whyte

More recently, as King William and Lavaca gentrified, English-speaking students became the majority and the dual language program's popular scores on standardized tests bolstered the school's reputation.

As Bonham's reputation brought in more students, "we had to figure out a way that the English speakers didn't overwhelm the Spanish speaker

Enrollment of English speakers in dual language is now capped at 60 percent in each grade. Neighborhood students get priority while outsiders for the remaining slots. Those who don't get it can join the wait list. There's also a waiting list for Spanish speakers, though not as long.

As the Bonham wait lists grew, SAISD used dual language instruction as a selling point for middle-class families to help turn around the fortune Middle School.

Enrollment had dwindled for years as many English-speaking parents in the Monte Vista, Beacon Hill, Alta Vista and Tobin Hill neighborhoods chose private or charter schools instead.

Three years ago, SAISD officials decided to convert Twain into a dual language academy for elementary and middle school students, making it t

public school in Bexar County without an English-only option.

Officials weren't sure how English-speaking families would respond, but they turned out in droves for informational sessions, outnumbering the



Ysabella Garcia, left, and Maya Rodriguez, who are third-graders at Mark Twain Dual Language Academy, go over a lesson in class on Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2018. (Billy Calzada, Staff Photographer |



Ysabella Garcia, left, Maya Rodriguez, Benicio de Leon and Cristiano Galicia, who are third-graders at Mark Twain Dual Language Academy, go over a lesson in class on Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2018. (E Photographer | Express News)

In 2017, when Twain Dual Language Academy opened, English speakers made up two-thirds of the enrollment and Spanish speakers one-third, Garcia, whom SAISD hired away from Hartman.

That's the most lopsided ratio that experts say is acceptable in an elementary two-way dual language program. Any more and the larger group o than learns from, the smaller group. By middle school, administrators said, that balance matters somewhat less because many students achieve in both languages.

Twain has drawn more Spanish speakers — last year, they made up about 44 percent of students in pre-K through fourth grade. The school will each of the next three years, stopping with eighth grade, as Bonham does.

More than 90 percent of students are of Hispanic origin, but many had never spoken Spanish.

"Somewhere in the family tree they had it, and they want to recoup that," Garcia said.



Maya Rodriguez, then a third grader, studies Spanish at Mark Twain Dual Language Academy. Two years ago, Twain switched from being a middle school to being the first traditional public school only dual language classes. (Billy Calzada | Express News)

Asset to the city

As more students master Spanish, dual language education could be key to developing San Antonio as a city of bilingual workers, said Claudia C bilingual programs coordinator in East Central ISD.

From 2006 to 2015, the percentage of San Antonio Hispanics who spoke Spanish at home dropped from 69 percent to 60 percent, according to

Center. It was the sharpest decrease among 25 U.S. cities with the largest Hispanic populations, the Pew study found.

Dual language education could help reverse that trend.

"If we do things right and we do them with a high caliber in mind, it's going to go beyond just the district," Claudia Garcia said. "It's going to be district's going to be able to provide to our city."

That depends on dual language programs continuing through high school — perhaps their biggest challenge. By middle school, many have left f programs, such as science and tech academies. Dual language enrollment drops again between middle and high school.

Even for those students who remain, there is a shortage of teachers who are both bilingual and qualified to teach higher-level subjects. The resu high-school dual language programs struggle to stay afloat.



Photo: Billy Calzada

Diego, center, participates in a dual language class last year at Hartman Elementary School. When Diego immigrated from Venezuela four years ago with his mother, he didn't speak any English. No

Maria Realpe, a junior at MacArthur High School, had her doubts about dual language. She moved from Colombia seven years ago with her fam knowledge of English she scored zero on the state's English proficiency exam.

In elementary school, she was in a transitional bilingual program that slowly phased Spanish speakers into full days of English. She planned to a Middle School in NEISD, where all her classes would be in English.

When the school district offered Maria a seat in the dual language program at Garner Middle School, she didn't want to go. Her mother worried English fast enough if half of her core classes were in Spanish, but students in dual language could earn college credit and certificates of bilinguate Garner.

"When you're bilingual, well, you're worth two people." After middle school, she chose to stay in dual language at MacArthur rat
Roosevelt High School, her neighborhood school. Now Maria, 16, preference the elementary school bilingual classes.

"You're learning both," she said. "You're not necessarily choosing one."

SAISD also expanded dual language into high school last year, partly to address the bilingual teacher shortage.

At Brackenridge High School, dual language students must take college-level courses in teaching and are encouraged to graduate with associate Philip's College. SAISD leaders hope the future teachers will return to their home district after just two years at a university.

"We want to develop our own," Assistant Superintendent Olivia Hernández said.



Mariana Morán, a sophomore in the dual language program at Brackenridge High School, takes notes in Algebra 2. (Billy Calzada | Express News)

Mariana Morán, a sophomore at Brackenridge, and three older siblings were born in San Antonio to parents who immigrated from Mexico. The Spanish at home. The children all went to Bonham Academy, then Brackenridge.

Mariana wanted to be a doctor until she visited the University of Texas at San Antonio with other teens entering dual language at Brackenridge. bilingual teachers shared their career paths.

One teacher's story stuck out. The woman had immigrated from Mexico as a child, and her father insisted she speak English to avoid punishmer speaking Spanish. By high school, the woman had come to appreciate the advantages of knowing two languages.

"I felt inspired, I guess," said Mariana, 16. "I really liked it. I felt like I could relate to her."

Now Mariana dreams of returning to the classroom someday as a bilingual teacher.

Her mother, Vanesa Morán, earned a teaching degree in Mexico and speaks enough English to work as an assistant in a local day care center. All teaching Spanish at a private school, she has not been a full-fledged teacher.

"It makes me feel frustrated," she said in Spanish, but "you have to continue. Life is that way."

She's pleased Bonham helped her children develop their home language while learning English. And now Mariana is pursuing the career in bilin mother has not been able to achieve.

"There are a lot of jobs in that," Vanesa Morán told Mariana last fall at their kitchen table.

"When you're bilingual, well, you're worth two people."



Stefani studies with her mother in the library at Twain Dual Language Academy. The library is filled with books in both languages, part of the principal's mission to make Twain a national model of d (Billy Calzada, Staff Photographer | Express News)

Alia Malik is an education reporter for the San Antonio Express-News. She covers several local school districts, community colleges a trends. Read her on our free site, mySA.com, and on our subscriber site, ExpressNews.com. | amalik@express-news.net | Twitter: @AI

Data editor Luke Whyte contributed to this report.

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