

**John F. Kennedy Magnet School  
Port Chester UFSD  
Port Chester, New York**



## *From “Hoy Dia” to “Today”:* Supporting Bilingual Education Students

### **Frank Fanelli, Assistant Superintendent, Port Chester Schools**

Port Chester’s always been an immigrant town. Before the Italians it was the Irish, the Polish, and going further back. So this immigrant population, from Mexico, from Central and South America, came for the same reasons any other immigrant population has.

### **George Santos, Bilingual Team Leader**

I came to the United States when I was 14 years old and I came exactly to Port Chester. I went into a sink or swim situation. I was very lucky that my mother was a teacher, that I had a strong foundation in my language, which helped me to acquire English. Not immediately; it took years. Imagine only for these children that do not have a real developed language, how much harder it is gonna be for them.

### **Lou Cuglietto, Principal**

When I came here, there were three people who spoke Spanish on the staff. To say they were bilingual teachers was not really fair because we had no program and we just put kids who spoke Spanish in those classes. It was just the most logical thing we could do at the time. Thanks to Mr. Santos, we were methodically and strategically — we were able to conceptualize a better method for our kids. And now, there are 22 members, 23 members of our bilingual team and they are very serious characters. They’re all wonderful, lively, bright but they are deadly serious about what they do and how important it is that we offer our services to these kids who have recently arrived.

### **Enrique Tovar, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Bilingual Teacher**

Research has shown even though students may speak social language, that doesn’t mean they have the academic language. Because of that, when we’re teaching them, if we’re teaching solely in English, they are really not understanding the subject. So while they’re still acquiring English, which takes five to seven years, they’re really not acquiring the content. So what we decided was that, especially in the lower grades, the dominant language would be in Spanish, because we wanted the students to get a really good foundation for the content. 7525 Whereas when they got to fourth, fifth grade, we could do less Spanish and more English but we still give them that support in their native language.

### **Judy Diaz, Bilingual Special Education Teacher**

In kindergarten, the instructional model is 80% of the day in Spanish, 20% in English for oral language development. In first grade, we maintain the same model up until January and for those students who are ready, who met benchmark in reading and comprehension in Spanish, we begin teaching a little more explicitly in English.

**Lower-third: Kristin Pascuzzi, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Bilingual Teacher**

When students enter second grade the percentages begin to shift a little bit. We spend the beginning portion of the year teaching in Spanish 70% of the day. Thirty percent of the day is done in English, which is mostly, again, that social, that oral language, with the introduction of academic content in English. By the middle of second grade, we shift a little bit more again, to a 60-40 model. So it's still Spanish dominant, but now when we teach math concepts, we can start introducing the vocabulary in English. By that point, by the middle of second grade there's more children on benchmark, because they've had a full entire year to build that foundation in their native language and they're ready to transition into English. And it's seamless

**Lower-third: Judy Diaz, Bilingual Special Education Teacher**

We have moved past the conversation about whether a child's learning issues are attributed to language or a learning delay, because when a child had a second language and was placed in a monolingual or ESL class and they weren't keeping up with the rest of the student population, you would say, maybe it's a disability or maybe they just need more time to acquire language. But by us being very deliberate and screening these students extensively, by taking these students who we know are truly Spanish dominant, teaching them in their native language, if that child is not making any gains, we don't say to ourselves, "maybe they just need more time." We know by a certain point that maybe there is a processing issue.

**Lower-third: George Santos, Bilingual Team Leader**

Beyond our philosophy, our efforts, as a staff, as a family, I think our biggest success has been the support of the school district to fund us in all the materials that we need. And also our school leader, Mr. Cuglietto, has been very open to our ideas, to the understanding of bilingualism and heard us, bilingual teachers, not only as bilingual teachers but as bilingual individuals that have learned through bilingual education.

**Maura McAward, Assistant Superintendent, Port Chester Schools**

Over the years, we have compared ourselves to New York State in general, and then we started comparing ourselves to other communities in Westchester County, which, as you may know from a wealth perspective, Port Chester is a little more of an aberration than the norm. And as we became more successful academically, we began to outpace some of the surrounding communities that have a little more wealth. We take a significant pride in pretty much challenging the common belief that someone's academic success is going to be rooted solely in their socio-economic background.