

Program immerses PAISD students in two languages

Dr. Bertha Garza: Professional of the Month

Dr. Bertha Garza is currently District Coordinator for Bilingual / ESL / Two-way Immersion / Migrant Education for Port Arthur Independent School District.

Dr. Garza was born in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. She came from South Texas to Southeast Texas and started a teaching career with Port Arthur ISD 21 years ago. While in PAISD, Dr. Garza taught middle school, high school, and elementary education. She was also an elementary school counselor at Franklin Elementary School.

Dr. Garza obtained a bachelor's degree in journalism and secondary education from Texas A&I University in Kingsville, Texas; a master's degree in journalism and bilingual education from Texas A & M International University in Laredo, Texas; a master's degree in counseling and human development from Lamar University in Beaumont; and a doctor's degree in educational leadership with a specialization in second language acquisition from Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Dr. Garza said she considers learning to speak English her greatest educational achievement



Dr. Bertha Garza

since she did not speak English when she started school. Other educational achievements include the following:

- Developing and implementing the first Two-way Dual Language Immersion Program in Southeast Texas.
- Developing and implementing the Alternative Bilingual Certification Program for Spanish and Vietnamese Bilingual Teachers through Lamar State College – Port Arthur.
- Becoming a member of the Advisory Committee appointed by the State Board of Educator Certification to develop standards and educator certification exams in the areas of Bilingual and ESL Education.

By Dr. Bertha Garza

Port Arthur Independent School District, like many other school district in Texas and across the United States, is currently challenged by the rapid growth of a linguistically diverse student population. Concurrently, school district leaders recognize the value and benefits of the ability to communicate in a foreign language.

In order to help our language minority students achieve academically and to give language majority students an opportunity to develop proficiency in a second language, PAISD leaders have developed and implemented Two-way Dual Language Immersion Programs.

As the United States becomes more diverse and global economies increasingly affect the U.S. economy, language diversity should become greatly appreciated and bi-literacy more widely embraced.

Port Arthur Independent School District began its TWI Programs in 2001. Houston, Travis, and

Tyrrell Elementary Schools have TWI Programs in grades Pre-kindergarten to five. In Two-Way Dual Language Immersion Programs, two languages are used for instruction: English and Spanish. TWI programs use a variety of models, but they all provide instruction in the two languages for a significant portion of the school day.

In PAISD the 50/50 model is used which means that instruction is given in English 50 percent of the time and in Spanish the other 50 percent of the time. All students have the opportunity to be both first language models and second language learners.

TWI creates an additive bilingual environment for all students since the first language is maintained while the second language is acquired.

The unique feature of this type of dual language instruction is that TWI programs enroll a roughly equal number of native English speakers and native Spanish speakers. The students are in mixed

groups for all or most of the school day. Thus, the term "two-way" describes the mixed groups where English speakers and Spanish speakers are mixed for instruction in two languages. All students have the opportunity to be both first language models and second language learners, and TWI creates an additive bilingual environment for all students since the first language is maintained while the second language is acquired.

Two-Way Dual Language Immersion Programs strive to promote bilingualism and biliteracy, grade-level academic achievement, and positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors in all students. It has been most successful in helping English language learners in PAISD meet the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind policy for English language acquisition while it offers the English language student population an opportunity to learn Spanish as a second language.

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