

In the Spotlight

A Publication of the Bastrop ISD Communications Office

Issue 7 / June 2019

Bilingual and ESL Programs

In this edition, we explore Bastrop ISD's Bilingual/ESL Program. This program is unique in that it offers not only students, but also parents the opportunity to increase their English language comprehension. In this issue, we highlight several programs, along with a Cedar Creek High School alum who has excelled after being part of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Bastrop ISD.

"Bastrop ISD provides a world-class curriculum for non-English speaking students. We start when students are very young and work with them all the way up to high school to support their English language acquisition as well as grade-level content. It's our priority to make sure all of our students excel regardless of their native language."

- Patricia (Trish) Flores, M.Ed.
Bilingual/ESL Program Director

We hope you enjoy!
BISD Communications Team

ESL/GED Community Classes

Community engagement is crucial to the success of Bastrop ISD. Our schools, programs and students are stronger when caring adults are involved. We also know that students perform better academically when their parents are informed, involved and able to support their students' academic work. But there can be barriers for Spanish speaking parents or parents without a high school diploma.



Adult students participate in one of the ESL or GED classes. A partnership with Community Action makes these classes possible.

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Bastrop
Independent School District

Norma Mercado, Bastrop ISD's Parent Engagement Liaison, wanted to help bridge that barrier. A recent parent survey indicated more than 50% of parents wanted to improve their English skills and/or obtain their General Education Development (GED) diploma.

"That's when I immediately reached out to Doug Mudd, Executive Director of Community Action of Central Texas, whom I had worked with in the past at other school districts, to provide a qualified program for ESL and GED adult classes," Mercado said.

Mudd jumped at the opportunity. "We already had a relationship with Cedar Creek High School, and we want to expand it, so this was a perfect time," he said.

The ESL and GED classes are free to participants because they are funded through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) federal funds. Community Action provides the teachers and the curriculum, while Bastrop ISD provides the classroom space.

"Our ESL and GED classes are offered at different locations in the district, both morning and evening hours, with childcare services," said Mercado. "This year, Spanish GED classes were also offered."

To enroll in ESL or GED classes, a participant must be at least 19 years old. For individuals who are 16 to 18 years old, special consideration can be given. Adult students enrolling in the ESL class go through a three-hour orientation, take a baseline test, and identify their goals so that the class can be tailored as much as possible.

Students are tested again after 60 hours of instruction to assess progress. Adult students enrolling in the GED class also take a baseline test. They then are grouped by academic needs and receive 40 hours of instruction.

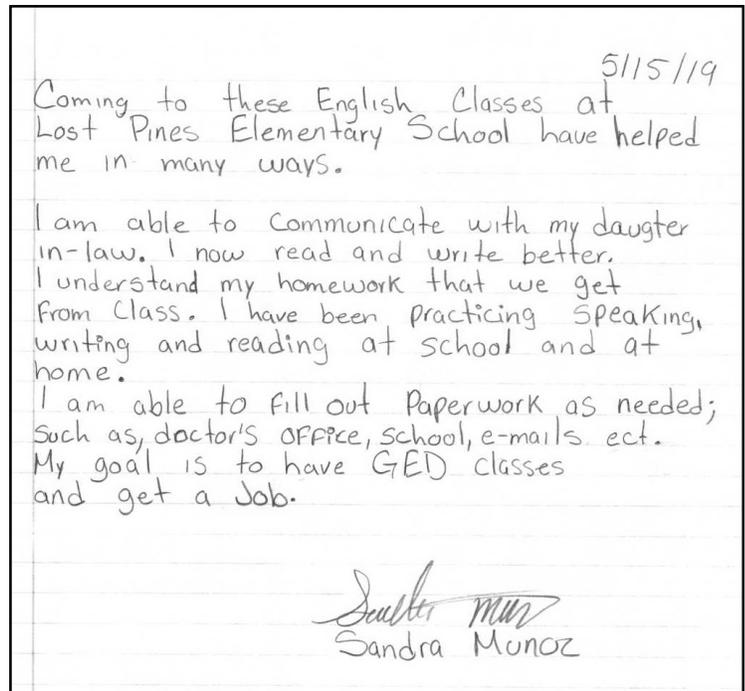
Dale Burke, the Adult Education Coordinator for Community Action in Bastrop, says people in the Bastrop community need this.

"This is all about improving lives and we're doing that," said Mercado.

"I taught at Gateway for 17 years, and I dealt with many students with behavior issues who had parents who didn't speak English," he said. "I could see how difficult it was for them to understand the behavior issues their child was having at school and to communicate effectively with the student's teachers and principals."

Burke helped start the ESL classes at Lost Pines Elementary and Red Rock Elementary two years ago. Initially, the classes started out slow, but as word spread, the classes quickly filled up.

"We began to see our classes grow and the adult students commit to learning, coming back the second year



An ESL adult student writes about the positive impact the classes have had on her life.

and advancing to a higher level in class, some going on to the Spanish GED class we have at Genesis along with a day time ESL class we have there. Some are taking part in integrated education and training classes Community Action has in bookkeeping and Clinical Nurse Assistants (C.N.A.) at our Workforce Solutions office in Bastrop,” explained Burke.

Gaining steady employment is the ultimate goal. “These classes help people get a better paying job. It gets them out of poverty and helps their children succeed in school. It allows people to move forward with their job or post-secondary education. Ultimately, we want them to improve their lives,” said Mudd.

Burke knows these classes have made a difference. He said he receives letters from students who say they are more confident and happier. They tell him how the classes helped them on their path to citizenship because they can now read, write, and speak English.

All of this makes Mercado smile. “It really has helped increase their self-esteem as they are able to communicate more fluently at work, school and help their children with homework. This is all about improving lives and we’re doing that.”

To learn more about GED/ESL classes, contact Norma Mercado at nmercado@bisdtx.org or call 512-772-7133.

EL Mentor Program

When students who are learning English have difficulty in class, trusted adults who serve in the EL Mentor program are there to help. EL Mentor stands for English Learner Mentor. The goal of the program is to guide struggling students with literacy development, to help students set goals and persevere to achieve them, and to empower them to be more successful.

“The point is to make sure they succeed in the classroom and on their state assessments,” said Jennifer Caldera, a third grade bilingual and dyslexia teacher at Red Rock Elementary School.

It’s Caldera’s eighth year teaching at Red Rock Elementary and her first year as a mentor in the EL Mentor program. She believes her personal experiences help her to connect to students.

“I understand [the students’] struggles. I was in their seat at one time,” she said. “Growing up I was an English language learner student, so I can relate to their fears of not understanding what’s happening in the classroom.”

Ada Beltran, a fourth grade bilingual special education teacher, adds, “I think the mentor program really helps



Jennifer Caldera and Ada Beltran, two of Bastrop ISD’s bilingual teachers review data for the EL Mentor Program.

the students feel more comfortable. I think it encourages them to speak up and say I need help.”

Beltran became a mentor three years ago when the program first started in Bastrop ISD. There are now more than 12 mentors who work with 150 students. Mentors are either volunteers or BISD employees who meet with students once every month. The program is offered in five of our six elementary schools. By bridging the language barrier when students are young, students make more progress academically and socially.

“Our job is to help students understand they have the ability to ask for help when they need it, to raise their hands when they have questions, to advocate for themselves,” said Caldera. “We want them to be more assertive, and that’s a difficult skill to teach.”

The EL Mentor Program is successful, in part, because mentors work closely with a student’s teachers and family, in addition to the student.

“We contact the student’s family so they can have support at home,” said Beltran. “By talking with the parents, we’re able to build a trusting relationship with the students too. They open up to us. Last year, I had a student who failed the reading portion of the STAAR test. After several mentoring sessions and working alongside his family we made progress. He re-took the test and passed. It was wonderful to see his reaction.”

Ultimately, students gain the ability to see their own potential. A strategy for helping students realize their potential is having them select one adjective to describe themselves.

“It’s a good way for them to have a different image of themselves and reframe their mindset. By having them describe themselves as kind, brave, nice, helpful, or generous, it helps them identify with that positive adjective and a better way of looking at themselves,” Caldera said.

Both Caldera and Beltran say their students look forward to the time they spend together. They come up to them in the halls and ask about meeting again.

“We only meet one lunch period a month. It’s not a lot of time, but it’s incredible to see the impact it has on students when they see someone is cheering them on. It makes a difference,” Beltran said with obvious pride.

For more information about the EL Mentor Program, contact Patricia Flores, Director of Bilingual/ESL, at pflores@bisdtx.org or 512-772-7113.

Jose Godinez, CCHS Class of ‘13



Jose Godinez was five years old when his family moved to Bastrop from Mexico. About to enter kindergarten, Jose could not yet speak or write in English. When he enrolled in Bastrop ISD, Jose was placed in the ESL program.

“At the early stage of learning the English language, it was really hard to take in the context and all the different tense forms,” said Jose. “I had a hard time adjusting my language to past, present, and future tenses.”

This experience is common among students whose first language is not English. This is why ESL education in Bastrop ISD is structured in tiers to meet students’ specific needs. Students in elementary and intermediate schools focus on a content-based program. This model integrates ESL instruction with subject matter content so that a student acquires all the necessary academic content to be successful at each grade level. The ESL “pull-out program” is for students in middle and high school. It requires ESL instruction in language arts and English classrooms only.

“The ESL courses were very important in laying the base for me, especially if you have parents who don’t understand the language and they can’t assist your homework. Thankfully I had fantastic teachers because at first, it was really hard to communicate with other students my age,” he said.

Jose immersed himself in ESL education and as a result, was able to move out of the program by the third grade.

“Being in the ESL program for four years was really helpful because it introduced me to the language,” and this is where he says he truly mastered English. “Once I wasn’t in ESL anymore, I was able to interact with English speaking students who I learned from. Just socializing with them completely changed the learning process. We learned from each other. I was able to have a much better understanding of the English language,” Jose said.

In 2013, Jose graduated from Cedar Creek High School. Not only was he part of the school’s first graduating class, but he was also a first-generation high school graduate.

“It was a very proud moment because my mom always pushed me to be a good student,” said Jose with a huge smile. “Bastrop ISD has an excellent ESL

program, and it helped me so much. I don’t think I would have been academically successful if I didn’t have these classes. I probably wouldn’t have finished high school if I didn’t have the opportunity to learn English with the proper support,” Jose said.

The classroom is where Jose found his calling as a long term substitute teacher at Cedar Creek Intermediate teaching math and ESL. Jose is able to identify with the students and fully understand their struggle.

“The students were having a hard time keeping up. They didn’t know any English, but since I had been in the ESL program, I was able to help the students a lot more. I knew exactly where they were coming from.”

Jose’s goal is to become a certified teacher in mathematics. He is attending the University of Texas of the Permian Basin in Odessa and is close to completing his college degree. His plan is to help students like himself.

“I’m glad that Bastrop ISD has an ESL program. I know I wouldn’t be where I am today if I hadn’t been a part of it. Thankfully I had fantastic teachers who were able to reach me, and that made all the difference,” he said.

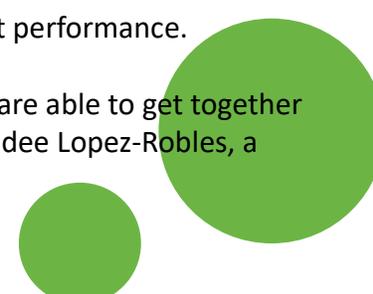
Sheltered Instruction Cohort

Bastrop ISD’s sheltered instruction (SI) cohort is best described as professional development on steroids. It is made up of 11 secondary teachers and ESL administrators like Alfredo Garcia, a secondary English language specialist.

“[The cohort model] is valuable because it provides teachers with the best practices that are then used to make content comprehensible to students,” explained Garcia. “We create a deeper understanding of how to develop English language proficiency to English learners.”

When the cohort meets once a month, their goal is to develop ways to increase student performance.

“As teachers, we learn basic strategies to help our students, but with the SI Cohort, we are able to get together and talk in-depth about those strategies and the best ways to implement them,” said Aidee Lopez-Robles, a





Aidee Lopez-Robles is part of the sheltered instruction cohort. It is made up of 11 secondary teachers and ESL administrators.

teacher at Colorado River Collegiate Academy. “We are being shown how to use the strategies we’ve learned.”

This was Lopez-Robles first year in the cohort. During this time she says she learned a lot and it has changed the way she teaches. “This is such an amazing opportunity for us. It’s fantastic to hear from other teachers about what strategies work best in their classroom, why it works. Can it be used in my classroom? Our goal is to make sure our ESL students are learning. If we can develop multiple ways to do that we are reaching more students,” she said.

One example Lopez-Robles learned from the cohort is how teaching cognitive verbs helps expand a student’s vocabulary.

“As a student’s vocabulary grows, so does their ability to read, write and speak English,” she said.

Garcia is happy with the results he’s seen. The progress students are making in Lopez-Robles’ class is the goal of the cohort--to have students successfully implement the strategies they’ve been taught and to increase their academic language and success.

To ensure the methods she learned in the cohort work for all her students, Lopez-Robles filmed herself teaching. While watching the playback of her lessons, she discovered something else.

“I learned so much about myself. I realized I talk too fast, especially in Spanish. I realized I moved along too fast. I had to go back to when I first started and slow down. Now, I’m communicating better with my students. They trust me more and feel more at home in my classroom. This has really helped build a stronger student-teacher connection,” she said.

In the 12 years she’s been teaching in Bastrop ISD, Lopez-Robles has seen more focus on the ESL program in recent years, and she applauds it.

“I’m glad Bastrop ISD has this cohort. Since I finished it, I’ve been telling other teachers about it, especially those who are struggling. These meetings give you an opportunity to learn from teachers who have different ideas or more experience. It’s been a real positive so far. The result is our ESL students are learning. We’re doing our job correctly!”

Summer Language Testing

Every Tuesday in June and until July 9th, Bastrop ISD is conducting summer language testing called pre-IPT, which stands for Idea Proficiency Test. This test is for incoming pre-k or kindergarten students whose native language is not English. The purpose is to assess their reading and writing skills to determine if they qualify for bilingual and/or ESL education. The tests take up to 30 minutes.

The district began summer language testing in June 2017 in an effort to help assist the elementary campuses with the placement process. This summer, more than 100 students are scheduled to test, and walk-ins are expected.

“The benefit of this summer assessment testing is that it allows campus leaders to make preparations for their students and decisions for classroom placements,” said Dr. Tina Lozano, the bilingual/ESL coordinator for Bastrop ISD.

Each year, school districts are required to give language testing for students who speak any language other than English. For newly enrolled students in pre-k or kindergarten, summer language testing is critical.

“Summer testing allows us to identify children who qualify for bilingual and/or ESL education. If we did not conduct summer testing, this would cause a delay for families and children waiting to see if they

“Summer testing is really helpful as it shows the school how they need to prepare for a new student’s education,” said Nataly Garcia, parent of three BPSD students.



Alison Garcia is one of many students who were tested over the summer in order to prepare for the upcoming school year. Her two older siblings have also taken part in summer testing to get a jump on the school year.

qualify once the school year started. Children qualify for pre-k under different measures, and being identified as an English learner is one criteria for eligibility,” Lozano said.

Nataly Garcia is enrolling her 3-year-old daughter Alison in pre-k at Lost Pines Elementary. Spanish is Alison’s native language. Her mom says she speaks English but needs more help, which is why she is having her daughter tested.

“Summer testing is really helpful as it shows the school how they need to prepare for a new student’s education,” said Garcia. “Alison is my third child entering school at Bastrop ISD. My other two children are in bilingual education, and it has helped them so much. They are learning two languages, which is a skill they need to have. They are also able to communicate with more people in the world.”

The district purchases all the test materials, and trained paraprofessionals help give the language test.



Austin television station Univision 62 visited Cedar Creek Elementary to highlight bilingual education.

Bilingual Education in the Early Grades

On May 3rd, the Austin television station Univision 62 highlighted the bilingual program at Cedar Creek Elementary. Anchors Leslie Montoya and Edwin Guzmán reported live from inside the elementary school all morning long. They interviewed students about Ozbots and other cutting edge technology the school has. The news station also reported on breakfast in the classroom and its success in helping students who may be food insecure.

Guzmán and Montoya also spoke with bilingual kindergarten teacher Ivonne Torres, who chatted live

on the air about the importance of starting bilingual education at an early age. She did a terrific job talking about Cedar Creek Elementary and bilingual/ESL education. Univision 62 did six live reports from CCE about the great things happening at the school and in Bastrop ISD. That was echoed by parent Carlos Calvillo, whose daughter, Karla is a student at CCE. Mr. Calvillo spoke about how instrumental the ESL program has been for his daughter.

Montoya also interviewed Superintendent Barry Edwards and Cedar Creek Elementary Principal Dr. Dolores Godinez. It was a fantastic morning that really put a positive spotlight on our staff and the bilingual/ESL program.



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