

Bilingual classes stress English

Hispanic dropout rate still high

United Press International
Dropout rates for children of Hispanic descent are as high as 85 percent in some urban school systems. Is bilingual education the answer?

The Reagan administration has revoked as "unworkable and incredibly costly" regulations requiring public schools to teach non-English speaking students in their native languages.

The effect has been to return the bilingual education issue largely to the local school board. And at least 12 states presently offer English-Spanish programs, although there appears to be a trend toward remedial teaching leading to the learning of English rather than teaching strictly in Spanish.

Such pull-backs from previous programs have met with resistance from Hispanic community leaders.

Given impetus under the Carter Administration, bilingual education was seen as a means to keep more Hispanics in school longer.

Those politically opposed hold that U.S. taxpayers shouldn't be saddled with the burden of educating the chil-

dren of illegal aliens, who make up a large portion of the Hispanic school population.

Opponents also see in the 2.2 percent annual population increase of U.S. Latins the eventual danger of a Quebec-style separatism fostered in part by our own school systems.

As mandated by a 1974 Supreme Court decision, the general objective of bilingual education has been to allow the student to pursue basic subjects in his native language while learning English. The now-revoked Carter regulations would have imposed such instruction through grade eight in certain districts.

Colorado is typical of states offering English-Spanish programs. Prior to revocation of the Carter regulations, if 50 or more students did not speak English, schools had to submit to the state board of education a plan for bilingual education. Now, optional bilingual education is mainly a tutorial program for children who have difficulty with English. The purpose is strictly to teach English, whereas the old program had cultural goals.

California has required state-wide bilingual programs since 1974, but the trend is to offer fewer Spanish-only classes, with the idea of speeding the transition to all-English language instruction in regular classes.

About 50 percent of the children in Los Angeles city schools are Hispanics, yet only 2,000 of 25,710 teachers were from Hispanic backgrounds in 1980-81. The last district-wide survey, made in 1977, showed the dropout rate was 68 percent.

Sarah Ortiz, an official of the Los Angeles bilingual program, said: "Bilingual education is mandatory so students can benefit from instruction that is more comprehensible. In the long run, this will affect the dropout rate of children with English as their second language because the child will stay in school much longer. Many chil-

dren who didn't speak English up to the par of their peers were not getting the benefits they should."

"I believe there have been remarkable behavioral differences. Kids must like what's going on, they have an increased pride in school, and there is less vandalism."

In New Mexico, which came into the Union with Spanish as a second official language, the 1912 constitution requires education in both English and Spanish.

In Arizona, bilingual education is permitted rather than required. Courses are taught in "English as a second language," according to Robert Sosa of the state education department. Local school boards decide for themselves how to spend block grants from the state legislature. An estimated \$2 million state-

wide is spent on bilingual education.

In Texas, where 21 percent of the population is Mexican American, a bitter court case has been waged over bilingual education. U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice, as a junct to an order consolidating school districts in a desegregation case, ordered the state to provide bilingual education. Spanish-speaking children grades kindergarten to 12.

Texas appealed Justice's ruling, saying it would cost an estimated \$120 million annually to implement 12 years of bilingual education. A panel of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Justice's ruling July 1982.

The Texas Legislature approved a bill requiring bilingual education through the third grade.

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New cars to have talking computers

United Press International
REED CITY, Mich. — After years of taking verbal abuse, cars are beginning to talk back.

They're not saying much right now — just simple patter, like asking drivers to fasten seat belts or turn off the lights.

Soon, however, they'll be more sophisticated, identifying engine problems and giving specific instructions for repair.

One company banking on talking cars — and appliances — is the Nartron Corp. President Norman Rautiola predicts every big ticket item will have a voice within five years.

Microwave ovens will announce when dinner is done. Toasters will warn people not to stick knives or forks inside to pull out a stuck English muffin.

But that's in the future. Right now, Rautiola's energies are directed toward making Nartron's voice computers a success on certain General Motors Corp. cars to be introduced next year.

Some Japanese models already are equipped with simple voice computers to convey messages to the driver. Ford also is expected to introduce a voice on Thunderbirds this fall.

This spring, it demonstrated a vehicle that not only spoke to the driver but had triggered windshield wipers triggered voice command.

The Nartron computer will tell the driver something wrong and tell him what to do about it, Rautiola said. For example, the computer will warn that the car is overheating and perhaps suggest the driver turn off the air conditioner.

He tells of the time the pressure light went on when his wife was driving.

A voice would have told her to pull off the road and stop the engine in the case of low oil pressure.

With a name like Nartron, one might expect the voice computers to issue cold, metallic sounding instructions. Not so.

Rautiola, a 50-year-old engineer with a law degree and background in patent law, says his engineers have developed a voice reproduction system that "has human quality and flowing speech." "We could actually imitate a voice that sounds like Bob Parton or Burt Reynolds," he said.

Nartron can now produce a voice computer that can issue about a dozen messages for less than \$50. If produced in millions, the cost could be cut in half.

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