Dual language program working, board told
Success of junior high school program evident in test scores

By Lyle R. Rolfe

The Dual Language Program in Oswego School District's junior high schools has been a success, Rafael Segarra, director of ELL (English Language Learning) and dual language, told school district board members last week.

Segarra said the program has been an advanced bilingual educational model program designed to address the needs of at-risk native Spanish speakers.

The program is also designed to allow native English speakers the opportunity to become bilingual, biliterate and bicultural, he said.

"Rather than downplaying the native Spanish speakers native language and only introducing English (ELL) program, Dual Language aims to maintain the child's Spanish language while making him proficient in English as well," he said.

Segarra said 228 students were enrolled in the program for the 2009-10 school year and about half were native Spanish speakers and half native English speakers.

The 280 students enrolled for 2010-11, are evenly divided between native Spanish and English speakers.

Segarra said the dual language program will provide students with a better opportunity to acquire a third language in high school because of the strong foundation of their second language.

Students will reach high school with an opportunity to participate in more honors and Advanced Placement courses, he noted.

In addition, almost all students with the bilingual background who took the Spanish Advanced Placement test in their sophomore year, scored high enough to earn AP credit he said.

Research shows there are benefits for students who have taken dual language classes during their secondary years, Segarra said.

Both Spanish and English speakers typically achieve native or near-native fluency in their new language.

He said on standardized academic tests, both groups outperform their counterparts, who have been educated in monolingual classrooms by sixth grade. Segarra added that students perform better on tasks requiring divergent thinking, pattern recognition and problem solving.

Segarra said recent tests show that both Hispanic and non-Hispanic students in the dual programs nationwide continue to become more proficient at reading and math the longer they are in the program.

By sixth grade, Hispanic students especially outperform other Hispanic students who do not have the benefit of the two language program. In fact, 83.3 percent of the dual program sixth grade Hispanic students read at proficiency in the spring 2008 Idaho Standard Achievement Tests compared to the state average of 39.4 percent for the sixth grade Hispanic students, he noted.

Segarra said MAP (measures of academic progress) scores showed that Oswego district students in third and fourth grade scored as much as 25 points above the national norm in math and reading when tested in the fall of 2009 and spring of 2010.

Starting next fall, the dual language program for kindergarten through fifth grade will be housed at Hunt Club Elementary School in Oswego.

Traugher Junior High will house the sixth grade dual language students starting next fall, with the seventh grades being added in the fall of 2012 and the eighth grade being added in the fall of 2013.

The total number of dual language classes in junior high will start at two next fall, be increased to six in 2012 and to 10 in 2013, Segarra said.

Less than one full-time teacher will have to be added to each of the junior high grades over the next three years, he said, noting that the cost for teachers and materials will be paid with state and federal grants.

"I'm really interested in seeing what happens seven years from now when these kids start graduating from high school and move into college and the workforce," board member Steve Wolf said.

Segarra said some school districts have been doing this so long they have students in their junior years of college, while some districts are adding other languages to the program.