Bilingual ed loses favor with some educators

By Scott S. Greenberger

Nobody had ever heard of "bilingual education" when 6-year-old Wilfredo Laboy walked through the doors of P.S. 24 in Brooklyn in 1957, speaking only Spanish.

When he struggled there, the Puerto Rican native was labeled "language delayed" and stuck in a basement boiler room with troubled children. A dedicated teacher saved Laboy and inspired him to become an educator — one who was in the vanguard of the bilingual education movement of the early 1970s.

Now, Laboy is the chief of the Lawrence school district, home to the state's third largest percentage of students whose native language is not English. But Laboy has become so disillusioned with the bilingual programs he once championed that he is putting an end to traditional bilingual education for Lawrence's youngest students.

Last week, as Silicon Valley millionaire Ron Unz swept into Massachusetts vowing to destroy the state's first-in-the-nation bilingual education law and replace it with a transitional year of English "immersion," defenders of the Commonwealth's law braced for a challenge from outside the state.
Bilingual ed loses favor with educators

**Bucking tradition**

Massachusetts' first-in-the-nation bilingual education law has come under attack before, but a new campaign to scrap it, led by California millionaire Robert Un, could be its toughest test. And unlike previous assaults, this time many people on the front lines have already moved away from the traditional bilingual approach, including the four school districts with the state's largest percentages of bilingual students.

**Chelsea 28%**
The high school's Cuban-born principal is so disgusted with the traditional approach that he has signed on to lead Un's ballot push to scrap it. (The superintendent continues to support bilingual education.)

**Holyoke 26%**
The district hosted a California superintendent who is an end to the traditional approach for the youngest students and is launching a K-2 English immersion program that is close to what Un wants.

**Lawrence 25%**
The Puerto Rican superintendent is determined to do away with the bilingual approach for the youngest students and is launching a K-2 English immersion program that is close to what Un wants.

**Cambridge 20%**
The only bilingual education district that the district now offers its youngest Spanish-speaking students is an innovative "two-way" immersion method.

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But even as Un, and his cash, heat up the debate, faith in the older way of teaching non-English speakers in their native languages seems to be crumbling where it matters most:

- On the front lines.
- In Bay State districts with the highest percentages of non-English speakers, leading educators - some of them Hispanic - have already switched sides. Well ahead of November 2002, when Unz hopes to have a referendum on the ballot, these educators have begun to move away from the "transitional bilingual education" approach that has been law for 30 years.

That marks a key change from previous assaults on the state's bilingual law, when minority leaders and officials in heavily minority school districts closed ranks to beat back the challenge.

Laboy said it has come down to theory vs. reality, and reality is winning. "What we know from the evidence is that even though there are pockets of success, children in bilingual education fall further and further behind," Laboy said. "That painful experience has moved me to say that after 29 years, we have to change it."

This fall, Laboy is launching a K-2 immersion program that is close to what Unz wants. Holyoke has hosted a California superintendent who is a prominent convert to Unz's approach, and it will co-criticize a pilot immersion program, begun last year, for another year. The only bilingual education Cambridge now offers its youngest Spanish-speaking students is an innovative two-way immersion program.

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**Chelsea isn't the traditional method, but the way it has - or hasn't - been implemented.**

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*Wilfredo Laboy, chief of the Lawrence school district*

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**Others say the problem in Lawrence isn't the traditional method, but the way it has - or hasn't - been implemented.**

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- The presence of more Hispanics like Tamayo and Laboy in influential posts is an important part of the changed landscape of the state's bilingual debate, said Charles Glenn, a Boston University education professor who from 1970 to 1991 was head of urban education and civil rights at the state Department of Education. Another change, he said, is that because of education reform, it's no longer possible to hide the lack of achievement. "It's nonsense," he's been told, "that students whose first language is not English." Glenn, who argues that bilingual education decisions should be left to local districts, said the closer scrutiny is overdue.

- "I used to ask my colleagues in bilingual education to put in place some way of knowing whether kids were achieving," he said. "I encountered resistance to that. They said it would hurt the kids' self-esteem." While arguing that the current approach doesn't work, Laboy said he doesn't want to duplicate his boiler room experience. While nearly all the instruction in the immersion classrooms he is introducing will be in English, a Spanish-speaking aide will be in the room to help students who are struggling, he says.

That approach worked well in Holyoke, which had a kindergarten immersion class last year. This coming year, it will have kindergarten and first-grade classes.

"We felt it was a big success. The children progressed a lot and they were all reading by the end of the year," said Kathleen Harvey, one of the two teachers last year. "My partner did have a background in Spanish, but it really wasn't needed, though she did speak to the parents sometimes in Spanish."

But Laboy's plan has run into stiff opposition. The superintendent says parents will be allowed to opt out of the new program, but Multicultural Education, Training and Advocacy, a pro-bilingual group based in Somerville, has questioned its legality. Others say the problem in Lawrence isn't the traditional method, but the way it has - or hasn't - been implemented.

"There's no one," said Todd P. "I've met here who had the magnitude of knowledge that would have been necessary for a history or future of progress and success," said Graciela Trilla, who was assistant principal at Lawrence's Arlington school last year. Trilla, who is a doctoral candidate at Boston University studying bilingual education, says she was fired because of her views.

Because only about a third of Lawrence students who would benefit from bilingual programs are enrolled in them, Trilla said, for practical purposes immersion is already being tried. And given Lawrence's low test scores, it isn't going well.

The pervasive failure you see in Lawrence is the result of immersion," Trilla says.

Although similar moves to end bilingual education that Unz bankrolled in California and Arizona were overwhelmingly approved by voters, he is not assured of success here, even with some converts on the front lines. Defenders of Massachusetts' landmark law have vowed to wage an aggressive battle.

And even some people who acknowledge the current law's failings worry that Unz's initiative would be overly prescriptive, grounding programs like Cambridge's two-way immersion approach (an argument Unz rejects).

In the popular "Amigos" program, native Spanish speakers and native English speakers are mixed in the same classrooms, and both groups learn both languages.

A Middle Eastern delegation once visited the 16-year-old Cambridge program seeking ideas on a "peace school" for Israeli and Arab students.

"My philosophy in this district is that we need a variety of programs to meet the needs of the variety of students that we have, determined on the basis of age, academic background, and what they bring," said Elena Steward, Cambridge's chief of the Lawrence school district.

Still, many observers are predicting Unz's referendum push will succeed here. "It'll pass," said Glenn, the former state education official.

One thing is certain: After decades of business-as-usual, bilingual programs in the Commonwealth are on everybody's radar screen.

"This is not about saying, "Mexicans, you're from Puerto Rico, we can't celebrate anything from Puerto Rico because we're monocultural,"" Laboy said.

"We know diversity is important. But we also have a responsibility to make sure every child has a fair and equitable chance at succeeding every day at the schoolhouse."
Seeking the right course on bilingual education

Despite criticism, Lawrence schools try a different approach

By Anand Vaishnav
GLOBE STAFF

AWRENCE — In Room 105 of the Gerard A. Guinmette School yesterday, Angel Ruiz, a tutee-headed 6-year-old newly arrived from the Dominican Republic, recited his numbers. He skipped 14, stumbled over 16, and with gentle prompting in English from teacher Fred Confalone, made it to 20.

A typical scene for day one of Grade 1, but Angel's halting, slightly accented counting in English — instead of in Spanish — is the result of a new district policy that has rearranged the sights, sounds, and feel of bilingual education in this heavily Latino school system. The new direction is more English and less of a student's native tongue.

"This is the way to go," said Confalone, a bilingual teacher for 18 years. "I see results. Children are excited to learn English. They're anxious to speak it and read it and write it. I see a love of learning to read in English — as long as it's done in a nurturing, safe, risk-taking environment where they know they're not going to be teased."

Lawrence's new policy of "structured immersion" in grades K-2 is being praised and picked apart by advocates on both sides of the emotionally charged debate over how best to educate children who don't speak English. As the school year kicks off, and with a November ballot initiative to replace bilingual classes with English immersion inclu
New course on bilingual education

Bilingual programs

A look at different bilingual education programs in Massachusetts public schools:

- Transitional bilingual education: Practiced in most school systems. Based on the state’s 1971 bilingual education law, “TBE” lets students take most classes in their native tongue for up to three years. They start with most classroom lessons in their native language and gradually get more English as they progress. The law caps time in these classes at three years, though many stay longer.

- Two-way bilingual education: These programs combine native Spanish speakers and native English speakers who are just learning to read and write. They learn both languages at the same time, becoming truly “bilingual.” Popular two-way programs exist in Boston, Cambridge, Framingham, and Somerville.

- Immersion: These classes give students almost nothing but English, with native languages being spoken for token uses, such as clarification.

- Structured immersion: These classes resemble immersion but allow 10-20 percent of instruction in their spoken language, for clarification, translation, or assistance. Some structured immersion classes also have daily blocks of time spent in the children’s native tongue.

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/TOM LAIDERS
Erika Rivera (left) was attentive on her first day in Fred Confalone’s first-grade English immersion class in Lawrence.

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ing closer, Massachusetts school districts are grappling with newfound pressure to produce better results for bilingual students — or mark this school year the last for bilingual education as it exists.

“The goal of all good bilingual education programs is to develop good English,” said Lawrence Superintendent of Schools Wilfredo T. Laboy. “The question is, did we get them there?”

One of the hurdles to answering that question statewide is a lack of data to prove which of the many variations of bilingual programs works best. MCAS sheds little light because bilingual education students are exempt from the English portion if they’ve been here less than three years. The state Department of Education does not measure whether a link exists between the time spent in bilingual education and English proficiency. Such information is left to individual school districts, with only a handful, such as Framingham and Lawrence, gauging the progress of limited-English students after they exit bilingual education.

That data void has left both sides use the same statistics to make opposite points: In California — the first state in the nation where the immersion initiative passed — bilingual opponents declared victory in rising test scores on the state’s test. But proponents said that the gap between limited-English students and regular-education students widened. The measure also passed in Arizona, but too recently for concrete testing data. Both efforts to the one in Massachusetts — were spearheaded by Silicon Valley millionaire Ron Unz.

The Bay State, in 1971, was the first in the nation to implement bilingual education to ease immigrant students into English by teaching subjects in their native tongues for up to three years. But over the years, the definition of bilingual education has broadened to encompass such popular efforts as two-way programs in which native English speakers and native Spanish speakers learn both languages simultaneously.

The lack of state oversight and penchant for local control has meant increasing inconsistency statewide. It led to Unz’s ballot challenge and to recent new reform taking affect this fall requir-

idea, but on a trial basis,” said Isabel Melendez, a former mayoral candidate in Lawrence. “If it works better, then we continue.”

But as with most of the fiery debate about bilingual education, and driven by the desire to find a solution, Lawrence’s new approach has Laboy and his staff voicing to keep it, no matter what.

“We’ll go to court,” Guilmette Principal Alberto Molina said. “If it’s something that helps kids learn better, what’s wrong with that?”

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/TOM LAIDERS
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Scores rise as Calif. schools immerse

Gains follow halt to bilingual ed

By Lynda Gorov
GLOBE STAFF

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — Today we're learning about the "short I" sound, Mrs. Schwyzer tells her second-graders in their second week of classes.

Pig. Dip. Slip. Tim hid the stick.
The words go up on the blackboard. Hands go up in the air. Children with names like Marina, Blanca, and Umberto vie to spell the words.

Two years ago, most of Carol Schwyzer's pupils at Harding Elementary spoke no English. Most came to kindergarten from Spanish-only homes. But unlike past generations, the youngsters were not eased into a second language. They were immersed in it, forced to grab onto English or sink among all the unfamiliar words.

"I'm sorry to see the children lose literacy in Spanish, but I'm happy to see them gain confidence in English," said Schwyzer, who taught bilingual education before it was voted down by ballot initiative, Proposition 227, in June 1998. "They need it, and they know it, and they're proud of themselves."

As Massachusetts considers a similar law, the experience of California is being watched closely. Many educators there had forecast catastrophe with the dismantling of bilingual education. That hasn't happened. The 1 million or so public school pupils classified as "limited English speakers" have shown respectable, sometimes striking, gains on standardized tests.

How much of the improvement is attributable to English immersion is less easily charted. Advocates and opponents alike say that other factors — from state-mandated reductions in class size to an emphasis on language arts — have helped, too. On its own, they agree, immersion might have had a less impressive launch.

As Harding principal Marlyn BILINGUAL, Page A4
As schools immerse, scores rising

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Nicolas put it, "Ending bilingual is just one of the tools; I couldn't say it's the most important."

Still, advocates of the immersion method say its role cannot be denied. Pupils in the program have shown stronger gains in both reading and math than have their nonimmersion classmates. For example, on the 2001 Stanford 9, which tests relatively basic skills, second-grade immersion pupils raised their average scores by 3 percentile points, an improvement twice as large as pupils considered fluent in English.

"It's not proof, but it's strong circumstantial evidence leading to the level of presumption that immersion makes a difference," said Ron Unz, who led the movement opposing bilingual education in California, helped Arizona rid itself of the classes, and is working to do the same in Massachusetts.

Those school districts that were exempt from Prop. 227 showed minimal gains. Those that most strictly complied showed gigantic gains.

Opponents of immersion argue that the gains are statistically insignificant. They also say that immersion pupils will not keep pace with fluent English speakers over the long term. According to them, the test score gains were inevitable, given how low they had been and the extra attention pupils now receive. With a shortage of bilingual teachers, they say, most limited-English speakers were already in ad hoc immersion classes.

No one disputes that children immersed in English, particularly in the primary grades, are now immersed in a stronger program overall. Among the changes cited by both sides of the debate: a return to a phonetics-based reading program, new materials to guide teachers through lesson plans, and an emphasis on preparing pupils for the standardized tests.

"Bilingual education is just a scapegoat for schools failing on other fronts," said Jill Kemper Mora, an associate professor of teacher education who specializes in English-language development at San Diego State University. "If knowledge of language were the only issue here, why are black students not achieving? . . .

"What we have now are all sorts of rewards and punishments for scores to go up," she added. "So the scores have naturally gone up for all students."

In the Santa Barbara School District, which made the controversial decision to end bilingual education on its own a year before California, math and English scores have steadily improved in almost every grade.

Harding has been no exception. About 60 percent of its 530 kindergarten through sixth-graders are considered English-language learners. Just 10 percent of so of its pupils are non-Hispanic whites. Most come from poorer families.

"I wasn't a big supporter of bilingual education, because I didn't see the growth kids were supposed to have," said Nicolas, the principal. "Now our scores are as high as the Anglo schools in the district."

Maria Calderon, a mother of three Harding pupils who speaks no English, said she appreciates the efforts to make her children fluent. But she resents her inability to help them with their homework and is concerned that they will not be able to read the simplest signs in Spanish if they ever visit her native Mexico.

"Bilingual is better, because they learn both languages and they learn better," Calderon said. "It's necessary these days to speak Spanish and English. I want my children to know both well."

Still, Calderon did not apply for a waiver to keep her children in bilingual classes. Each year, fewer parents have applied statewide, according to educators. In the Oceanside School District, for instance, about 150 waivers were requested the first year. This year, none were, said Superintendent Ken Noonan.

Noonan, who campaigned against Proposition 227, is a convert to immersion. His pupils have improved their performance on the Stanford 9 test by double or more. Even the scores of those students redesignated English-proficient — meaning that they had left immersion classes for the mainstream — continued to rise, although at a slower rate.

Test scores "hadn't moved out of the basement for many years, then all of a sudden there was a 100 percent gain," Noonan said. "We thought it could be a fluke. But we saw [improvement] again and again. . . . Anyone who tells me that's not significant is spouting foolishness."

Still, the numbers are far from good enough, educators say. Even with all the changes, no more than half of California's pupils are reading at or above the 50th percentile in any grade but second. At Harding, whose pupils have been taught exclusively in English for an additional year, the numbers are better. Seven of 10 grades are scored at or above the 50th percentile; eight grades outperformed the state as a whole.

Those improvements do not impress Francisca Sanchez, president of the California Association of Bilingual Educators. Instead, she credited the additional emphasis on reading among all students and wondered whether the underlying program was powerful enough to maintain continued gains. She also called the comparisons made by immersion supporters misleading.

"When Ron Unz talks about scores going up, he's not comparing the same group of students," Sanchez said. "They're looking at how this year's second-graders did compared with last year: The question is: How are last year's second-graders doing, now that they're in third grade?"

Immersion advocates expect similar criticisms to be raised in Massachusetts, where they are aiming for a November 2002 ballot initiative. But they argue that the evidence is incontrovertible, even as practitioners such as Nicolas stress the necessity of preschool and after-school tutoring programs.

At Harding, where school forms are still available in Spanish, teachers sometimes still slip into the language when pupils are confused. But Kendall Lyons said his sixth-graders don't need him to translate anymore, giving him more time to concentrate on the day's lessons. All of the birthday cards taped to Nicolas's door are in English, almost all of them grammatically correct.
Ambivalent in any language
Subject of landmark bilingual case uncertain of role

By Garance Burke
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PACIFICA, Calif. — At times, the fog covers this seaside town entirely, filling its dilapidated motels and country club lawns with clouds of wet air. It is the kind of place where someone who wanted to could go unnoticed for years, living in a cottage pegged to the cypress-covered cliffs. For Kinmon “Kinney” Lau, who as a first-grader became a national symbol for bilingual education in the 1970s, Pacifica has been a refuge from public attention for several years.

The Lau family moved from Hong Kong to San Francisco when Kinney was 5. A year later, his difficulties learning English took on a national significance when he and his mother became the lead plaintiffs in Lau v. Nichols, a landmark class-action suit brought against the San Francisco Unified School District for its failure to provide appropriate language instruction to 2,850 children who spoke only Cantonese.

For the first time in 17 years, Lau agreed to be interviewed, as Massachusetts prepares to vote on bilingual education, a move California made four years ago.

In 1974, when Kinney was 10, the US Supreme Court ruled that bilingual education was a civil rights issue, prompting school districts across the country to offer native language instruction to immigrant children, and creating an issue that has been debated ever since.

But even as some parents protest the Boston School Committee’s decision to repeal a bilingual education policy that, as in many districts across the country, is called the Lau plan, the Chinese-American man whose learning difficulties

Students in the early 1970s outside a Chinese-language school where Kinney Lau took after-school classes to read and write Cantonese. The school is located in San Francisco’s Chinatown.
Bilingual education plaintiff uncertain about his impact

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sparked a nationwide education movement leading a deliberate quiet life - primarily in English.

As an adult, Lau is a reluctant poster child for bilingual education, perhaps because he never benefited from it. By the time dual-language instruction was introduced, he was too old to be placed in any of the programs.

"If you grew up here and were born here and you speak English at home, you have an advantage, no doubt about it," Lau said. "It's just that I adapt pretty well if you throw me into the fire. I'm pretty flexible, but maybe other kids don't do as well. If you threw them in the classroom and tell them to sink or swim, there's a much bigger probability that they're going to sink."

Lau came to be fully acculturated sometime after his family left Chinatown, when he was in junior high school. Today, he speaks flawless, accentless English, but can no longer read or write Chinese, the only language his parents speak fluently. Over the years, he changed his name from Kinney the Anglicized spelling, Kenny, and finally to Ken. At 38, Lau is unmarried and has perished at a Bay-area consulting firm doing database and software work for Fortune 500 companies. He is also in no hurry to claim his role in history.

"I don't know if bilingual education is better - I'm still trying to work it out. I had trouble with math and science in school, but I would find ways to get the job done," he said. "Today I can't read a Chinese newspaper, and I sort of wish I had studied more so I could work in a foreign country like Hong Kong or something, where strong Chinese skills are necessary."

While there were periods when he did not understand what was on the blackboard, Lau says he found ways to translate his lessons into Chinese. He struggled with English through high school, but finally mastered the language at San Francisco City College, where he majored in computer programming, graduating in 1984.

Lau views the case that bears his name from several perspectives.

"My mother told me that having equal opportunity was important, but I think this movement was brought on by other groups and they just needed a face, and that's where we came in. I don't know how many people the whole thing has helped. If I knew, I would think it was great, and that we stood for something, that we did something to help people," he said.

Guidelines established under the Lau ruling have set federal policy and influenced school districts from Boston to San Francisco. For 23 years, the Boston schools abided by the Voluntary Lau Compliance Plan, a 100-page document that outlines the school system's bilingual education policies, ranging from class sizes to paid advocates. Accepting the recommendation of Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant, the School Committee recently dismantled the plan on the grounds it was outdated. Some parents of bilingual students fear the change could pave the way for the school system to do away with bilingual education.

For Edward Steinman, the lawyer who argued the case, bilingual education remains a civil rights issue. After meeting dozens of children in classroom situations similar to the young Lau's, Steinman, then working in a public interest law clinic, decided for strategic reasons to wage his legal war from Chinatown.

"Why isn't the case called Lopez instead of Lau?" Steinman asked, speaking from his Victorian home high in the San Francisco hills. "I knew it was going to be an appellate court issue - I didn't know it would get me to the Supreme Court - but I thought there would be fewer biases against Asian-Americans than Latinos."

Steinman says he chose Lau to be the lead plaintiff because he was told that the boy was US-born, and that his mother, Kam Wai Lau, was a young widow. Steinman, who does not speak Chinese, communicated with the Lau's through an interpreter, a process that meant that some key facts possibly got lost in translation.

Lau now wonders how these essential details could have been missed: He was born in Hong Kong, and he and his mother moved to San Francisco in 1968, later to be joined by his father, who today is a retired carpenter living in San Francisco.

"Whoever told the story wanted to tell it in their way, is my feeling," he says three decades later. "I don't remember much about it other than taking a trip to New Orleans a few years later - they invited us for a dinner, and they presented us with a plaque. I remember going up to the stage and saying thanks you."

The Laus eventually broke with Steinman after a series of misunderstandings, but the case galvanized teachers in Chinatown, including Lau's first-grade teacher, Lucinda Lee Katz, who has since received awards from the American Immigration Law Foundation for her work on bilingual education.

In 1970, just 1,050 of San Francisco's Chinese-speaking students received language assistance to learn English, most of which consisted of tutoring work done by volunteers. Today, nearly 25,000 Chinese-speaking children are enrolled in some kind of bilingual program, and students learning English as a foreign language now make up 30 percent of all students enrolled in San Francisco public schools.

The total number of bilingual education students in San Francisco is roughly double the number of such students in Boston, where 9,000 bilingual students include Haitians, Cape Verdians, Chinese, Somalis, Vietnamese, Portuguese, and Latinos. In November, those students could face major adjustments to their curriculum if voters approve a ballot initiative funded by California millionaire Ron Unz that would make one-year immersion courses in English the standard teaching method for students with limited English proficiency.

In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 227, a similar measure that Unz also funded. School districts have since found ways to continue providing bilingual classes, but only parents can request a waiver to remove their children from English-immersion classes. According to the California Association for Bilingual Education, 1 million students have stayed in English Immersion classes longer than 12 months.

Yet from the vantagepoint of Lau's foggy perch in Pacifica, public debates about immigration and cultural diversity appear removed from his concept of bilingual education. He is clearly proud of his accomplishments and his ability to navigate between corporate America and his Chinese-speaking family.

"The thing about America is that if you're not native Indian, then you're an immigrant by default," he said. "People risk so much to come here... and I think they should be able to retain their language and their culture."
Bilingual education facing major test

By Anand Vaishnav
GLOBE STAFF

For 18 gap-toothed, fidgety first-graders, the journey to English began yesterday in a Jamaica Plain classroom headed by bilingual teacher Claudia Jaramillo. Calling some of them mi amor — “my love” — the Louis Agassiz Elementary School teacher mostly spoke Spanish as she set her students to work.

Gradually, Jaramillo will introduce more English. Making her students fluent enough to survive in non-bilingual classes will take at least three years — and probably more, she said.

But that time frame, under which most bilingual teachers work, has prompted critics to charge that bilingual education classes have become destinations, instead of vehicles to move students into English classes. That’s the driving force behind Silicon Valley millionaire Ron Unz’s attempt to scrap the state’s 30-year-old bilingual education law through a ballot initiative. If it succeeds, as he did in Arizona and California, students like Jaramillo’s will have just one year of English immersion before being placed into all-English classes.

First-grader Shelyn Gonzalez was welcomed by instructor Claudia Jaramillo yesterday.

As the school year kicks off, the question of how quickly students can learn English promises to be fiercely debated. Bilingual advocates have begun mobilizing, vowing to defeat Unz’s campaign.

The ballot initiative cleared a hurdle yesterday when state Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly certified it. Unz has until Dec. 5 to gather 57,100 signatures to place the initiative on the November 2002 ballot.

Yesterday, as Boston’s 130 schools officially opened for business, a visit to several bilingual classrooms underscored the complexity of teaching non-English speakers, and why some advocates are seeking a program overhaul.

In Boston, as in many districts, bilingual education varies from school to school — and sometimes classroom to classroom — as educators tailor their program to their own philosophies. Unz’s effort aims to set stricter limits on an area of teaching that has long operated with mixed results.

About 17 percent of Boston’s 83,300 students are enrolled in bilingual education, compared with 4 percent statewide, figures show.

The Commonwealth’s bilingual-education law lets students take classes in their native tongues for up to three years, although many students stay longer, allowed to do so by principals who fear the students will fall behind in all-English settings.

At the Agassiz, a 750-student school, students used to be in bilingual programs for five or six years, Principal Alfredo Nunez said. That changed several years ago when the school introduced a strong literacy program. Now, the average stay in bilingual education is four years, he said.

Nunez, a veteran Boston principal, is aware of the three-year cap on bilingual education. But law and research are two different things, he said, arguing that studies show that it can take up to six years for students to be competent in grade-level English.

“Most students in our school can speak English and converse in English and do it in the school yard with native English-speakers,” said Nunez, who vigorously opposes Unz’s initiative. “But that’s one thing. Another thing is being able to deal with content in English and compete academically with a person in English. That takes much longer.”

Fourth-grade teacher Maria Jaramillo, Claudia’s sister, spoke mostly Spanish to her class on the school’s first day, and her 21 students wrote essays in the language as well. Most have been in bilingual classes since they started at the Agassiz, and they’ll take MCAS in English this spring.

Maria Jaramillo said she will boost the amount of English as the year progresses. She is confident that by the end of fourth grade, her students will transfer into regular education. “Even though the law says three years, I’m basing my decisions on their own needs,” she said.

Other educators, while agreeing that each student must be analyzed individually, say that bilingual education must return to what it first was — a transition. At the Donald McKay School in East Boston, Principal Janie Ortega arrived four years ago to find that most of her bilingual students were learning little English, despite staying in bilingual classes for five years.

Moreover, there was no timeline to move students out of bilingual classes, and some teachers weren’t spreading English throughout other subjects, Ortega said. As a result, students often came to Grade 6 — the McKay is a K-8 school — with a poor command of English, she said.

Ortega tightened the McKay’s bilingual programs, but disagrees with Unz’s initiative, saying three years is the appropriate limit.

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Bilingual ed law gets a new foe

California man joins Mass. ballot crusade

By Scott S. Greenberger

The Silicon Valley millionaire whose money helped demolish bilingual education in California and Arizona is bringing his crusade to Massachusetts.

Ron Unz will be on the State House steps this morning to join the push for a ballot initiative that would virtually eliminate bilingual education in the Commonwealth, which enacted the nation's first bilingual education law in 1971. Unz bankrolled overwhelming ballot victories in California in 1998 and Arizona in 2000, and he recently initiated an effort in Colorado.

He says the Massachusetts measure, which would appear on the November 2002 ballot, is long overdue.

"Nothing has changed here in 30 years," said Unz, who will have to collect 57,100 signatures to place his initiative on the ballot. "An effort that dismantled the bilingual program here, a large East Coast state which is a major media and intellectual center for the whole United States, could have huge national significance."

Opponents say the one-year English "immersion" approach Unz advocates will be a disaster for many students, particularly older ones who had limited schooling in their native lands.

State Representative Jarrett Barrios says the Commonwealth should change its 30-year-old bilingual education law. But he doesn't believe that bilingual education, in all its forms, should be ended.

"The top priority of any bilingual education program is to teach children English," said the Cambridge Democrat, who is organizing a probilingual education event to follow Unz's. "But one-size-fits-all, either in current law or what Unz is proposing, will never meet the needs of all children."

Unz isn't the first person to announce his intention to put an antibilingual education measure on the November 2002 ballot. On Sunday, state Senator Guy Glodis said he would file the necessary paperwork by tomorrow's deadline.

But Unz said Sunday that he wouldn't pay for any campaign led by a politician, and that he needed Hispanics, immigrants, and educators to lead the charge.

He now has them: Chelsea High School principal Lincoln Tamayo, who was born in Cuba and chairs the state Education Department's bilingual advisory board, will lead the campaign. Two authors of books critical of bilingual education, Italian imm-

Calif. man joins drive against bilingual ed

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migrant Rosalie Pedalino Porter and Boston University professor Christine Rossell, will play leading roles.

Under current law, Massachusetts school districts that have 20 or more children who have a limited grasp of English and speak the same language must provide a transitional bilingual program for up to three years. Students learn English, but they also learn math, science, and other subjects in their native tongue until their English improves. About 49,000 Massachusetts students are classified "limited English proficient."

Supporters of bilingual education say it eases children into English while allowing them to keep their native languages.

But Unz and other critics contend that such programs hurt students by coddling them, leaving them far behind their English-speaking classmates. Many, they point out, spend more than three years in bilingual classes.

These students are being segregated from mainstream English opportunities," said Glodis, a Worcester Democrat. "They have the lowest MCAS scores, the highest dropout rates, and the lowest college admission rate. Something has to be done."

For several years, Glodis's bills to eliminate bilingual education have gone nowhere. Even before today's announcement, however, the specter of an Unz-funded campaign had prompted serious debate on the state's law.

But Unz said those discussions did not go far enough.

Under his proposal, all non-native English speakers would be placed in one-year "sheltered immersion" classes where they'd be with other immigrants but instruction would be in English. Waivers would be granted for some older children and some special-needs students.

Unz said his polling in Massachusetts indicates that support here is even stronger than it was in California, where his initiative passed with 61 percent of the vote. In Arizona, 63 percent of voters favored his proposal. He spent about $700,000 in California and $250,000 in Arizona, he said.

Fewer than 40 percent of California's Hispanics voted for Unz's proposal. He says rising test scores there have bolstered Hispanic support for his measure in the three years since the vote.

Barrios said some research suggests that bilingual education, not English immersion, boosts scores. "There's no way you can construe what Ron Unz is doing as anything less than anti-immigrant and antichildren," he said.

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Ron Unz digging for press releases after his news conference yesterday on the State House steps.

Rumpled but ready

Calif. businessman targets Mass. bilingual education

By Scott S. Greenberger
GLOBE STAFF

Ron Unz is a Silicon Valley millionaire with victories against bilingual education in two states to his credit, but he certainly didn't look the part yesterday as he darted around the fringes of his own State House event, snapping photographs with a disposable camera.

He flew into town by himself — riding coach, using frequent flyer miles — ready to demolish the Commonwealth's 30-year-old bilingual education system. He sported a baggy brown blazer, slightly rumpled khakis, and a less-than-perfect shave. At 5-foot-8, 140 pounds, Unz struggled under the weight of a black gym bag filled with information packets.

The Harvard graduate doesn't have a polished press operation, but bilingual education supporters underestimate him at their peril: He has already bankrolled overwhelming victories in California and Arizona. And with images of pull-themselves-up-by-their-bootstraps immigrants of the early 1900s firmly implanted in his brain, he has the tireless zeal of a true believer.

"I'm really surprised that I still have to devote a lot of time to this," he said shortly before boarding a plane back to California. "When something doesn't make any sense, and the newspaper articles indicate it isn't working, you expect it to go away."

Advocates of bilingual education say that Unz doesn't know what he's talking about. "I think he's a well-meaning guy who knows very little about education and how it works," said John Perez of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, a teachers' union that opposed Unz's California campaign. "He's not a teacher. He listens only to people who agree with him philosophically. And he has no interest in actually coming into the schools and finding out how kids learn and what can be done to improve education in the state."

In Massachusetts, Unz's initiative would force schools to put students who don't speak English into regular
Businessman targets bilingual education

UNZ
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classrooms after a transitional year of English immersion. He and his supporters must collect 57,100 signatures to put the measure on the November 2002 ballot.

Unz's financial services software company — Wall Street Analytics, based in Palo Alto, Calif. — has made him rich. But the millionaire still lives like a graduate student. A bachelor, Unz, 39, sleeps on a mattress on the floor. He eats breakfast every morning at a neighborhood diner.

Since 1997, when he began his California campaign, he has left the day-to-day operation of his company to others and devoted most of his time to demolishing programs that he believes deny immigrant children a piece of the American Dream.

Like many other American Jews, Unz looks back with some nostalgia at the turn-of-the-century immigrant community on the Lower East Side of New York. Most of the Eastern European Jews who lived there arrived in the United States poor, and many spoke only Yiddish. But their children, funneled immediately into English-only classrooms when no one had heard of bilingual education, went on to college and success in a land of opportunity.

Unz views himself as a champion of immigration, but not everyone agrees. Earlier this week, state Representative Jarrett Barrios, a Cambridge Democrat, called Unz "anti-immigrant and anti-children."

Unz's response: When it comes to bilingual education, most Hispanic elected officials are out of step with what most Hispanics believe. "What you have is a very small group of active, determined, even fanatical people, and everyone's scared of having them yell at them," Unz said.

Ron Keena Unz is not scared, and he's anything but typical.

Unz was born to a single mother. When he was growing up, they lived with his grandmother in North Hollywood. Sometimes, the family had to rely on welfare.

Unz excelled in school — in second grade he was tested as having a genius-level IQ, 214. He was more interested in math and debate competitions than girls or sports, and at 17 he won the prestigious Westinghouse Science Talent Search for a paper he did on black holes.

He attended Harvard on a scholarship, double-majoring in theoretical physics and ancient history, and developing a keen interest in public policy. His mother had been active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, and as a child he had gone door to door for presidential candidate George McGovern. But he was repelled by Jimmy Carter, and, like some other college students of the early 1980s, Unz gravitated toward Ronald Reagan and conservatism.

Unz graduated from Harvard in 1983. After a one-year fellowship at Cambridge University, he went to Stanford to pursue a physics doctorate. But a summer job on Wall Street turned him in a different direction: Unz developed mortgage-related software that he parlayed into his own business, which he launched in New York in 1987 and then moved to Palo Alto.

Unz became a politician in his own right in 1994, when he mounted an unsuccessful Republican primary challenge to Governor Pete Wilson of California. He garnered a surprisingly high 34 percent of the vote and, after his defeat, helped lead the fight against Wilson's Proposition 187, a measure to deny public benefits to illegal immigrants.

Two years later, Unz heard about a group of Hispanic parents in Los Angeles who were protesting that schools weren't teaching their children English. Unz said he always thought bilingual education was a bad idea, and that protest spurred him to action.

"When a program has gotten so crazy parents have to hold picket signs outside their own elementary school," he said, "I had to do something about it."

Unz launched a group called English for the Children in 1997 and drafted a ballot initiative that would replace bilingual education with one year of English immersion.

Proposition 227 passed with 61 percent of the vote. In November 2000, Unz repeated the feat in Arizona, where Proposition 203 won with 53 percent of the vote.

Now Unz has his sights set on Massachusetts.

Lincoln Tamayo, principal of Chelsea High School, is chairman of Unz's Massachusetts initiative, at the millionaire's behest.

"He's a very driven man," Tamayo said.

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Bilingual education ready for reform

The entry of Ron Unz into the effort to reform bilingual education in Massachusetts is a cause for celebrating. This California entrepreneur reformed the education systems of two states, California and Arizona, through ballot question campaigns he financed.

Efforts to legislate reform here — as elsewhere — have gone nowhere because politicians are reluctant to oppose something so fiercely defended by Hispanic activists (though not by most Hispanic parents). The chief local reformer, state Sen. Guy Glodis (D-Worcester), has not given up hope for this session, but his office said he will support Unz's effort to put the matter before the voters in 2002, if the Legislature does not act.

Unz, whose previous campaigns won approval by more than three-fifths margins, is not some lone carpetbagger. Professor Christine Rossell of Boston University, author of a devastating critique of bilingual education, and other local experts have already signed on to his campaign.

Unz wants to put non-English speaking children in one-year "immersion" classes taught entirely in English, though with native-language speakers available to help in the rough spots. In California communities where the system is already in place, test scores are rising.

Voters who are asked to sign a petition should understand that it is not the "anti-immigrant, anti-child" measure that opponents claim.

The "transitional" native-language classes used in Massachusetts have been holding children back for too many years. It is high time to scrap them and move away from a system that has consigned too many to second-class citizenship.
Mogul gets slammed for efforts vs. bilingual ed

By ED HAYWARD

Supporters of bilingual education lashed out at a California millionaire yesterday, branding him a racist outsider who will bankroll a ballot measure to scrap the state's bilingual program.

State Rep. Antonio F. Cabral blasted the involvement of high-tech mogul Ron Unz with the group English for The Children of Massachusetts, which announced yesterday it would begin collecting 57,100 signatures needed to put its reform initiative on the ballot by the 2002 ballot.

"This is not about education policy," said Cabral (D-New Bedford), a co-sponsor of legislation to overhaul the existing system. "This is about the politics of hatred, the politics of division — divide and conquer."

Roslindale mother Regla Gonzalez of the League of United Latin American Citizens called the proposal a "racist" attack on the freedom of parents to choose a bilingual program.

The outbursts followed the announcement by Unz — godfather of a referenda movement that has so far won in California and Arizona — and local supporters that they will start collecting signatures.

Unz fired back, calling the race card tactics of state politicians and Hispanic activists "silly" and similar to the first wave of opposition his forces faced in California, Arizona and Colorado, where another ballot initiative is under way.

The English For Children proposal would require non-English speaking students to spend a year in a bilingual class, and then enter mainstream classrooms.

The plan, which also declares English "the common public language" in the United States and Massachusetts, would give parents the option of keeping their children in a traditional program.

"They're saying I'm anti-immigrant," said the unflappable Unz. "But how can something that is supported by immigrant parents be anti-immigrant? Immigrants want their children to learn English."
Spotlight is on state’s bilingual education law

By Scott S. Greenberger
GLOBE STAFF

The Silicon Valley millionaire who bankrolled ballot initiatives that scrapped bilingual education in California and Arizona recently launched a drive in Colorado — but he has not lost interest in the Commonwealth.

"The fact that I’m committed to helping the people in Colorado with their effort obviously puts a strain on the time I can spend in Massachusetts," said Ron K. Unz, who has become one of the most prominent advocates of an "English immersion" approach. "On the other hand, the fact that it’s going so well in Colorado makes it more likely that we’d do it in Massachusetts."

Unz says he’s been pleasantly surprised by the favorable press coverage of his two-week-old Colorado effort, and by polls in that state that show strong support for English immersion, which funnels non-native English speakers into regular classes after a one-year transition period.

The prospect of an Unz-funded initiative in the Commonwealth has spurred a legislative effort to overhaul the state’s 30-year-old bilingual law — the nation’s first — for the first time.

Democratic state Representatives Jarrett Barrios of Cambridge and Antonio Cabral of New Bedford tout their bill as a “third way” between the 30-year-old method of bilingual education practiced in most of Massachusetts and Unz’s approach.

Under Massachusetts law, any district with 20 or more children who have a limited grasp of English and speak the same language must provide a transitional bilingual program for up to three years. Students learn English, but they learn math, science, and other subjects in their native tongue until their English improves.

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Spotlight turned on state’s bilingual education law

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The Cabral/Barrios measure would preserve that system, if parents in a district want it, but offer other options: “two-way” bilingual education, in which native and non-native English speakers are taught both languages in the same classroom; “structured immersion,” in which students learn in English but spend at least 30 percent of the school day practicing their native tongue; and a “modified bilingual/world language program,” in which the entire school “embraces the language and culture of the language-minority group.”

The Cabral/Barrios bill also would stiffen testing and standards. Supporters of the proposal see it as real reform that should fend off a ballot initiative.

"The dynamics here in Massachusetts are very different than they are in Colorado or in California, for that matter," Cabral said. "By and large, bilingual education has worked fairly well in Massachusetts. Is it perfect? It is not. Does it need some comprehensive reform at this point? It does. And it’s ongoing."

But Unz and other critics say the Cabral/Barrios bill amounts to more of the same: a system that hurts the children it is supposed to help by coddling them.

Unz says he believes there is widespread support in Massachusetts for scrapping bilingual education. He says state figures have told him privately that they agree that bilingual education is a failure. But Unz says he won’t launch a movement until those leaders — particularly Hispanic ones — are ready to go public with their views.

Unz says they’ll have to speak up within the next couple of months to have a shot at getting an initiative on the 2002 ballot.

"Based on our polling, I think something like this would win overwhelmingly as long as it’s done the right way," Unz said of the Massachusetts prospects.

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Bill would overhaul bilingual education

Backers hope to halt push for elimination

By Scott S. Greenberger
GLOBE STAFF

Hoping to preserve bilingual education by changing it, a state lawmaker today will propose the first major overhaul of the Commonwealth's bilingual law since it was put on the books in 1971.

Representative Antonio Cabral's bill, still in draft form yesterday, would stiffen some teaching and testing standards while giving schools alternatives to the traditional bilingual formula - allowing, for example, a "two-way" approach that teaches all students two languages. The New Bedford Democrat and his allies hope the measure will fend off a ballot initiative such as the one that scrapped bilingual education in California and Arizona.

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The Silicon Valley millionaire who financed those efforts, Ron K. Unz, is considering paying for one in Massachusetts.

Representative Jarrett Barrios, who helped Cabral craft the bill, described it as a "third way" between the 30-year-old method of bilingual education practiced in most of the Commonwealth and Unz's plan, which virtually eliminates bilingual instruction.

"Ron Unz is right when he says that we need to reform bilingual education," the Cambridge Democrat said. "But Ron Unz is wrong to throw out transitional bilingual education and replace it with a one-size-fits-all solution that will harm many immigrant children."

State Senator Guy Glodis, a leading opponent of bilingual education, said Cabral's measure does not go far enough. As he did last year, Glodis has filed a bill that would eliminate bilingual education. If that bill does not advance or if Cabral's bill is not changed significantly, Glodis said, he would push a ballot initiative - perhaps with Unz's money - next year.

"They've been forced to acknowledge," BILINGUAL EDUCATION, Page B5

of the vote in 1968. Seemingly ros
d results in that state, though disputed by some, converted even leading opponents of the measure.

In November, Unz repeated the feat in Arizona.

Unz said yesterday he is not impressed with Cabral's proposal. "To be honest it sounds like the three choices are bilingual, bilingual, bilingual," Unz said. "It sounds like the goal of these programs is primarily to maintain a native language.

Unz, however, said he is focusing on Colorado and New York City and wouldn't come to Massachusetts unless there is a "critical mass of credible local supporters."

Backers of Cabral's bill hope it will prevent that critical mass from developing. "This is a comprehensive response," said Roger Rice, who heads Multicultural Education, Training and Advocacy Inc., a national pro-bilingual group based in Somerville.

"I would hope that if the Legislature passes this and the governor signs it, this would mean that the leadership of both parties are committed to a Massachusetts solution and will resist a guy who has the nerve to come to the State House and say, 'Pass my California model or else.'"

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Bill seeks a halt to bilingual education

Senator proposes immersion course

By Doreen Indius Vigue
GLOBE STAFF

Seeking to bring a hotly contested California program for non-English-speaking students to Massachusetts, state Senator Guy Gidios will file a bill today to eliminate bilingual education, a program he called “a mistake of epic proportions.”

Asserting that Massachusetts’ bilingual instruction programs have failed to help the students they were designed to serve, Gidios, a Democrat from Worcester, wants the state to adopt a one-year immersion course that mirrors California’s controversial programs for students who do not speak English.

“There are over 100 different language backgrounds in Massachusetts and out of all of these, Hispanic is the highest ethnic background to take bilingual education courses,” he said. “However, that group also has the lowest test scores, the highest dropout rates, and the lowest college admission rate. What does that say about bilingual education? Obviously, it’s failing.”

Advocates for bilingual education, the American Civil Liberties Union, and several legislators denounced Gidios’s bill, but others insisted bilingual education is in need of a serious overhaul.

State Board of Education chairman James A. Peyser fell short of endorsing the bill, but he did say he favors ending the way the state’s bilingual instruction law is structured.

State law allows students to remain in bilingual programs for three years or until they are able to perform successfully in English-only classes. Students can stay in the programs beyond three years if their parents and the local school committee agree they need to.

Gidios will unveil the bill at a State House news conference, where he will be joined by Ron Unz, a Silicon Valley businessman and the architect of Proposition 227, the California law that dismantled bilingual education in that state. Students there now take a one-year “sheltered immersion” English course, with some instruction in their native language, and then transferred into regular education programs.

Adopted in 1971, Chapter 71-A is the nation’s oldest bilingual education law. Several attempts over the years to dismantle the system, including one by former governor William F. Weld in 1994, have failed. Today, more than 40,000 students are enrolled in bilingual education programs, a figure that has remained relatively steady over the past decade.

“I endorse the idea that we need to eliminate bilingual programs,” Peyser said. “BILINGUAL, Page B4

End sought to bilingual education

The mandate for bilingual education and open up the process of teaching English to immigrant students with a broader range of teaching methods,” Gidios said. “In other countries other than the US, students who immigrate are put in intensive language acquisition environments for a limited time. I don’t think that’s a bad approach at all.”

Peyser also said that in California, test scores have gone up and dropout rates have gone down among bilingual students in the immersion program.

Governor Paul Cellucci was out of town yesterday, but spokeswoman Shown Federman said that while he has not read the Gidios bill, he favors changes in the bilingual education law overall and “wants to work with Latinos and other minority groups to get their input into this process.”

Critics of the Gidios bill, and of Proposition 227, however, said one year is not long enough for most non-English-speaking students in Massachusetts to master the language and perform well in English-only courses.

They warned that students will fail standardized tests, such as the MCAS exam, at even higher rates and would be more inclined to drop out of school.

“Comprehensive instruction will be just noise to students and no one will be getting an education,” said Tom Louie, director of the Massachusetts English Plus Coalition, a Boston-based language rights advocacy group. “It is ludicrous to think that a student without a formal education can master a language and learn on grade-level in just one year.”

“Comprehensive instruction will be just noise to students. It is ludicrous to think that a student without a formal education can master a language and learn on grade-level in just one year.”

TOM LOUIE
Director of a language rights advocacy group

Alan Jay Rom, a Boston attorney who has waged many court battles to Gidios said, “What’s lacking are the force lax school districts to obey the tools from the Department of Edu-bilingual education law, called Gidios cation to make sure school systems “ xenophobic” and contends bills that are accountable and are producing try to eliminate bilingual education the results the law is looking for.”