

CLASS

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little to no experience with the language.

Though the district had a Newcomers program about 10 years ago, it rebooted a more comprehensive program this year to accommodate the growing number of students coming from outside the U.S.

The Hermiston School District has seen an influx of students who speak indigenous languages in the past few years, according to district staff that teach in the Newcomers program. Some of the most common languages those students speak at home are Mayan languages such as Mam, Q'anjob'al and K'iche', which are all spoken primarily in Guatemala. The languages are all distinct from Spanish and from each other.

According to data from the district office, there are currently 21 third through eighth grade students in the Newcomers program, and 22 at the high school.

Those students spend part of their day learning vocabulary for math and science, as well as English grammar.

Colleen Muldowney, who teaches the younger students in the program, said the goal is to have them spend about one year in the program before moving into a mainstream classroom.

Fitterer said while many of the students speak an indigenous language at home, most also speak some Spanish.

"For probably about half of my kids, English will be their third language," she said.

Fitterer said she has seen an uptick in indigenous speakers in the past four or five years. According to Jonathan Shaklee, an immigration lawyer in Kennewick, the reason for the influx of families coming from Guatemala — as well as El Salvador and Hondu-



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Instructor Colleen Muldowney works on comprehension with students, clockwise from center, Pamela Ambriz Ponce, Senisse Diaz Loza, Edgar Diaz Loza and Cristopher Monales Trejo on Monday in the Hermiston School District's Newcomers Program at Highland Hills Elementary School.

ras, known as "the Northern Triangle" — are different than those coming from Mexico. Generally speaking, he said, they are not fleeing just poverty.

"I can't point to the specifics of (Hermiston)," he said. "But most kids (from the Northern Triangle) are fleeing real horrific violence in their home countries. There are really high homicide rates, gangs and transnational crime organizations — and those countries are not able to protect women and children."

Fitterer said the biggest factor in student success with English is if they have attended school in their home country.

"The concept of reading, forming sentences — all of that transfers to the second or third language easily and quickly," she said.

Fitterer said there are no district employees who speak indigenous languages. Most interpreters or translators communicate with families in Spanish.

Cathy Keeney and Alejandra Maldonado are home liaisons for the Hermiston

School District. They said there may be one parent in a family who doesn't speak any English or Spanish, but they are usually able to communicate with another family member, or get someone who can translate from Spanish to the family's native language.

Home liaisons serve as interpreters for school events, make phone calls on behalf of teachers for discipline or attendance issues, and help parents understand the paperwork that comes home from school.

While both Fitterer and Muldowney are fluent in Spanish, and interact with students in both languages, all their instruction is in English.

They rely heavily on pictures and physical learning, as well as drawing connections to cognates, or words that are similar in both languages.

Fitterer has been a bilingual teacher in the district since 1993, and said it's important to acknowledge the schooling that kids have already had prior to coming to the U.S.

"You need to affirm the students' culture and language," Fitterer said. "I've tried to learn a few words of whatever language the kids I've had at that time speak," she said.

She recalled a student many years ago — he was hardworking and learned quickly, but one day he broke down in class.

"One day he came in at recess, just put his head down, and cried," she said. "He said, 'in (my home country), my teachers loved me. I knew everything. Here, they think I'm stupid.'"

She said she makes sure to tell students that it's not a matter of lacking knowledge, but developing the language to communicate what they may already know.

That comes into play when teaching students math and science — especially with a range of third- to eighth-graders in the same class.

"To account for grade levels, we are teaching the language of math across grade levels," said Muldowney. "So students can access the content they'll see in sixth, seventh grades."

InterMountain Education Service District also has several programs for migrant students, including summer school, tutoring, migrant preschool, college assistance and school-to-home support. They provide these services in Boardman, Hermiston, Irrigon, Milton-Freewater and Umatilla.

As students finished up their lessons and lined up for lunch, one continued to recite the numbers she had just learned.

"How do you say 'one million?'" she asked in Spanish.

Muldowney said she's happy with the progress she's seen as a result of the more specialized class.

"I think a solid year of language across curricula will help them this year and beyond," she said.

MARKET

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developer Mitch Myers had originally hoped to hold this year's market after the city approached him about taking the event over.

At the beginning of the summer Myers announced he would have to cancel the market after a dispute with the city's building department held up permits for the site and a stop-work order was issued. But after the city offered to hold the market on its new festival street instead, Myers changed his mind and said he could make it work on a property he owned across the street using a temporary canopy.

The building permit has since been issued, and work has begun again on the pavilion, which is expected to be complete in time for next year's market. Brown said they may be able to talk to the city about blocking off a road or doing something else to create more room for the market.

In the meantime, this year's market drew more vendors than years past, and bigger crowds. Offerings last Thursday included fruits, vegetables, honey, fresh bread, salads, meat, cheese, jewelry, soaps, rugs, fresh flowers and other locally sourced items.

Jonathan Tallman was manning a booth for his parents' small family farm, selling eggs, watermelon and a variety of vegetables. He said they hadn't participated in the old Hermiston farmers market but there was more incentive with the larger crowds and the fact that there was no fee for vendors.

"It didn't cost anything," he said. "That was the number one factor."

Kevin Engelhart, who was selling produce from

his garden, said this was also his first year participating in a farmers market. He and a buddy from high school have a "giant garden" on about half an acre of land. Usually Engelhart just gives away the results to family and friends, but this year he planted extra.

"I needed a place to market stuff," he said, touting the opportunity to buy local, organic, vine-ripened, hand-picked produce.

Teenager Katie Brink was selling soaps under the business name Mercy Bee Soaps. She said she started making and selling scented soap to raise money for a church camp. Early in the summer, when there were still a few spaces left, she and a friend saw the market and decided to stop.

"I thought, 'Oh my gosh, this is a perfect way to get my stuff out there,'" she said.

Her mom, Stacey Brink, said she felt that placing live music, tables and places to buy dinner outside of the canopy helped draw people in.

"People can sit and eat and enjoy the evening," she said.

Tamara Warrington said she was a big fan of farmers markets and goes to others, including Echo's.

"I would rather go to one of these than go to the grocery store for fresh vegetables," she said.

She said she missed the trees and grass of when it was at McKenzie Park and had preferred having the market on a Saturday, but she did like the large range of vendors that the Maxwell Market had drawn in.

Mallory Bark, buying nectarines at the market with her young children, said the kids loved picking out produce and sitting and listening to the music.

"I think our community needed this," she said. "I'm glad it got worked out to do it."

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