

OVERHEARD | QUOTES OF THE MONTH FROM OUR ONLINE STORIES

“Every single competition is a way to learn new strategies and network with teams ... They help you get a lot of practice, and **you can’t win without experience.**”

Junior **Zoya Brahimzadeh**, encouraging students to join the Bionic Bruins robotics club.



Sophomore Lindsay Dixon performs “Kiss Me” by Sixpence None the Richer.

Aidan Weiler/Bear Witness

“I really love watching people gain confidence and **giving them that platform** to just try new things.”

Senior **Liv Do**, president of Acoustic Club, which hosted its first Acoustic Night on Nov. 9

“This country is multicultural, so we have a part to play and **it’s fun when you interact with different cultures.**”

South Asian Student Union adviser **Ramani Visvanathan**, sharing the joy of celebrations such as SASU’s Graba Night.

ENGLISH LEARNERS

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Spanish-only resources combined with shortage of language aides make school a challenge for EL students

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Staff Writer

Sophomore **Rino Moriyama** is a first-generation student at Branham whose family immigrated from Japan. At home, her parents prefer to speak Japanese, a common story for immigrant families.

She said that her parents’ Japanese-only household has hindered her English-language development and her self-esteem among her peers.

“Compared to other students, I get no time to practice English,” she said. “So I feel like my speech is bad and lower than other students.”

Branham hosts 111 first-generation American students at Branham, with native languages ranging from Punjabi, Farsi, Korean, Vietnamese and Japanese. However, a vast number of English learners speak Spanish, and the resources dedicated to the students show that.

According to **Harinder Kaur**, the Emergent Multilingual Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) at Branham and Leigh, 111 Branham students are in the process of learning English.

School resources include language aides, English Language Development classes, and translation services for emerging multilinguals, which cater to the majority Spanish-speaking students.

ELD teacher **Roland Francisco** works to help first-generation American students learn and create a safe space to make students comfortable with the English language.

“The language barrier is a big thing and it can make people uncomfortable,” he said. “I try to just make them feel at ease just because being comfortable in class is a way we can combat that.”

Socialization issues

Francisco also believes that students also tend to suffer with socialization and adapting to the differences between home and school life. He says that it is often difficult for the students to branch out from the community they have found in school and socialize with students of other backgrounds.

“Just being different from their peers and socializing is sometimes difficult,” he said. “In general, I see them hanging around just in their group, or in their clique, and maybe not socializing with other students.”

Stuti Arora, another ELD teacher, said she aims to teach students English as fast as possible so that her students don’t suffer in their other classes. She believes that teachers often don’t realize that their emerging multilingual students are struggling since they don’t communicate their struggles due to the language barrier.

“Teachers have so many students who have so much going on in their lives and it’s really easy in a class of 30 kids to not realize that one kid is struggling,” Arora said. “Some of the things that come along with being a first generation student are the same things that come along with learning a new language, and I think that they might fall behind because of that.”

Stuti brings to attention that although she is appreciative of the efforts of the schools’ resources for the ELD, she believes that the resources should be more inclusive to students whose native language is not Spanish and that existing resources are limited.

“The bilingual aides are stretched very thin. There are some students who are going to all of their classes and they have nobody there to help them translate,” Arora said. “There’s only translators available for Spanish, so for students who speak Chinese or Japanese or Ukrainian,



Grace Ngo/Special to the Bear Witness

they don’t have anybody to translate things for them. And they’re just doing everything on their own.”

Teachers encourage self-advocacy

Arora advises students to reach out and advocate for themselves, since she said that the average teacher has around 150 students, and it can be difficult for them to differentiate between a student who cares but is struggling and a student who doesn’t care at all.

She said she’s had many conversations with teachers of one of her ELD students where they say that the student “doesn’t seem to care.” That most likely isn’t the case.

“They care a lot and they work really hard,” she said. “But imagine taking all of your classes in Russia as an English speaker. At a certain point, it’s just gonna wash over you and you might check out, but it doesn’t mean that they don’t

care.”

Although there are many resources for first generation students that come from a Spanish-speaking country, there are still many shortcomings that these students face on campus. With the help of Spanish teacher **Erica Marquez**, junior **Gerardo Rodriguez**, a first generation student from El Salvador, expressed his concern with the existing resources and their shortcomings.

It’s about language, not motivation

Marquez explains that emerging multilingual students are often A students in their home country. When they come to America, it can be such a difficult shift that their grades tend to suffer, making it easier for them to fail.

“[Rodriguez] is struggling in his theater class because it’s difficult for him to understand,” Marquez said. “He doesn’t have the help of a

EL students at Branham (2022-

2023)

- 61 Spanish speakers
- 3 Mandarin
- 4 Korean
- 3 Vietnamese
- 7 all others (including Hebrew, Russian)

Source: California Department of Education

“You might check out, but it doesn’t mean that they don’t care.”

Spanish teacher **Erica Marquez**, on the struggles of English learners in class.

language aide to help him get through the period, but he wouldn’t have these issues if he could get the support he needs.”

Rodriguez currently uses Google Translate and support from his ELD teachers and friends to translate his classwork and homework to Spanish. He said that wishes that the school could provide the emerging multilinguals with more language aides and translation applications they need so that other first-generation students can succeed in school.

Moriyama’s beliefs align with both Arora and Rodriguez’s, as she also mentions a lack of resources for non-Spanish languages at the school. This requires her and other students to translate forms and documents to other languages like Japanese to parents and guardians.

“They have translations for Spanish speakers, but they never have translations for other languages like Japanese. So when the school sends a form home, I have to explain what it says in the form to my parents, because there’s no Japanese version,” Moriyama said.

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