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SCHOOL MATTERS

Language immersion film to screen at Gunn High

If the flap over bringing Mandarin Immersion to Palo Alto was any indication, many people are interested in bilingual education. They should make time to see a film called "Speaking in Tongues," which will be shown in Spangenberg Auditorium at Gunn High School on Nov. 3 at 7 p.m.

The film focuses on four students in the San Francisco Unified School District who are at different phases in their school careers in immersion programs. It draws on the subtle nuances of the children's stories to illustrate the complex shades and permutations of bilingual schooling.



PREEVA TRAMIEL

Marcia Jarmel, the director of the film, has two sons in Mandarin immersion programs in San Francisco. They helped her translate footage. "Speaking in Tongues" won the audience choice award at the San Francisco Independent Film Festival in May, just about the time the city's school passed a resolution that every child in the district gets the opportunity to participate in bilingual education.

Jarmel was very pleased with the decision. "Kids who are bilingual just do better," she said.

The film is coming to Palo Alto through the joint effort of the PAUSD, SIPAPA (Spanish Immersion Parents Association of Palo Alto) and Menlo Park Spanish Immersion Parents. They believe, as the director of the film does, that multilingual immersion education, in general, is good for the young brain. Tricia Barr, a Menlo Park parent who has been advocating for immersion education in Menlo Park for years, spotted the film in the spring, and contacted Sarah Carpenter, the president of SIPAPA, and kept in touch with Patchwork films until they had a DVD ready to use for public screenings.

"Once school started," Barr said, "Sarah soon secured a location and date and we (Menlo Park Spanish Immersion parents) secured a copy of the film. I wanted to bring this documentary to the Peninsula to bring more awareness to Immersion programs and the benefits they bring, which extend beyond biliteracy and bilingualism and into appreciation of others and multiculturalism. Also, with Menlo Park's Spanish Immersion program being fairly new, many district parents may not know much about Immersion programs."

Grace Mah, who has a child in the Mandarin Immersion program however, won't be at the screening, because Ohlone School has a meeting that night. Mah says that Bill Overton, the principal, is considering acquiring a copy of the film for use at the school.