On February 11, 1991, the U.S. Department of Education released the findings of an eight-year study designed to provide definitive answers to one of the most volatile questions in American Education: What types of programs work best in helping Hispanic students succeed in school? The issue has revolved around the effectiveness of bilingual education which involves using the child's primary language in addition to English as a language of instruction.

The Ramirez report (so called after its principal investigator, J. David Ramirez) speaks directly to these issues. The study compared the academic progress of Hispanic elementary school children in three program types:

- **English immersion**, involving almost exclusive use of English throughout elementary school,

- **Early-exit bilingual**, in which Spanish was used for about one-third of the time in kindergarten and first grade with a rapid phase-out thereafter, and

- **Late-exit bilingual**, that used primarily Spanish instruction in kindergarten with increasing amounts of English instruction thereafter up to about sixty percent in grades 5 and 6.

One of the three late-exit programs in the study was an exception to this pattern in that students were abruptly transitioned into primarily English instruction in grade 2 and English was used almost exclusively in grades five and six. In other words, this "late-exit" program was similar in its implementation to early-exit.
Among the findings of the study are the following:

- Little difference in academic performance or growth was found between early-exit and immersion programs by the end of grade 3, although a significant gap exists between the general population and these students. Students in each of these programs progress academically at about the same rate as students in the general population but the gap between their performance and that of the general population remains large. In other words, they tend not to fall further behind academically between first and third grade but they do not bridge the gap to the general population in any significant way. The lack of differences between these two programs refutes the long held popular belief that more instruction in English leads to more achievement in English. The early-exit bilingual students have had less English instruction than those in English immersion, yet performed at the same level.

- In contrast to students in the immersion and early-exit programs, "late-exit students appear to be gaining on students in the general population." This pattern is particularly apparent for the program whose students were most at-risk in terms of socio-economic status. According to the report, "as in mathematics and English language, it seems that those students who received the strongest opportunity to develop their primary language skills, realized a growth in their English reading skills that was greater than that of the norming population used in this study. If sustained, in time these students would be expected to catch up and approximate the average achievement level of this norming population."

- Students at a late-exit site who were abruptly transitioned into almost all-English instruction in the early grades (in similar fashion to early-exit students) seemed to lose ground in relation to the general population between grades 3 and 6 in mathematics, English language and reading. This is evidence that suggests that when limited English proficient students receive most of their instruction in their home language, they should not be abruptly transferred into a program that uses only English.

- Parents of children in the late-exit bilingual programs are more aware that their children have homework and more likely to help them with it than parents in either of the other two programs. According to the report "this is attributed to the fact that the greater use of the child's primary language makes it possible for parents to participate and support their child's learning."
There is a need to improve the quality of training programs for teachers serving language-minority students both at the university and school district levels, so they can provide a more active learning environment for language and cognitive skill development. "Effective training models do exist which can help teachers provide a more active learning environment for language and cognitive skill development".

"Efforts should be made to disseminate this information and support implementation of the models."

The report concludes that "students who were provided with a substantial and consistent primary language development program learned mathematics, English language, and English reading skills as fast or faster than the norming population used in this study. As their growth in these academic skills is atypical of disadvantaged youth, it provides support for the efficacy of primary language development in facilitating the acquisition of English language skills."

In summary, although the Ramirez report may not have provided definitive answers to all the questions concerning the education of Hispanic children, it has achieved at least two important outcomes: first, it has demonstrated that sustained promotion of children's primary language can be an effective route both to academic excellence and literacy in two languages; second, it has unequivocally refuted the notion that intensive exposure to English is the best way of teaching language minority children.