Erin was born in Fairfax County, but spent three pre-teen years in Mexico while her father was on duty there. Upon returning to Fairfax County, the family decided to retain their Spanish fluency by speaking Spanish at home. Over her parents’ protests, the Fairfax County schools classified Erin as ESOL (English Speaker of Other Languages) because Spanish was spoken at home – even though English was Erin’s first language. The school system, after all, gets 25% more funding for each ESOL student as compared to a regular student.

Being classified as ESOL seems harmless enough (except to the taxpayer); however, when other students are in AP, IB, Honors, or other advanced classes, ESOL students are in classes where the English language is taught simultaneously with mathematics, literature, etc. They are with other Spanish-speaking students; therefore, Spanish is commonly heard in these classes. Their language proficiency is thereby retarded as are their skills in the other subjects. It should not be so surprising that there is a performance gap between Hispanics and English-language students.

Hispanics are handicapped not only by being sent to ESOL-based classes, but also by the way reading is taught. In Fairfax County, reading is taught by the “whole-word” method, rather than by phonics. Yes, some phonics is taught, but phonics is not the basis by which reading is taught. Hispanics are more accustomed to using phonics to learn Spanish. They must make the transition not only to English but to the “whole-word” method – a method that has proven to be inferior to phonics-based methods.

The deficiencies in the education method used for Hispanics is evident not only by their lower performance in the SAT’s but also by their hurried education. Fairfax County has as a goal having all students graduate with other, regular students of the same age. For ESOL students, this frequently means cutting short what they should have learned. Instead, ESOL students should have up to one year of intensive English-language education, based on phonics, and should then be declassified as ESOL and put into regular classes so they learn what regular students learn.

The School Board certainly would rebel against declassifying ESOL students. Declassifying would result in less funding. There is no incentive for the schools to transfer a student from ESOL to regular status. In fact, there is a disincentive because, by state formula, fewer teachers will be needed and funds flowing to the school will be decreased. The current Democrat-backed School Board has its eyes on the funding, not on the good of the Hispanic students.

The direction will not change if we do not elect people to the School Board who look in a new direction – the student’s direction. Of the candidates for the November 5, 2019, election, Laura Ramírez-Drain (Hunter Mill), Cheryl Buford, Priscilla DeStefano, and Vinson Palathingal (at large) would provide the needed reorientation. These are all backed by the Republican Party. Voters can and should vote for all four.