In some schools, iPods are required listening.

"I'm going to make home visits," said Geri Perez, principal at José Martí. "I'm going to check your iPod to make sure there is English music there," Ms. Poli teased Dianelis Cano, 13, who moved here from Cuba less than two years ago, said that she had enrolled in the iPod-equipped classes. Ms. Perez, who does not speak Spanish, said that bilingual students who once shied away from talking to her have gained self-confidence.

Ms. Poli scoured the music charts for songs that appealed to students, compiling an audio library of popular songs. After the first week, Ms. Cano said, "I feel more comfortable. Now I like to sing to Jingle Bells and other songs in English." Ms. Poli enjoys the music too. "It speaks to me," said Stephanie Rojas, 13, who moved here last year from Puerto Rico. "You know the No. 1 complaint about school is that it's boring because the traditional way they learn is that you read from the book and you study and you do drill exercises," Ms. Cano said. "But now we're doing something different. We're learning with music." Ms. Cano now knows the words to several popular songs.

Ms. Poli has also downloaded audio books, including the U2 album "All That You Can't Leave Behind," saying that many students love the band. The braver ones sang out loud.

The iPods are collected at the end of class, and school officials said that none has been confiscated. As the iPods have been used mainly in bilingual classes, the district plans to try them in some English classes.

In 2004, the Perth Amboy (N.J.) district bought 40 iPods for students to store text books, dictionaries and song lyrics. The iPods are collected at the end of class, and school officials said that none has been confiscated.

The district officials said the stakes are high; 4 of the district's 12 schools have been put on probation because not enough bilingual students have passed the state reading and math tests. District officials said the iPods sharpen their vocabulary and grammar by singing along to popular songs.

"This issue is enormous," said Jeanne Flowers, a superintendent for the Irondequoit School District in Rochester, N.Y., where in recent years the schools have been able to purchase iPods. "It's a good test of whether we can use technology in the classroom." The iPods are a splurge for many of the immigrant families who live in this densely packed urban center, once known for its embroidery factories.

While the iPods have been used mainly in bilingual classes, the district plans to try them in some English classes.

Every Brearley student in seventh through ninth grades is required to buy or rent an iPod. In class, they sing or recite the completed lyrics back to her. "You know the No. 1 complaint about school is that it's boring because the traditional way they learn is that you read from the book and you study and you do drill exercises," Ms. Cano said. "But now we're doing something different. We're learning with music." Ms. Cano now knows the words to several popular songs.

But even as students have been told to store their own iPods in their lockers, some parents have raised concerns that students may use the iPods for inappropriate reasons. "I'm going to try to do what I can to make sure iPods are used to their full potential," Mr. Cano said. "We want to encourage them to be able to use the iPods in a positive way."