



SPRING LAKE PARK SCHOOLS

SPANISH IMMERSION

**GETTING STARTED:
WHAT IS LANGUAGE IMMERSION?**

LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROVIDES CHILDREN THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACQUIRE SECOND LANGUAGE FLUENCY DURING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. FOR 2010-11, OUR IMMERSION PROGRAM IS KINDERGARTEN – FIRST GRADE, FOR 2011-2012 IT EXPANDS TO KINDERGRATEN-SECOND GRADE

The Spring Lake Park School District Language Immersion Program is a school-within-a-school located at our Westwood complex in Blaine for 2010-2011 and for 2011-2012 as well. In the future, the location of the program may need to change after reviewing the capacity and interest in the program.



What is Immersion?

Over thirty years of research indicates that immersion is the most effective type of second language instruction. Students are immersed in the second language in their classroom.

The second language is the primary spoken language by the instructor and eventually the students. The goal of language immersion is for the students to become proficient in the second language and increase cultural and global awareness.

Students develop proficiency in the second language by hearing and using it to learn all of the school subjects, rather than studying the language itself.

The immersion teacher speaks the language the majority of the time. Although kindergarten students will speak to their teacher and classmates in English within a few years the students will speak the Spanish language the majority of the time as well.

Key Components of the Elementary Program

- The second language is the language of instruction for all classroom instruction in kindergarten.
- The curriculum parallels the district curriculum in all subjects. Students will be taught to read in the second language until the 3rd grade.

- There is direct instruction in English beginning in the 3rd grade for reading/Language Arts.

Students will possibly continue to be taught the other subjects in the second language through 5th grade.

After two or three years in an immersion program, students demonstrate fluency and their comprehension skills are comparable to those of native speakers the same age.



Research, however, has found that immersion students' second language lacks the same grammatical accuracy, variety and complexity produced by native speakers. To attain that skill level is a long-term process. Native-like proficiency in every skill area is unlikely.

Many immersion schools report that test scores, on state tests like the MCA, in 3rd grade are lower than the non-immersion classes. This is due to delaying direct instruction in English until 3rd grade. By 5th grade, however, students' English test scores are equal to, or higher than, the non-immersion classes.

Why begin a second language in kindergarten?

The young child's brain is developmentally ready to learn language. A child's brain has twice as many synapses (connections) in the brain as an adult. The young brain must use these connections or lose them.

There is a window of opportunity in which a child learns a first language normally. After that period, the brain slowly becomes less receptive. Young children can learn as many spoken languages as you can allow them to hear systematically and regularly at the same time.

Children just have the capacity. When children wait until high school to start studying a second language, the task is much harder.

Learning a second language at an early age:

- has a positive effect on intellectual growth which enriches and enhances a child's mental development
- leaves students with more flexibility in thinking, greater sensitivity to language and a better ear for listening
- improves a child's understanding of his/her native language

- gives the child the ability to communicate with people he or she would otherwise not have the chance to know
- opens the door to other cultures and helps a child understand and appreciate people from other countries
- increases job opportunities in many careers where knowing another language is a real asset

Why Spanish?

Spanish is the most common language spoken in the United States next to English and the fourth most common language spoken in the world. The Hispanic population is the fastest growing demographic in the United States. This presents great domestic opportunities, as well as career opportunities for bilingual professionals.

What's the school day like?

The immersion classroom follows traditional English curriculum, except the classroom instruction and culture is in the Spanish language. In Spring Lake Park, families may elect either the traditional half-day kindergarten option or enroll in a fee-based K+ (full-day) kindergarten option.

In the classroom the teacher speaks the Spanish language the majority of the time using expressive tones, exaggerated gestures, facial expressions, and many visual aids. However, children speak in English to their teacher and peers.

It is helpful if parents reassure their child their teacher does understand them when they speak in English. Children should feel comfortable speaking to their teacher and or classmates in English. As the year progresses the students will begin to use Spanish to speak to their teacher.

Outside of the classroom, at lunch, recess, children and adults in the building use English. In grades one and two, all classroom instruction is in the Spanish language. Specialists in music, art, and physical education speak in English.

Typically in first or second grade the classroom is Spanish speaking only with their peers and teacher – this is different for each group of kids.

In third grade direct instruction in language arts is done in English. The remainder of the day is comparable to grade one and two where the instruction and

interaction between peers is in Spanish. This is approximately 50 percent of their day.

Student support services such as working with the social worker, Special Education is only in English. The extra support in reading with basic skills is done in the language in which reading is taught for that grade level.



Effects of Immersion Education

Formal and functional characteristics of language change from one context to another. An integrated language and content model in an elementary school setting provides a wide variety of contexts in which to use the second language.

A growing body of research on immersion education has shown that immersion students consistently meet or exceed academic expectations in the following areas:

- Second language skills: Immersion students by far outperform students in traditional foreign language classes. They are functionally proficient in the immersion

language and are able to communicate according to their age and grade level.

- English language skills: In the early years of English instruction (K-2), there may be a lag in English reading and writing skills. By 5th grade, however, immersion students do as well or better than students in English-only classes.
- Content areas: Immersion students achieve in academic areas as well as students in English-only programs.
- Cultural sensitivity: Immersion students are more aware of and show positive attitudes towards other cultures.

How will my child understand what is being taught?

In kindergarten immersion teachers understand that their students will not understand everything they say. They use both body language, visuals, manipulatives, exaggerated facial expressions, and expressive intonation to communicate their meaning.

To draw students into using the language, teachers often use songs, useful phrases, chants, and rhymes and carefully structure the day with familiar routines. In Spring Lake Park all elementary classrooms are equipped with an audio enhancement system.

The system distributes the teacher's voice to all four corners of the classroom, enhancing children's ability to hear new words and sounds.

How will learning everything in a second language affect my child's English literacy?

Research consistently finds that the immersion experience actually enhances English language development and learning a second language actually enhances an individual's understanding of his or her native language.

Research also indicates that children only learn to read once and that the concept and skills in reading are translated across languages. Vocabulary and grammar are only two components of learning to read. Children will learn early literacy and reading skills using the second language and add English to the components of literacy in grade three.

During the primary years, students' English development may lag temporarily in reading, word knowledge and spelling while instruction is occurring in the second language. By fifth grade this discrepancy disappears and immersion students perform as well as their peers.

Is the Immersion program open to all kindergarten students?

Yes, The Spanish Immersion Program is open to all kindergarten students. However, the half-day and full-day sections are dependent upon enrollment.

Spanish Immersion is not for every child. Students with language-based processing disabilities may struggle more in an immersion program but can be successful.

Students who are already bilingual in a language other than Spanish would need to consider factors such as their commitment to learning a third language, and/or if the third language would interfere with the development of learning to read in the two languages in which they are already fluent.

Will children become proficient in the Spanish language?

After only two or three years in an immersion program, students demonstrate fluency and confidence when using the immersion language. Their listening and reading skills are comparable to those of native speakers of the same language. While their skills remain native-like students speaking and writing abilities lag behind those of native speakers.

Research finds that immersion students' second language lacks grammatical accuracy and does not display the variety and complexity produced by native speakers of the language. Achieving high levels of oral and written proficiency in a second language is a long term process. Still immersion students will have a strong language base upon which to continue moving forward.

What role do parents play in an immersion program?

Like all parents of children in kindergarten they need to maintain an active role in their child's education by providing experiences that enrich the English language skills and enhance their cognitive and affective developmental growth.

Parents need to read to children daily in English and engage them in activities to extend what they are learning in class. Families are also asked to make a long term commitment to the program.



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Questions?

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