

Implementing a Secondary Dual Language Program... Where do I start?

by Keely Krueger, Director of Grants and Bilingual Education—Woodstock, Illinois

Promising practices...

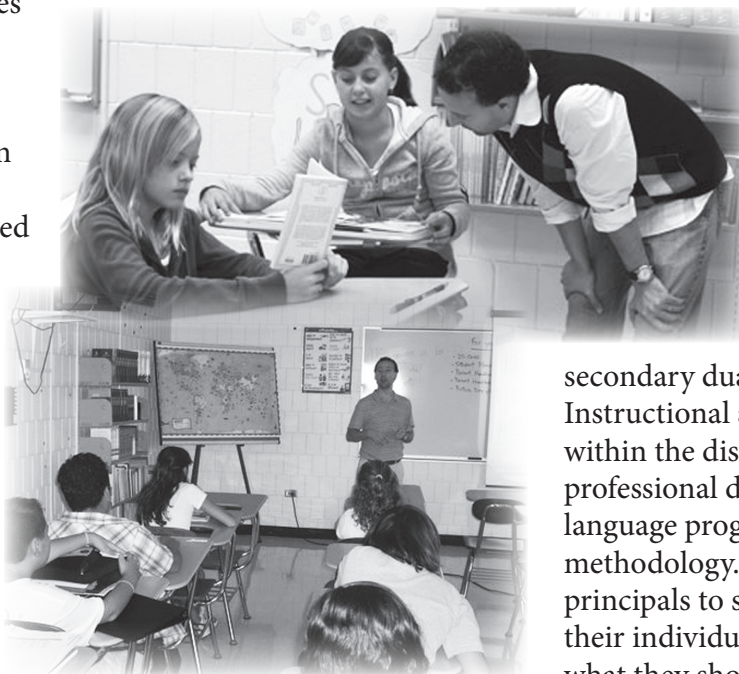
The community of Woodstock sits at the edge of the rural farmlands of northwestern Illinois and the sprawling suburbs that lead to the city of Chicago. For many years, Woodstock was a homogeneous middle-class community of commuters, but over the past 16 years, we have experienced rapid growth and demographic change.

Currently, the district serves 6,503 students in grades PreK-12, an increase of over 1,500 students in the last ten years. Twenty seven percent of the students are Hispanic, with 12.4% limited English proficient. Forty percent of district students qualify for the federal free/reduced lunch program. Due to changing demographics and needs, a transitional bilingual program was implemented in 1999. In 2004, the district decided to change to a dual language program model in hopes of giving all students the opportunity to become bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural.

Presently, with a rapidly growing dual language program of over 900 students in grades K-7 and the expectation from families, administration, and staff that this increasingly popular program continue through the secondary level, I found myself searching for help on how and where to begin this process. This search has led me to all parts of the country, as there are very few established secondary dual language programs in Illinois. After visiting several programs in hopes of avoiding some of the bumps that they have encountered along the road, I have found five key areas crucial to the planning for and implementation of secondary dual language programs: advocacy, funding, extensions, parental support, and class selection.

Advocacy—

It's important to build support for your program with all stakeholders, including the board of education, administration, staff, and parents. Through yearly presentations to the board of education, I've been able to keep this group aware of the program's activities and successes. They have a chance to ask questions and then take what they learn and advocate for dual language in the larger community.



Dual language teacher Eduardo Marti teaches history, science, and literacy in Spanish at Northwood Middle School.

A supportive administration is crucial too. All secondary principals have attended national conferences on dual language education or visited

secondary dual language schools. Instructional administrative leaders within the district receive yearly professional development on dual language programming and teaching methodology. This helps building principals to serve as advocates for their individual programs and know what they should be looking for when they are observing teachers. Principals need to understand the importance and effectiveness of the program, as dual

language isn't easily scheduled or staffed in secondary schools. Scheduling is difficult at this level due to the small number of sections being offered in each class, and the challenge of finding a teacher proficient in the language of instruction who is also certified in the content being taught is even greater.

In addition, all school staff members are educated about dual language and its effectiveness in the district through presentations on late-start days. Sometimes dual language classes have fewer students than monolingual classes due to attrition and the inability to add students at later grades. When teachers see that their class sizes are larger, it's important that they understand why this program has been implemented and its effectiveness for English language learners.

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Finally, parents are kept abreast of the activities in the program via our website, quarterly newsletters, and parent committees.

Funding—We have been fortunate to receive the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) Grant three times through the U.S. Department of Education. The current grant was written specifically to expand the dual language program to the secondary level. This has allowed staff to visit established dual language high schools in Texas and California, purchase the materials needed to extend the program, and provide professional development through GLAD training to our teachers. We have also used a Title III grant for teacher release time and for after-school stipends to design math and science curricula and develop a literacy framework focusing on biliteracy for our students.

Language Development Extensions—Additional opportunities for students to use the language outside of the classroom are extremely important. Currently, we offer a Language and Cultural Immersion Camp to our dual language students. Students are immersed in Spanish four hours a day, four days a week, for six weeks. As they explore different countries, they practice Spanish through art, music, physical activity, and cooking. Once our dual language students reach high school, we hope they will act as camp counselors. With FLAP grant funds, we are also purchasing video conferencing software so that students are able to connect with other Spanish-speaking students across the country and world. Plans are underway for our first class of dual language students to travel to a Spanish-speaking country at the end of their eighth grade year.

Parental Support—The rapid growth of our program is due to word of mouth by the parents. Our parents' support is crucial to the success of the dual language program. Three parent committees support and enhance our current program.

- ❖ The role of the **Recognition/Scholarship** committee is to establish a process for awarding students certificates and/or other awards at the end of their fifth- and eighth-grade years. We are investigating the possibility of an eighth-grade dual language graduation celebration. The committee is also developing a process to award scholarships to language camps and a scholarship for seniors who want to pursue a

Spanish major/minor in college. In addition, we are excited about the possibility of awarding seniors cords or medallions to wear at graduation, as well as sponsoring a celebration for their accomplishments.

- ❖ The **Cultural Connections** committee plans for cultural events throughout the school year and uses local organizations and groups to help support cultural connections. Woodstock is near Chicago and there are many cultural organizations in the area. Parents of our students who are participants in mariachi bands perform at end of the year celebrations. The committee also plans for trips abroad or exchanges with schools so that students can practice their language skills. Woodstock has a sister city in Mexico, and we are setting up exchanges and pen pals with schools there.
- ❖ The **Fundraising** committee supports the efforts of the Recognition/Scholarship Committee and Cultural Connection Committees by securing funding for the various initiatives.

Class Selection—Sometimes, it's necessary to choose the classes that you offer in Spanish based on existing staff. If you have a teacher who is a Spanish speaker and teaches science, then offering biology in Spanish might be the best fit for your program. It's crucial to review staff qualifications and design your program around their specialties and certifications. Another important idea when planning Spanish course offerings is to choose those that are part of a graduation requirement and not an elective. If you offer world history—a graduation requirement—in Spanish, the student's schedule will most likely still have space for an elective. If the dual language class *is* the elective, students may opt out of the program rather than giving up other electives.

The development and implementation of a secondary dual language program is truly a collaborative and on-going effort. We are currently at grade seven with our two middle school programs, with enrollment of about 135 students. We will begin our high school program in the 2012-2013 school year and have our dual language courses finalized by the end of this school year. With so many components required for a comprehensive program, the board of education, administration, staff, community organizations, and parents all need to work together in order to ensure the success and longevity of the program. The process is a long one, but well worth the effort.