

Immersion Program Family Handbook



2025-26

Duluth
Public Schools

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Handbook Purpose	3
Program Overview	3
Program Scope	3
Bilingual/Multilingual Diploma Seal	4
Curriculum and Instruction	4
Assessment	4
Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) in an Immersion Setting	4
Immersion Elementary Literacy	5
Transportation	6
Parent Involvement Opportunities and Expectations	6
Application Process	7
New Students	7
Transferring Students	7
Special Considerations for Student Receiving Special Services	7
Program Guidelines	8
Immersion Program Expectations	8
Immersion Program Removal Process	9
Frequently Asked Questions	9
Who Do I Contact When I Have A Question About Things?	9
What is Immersion Education?	10
Is there a tuition fee to participate in an Immersion Program?	10
Will transportation be provided for Immersion students?	10
Is there before and after school child care available for Immersion students?	10
How many students will be enrolled and how many classrooms will there be?	10
Is a background in the target language needed?	11
How does my child learn to read English when learning everything in Ojibwe or Spanish?	11
What level of target language skills will students have by the end of fifth grade?	11
What role do families have in the immersion program?	11
Where can I find more information about Immersion education?	11
Appendices	11

September 2025

Dear Immersion Families,

Boozhoo! ¡Hola! Greetings!

Welcome to the language immersion programs in the Duluth Public Schools. We are proud to offer both the Misaabekong Ojibwe at Lowell and the Nueva Visión Spanish Immersion at both Lowell and Myers Wilkins as well as Lincoln Park Middle School. The purpose of this handbook is to address the unique aspects of language immersion education. Please refer to the [Duluth Public Schools Family and Student Handbook](#) for information on our district policies and procedures.

Why language immersion?

Being multilingual, multiliterate and multicultural creates many social and professional opportunities, and develops an understanding of our global society. Many research studies on the benefits of immersion education suggest the following:

- Academic performance is at or above the same level as peers in English-only classrooms
- Advanced levels of functional proficiency in the second language are acquired in comparison to traditional language programs
- Demonstration of high levels of cultural awareness, identity, and competency
- Gains in additional cognitive, academic, and employment benefits
- Demonstration of more mental flexibility
- Increased sensitivity to others, heightened awareness, receptivity and appreciation of language
- Exhibition of many cognitive benefits like increased problem solving skills and the ability to think creatively
- Language & culture revitalization (Ojibwemowin specific)

Sincerely,

TBA
Coordinator, Misaabekong
218-336-8895 ext.2409

Gabriela Theis
Coordinator, Nueva Visión
gabriela.theis@isd709.org
218-336-8895 ext. 3275.

Eve Hessler
Principal, Lowell Elementary
eve.hessler@isd709.org
218-336-8895 ext. 2275

Lisa Nicholson
Principal, Myers Wilkins Elementary
lisa.nicholson@isd709.org

Brian Kazmierczak
Principal, Lincoln Park Middle
School
brian.kazmierczak@isd709.org

Handbook Purpose

The purpose of this immersion handbook is to provide a clear picture of immersion programming purposes, processes, and supporting structures for families. This handbook is a supplement to the Duluth Public Schools Family and Student handbook that is mailed to all families at the start of the school year. The information found in this handbook is specific to the immersion programs housed within the district.

Program Overview

Duluth Public Schools offers two immersion programs: Misaabekong (Ojibwe) and Nueva Visión (Spanish). Spanish Immersion is offered at three sites, Lowell, Myers-Wilkins and Lincoln Park Middle School. Beginning in kindergarten, the goal of language immersion is to provide high quality educational experiences that support academic and linguistic development. Multilingualism, multiliteracy and multiculturalism strengthen students' own cultural identity, helps students understand others of different backgrounds, while also showing the district's strong commitment to value diverse languages and cultures. Our Misaabekong program provides a unique opportunity for advancing the recognition of Ojibwemowin as the local Indigenous language and participation in the revitalization of the Ojibwe language and culture.

Program Scope

The vision of Duluth Public Schools is to offer K-5 immersion programming at the classroom level with direct English Language Arts instruction being included beginning in grade 3. Given current capacity, our plan is to develop and maintain a strong K-5 program and continue Spanish Immersion into Middle School via one or two classes of Social Studies and/or Spanish Language Arts. At this time, due to lack of teachers, Misaabekong is a K-5 program only.

Middle School Immersion Expansion for NVSI

The District has seen promising results from the elementary program and is committed to providing students with opportunities to continue studying a second language into middle and high school. Assessment results reveal that students are being well prepared in both the English and Spanish language. We see value in ensuring that these skills continue to be developed in middle school, high school, and beyond.

Duluth's NVSI Middle School program was designed to meet the needs of our middle school students by providing the opportunities to expand friendships and peer groups while continuing to develop language skills and vocabulary. Lincoln Park Middle School has been designated as the host school due to available classroom space, flexibility with scheduling, and community school resources. Students wishing to continue in middle school immersion would enroll in one or two immersion language classes, likely Social Studies, but dependent on the licensure of qualified teachers. This plan aligns with many other middle school immersion programs across the country that offer one or two courses in a target language. While the program is being established, a commitment from at least twelve students is necessary in order to offer the middle school continuance option.

Bilingual/Multilingual Diploma Seal & Language Proficiency Certificates

Minnesota districts and charter schools may award Minnesota bilingual and multilingual seals to high school graduates who demonstrate the required levels of language proficiency in speaking, writing, reading and listening for languages other than English, including American Sign Language (ASL) and American Indian (indigenous) languages in grades 10, 11, 12 regardless of how the language was learned. Bilingual and multilingual seals are awarded upon graduation. World language proficiency certificates can be awarded when students meet proficiency requirements based on assessments from the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL.)

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (Minnesota State) will award free college semester credits to graduating high school students who receive bilingual and multilingual seals and world language proficiency certificates. Students must request the college semester credits within three academic years of graduation from high school and upon enrollment in a Minnesota State college or university.

<https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplq?IdcService=GET...MDE073739...>

STAMP for 5th Grade NVSI

Nueva Visión Spanish Immersion 5th grade students will take the STAMP 4e assessment each spring. This assessment consists of four separate tests evaluating the four components of language acquisition: reading, writing, speaking and listening. The purpose of the assessment is to measure student outcomes in the target language, and to identify program strengths and weaknesses so improvements in curriculum, training, and student experiences can be addressed.

5th Grade Misaabekong Proficiency Test

A standardized proficiency language assessment has yet to be developed by an outside agency and promoted by the Minnesota Department of Education. The Duluth Public Schools has developed a team to collaborate in the creation of an original assessment that will provide program stakeholders with a consistent measure of student language outcomes after 5th grade. Implementation began in the 24-25 school year.

Curriculum and Instruction

Both immersion programs will use the current Duluth Public Schools established standards, outcomes, and assessments. Curriculum is aligned with Minnesota Standards and Benchmarks, which are built on Career and College Ready Standards. However, the materials and approaches used are specific to the target language and program.

Nueva Visión uses curriculum materials and assessments that are similar to the District English curriculum and assessments, but in Spanish, while also incorporating language and culture and the wide variety of world view points taught by both local and international teaching and support staff. Students learn to understand, speak, read, and write in Spanish, with increasing language proficiency levels each year they are in the program. All content is

taught through the target language of Spanish in which teachers use differentiated instruction to meet the language and curriculum goals through gestures, songs, dance, routines, rhymes, and repetition.

Misaabekong staff collaboratively create local units of instruction and specific learning materials that incorporate the MN standards into culturally-based learning, due to the lack of monolingual Ojibwemowin materials available for purchase. The district adopted materials that are often directly translated into Ojibwemowin, with culturally-specific adjustments made when necessary. Local assessments are collaboratively created for assessing content specific skills and knowledge.

English Language Instruction

Formal English instruction begins in 3rd grade for students enrolled in both immersion programs . Research has shown that immersion students perform at the same level or better than their non-immersion peers on state standardized tests by 5th grade. The English teacher is responsible for teaching MN state standards to students in grades 3-5 for 45 minutes daily. This instruction ideally takes place outside of the immersion classroom to better separate target language instruction from English instruction.

NVSI is working with other districts and MDE (Minnesota Department of Education) to explore models that promote the growth of Spanish and English, as well as make connections across languages, from the beginning. This process is in its initial phase.

Current Model Instruction time in Immersion Language

Grade	Target Language (Ojibwe or Spanish)	English
K-2	90%	10% (Specialists only-Music, PE, Art, & Media)
3-5	80%	20% (Specialists & English Language Arts)
6-8	25% (2 of 8 classes)	75%

Assessment

Immersion students participate in the district’s Formative Assessment and Screening for Teachers (FAST) assessments three times each school year in both the target language and English. Curriculum based assessments are more frequently utilized in the target language to measure student growth in all content areas. Once students reach grade 3, they also take the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) in English.

Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) in an Immersion Setting

Instruction is delivered within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Content is delivered daily through the target language, as well as during literacy interventions. Enrichment, extension activities, and special education services are provided in English. Beginning in grade three, instruction in literacy is provided in both the target language and

in English. Our immersion programs have also begun to offer English interventions in second grade for the lowest in both languages.

Families receive ongoing communication about how to support their student(s) in an immersion learning environment and are provided with resources and strategies. Each program offers parent/family engagement nights to foster communication and a partnership of student support between the school and families.

IMMERSION ELEMENTARY LITERACY

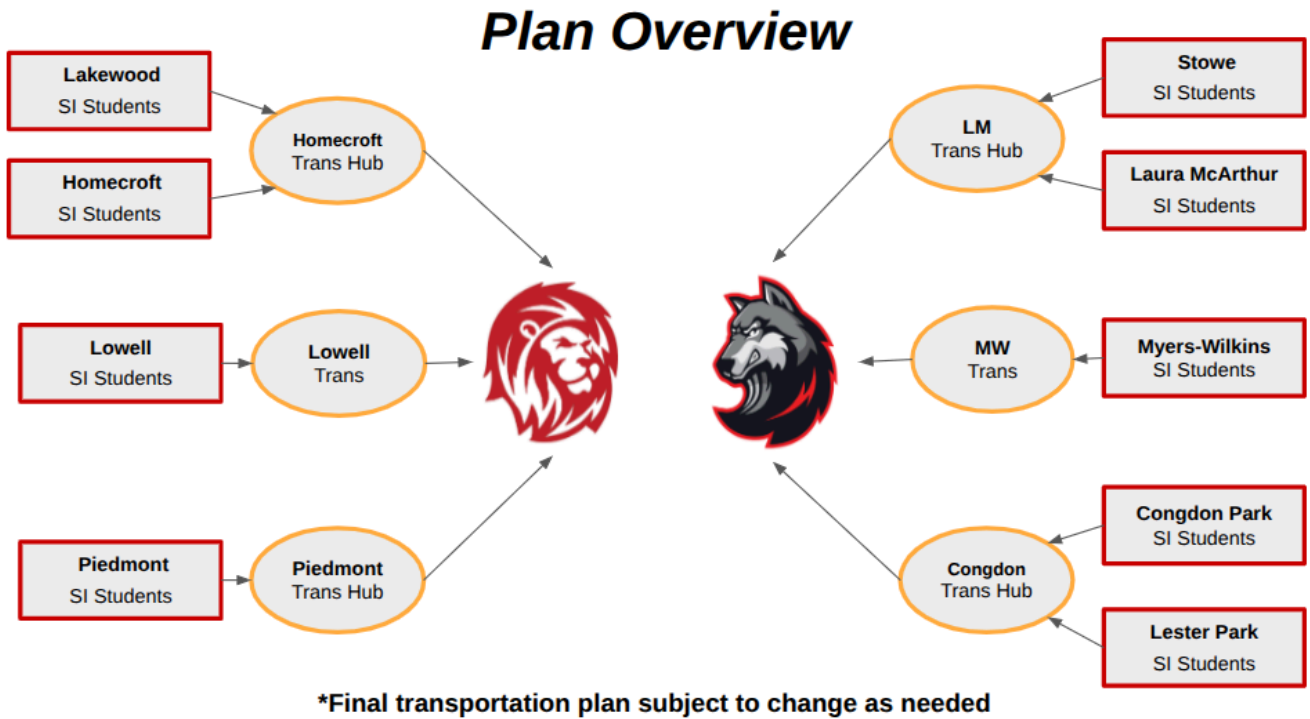
	Description	Group Size	Progress Monitoring	Instructional Adjustments	Instructional Materials	Additional Time
<i>Tier 1</i> <i>All Students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid core instruction and the majority of students are functioning on target (based on a screening assessment) • Teachers work together in PLCs to determine instructional strategies and analyze data to support students struggling with grade level standards • 90-120 minutes 	All	3 X year (District Screening Assessments in English & Spanish) Classroom Teacher	Core instruction in the target language Small group frequency	Reading Maravillas (Wonders)/ Estrellita Ojibwe created literacy materials PRESS or FAST (Spanish or Ojibwe) Classroom Interventions	Small groups as needed
<i>Tier 2</i> <i>Some students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students receive core instruction plus • Students receive additional instruction beyond core instruction (approx. 15-30 min) 	5-8 students per group	Every other week Curriculum based assessment Classroom Teacher	Daily targeted small groups based on diagnostic assessments	FAST, PRESS or Estrellita materials Ojibwe created targeted skill materials	+15-30 min
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students receive core instruction plus • Students receive even more additional instruction beyond core instruction 	3-5 students per group	Every week (District Progress Monitoring Assessments) Interventionist	Frequency and group size adjusted based on diagnostic assessment of specific skill deficiencies	Spanish: PRESS and Estrellitas sounds and blending Ojibwe: speaker-created/translated materials	+20-30 min
<i>Tier 3</i> <i>Few students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students receive core instruction plus • Students receive even more additional instruction beyond core instruction • English Instruction for interventions 	1-3 students per group	Every week (District Progress Monitoring Assessments) English Interventionist/ Special Ed Teacher	Explicit, focuses on remediation of skills	Voyager Passports in English PRESS	+45-60 min

Transportation

Immersion students residing in the Myers zone will receive normal neighborhood transportation via neighborhood routes. Same for immersion students attending Lowell that reside in the Lowell boundaries. Misaabekong students living in the Myers zone will be eligible for busing to Lowell. Please contact the Lowell front office for help in arranging transportation at 218-336-8895 ext. 2275.

Additionally, transportation hub locations have been added to existing Lowell and Myers bus routes in order to support families wanting to attend a language immersion program but live outside the Lowell and Myers zones. The “hubs” are a drop off and pick up point along bus routes that parents can access. **Use of the immersion bus hubs is only available to immersion students and siblings.** Bus hub drop-off/pick-up only occurs at the following school sites: Congdon, Homecroft, Piedmont, and Laura MacArthur. There are additional expectations for hub bus use which will be explained upon transportation registration.

Contact the Lowell or Myers Administrative Assistants for more information. Hub bus sign-ups are generally sent in mid-August to all immersion families.



Parent Involvement Opportunities and Expectations

In order to provide our students the best language immersion experience possible, we ask families to fully commit to the entire K-8 program. Learning a language is an ongoing process and the more years spent learning Ojibwe or Spanish, the higher level of bilingualism and biliteracy our students can achieve.

See immersion program expectations on page 9 for all general expectations. Families are encouraged to read with their child 20 minutes daily in English. Specific program expectations are below.

Parent involvement is of the utmost importance in a student’s education. We welcome families to participate and volunteer in the classroom. Please work with each teacher to determine the best way to support in or outside of the classroom.

Each classroom has special activity days during which all parents are invited to visit. Families will receive special notice of these dates.

Application Process

Application procedure for new and transferring students in the Duluth Public Schools Language Immersion Programs:

New Students

Immersion spots will be held for Duluth Public Schools students first, including students who reside outside of the neighborhood boundary of Lowell Elementary before non-resident students. Siblings of current students will be considered first in the enrollment process.

Minnesota law requires Early Childhood Screening for all children before they start kindergarten. If your child has not had their screening, please call 218-336-8816 or email escreening@isd709.org to schedule a screening.

1. All enrollment forms are located online at the [Online Enrollment Center](#) within the Duluth Public Schools Website. All paperwork should be electronically submitted:
 - a. Same documents needed as all students: proof of address, proof of age, Immunizations records, previous transcripts, legal guardian documentation
2. Assuming there is space available, families will receive notice of program acceptance from the Assistant Superintendent's Office. If the program is full, families will be notified of placement on a waitlist.
3. Immersion Coordinators will send welcome letters to incoming families in May.
4. Any families placed on a waitlist will be notified as spots open within the programs.
5. Families should notify the school directly, as soon as possible, of any changes in program enrollment

Transferring Students/Re-entry

A transferring student is defined as a student requesting to enter either immersion program mid-year, or into 2nd grade or higher.

- In addition to the above application process, the Lowell Administrative Assistant will request the student cumulative file from the student's previous school.
****Receiving information on IEPs and a student's cumulative file prior to student attendance is helpful for planning accurate placement.*
- Students requesting entry into an immersion program at grade 2 or higher will be assessed for language proficiency and academic level prior to acceptance into the program. Students not scoring at a sufficient level of speaking, listening, reading and writing proficiency will be denied acceptance.

Special Considerations for Student Receiving Special Services

1. Special services and immersion staff will review students with established IEPs or other documents indicating additional support may be needed to be successful in the selected immersion program. Staff will determine what appropriate accommodations or modifications can be made within the context of the immersion program to which they are applying.
*****Use of the target language remains a priority for all immersion students. Due to scarcity of language speaking support staff, this is a known limitation for providing extra support in immersions programs*

2. After review of accommodations/modifications, staff will meet with parents to explain what can be accomplished in a full language immersion setting and discuss advantages/disadvantages to enrolling the student in a language immersion program.
3. Special Services Staff and Immersion Program Staff will prepare necessary materials, training, etc., to ensure the student's IEP can be met in the context of a language immersion program.
4. In some instances, the special services required for a student's academic success and the immersion program setting are significantly incongruent. **It is strongly recommended that out of classroom services not provided in the target language total no more than 35 minutes per day.**

**Special Education bussing is not available to students coming from outside the Lowell boundaries.

Program Guidelines

Immersion Program Expectations

These expectations apply to all immersion programs offered through Duluth Public Schools.

We actively encourage all interested and accepted students to participate in immersion programming. Students are eligible for admission between kindergarten and first grade. Acceptance after first grade is determined by immersion program leadership and may include a language proficiency assessment.

The following factors may be considered when determining whether immersion program continuance is appropriate for struggling students:

- ✓ **Completion of all necessary enrollment documents as outlined in the initial application and enrollment process**
- ✓ **Participation in the full K-5 immersion program experience**
- ✓ **On-going display of a positive attitude towards and active engagement with the target language**
- ✓ **Demonstration of growth towards grade level expectations in the target language**
- ✓ **Consistent positive attendance of at least 90% with minimal tardiness**
- ✓ **Daily reading with family for at least 20 minutes in English**
- ✓ **Consistent engagement and participation in class activities and lessons**

Use of the target language by students is highly encouraged and necessary for the classroom culture and language growth. Teachers use a variety of strategies to motivate students to use a high amount of the target language including positive praise and group incentives. Educators recognize that student expression is fundamental, especially when a student is distressed, and work with the student to meet their needs.

No student shall be denied access to an immersion program because of their race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, or disability.

Student Progress Monitoring

Student academic, social, and emotional progress is reviewed as part of an ongoing school-wide data review process for our multi-tiered system of support. Concerns regarding students meeting program expectations will be reviewed as part of the school's data review team, and will be communicated with the parent/guardian. A

problem-solving meeting may take place as needed to identify ways to support a student who is not meeting program expectations (highlighted above).

Special Education Identification & Evaluation

Identification for Special Education can take longer when students are in the immersion programs. Instruction in the first language is essential to identify if the issue is an academic deficit vs issues with language comprehension.

Immersion Program Required Dismissal Process

We actively encourage all interested and accepted students to participate in our immersion programs, while also recognizing that occasionally students have the potential to be more successful in an English speaking classroom. When there is a concern regarding a student’s ongoing success and continuance in an immersion program, the program’s leadership team will intervene as necessary in order to support the student. If a student continues to struggle despite rounds of interventions, a student may be removed from the program. *(See Immersion Program Expectations for removal concerns)*

A student with documented ongoing struggles may be removed from continued participation in optional immersion programming with the following steps:

- (1) Letter of Concern containing factual documentation of the reason(s) for possible program discontinuance
- (2) Family meeting with all involved parties to discuss the concerns and create an improvement plan
- (3) Minimum six weeks monitoring of the improvement plan
- (4) If the reason(s) for concern does not improve, a second family meeting will occur with written notice of the final team decision
- (5) if the student has a disability, a determination of the student’s misconduct/concern is not a manifestation of the disability.

No student shall be removed from an immersion program because of their race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, or disability.

***Students removed from an immersion program will be re-enrolled in their home boundary school. The exception is a student that has siblings enrolled in an immersion program at Lowell .

Reminder- any student that is not enrolled in an immersion program will not have access to Lowell’s immersion bus hub system.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who Do I Contact When I Have A Question About Things?

<p>Classroom Assistant: -Family engagement nights -Field trips -Culturally specific learning opportunities</p>	<p>Classroom Teacher: -Academic progress -Behavior updates -Newsletter -Daily classroom activities</p>	<p>Immersion Program Coordinator: -Program specific curriculum information -Immersion specific questions</p>
--	---	---

American Indian Education Coordinator: -Changes or updates about Misaabekong	Clerical at Lowell and Myer-Wilkins: -Attendance -Meal account(s) -School wide activities/events	Building Principals: -Attendance letter questions -Behavior response questions -Building level communication -Transportation questions
Enrollment Center -Program enrollment information -Enrollment /registration		

What is Immersion Education?

The Guiding Principle of Language Immersion is that students learn a second language in the same way they learn a first language; in the environment where they experience it in its natural form. The second language is not the focus of instruction, but the medium of instruction, and is used for real, communicative purposes.

Is there a tuition fee to participate in an Immersion Program?

No, both Misaabekong and Nueva Visión Immersion Programs are a public school choice within Duluth Public Schools.

Will transportation be provided for Immersion students?

Currently, transportation will not be provided for students living outside of the Lowell Elementary or Myers-Wilkins boundaries who attend an Immersion Program. However, the District has implemented a hub system for families that wish to drop off/pick up students at a designated site. See the transportation section above.

Is there before and after school child care available for Immersion students?

Key Zone after school child care, and Adventure Club (limited space) through Positive Energy Outdoors are available at Lowell Elementary for a cost. More information can be found at:

- Keyzone: <https://www.isd709.org/programs-services/key-zone-school-age-child-care>
- Adventure Club: <http://www.outdooredventures.org/adventure-club/>

How many students will be enrolled in the Immersion Programs and how many classrooms will there be?

Each year, the number of sections will be determined by current enrollment numbers. When full-capacity is reached, students are placed on a waitlist and notified as spots become available.

Is a background in the target language needed?

No, the purpose of the immersion programs is to help students become proficient in the target language. Communication between teachers and families will be in English unless requested by the family, and teachers take this into account when they assign homework. Translation and interpretation services are available for families upon request.

How does my child learn to read English when he/she is learning everything in Ojibwe or Spanish?

Research consistently finds that learning in another language actually enhances English language development. Reading skills, concepts, and strategies learned in one language are transferable to the other. Students will acquire the same English language skills as the students in the other Duluth elementary school English instructional settings. At every grade level, reading to and with the child at home is imperative for the child's language development.

In the first few years of an immersion program, students' English language skills are expected to lag behind in performance in comparison to their English learning peers since the students have not yet been exposed to English language instruction in grades K-2. The lag disappears once the English curriculum is introduced, typically in grade 3. Studies have found that the use of English outside of school, especially reading skills, are transferred from the second language to the native language spoken at home.

What level of target language skills will students have by the end of fifth grade?

The overarching objective of language immersion is for students to demonstrate Spanish or Ojibwe proficiency and confidence when using the language, while their listening and reading skills will be comparable to those of native speakers of the same age. Achieving high levels of oral and written language proficiency in another language, is a long-term process. Our program objective, as measured by the STAMP test at the end of 5th grade, is for our students to score at an intermediate-low proficiency level in all four modes of communication.

What role do families have in the immersion program?

Families are encouraged to be supportive in their child's immersion education setting by being enthusiastic and having a positive attitude toward the target language learning. Families are enhancing students' cognitive and developmental growth by providing experiences that enrich language skills, such as reading, writing and playing games.

Where can I find more information about Immersion education?

FAQs of Immersion Education for Parents:

- <http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/faqs.html>
- http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol10/may2007_parentsten.html
- Characteristics of successful vs unsuccessful immersion students-
https://carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol7/May2004_Student_Performance_Factors.html

Minnesota Advocates for Immersion Network:

<http://www.mnimmersion.org/>

Overview of Immersion Education:

http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol10/may2007_researchfindings.html

Minnesota Immersion Education Video

<http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/immersionmnvideo.html>

Appendices:

- A. Sample Student Concern Letter
- B. Improvement Plan Template

[Family Hub letter](#)

[Parent Guidelines / Parent Agreement](#)