Get the facts on language immersion

As a parent, you play an important role in your child's education. If you are considering an immersion program, you need to know how to help your child develop the best possible language and literacy skills, while also supporting their achievement in the basics. We've developed this list of frequently asked questions on language immersion to help you make informed decisions. If you have additional questions, please contact us.

— Vicky Kim, Director of Programs & Services

FAQS

What is language immersion education?

The focus of language immersion programs is to help students become proficient in a target language while mastering subject content from other disciplines. In immersion programs language is not taught as a subject; it is the medium in which core instruction is delivered. Research shows the most effective way for children to acquire a second language is to integrate instruction into the standard curriculum children are already learning. Research shows that immersion education students outperform students in traditional language classes, do as well as or better than non-immersion students on standardized tests, and have a greater appreciation of cultural diversity.

What does it look like?

The language model in a given setting and the term used to describe it are ultimately dictated by the population being served by the program. The two models you will currently find in Splash programs are described by North Carolina Department of Instruction (NCDPI) as follows:

- **Two-Way Immersion Programs:** These programs group native speakers of English with native speakers of the target language. The mix is approximately 50% of each group and both become bilingual, bi-literate and bicultural. Instruction is provided both in English and in the target language on alternate days, according to academic subjects, or according to a daily schedule (morning in one language and afternoon in the other.) There are a variety of models, and percentages like 90/10 and 50/50 are used to refer to how much of the instruction at different grade levels is conducted in the target language versus how much is given in English. For example, one school might have 90/10 in K-1 and then move to 50/50 for grades 2-5 while

another school starts at 50/50 in kindergarten and continues with that through grade 5.

- **Full Immersion programs:** These programs serve native speakers of English in an environment where the target language is used exclusively. Content is delivered in the target language. English Language Arts is introduced around grade 2 or later. The students become bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural and are equally proficient in both languages with near-native fluency in the target language.

It is important to note that schools may slide up and down the scale of immersion, meaning that students may move from 90/10 to 50/50 over the course of years in elementary school given specific school situations and student populations.

What happens in middle and high school, after completing an elementary immersion program?

Many elementary immersion programs expand to a continuing immersion program for middle school, where most classes will be in English. Middle school students continuing with immersion studies will generally take 1 or 2 classes of content-based language instruction to maintain the language skills already developed in total or two-way immersion programs and to further develop them to as high a degree as possible. Splash programs will articulate up to middle school beginning in 2014 at 3 participating schools. If your child continues language development through an immersion middle school program he should be ready for advanced language studies or for a third language in high school.

How does the admissions and application process work?

It depends on the district policies, but in general, parents of new Kindergarten children will go through the standard Kindergarten registration process at their school or complete the choice program application process if the school is part of a magnet/choice lottery program. To ensure your child gets a slot in the program, make sure to register as early as possible. If more applications are received than can be accommodated, districts may host a lottery for the grade. Based on the lottery, some applicants will be offered the opportunity to enroll. The other applicants will be put on a waiting list. After the close of the enrollment period, schools should continue to accept applications for all grades. If there is not space available in a specific grade, the prospective student will be put on a waiting list.

My child will be in 2nd grade next year. Can she join the immersion program?

Two-way immersion programs may admit new students through the upper grades based on target language proficiency and English literacy skills. In full immersion programs new students are not admitted beyond the first week of first grade. Principals will screen to determine suitability to join the program --- and to ensure that the late addition will not negatively impact the rest of the class's learning. Check with your school district to see what type of immersion program is available and how to get more information on admissions.

Is an immersion program only appropriate for really high performing students?

Research shows that immersion education can be effective for a wide variety of learners, including academically/intellectually gifted students, non-native English speakers, students with many special education needs and socio-economic challenges.

What languages can my child learn?

Check with your school district on language immersion programs offered. The most wide-spread immersion programs in the US are Spanish immersion programs though there are also immersion programs in languages such as French, German, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, etc. VIF currently helps schools deliver Splash immersion programs in Spanish and Mandarin.

Isn't kindergarten too young? Transitioning my 5 year old to school is hard enough. Why would I make it harder?

You're right. Starting school is a transition, especially for those who have not had pre-school experiences already. Learning to go to school, to understand school procedures and routines, is a transition, but it can happen in any language. The high use of props, puppets, and gestures at this early age benefits language learning. When you watch your five year old responding to her Kindergarten teacher's instructions and conversing with her classmates in another language you will understand the possibilities.

What if my child doesn't respond well or doesn't like it?

Like any kindergarten child, your child will be tired at the end of the school day. It's tough work to play hard and stick to all those school rules. It's even more exhausting when you are processing a new language. So don't be surprised if your child is tired and cranky after school. If you are worried your child is not enjoying school or thriving in the immersion environment, talk to your teacher and principal. Most kids respond well to joining an immersion program --- they are made to feel secure right from the start and, after a few days, they do not focus on the fact that the teacher is not speaking English. Parents should give it at least 9 weeks, if not a full semester, to see if the child responds better after just getting through the transition of being in school.

Will my child be able to speak English in class until she learns enough vocabulary to communicate?

In kindergarten you will often hear children speaking or responding to teachers in English. However, their teachers will be speaking only in the target language to them, using a lot of gestures and props to convey the messages. Good immersion teachers will encourage new language learners to respond in the target language by giving them the needed vocabulary to mimic. Good immersion teachers will not revert to English, unless safety or emergency necessitates. Good immersion teachers, by the middle of first grade, will insist on NO ENGLISH in the immersion classroom. Students will quickly realize an easy way out if they are able to speak any English (except in emergencies) with their teacher. Don't be surprised if your child thinks her teacher does not know any English!

Will my child take state mandated assessment, like the EOGs, in the foreign language?

No. All state mandated assessments, like the EOGs, will be taken in English.

My child is in a full immersion program, so how will he learn the English skills he needs to be successful on EOGs and other assessments in English?

In a full immersion program, your child will get dedicated English Language Arts instruction beginning in 2nd grade. In grade 2, immersion students receive about an hour of English Language Arts daily. This time increases to 75 – 90 minutes in grades 3-5. Literacy skills & patterns learned in one language will help the development of skills in another language.

I don't speak another language so I won't be able to help my child at home.

The most important thing you can do at home is read to your child in English. Read and ask questions. Reading in any language supports the acquisition of reading skills such as fluency, vocabulary building, comprehension, etc. Your child's homework should support what he has learned in class. Students should be able to tackle the assignment on their own. Parents will be able to identify what skill is being addressed and support your child's learning in the skill, even if you can only help in English. Homework should not be a struggle! If it is, please talk with your child's teacher. The good news:You don't have to know the language to support your child at home.

What else can I do to help?

There is a lot you can do. Be a strong parent advocate. Start an immersion parent group – to support each other, educate each other, share successes and challenges and ideas to make the program outstanding at your school. Recruit for your school. Spread the word. Tell all your friends what you know about the program. Post it on your Facebook wall. It will be important for the health of the program at your child's school to maintain healthy numbers in the immersion classrooms. Your school should have a healthy wait-list at all times so that any vacancies are immediately filled. Fundraise for a bilingual library. A school can never have enough Spanish or Mandarin books. Host a holiday book drive. Purchase books for the classroom or school library and encourage other parents to do the same.

Also, check in with your teacher regarding volunteer activities. It is important that volunteers maintain the "no English in the immersion classroom" rule to prevent inconsistent practices and to build the children's confidence that they can learn to understand in the immersion language. We don't want adult visitors or volunteers to send the message that speaking English is an option in the immersion classroom. Here are some ideas for volunteers who do not speak the immersion language:

- Select activities and games where a volunteer may be able to help in the classroom using only non-verbal communication.
- Provide tasks that can be completed outside of the classroom, such as materials preparation, bulletin board preparation, newsletter formatting, etc.
- After English instruction has been introduced, suggest one-on-one or small group tutoring (after school) for children struggling with English language arts concepts

PREGUNTAS FRECUENTES EN ESPAÑOL

¿Cuánto tiempo necesita mi hijo para llegar a ser bilingüe?

Las investigaciones indican que los estudiantes necesitan 5-7 años para aprender a hablar y escribir a niveles más altos en un idioma nuevo. Por eso es importante que las familias que escogen un programa de inmersión estén comprometidos a permanecer en el programa. Durante los primeros meses hasta el primer año es normal que el estudiante experimente un 'periodo silencioso' en el cual el estudiante podrá entender mucho más de lo que puede hablar. Este periodo silencioso es natural y necesario. Cuando esté listo, su niño va a interactuar con sus compañeros y los maestros en los dos idiomas.

¿Qué pasa en la escuela secundaria o en el colegio después de completar un programa de inmersión en la escuela primaria?

Muchos colegios y escuelas secundarias tienen un Programa de continuación para la inmersión lingüística. Estos programas mantienen las destrezas lingüísticas ya desarrolladas en un programa de inmersión total o parcial y continúan a desarrollar estas destrezas al más alto nivel posible. Los programas de Splash van a estar en 3 escuelas secundarias a partir de 2014.

¿Qué pasa si mi niño no se responde muy bien al programa o no le gusta?

Como cualquier niño de Kindergarten, su hijo va a estar cansado al final del día escolar. Es bastante difícil jugar, trabajar y adherir a todas las reglas de la escuela. Es aún más agotador cuando se hace en un idioma nuevo. Aunque tal vez Ud. hable español en casa, su niño todavía puede encontrar palabras desconocidas. Así que, Ud. no debe preocuparse si su hijo está cansado o de mal humor después de un día largo de escuela. Si está preocupado que su niño no se está disfrutando la escuela o no se está desarrollando muy bien en el ambiente de la inmersión, favor de hablar con el maestro y el director. La mayoría de los niños se reaccionan muy bien al programa de inmersión--les hace sentir muy seguros desde el principio y, después de algunos días, no se van a enfocar en el idioma de instrucción. Los padres deben esperar por lo menos 9 semanas, si no un semestre entero, para ver si el niño se reacciona mejor después de la transición inicial de estar en la escuela.

Si mi hijo está en un programa de inmersión, ¿cómo va a aprender las destrezas necesarias de inglés para tener éxito en los EOGs y otros exámenes?

En un programa de inmersión parcial, los niños reciben 50% de su instrucción en inglés. En un programa de inmersión total, su niño va a recibir el alfabetismo en inglés a partir del principio del 2° grado. En 2° grado, los estudiantes de inmersión reciben aproximadamente una hora de instrucción en inglés cada día. También, sus clases"especiales", como la música, el arte y la educación física están en inglés. En el 3° hasta el 5°, este tiempo subirá hasta entre 75-90 minutos en grados. Cuando se aprende el alfabetismo en el primer idioma, se desarrollan las destrezas en el segundo.

¿Cómo ayudo a mi hijo?

Dígale que su educación tiene gran valor. Puede ayudarle en el idioma que Uds. hablan en casa y enseñarle los conceptos, las destrezas y la información que él o ella necesite. Un viaje al supermercado, una conversación sobre un libro favorito o la preparación de un plato especial, siguiendo una receta familiar--todas estas maneras de comunicarse con su hijo pueden ayudarle en la escuela. La tarea de su hijo debe apoyar los conceptos que ha aprendido en clase. Los estudiantes deben tener la capacidad de hacerla solos. Los padres pueden identificar la destreza que se está utilizando y ayudarle a aprenderla. La tarea no debe ser una lucha y, si se convierte en ella, favor de hablar con el maestro. Una de las cosas más importantes que puede hacer en casa es leer con su hijo en su idioma nativo y animar a su hijo a hacer preguntas sobre lo que ha leído. Leer en cualquier idioma apoya el desarrollo de las destrezas de fluidez, vocabulario, comprensión, etc.

¿Qué más puedo hacer?

Hay mucho que puede hacer. Sea un padre defensor fuerte. Empiece un grupo de padres de niños que están en el programa de inmersión– para apoyarlos, educarlos, compartir los éxitos, dificultades e ideas y hacer que el programa sea espectacular en la escuela.

Reclutar gente para su escuela. Corra la voz. Informe a sus amigos sobre el programa. Escriba algo en la pared de su Facebook. Será importante para la salud del programa en su escuela mantener los números de estudiantes en los salones de inmersión. Su escuela debe tener una lista de espera todo el tiempo para que las vacantes se llenen inmediatamente.

Recaudar fondos para una biblioteca bilingüe. Una escuela nunca logra tener suficientes libros en español. Ser anfitrión de una campaña de libros. Si es posible, compre libros para la biblioteca del salón o de la escuela y animar a otros padres a hacer lo mismo.

Ser voluntario en la clase: Sería genial tener hispanohablantes que participen en la clase y que modelen el idioma para los niños. Hable con el maestro para averiguar cuándo y cómo podría ayudar en el salón.

FAQs in English

Preguntas frecuentes en español

PROGRAMS (PASSPORT-GLOBAL-SCHOOLS.PHP) ABOUT (ABOUT.PHP) NEWS (NEWS.PHP)

→CONTACT US (SPLASH-LANGUAGE-IMMERSION.PHP#SPLA