

Chinese and Spanish Language Immersion Kindergarten in 2008-09



CHINESE IMMERSION OPTIONS AT: **Madison Elementary School**

Why begin a second language in kindergarten?

The young child's brain is developmentally ready to learn language. A child 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 this period, the brain becomes slowly 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 this capacity. When children wait until high school to start studying a world language, the job is much harder.

What is immersion?

Language immersion is an approach to second language instruction in which the usual learning activities are conducted in a second language. This means that the new language is the medium of instruction as well as the object of instruction. Immersion classes follow the same curricula, and in some instances, use the same materials (translated into the target language) as those used in the non-immersion schools of their district. The goal of the language immersion classroom is language acquisition.

In the early years, immersion teachers realize that students will not understand everything they say. Teachers use body language, visuals, manipulatives, exaggerated facial expressions, and expressive intonation to communicate meaning. In kindergarten, it is common for students to speak English with each other and when responding to their teacher. As the years progress, students naturally use more of the immersion language. (Fortune and Tedick, 2003)

Why immersion?

According to the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), at the University of Minnesota, immersion programs are the most effective type of world language program. Students can be expected to reach higher levels of a second language proficiency than students in other school-based language programs.

A great deal of research has centered on second language acquisition in various school settings. Over the past thirty years, due in large part to the success of immersion programs, there has been a shift away from teaching language in isolation and toward integrating language and content. This shift is based on four principles:

- Language is acquired most effectively when it is learned in a meaningful social context. For young learners, the school curriculum provides a natural basis for second language learning, offering them the opportunity to communicate about what they know and what they want to know, as well as about their feelings and attitudes.
- Important and interesting content provides a motivating context for learning the communicative functions of the new language. Young children are not interested in learning language that serves no meaningful function.
- First language acquisition, cognition and social awareness go hand in hand in young children. By integrating language and content, second language learning, too, becomes an integral part of a child's social and cognitive development.
- 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.

If you are interested in enrolling your child in an Immersion program in St. Cloud Area School District 742, please attend the parent information meeting on:
January 31, 2008, 7:00 p.m., Apollo High School, Room 415
You may also contact our Schoolink Welcome Center at 320-202-6897 or go online: www.isd742.org to find more information about Immersion programs.