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St. Cloud Area School District 742

# Language Immersion Programs

2008-09

*Information Guide*

K - 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

**Academia de Español Vista Clara**

Spanish Immersion Program

Clearview Elementary

**Guang Ming Academy**

Chinese Immersion Program

Madison Elementary



# Welcome to St. Cloud Area School District 742 Immersion Programs!

Thank you for considering St. Cloud Area School District 742's Immersion Programs for your child. Our programs provide exciting and challenging educational opportunities that will prepare your child for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We realize that sending your child to kindergarten can be exciting but stressful as well, for both you and your child. The anxiety can be lessened if parents and children know what to expect.

This information guide is intended to answer your questions about immersion programs in our district. We hope this guide will provide you with information you need to make a decision on whether or not and immersion program is right for your child.

## Benefits of learning two languages:

- Enhances academic and linguistic performance in both languages
- Cognitive advantages – physically enhances brain development
- Increases career and social opportunities
- Expands world view
- Scores statistically higher on SAT college entrance exams\*
- Increases attendance at colleges and universities
- Improves English language skills
- Enhances learning capacity for life

\* College Entrance Examination Board, 1992

***The mission of District 742 is to  
prepare all learners, in partnership  
with their families and the community,  
to live and contribute within a  
changing and diverse world.***

## What is St. Cloud Area School District 742 Language Immersion Program?

The Language Immersion program is available for Spanish at Clearview Elementary School and Mandarin Chinese at Madison Elementary School for kindergarten through first grade students. In the school, students are immersed in Spanish/Chinese while they learn mathematics, science, reading, writing and other curriculum. Immersion means that teachers communicate only in Spanish/Chinese while teaching students.

## Is language immersion a new concept?

The language immersion concept has been used in schools for decades. Many schools in Canada have successfully implemented immersion programs with French as the second language. In reality, immersion has been used for thousands of years. For example, when a child is raised in an English-speaking environment, he or she will become acquainted with the language and begin using it. Students learn the second language in a very similar way they learned their first language.

## How do children benefit from language immersion?

The main benefit of immersion is the development of a second language. Students also develop greater listening and higher level thinking skills by being immersed in a second language. Another benefit is increased awareness and appreciation of other cultures.

## Is immersion education right for all students?

Most students are well-suited for immersion instruction, regardless of their academic ability level. Students who have difficulty learning to read Spanish or Chinese also would probably have difficulty learning to read English in a non-immersion setting. For children who have difficulty with auditory discrimination or auditory memory, or who have severe language delays, an immersion school may not be the best academic setting.

## How do immersion students compare to non- immersion students in verbal skills?

A great deal of research has been done on the development of English language skills by immersion students. Studies have consistently shown that immersion students do as well or better than comparable non-immersion students on measures of verbal and mathematics skills.

## **Is there any emphasis on international cultures in the program?**

Instruction on international cultures is taught by integrating specific information into daily lessons, as well as using major themes as a focus. Instruction at each grade level also focuses on learning about individual countries.

## **What opportunities do students have to participate in the Fine Arts and Physical Education?**

All students, from K through 6<sup>th</sup> grade, are given instruction by qualified Art, Phy. Ed. and Music teachers. This instruction is delivered in the English language.

## **What other kinds of special activities are offered at for immersion students?**

Immersion programs include several special features that add to the child's educational experience. One is the use of young adults, often teacher candidates, from Spanish or Chinese-speaking countries as part of the program. These young adults assist with classroom activities. By working with these teaching assistants, students are exposed to Spanish and Chinese in native dialects.

## **What level of skill in Spanish/Chinese will students have by the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade?**

By the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade, students will have received more than 4,000 hours of Spanish or Chinese instruction, and most will be functionally proficient at writing, reading and speaking Spanish or Chinese. Students will need to continue with their Spanish or Chinese studies in order to maintain and improve their skills.

## **What role do parents play in the school?**

Like all parents, parents of children in immersion programs should maintain an active role in their children's education by providing experiences that help develop their English language skills and enhance their cognitive and affective development. They should read to them daily in English and the second language and engage them in activities where they need to apply what they are learning in class. Families are also asked to make a long-term commitment to the immersion program for children to experience the great benefits an immersion education yields. Parents can support their child in these ways:

- Make a long-term commitment to immersion.
- Develop an understanding of immersion education.

- Provide experiences outside of school to develop English language skills.
- Encourage the use of the second language outside of school.
- Most importantly, be sure your child attends school everyday.
- Volunteer at school and in your child's classroom.

Various volunteer opportunities exist in the school. Parent involvement in school activities shows the child that education is very important to the family.

## **What if our child becomes discouraged or frustrated in the immersion program?**

If a child seems to be frustrated or discouraged, it is important to discuss those feelings with the child. Many children feel they are the only one who does not understand. It is important to reassure them they are not alone. If the problem persists, it is very helpful to let the teacher know so that he or she can focus on the situation.

Because language immersion is seen as a unique concept, Spanish and Chinese may be labeled as the source of the frustrations. For the most part, the child probably would have the same frustrations if he or she were in an English-only classroom. Language immersion teachers create positive situations by focusing lessons around the students' language level.

## **What about the first days in the Immersion programs? Won't students be confused?**

Teachers will use English and Spanish/Chinese during the first weeks of school. Once students have demonstrated an understanding of school routines and safety, the teachers will switch to language immersion. At that time all instruction will be in the new language and, especially at the beginning, students are constantly encouraged to be aware of not only the spoken word, but also the actions and demonstrations by the teachers which will assist in the child's understanding of the language.

## **How and when do students learn English skills?**

In Kindergarten and First grade, all instruction is in Spanish or Chinese. Beginning with the Second grade, English reading and language arts are introduced for approximately 90 minutes per day. Except for the 90 minute period of direct English instruction, all classroom activities continue to be carried out in Spanish or Chinese. The amount of English instruction increases as students move into the intermediate grades. Immersion students will acquire the same English skills as students in other elementary programs.

## **Will English language arts skills be delayed?**

At the start of 3rd grade, some Spanish or Chinese immersion students may be slightly behind non-immersion students in English reading and language arts. However, by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, most immersion students do as well or better in English language arts skills as non-immersion students. Many students exceed non-immersion students in their language arts skills by the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

## **What are the goals of the Immersion Programs?**

There are three major goals for immersion students; to effectively communicate in Spanish or Chinese, to acquire the same English language arts and content area skills as students in English-only programs, and to acquire greater knowledge, understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

## **How do Immersion Programs compare to other Programs?**

Curriculum used in immersion and other elementary programs is basically the same. The difference is that students learn through the Spanish/Chinese language rather than through English. Language immersion students also learn to understand, speak, read and write in Spanish and Chinese.

## **Do children need a background in Chinese or Spanish to enroll in the program?**

No. The program is designed for children of families who do not speak Spanish or Chinese.

## **Are students screened before being admitted into the program?**

In Minnesota, before entering Kindergarten, all students must go through developmental preschool screening. There is no separate screening process for admission to immersion programs.

## **Why learn a second language at an early age?**

Learning a second language at an early age has a positive effect on intellectual growth and enriches and enhances a child's mental development

- It leaves students with more flexibility in thinking, greater sensitivity to language, and a better ear for listening.
- It improves a child's understanding of his/her native language.
- It gives a child the ability to communicate with people s/he would otherwise not have the chance to know.
- It opens the door to other cultures and helps a child understand and appreciate people from other countries.
- It gives a student a head start in language requirements for college.
- It increases job opportunities in many careers where knowing another language is a real asset.

## **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 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 foreign language, the job is much harder.

