Questions Parents Frequently Ask About Dual Language Programs

Will two languages confuse my child or "slow down" his/her academic progress?

There is no research to indicate that learning in two languages will confuse students or slow down academic progress. There is, however, significant research to indicate that students who learn two languages experience cognitive and linguistic advantages when compared to monolingual students. This has been demonstrated by their ability to perform better on tasks that require divergent thinking, pattern recognition, problem solving, and higher levels of metalinguistic awareness.

How do we know the program will be effective?

Research studies and established programs show Dual Language Immersion programs as the most effective way to become proficient in two languages. Results from more than 30 years of research indicate that students in Dual Language programs develop higher levels of dual language proficiency and academic achievement than in other program models.

What if we need to move out of the area?

A well-designed Dual Language program requires consistent implementation. Moving children in and out of the program reduces its effectiveness. In order to get the maximum benefits from the Dual Language Program, students should stay in the program for a minimum of five years. Proficiency in two languages requires extensive exposure to both languages and building a large vocabulary and a deep understanding of syntax which makes the early years of the program critical.

Do Dual Language students learn the same curriculum as the regular English program?

The standards and curriculum in Dual Language are the same as for all students in the mainstream program. The only difference is the language of instruction. Teachers are specially trained and the curriculum is designed to maximize transfer of skills between languages.

What if my child is already able to speak in English and Spanish?

Research has proven that students that grow in bilingual homes are at risk of losing language proficiency if both languages are not academically developed. At a same time, children who have had the opportunity to gain proficiency in English and Spanish prior to kindergarten will thrive in Dual Language instruction. Their skills in both languages will be developed to help them achieve high levels of academic proficiency.

Why not wait for my child to learn a second language in high school?

High school foreign language programs teach language separately from other academic subjects, thereby reducing the opportunities for natural language acquisition. Students in a Dual Language program spend at least half the day learning the second language years before entering high school. Learning a language at a young age is strongly supported by brain research.

How will my child understand if he/she does not speak Spanish?

Dual Language teachers are specially trained to make instruction meaningful through the use of visuals, objects, gestures, and specialized instructional strategies. The students also help each other.

What if my child seems frustrated by listening to Spanish?

Your child might feel a bit tired or frustrated during the first few months in the program. Try to be encouraging and ask for positive feedback about what they like most in school each day. Children are very perceptive. If you are having doubts about the program, they will know it and feel similarly, no matter what you say to them. Your positive attitude will be the most significant factor in your child adjusting well to the Dual Language environment.

Does it matter if no one at home speaks Spanish?

No. It is important to encourage high levels of language development in the dominant language of the home. Read to your child daily, talk to your child, and encourage them to talk to you. Continue literacy experiences you would naturally encourage. Research indicates that strong language skills in the native language transfer to new languages that are introduced.

Should I be reading at home in Spanish or English?

Don't stop reading aloud to your child in the language you are most comfortable using. It is very important to continue this special way of spending time together. You are not expected to read in a language you do not speak yourself.

Am I expected to help my child with homework in Spanish?

Written instructions for all homework are given in both English and Spanish. There may be times, however, when an English/Spanish dictionary at home may be helpful.

How can I be a volunteer?

There are so many ways you can help your child succeed in school. If you are available during the day, there are opportunities to help out in the classroom or doing preparatory work. If you work outside of the home and are only available evenings, there are many available activities to support your child’s school through PTA.