



What is language immersion?

Language immersion is a powerful tool for teaching children a new language. An immersion education gives students an opportunity to expand the ways they communicate and think.

Here are a few benefits of an immersion education:

- Proficiency in both English and the target language
- An increased understanding of a culture other than the dominant culture
- Strengthened brain development
- Improved overall school performance and problem-solving skills
- Higher scores on standardized tests (e.g. SAT)
- More career choices

What if I don't speak the target language?

You do not need to speak the target language for your child to succeed in the immersion program. Show your child that you value her ability to speak a second language. Attend cultural events that feature music, dance or food from a country where the target language is spoken. At the same time, continue to reinforce English language development skills at home.

How can I deal with friends and relatives that question my decision to enroll in a language immersion program?

"Well meaning" friends and relatives may question your decision to enroll your child in an immersion program. You may be told that you are putting your child under unnecessary pressure or that your child won't learn English. However, when you see that your child is learning to speak, read and write in both English and the target language, be reassured that you made the right decision.

More questions? Don't hesitate to call!

Multilingual Programs-SFUSD
415-355-7771, www.sfusd.edu

Parents for Public Schools-SF
415-468-7077, www.ppsf.org

Parents' Answers to Parents' Questions

about

Language Immersion Programs



Multilingual Programs
San Francisco Unified School District
Parents for Public Schools-San Francisco



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Why is it good to start learning another language at a young age?

The earlier a child is introduced to a language, the greater the chances are that that child will become truly proficient in this language. Children at a young age are very sensitive listeners and possess an astounding ability to correctly remember and reproduce sounds. This ability declines with age.

Can I expect academic excellence from a language immersion program?

Yes, absolutely! Any immersion program in the SFUSD is driven by a standard curriculum. The only difference is that in the immersion classroom, most of the curriculum is taught in the target language. Immersion teachers apply the California State academic standards for every grade level.

What about homework?

You may feel frustrated because you don't know how to help with homework. Teachers will provide helpful materials to help parents understand what will be studied and how to help with homework. Any time you encourage academic achievement, in whatever language, is positive. If you are concerned about progress, don't hesitate to ask for a conference with your child's teacher.

How will my child know what to do in the classroom if he doesn't understand the language?

In immersion, 80-90% of classroom instruction in kindergarten and 1st grade is conducted in the target language. Instruction is carefully designed so that students can understand what is being taught. Immersion teachers use songs, body language, exaggerated facial expressions, hands-on activities and expressive intonation to communicate and help build vocabulary in the target language.



What if my child is confused and tired?

Be prepared that your child may at first be confused or frustrated. She may be tired at the end of the day. Language learning is challenging! If your child becomes confused, reassure her and express confidence in her ability. This reaction is very normal for first-time immersion learners and can last from two weeks to two months. Children are generally very resilient and will soon feel comfortable with the new language.

My child speaks only English. Can my child really become fluent in another language?

If your child speaks only English, it often takes three to five years to develop written and oral proficiency in the target language. Typically, children soak up the language for the first two years. You'll notice they will understand more than they can speak. By the second grade, teachers will encourage students to speak more in the target language until it becomes more natural.

My child does not speak English. How will immersion affect how my child learns English?

Many parents are fearful that immersion may delay their child's learning to speak, read and write in English. However, research shows that the immersion experience actually advances English language development. The amount of instruction in English will increase every year until half the day is in English by the 4th grade. After three to four years, students generally will be doing as well or better than their peers in general education. It is important for parents to understand that the initial lag is temporary and is to be expected.

"Target language" = non-English language in which instruction is given.
