

CÉSAR CHÁVEZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



SPANISH IMMERSION PARENT HANDBOOK

2008 – 2009

History of Spanish Immersion Education

While it is a relatively new idea to North America, total immersion is the way that millions of children in the world learn second and even third languages. In Scandinavia, Switzerland, India, Singapore, Africa, and South America, students attend schools in which the language of instruction is different from the home language.

In North America, English-speaking Canadian parents in St. Lambert, Quebec, wanted their children to become truly bilingual. In 1963, they pioneered the first French immersion program in Canada. Today in Ottawa, 25% of the English-speaking kindergartners enter classes in which only French is spoken. Over 200,000 children across Canada are now in French immersion programs that have been developed in every province. In the United States, a growing number of school districts have followed St. Lambert's lead. Some of the largest programs are located in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, Virginia, and Louisiana. Children in these programs are immersed in Spanish, French, German, Japanese, Chinese, and even Norwegian! The large number of new immersion programs initiated each year reflects the growing interest in, and documented success of, immersion education.

The Davis Program

The Davis Board of Education approved the Davis Spanish Immersion program in 1982. The program began in September of 1982 with a split kindergarten/first grade at Birch Lane Elementary. As the program grew, classes were also opened at North Davis and West Davis Intermediate Schools. In 1992 the entire program was moved to West Davis Elementary (K-3) and West Davis Intermediate (4-6) to allow for a more efficient consolidation of Spanish language resources. In 1997, all seven grades were united at one school and the new school (formerly West Davis Elementary) was renamed César Chávez Elementary in honor of the renowned union activist.

Davis' Bilingual Spanish Immersion Program

Program Description

The Davis Spanish Immersion Program for grades kindergarten through sixth grade is an early total immersion model in which students begin their study of Spanish in kindergarten. Formal instruction in English begins at the very end of second grade.

The Davis Bilingual Spanish Immersion Master Plan

Program goals in the plan include:

- Goal 1: All students will develop a high level of proficiency in Spanish and English.**
- Goal 2: All students will gain skills and knowledge in the content areas of the curriculum in keeping with the District's stated objectives in these areas.**
- Goal 3: All students will develop positive attitudes toward other languages and cultures.**

The Master Plan sets the following enrollment criteria for the program:

1. All students eligible to attend Davis schools may apply.
2. Students who do not yet speak Spanish may enter the program at kindergarten or the first semester of first grade. Students who speak Spanish may enroll at any grade level.
3. Parents should understand that continuing participation from kindergarten through sixth grade allows for maximum benefits for the child.
4. Registration will be handled by the César Chávez school site.
5. Spanish-dominant students and siblings of students already enrolled in the Bilingual Spanish Immersion Program will receive first priority for placement.
6. Priority numbers will be issued if any of the following conditions occur:
 - a. A sufficient number of kindergarten students have not registered by the established date to fill a class;
 - b. there are not enough vacancies in the established first grade classes to accommodate applications.
7. Once enrolled in the program, students will automatically continue unless unenrolled by parents or the District.

The Spanish Immersion Curriculum

The curriculum is the same for pupils in this program as it is in all of the district's other schools. Students study reading and language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health, art, music, and physical education through the medium of another language. Thus, pupils learn to understand, speak, read, and write in a second language as well as English. At the kindergarten level, the emphasis is on vocabulary, short sentences, and passive comprehension. The teacher speaks only in Spanish. Although children may use English, they are encouraged to use the Spanish vocabulary and expressions with which they are comfortable.

In first grade, the teacher and students use Spanish for classroom communication and for teaching the content of subjects. Students are encouraged to use the Spanish language expressions, vocabulary and structures that they know.

During their first three years (K, 1st, 2nd), children are totally immersed in Spanish in the classroom instruction. They thus adjust naturally and easily to this language. English reading and language arts are introduced in third grade, with 20% of total classroom instruction in English. The percentage of classroom instruction in English increases slightly each year until grade 6, when students receive 70% of their instruction in Spanish and 30% in English.¹

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Percent in Spanish	100	100	95	80	75	70	70
Percent in English	0	0	5	20	25	30	30

¹ From DJUSD Spanish Immersion Master Plan

Basic Educational Assumptions

The concept of a total immersion second language program is based on the following educational assumptions:

- Language learning should be started early. To be meaningful, it must involve the student in the use of the language for communicating in normal everyday situations and in subject content learning. Children learn the second language much as they learn their first language.
- It has been shown that there is a direct correlation between the amount of time spent using the second language and the level of fluency attained. Therefore, the total immersion program provides maximum opportunities to learn the second language. Studies have shown that students in partial immersion programs who spend half the day in English do not obtain the same fluency in the second language as total immersion students and do not demonstrate increased achievement in English, even though they have spent more time in English instruction.
- In the past, too many elementary foreign language programs were unsuccessful because pupils were not given sufficient opportunity to hear the language and to use the language for communication. In order for language learning to be successful, children must see that the language can be used immediately in meaningful situations to convey wants, thoughts, and feelings.
- The immersion program provides children with the opportunity to achieve functional proficiency in the second language by the time they complete the kindergarten through sixth grade sequence. This is a level of proficiency that cannot be attained in a regular elementary foreign language program.
- Being immersed in second language learning provides new and exciting opportunities for children to gain deeper insights into themselves and into other ways of thinking and expressing themselves. Changes in cognitive flexibility occur when a child becomes fluent in a second language that does not occur with a more limited exposure to the language.
- Results from existing immersion programs in the United States have consistently shown that, as a whole, immersion students score equal to or better than their non-immersion peers on tests of reading and math skills.
- Canadian and United States research has shown that most children in immersion programs do learn the second language and at the same time achieve skills in English reading and in subject content areas appropriate to their grade level.

Native Speakers of Spanish in the Program

*"For native speakers of Spanish, the program functions to accomplish three academic goals: to maintain and develop Spanish language proficiency, to develop English proficiency through natural communicative interactions and comprehensible content instruction and to develop literacy and academic proficiency in two languages. The Bilingual Immersion Program also addresses two very important social goals: social integration and psychosocial competence. Native speakers of Spanish maintain pride in the validity of their first language and develop high levels of competence in integrating with native English speakers."*²

Davis' Spanish Immersion program is a bilingual, or two-way, immersion program. It serves both *language-majority* children (whose first language is English) and *language-minority* children (whose first language is Spanish). The goal for both groups of students is to develop high levels of proficiency in both their first and second languages.

Research clearly shows that language minority students best acquire a second language **after** their first language is firmly established. In contrast, research also shows that a second language is best developed by *language majority* children through immersion in that language. Kathryn Lindholm, of San Jose State University, explains this apparent contradiction:

"First, students whether they are *language minority* or *language majority* students, who can enjoy an *additive* bilingual program (one that enables them to add a second language to their first) demonstrate higher levels of language proficiency, academic achievement, and self esteem. In contrast, *subtractive* programs that require language minority students to learn English as quickly as possible and to supplant their native language... typically result in lower levels of language proficiency, academic achievement, and self esteem.

"Second,... immersing language minority students in their native language will produce not only higher levels of their native language but also higher levels of English proficiency. Because English is so dominant in society, all of the students, including language minority students, need to be encouraged to use the non-English language if they are to develop high levels of proficiency in both languages."³

Lindholm, along with many other researchers, points out that knowledge learned through one language paves the way for knowledge acquisition in the second language. She writes, "Students who learn content (e.g. reading, mathematics, science) in one language will demonstrate content knowledge in the second language once they acquire the language skills to express that knowledge.

² From DJUSD Spanish Immersion Master Plan

³ From "Two Way Immersion Programs: A First-Rate Education."

The Research

Parents can be reassured that the success of immersion education is well documented through decades of research. In 1987, S.I. parent Linda McHenry (one of the founders of the Davis Spanish Immersion program) summarized the research in a paper distributed to the school board and other interested parties. Studies have addressed the questions of most concern to parents and educators by providing quantitative measurement of children's school achievement. These questions include:

- **What effect does immersion education have on first language (L1) development?**

There is a clear pattern of L1 development in immersion: a lag in English literacy skills followed by parity with control groups in English-only classrooms. By grades 5 and 6, immersion children equal the English language skills of English controls whether the immersion program has been early, partial, delayed, or late, and whether English has been introduced in grades K, 1, 2, 3 or 4.

- **Are students who participate in an immersion program able to master academic material even when it is taught via the second language?**

A report on a decade of research in Ontario concluded "... that early total immersion students are able to study history, geography, science, and mathematics in French and still maintain achievement levels (tested in English) consistent with students studying the same subjects in English" (Swain and Lapkin, 1984: 95). Milwaukee, San Diego, Culver City, and our own Davis immersion program report similar results.

- **How effective is an immersion program in promoting acquisition of second language (L2) skills?**

All research reports that L2 achievement in immersion far exceeds that of traditional foreign language programs. When compared to native speakers of L2, immersion students attain near native levels in the receptive skills of reading and listening. Immersion students are quite capable of communicating in L2, but do not reach the fluency of native speakers. Their functional competency could be moved toward fluency by the introduction of more native speakers into immersion classes and development of different teaching strategies at the intermediate and secondary levels.

- **What effect does schooling in a second language have on the intellectual development of a child?**

Researchers have found increases in I.Q. and divergent thinking (one measure of cognitive flexibility) in immersion students. Second language proficiency is said

to result in cognitive advantages for bilinguals because of a greater understanding of the relationship between words and meaning.

- **What effect does immersion education have on social and cultural attitudes?** Generally, it has been found that immersion students do have more positive and tolerant attitudes toward those who are culturally and linguistically different.
- **Is immersion suitable for all students?** Immersion students of below average intelligence perform at the level of similarly matched children in English-only programs in English language skills and academic achievement. Children with learning disabilities develop "... linguistic, cognitive and academic skills at a rate similar to that at which they would develop were they placed in an all English classroom" (Bruck, 1978: 65). Studies in Canada and the United States (Cincinnati) have found that children from lower socio-economic classes achieve in immersion programs at the same level as do control groups in English only programs.
- **How can second language fluency be improved?** Research suggests several ways to improve L2 achievement: increase the length of time of L2 instruction both by delaying introduction of English and maintaining a higher ratio of L2/L1 in the intermediate grades, set immersion programs in their own school rather than in a dual-track situation, and encourage teaching strategies which promote more discourse in the classroom. Also, the follow-up component in secondary school is extremely important in determining the ultimate level of proficiency in L2 (Snow, 1986).

Note: A complete copy of Linda McHenry's research summary and bibliography is available in the SIPA binder housed at the César Chávez Elementary school library.

Spanish Immersion Parents and Teachers (SIPAT)

The Board of Education approved the Spanish Immersion Program in 1982 with the provision that an immersion classroom would cost the district no more than a regular classroom. From the very beginning it became necessary to supplement district support in many ways, including volunteering time in the classroom and contributing money for the purchase of classroom materials and Spanish library books. Parents eager to support their children's learning established the Spanish Immersion Parents' Association (SIPA) in 1983. Spanish Immersion parents have also always been active in school site PTAs. In 1997, when all Spanish Immersion classes were consolidated at one school, a single parent organization named Spanish Immersion Parents and Teachers (SIPAT) was formed and became a member of the nationwide Parent Teacher Association.

Every fall, as its primary fundraiser, SIPAT asks parents to make a donation to support educational programs at César Chávez Elementary. Amounts vary, but the average donation is around \$150 per family. These donations, while greatly needed and appreciated, are entirely volunteer and are not in any way a requirement for having a child in the program.

SIPAT supports Spanish Immersion teachers by providing funds for additional classroom equipment and Spanish books they need in order to teach the curriculum in Spanish. It also purchases additional Spanish language library books and reference materials, provides funds for educational assemblies and cultural events, funds the *Circulo de Lectura* home reading program, contributes to a unique art program, and sponsors extra-curricular activities that supplement the academic program. Each classroom has a SIPAT class representative to organize classroom volunteers and to provide communication between teachers and SIPAT. Each year, SIPAT publishes a directory of all students in the program, which is distributed free of charge to all families.

The SIPAT Coordinating Council holds monthly business meetings at the school site. The principal and at least one faculty representative serve on the council. Meeting dates and times are listed in the weekly SIPAT published newsletter called *El Noticiero*. All parents are always welcome and comments or concerns are invited. Many committees are formed throughout the year and actively seek new members.

Experience has shown that parent involvement is an important aspect of successful immersion programs. We invite you to get involved!

The Home-School Connection

Even parents who do not speak Spanish can help their children at home. Spanish Immersion teachers encourage all parents to read to their children daily in *any* language to foster a love of reading. In addition, parents may want to try *some* of the following tips (provided courtesy of Meg Grulich, teacher at Adelante School in Redwood City, CA):

- Label objects in homework space and in child's room in Spanish.
- Have your child read to you in Spanish every day.
- Keep up with the reading, when possible, on Fridays and weekends and vacations.
- Enjoy the books that you read to your child in English. Ask him/her to name things in Spanish.
- Show your child that you are trying to learn, too. Let your child be the teacher.
- Record your child speaking in Spanish.
- Listen to tapes in the car on the way to school.
- At restaurants and stores, encourage your child to talk to Spanish speaking waiters and clerks, at least to say "gracias."
- Encourage friendships with native Spanish-speaking classmates.
- Make travel to Spanish-speaking countries a family priority.
- Use Internet or other resources to find a Spanish-speaking pen pal.
- Learn the alphabet in Spanish. Refer to the letters by Spanish names and sounds.
- Try to show the same enthusiasm for accomplishments in Spanish reading as you do for English reading.
- Be patient. Don't rush your child into English reading just to ease your own anxieties. For nearly all children, skills learned in Spanish will transfer naturally to English when instruction in English begins in third grade.