

Frequently Asked Questions about Dual Language

1. What is Dual Language Two-Way Immersion?

Dual Language Two Way Immersion (TWI) is an educational model that integrates native English speakers and native speakers of another language for all or most of the day, with the goals of promoting high academic achievement, first-and-second-language development and cross-cultural understanding for all students. In DL TWI programs, language learning takes place primarily through content instruction. Academic subjects are taught to all students through both English and the non-English language. As students and teachers work together to perform academic tasks, the students' language abilities are developed along with their knowledge of content area subject matter.

2. Will a second language interfere with my child's English ability?

In most cases, learning another language enhances a child's English ability. Children can learn much about English by learning the structure of another language. Common vocabulary also helps children learn the meaning of new words in English. Experimental studies have shown that no long-term delay in native English language development occurs in children participating in second language classes, even in full immersion programs.

In fact, children enrolled in foreign language programs score statistically higher on standardized test conducted in English. A number of reports have demonstrated that children who have learned a second language earn higher SAT scores, particularly on the verbal section of the test. One study showed that, by the fifth grade of an immersion program, students outperformed all comparison groups and remained high academic achievers throughout their schooling.

3. Will my child fall behind if he/she learns two languages?

Concepts learned in either language become a part of the child's general knowledge. Many language concepts transfer from one language to another. Please see the following websites for more information on current research in language learning: Center for Applied Linguistics (www.cal.org), Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (www.carla.umn.edu), National Association of Bilingual Education (www.nabe.org), Illinois Research Center (www.thecenterweb.org/irc/), Dual Language Education of New Mexico (www.dlenm.org/).

4. Will my child learn the same things as students in the regular classes?

Yes, the TWI curriculum follows the same District guidelines and standards. TWI classes cover the same grade level objectives, as do regular English classes. Students work toward the same academic goals regardless of the language of instruction.

5. How can we manage if no one in our family speaks Spanish?

That is not a difficulty. The school realizes that many parents are monolingual and will answer your questions/concerns in English. Homework instructions will be given in both languages and will consist of previously taught material.

7. If we move to another area, will my child fit into a regular English classroom?

Yes. However, now that DL programs exist in many school districts, you may be able to find one in your new neighborhood.

8. How can I evaluate my child's progress if no one speaks Spanish at home?

In addition to the report card, there is also communication with parents through newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, special notices, email and phone calls. Parents are welcome to visit classes with prior teacher notification.

9. How will my child understand if he/she does not speak the second language?

Teachers use many strategies to make the content understandable, such as visuals, props, manipulatives, facial expressions, gestures, physical movements and many other instructional techniques. The teachers also repeat vocabulary and concepts and always check for understanding. Teachers do not expect your child to speak the second language right away. The students are not forced to speak the second language and there are initially allowed to speak English/Spanish. The teacher will restate what your child says to reinforce connection between the Spanish and English vocabulary or vice versa.

10. How can parents support their child in the program?

Encourage your child by telling him/her how proud you are that he/she is learning a second language. Let your child know you are pleased with his/her progress. Show him/her that you value the ability to speak a second language. Here are some suggestions on how parents can help:

- Encourage your child's interest in the language and other cultures.

- Attend cultural events that feature the music, dance or food from the country where the language is spoken.
- Provide books, videos, and other materials in the second language.
- Be actively involved in your child's school.
- Teach your child the songs and nursery rhymes from his/her own heritage.
- Read stories to your child in English/Spanish.
- Encourage, but do not force your child to speak the second language at home.
- Get to know your child's teacher either by phone, email or personal visits.
- Take time to get involved with school activities.
- Keep informed of DL programs.
- Be supportive at all times of your child, the program and the teacher.

11. When will my child become fluent?

Do not expect your child to start speaking the second language after the first few weeks. He/she is in the listening phase of his/her second language development. Your child will become familiar with vocabulary and then will begin to take the steps to speak the second language. Do NOT compare your child to other DL students. Learning a second language is a five to seven year process, and each child develops at his/her rate.

12. What about the first days in immersion?

Do not feel discouraged if, at the beginning, your child cries or seems nervous about the experience. Your child will need some time to adjust to this new challenge. From the start, the students are made to feel secure. Be patient. By the end of the first month, most of the students are over the initial adjustment. When your child come home, do not be upset if he/she does not feel like telling about his/her day at school. Children often are very tired after their day and are in need of a change once they get home. If you feel that your child is continuously experiencing anxiety, it would be wise to discuss this issue with your child's teacher.