

Top Ten Considerations to Successfully Implement a New Immersion Program

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By David Bernhardson

Our suburban Twin Cities school board authorized the formation of a Spanish Immersion Task Force in November of 2002. The Task Force reviewed student achievement data from other immersion schools, looked at curriculum and instruction research in immersion education, met with parents, and interviewed teachers. Our Spanish Immersion school opened in September 2004 and we offer the following considerations when looking to implement a language immersion program:

Uno

Build an immersion school and students will come. Today's parents seek second language instruction at an early age and "a passport to another world."

Dos

Establish an admissions process early because interest will exceed availability. Our district recently changed from a first-come, first-served policy to a lottery system because some parents were arriving as many as 36 hours prior to the start of the enrollment process!

Tres

Include resources to hire a curriculum coordinator - someone whose primary role is to attend to the many unique curriculum development needs of an immersion program. Content-based second language instruction is not merely translating English curriculum into the immersion language.

Cuatro

Advocate consistently for the program in order to counteract misconceptions about immersion. Constantly remind district employees and community residents alike what immersion education is and isn't.

Cinco

Select an immersion language where staff and materials are readily available. The pool of qualified candidates is not very deep.

Seis

Anticipate parent involvement and plan ahead for how their talents can be used to support the program. Our parents passionately serve as advocates for the program. They speak up on district issues that affect immersion and support it with funds.

Siete

Seek the advice of other immersion educators and teacher educators who are familiar with immersion research. In this last regard, the CARLA website is an outstanding resource (www.carla.umn.edu/immersion).

Ocho

Listen to the students. They will exceed your expectations. In a recent high school Spanish class visiting seniors were awestruck by our second graders' level of proficiency.

Nueve

Be prepared for growth. Our research showed that the most successful implementation model starts with one or two classes of kindergarten and grows one grade level each year. Secondary planning starts when the first group of immersion students reaches fourth grade. Growth also means recruiting new teachers, developing curriculum and responding to parents who request that you add more sections!

Diez

Enjoy every minute. Immersion is challenging and exciting. We are amazed every day at what our students have accomplished.