

## Spanish Language Immersion – What To Expect

The John Stanford International School will launch its Spanish language immersion program in kindergarten and first grade this fall. Kindergarteners and first graders will spend half their school day in a Spanish-only classroom.

Although this is the first year for a Seattle public school to implement an immersion program, language immersion is not an experimental new fad. It has been successfully carried out in Canada for over 30 years, as well as in a number of schools in the U.S. Studies have shown again and again that children in an immersion setting do as well as, and often better than, comparable non-immersion children on tests of verbal and mathematical skills. In addition, of course, they also learn another language, and because they are starting at such a young age, their pronunciation will approach that of a native speaker.

You may be wondering how your children will manage in a classroom where the teachers (and instructional assistants) only speak in Spanish to them. You'll be surprised. They will manage just fine! Of course, the teachers will use everything around them (pictures, signs, movements, facial expressions, etc.) to help get the meaning across. By focusing on communicating meaning (rather than on teaching about the language or its grammar), they'll help the children acquire Spanish in a very natural way. Since the children will be learning Math and Science concepts and skills, they may not even realize that they're learning a foreign language at the same time.

When children learn Math and Science these days (not just in Spanish, but in any classroom), they use lots of hands-on materials (or “manipulatives” – objects that the kids can pick up and hold). During the year, you may find your child noticing how Math is all around your home. (You have cans that are cylinders, clocks that are circles, silverware and socks to be sorted and counted, etc.) To support beginning language development, the immersion program will simplify some of the activities that the kids do, but they will still be learning to the same Math standards that the District has identified for each grade level (for example, Number sense, Geometry concepts, Measurement, Problem solving, Communicating solutions, etc.).

If there were one thing we could say to you about the immersion program, it would be to have patience. Over time your children will learn to speak Spanish, but at the beginning they need to simply soak it up. You can support them (and the program) best by giving them the space to develop in their own time. It may be tempting to ask them to “show off” their Spanish to Aunt Matilda the second week of school, but putting them on the spot may actually make them feel less comfortable and confident about learning the language. Like the seeds we plant in spring, some sprout after just a few weeks and some take several months. It's better not to rush things.

We look forward to a wonderful and exciting year in the Spanish immersion program. Thank you for caring enough about your children and their future to give them this unique opportunity.