



An environment of discovery
for young children

Spanish Immersion

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Spanish Immersion Program?

A Spanish Immersion Program is a unique experience where students are completely immersed in a foreign language in a natural environment, which is the most effective way to learn a foreign language. The class is complete immersion, which means no English will be spoken except in emergency situations. Communication with parents will be in English. Once the children enter the classroom, they are immersed in (surrounded by) the Spanish language. Young children learning a second language will learn Spanish the same way they learned their first language. The teacher will use hand and body cues, stories, inflection, facial signals, songs, games, and fun to make clear what is being conveyed. This way of teaching is known as Total Physical Response (TPR), and it is very successful in communicating in situations where the language is not understood. Children learn to explore and examine their surroundings and environment. In a short time, they catch on to what is being communicated. Young children do not have the same inhibitions that older people tend to have while learning. They are natural mimics and have little fear in making mistakes; they absorb the second language much more naturally and without hesitation compared to an older child or adult.

Why have an immersion program at the preschool level?

Research has shown that young children have a unique ability to absorb a foreign language naturally. Experts estimate that by age 8-12, humans already lose the ability to hear and say new sounds. Young brains are hard wired to acquire language. Taking advantage of the window of opportunity that exists between birth and adolescence allows a child to optimize his or her learning potential, and speak the second language with a native accent. In addition, studies show that young children who learn a second language enjoy many additional cognitive benefits, such as enhanced problem-solving skills, enhanced spatial relation skills, and heightened creativity. When children enjoy their environment and feel safe, they absorb their surroundings and learn without even realizing it.

What types of activities will my child participate in?

Our Spanish Immersion programs are very similar to our English preschool programs except it is all done in Spanish! The daily schedule includes: circle time when students share in common experiences and discuss activities for the day, snack time, activity time when students are taught Spanish while also

developing fine motor skills through art projects, songs and games, outdoor/indoor play time, story time, etc. Although the activities will vary, the same preschool goals are addressed in our English and Spanish classes in order to prepare our students for an easy and successful transition to kindergarten. Our K-1 Spanish classes will address K-1 standards set forth by the MN Department of Education.

Is any prior exposure or knowledge of Spanish required?

No prior exposure or knowledge of Spanish is required. We assume children coming to our class are being exposed to Spanish immersion for the first time. However, we welcome and encourage children who have some prior knowledge of Spanish. Our classes are set-up so students can enter the program at any age and still be successful. For example, a 6 year old can enter the K-1 class with no prior experience. We do this by keeping our student-teacher ratios low at 10:1 and differentiating within the classroom to accommodate for the needs and abilities of all of our students. Another reason is a true Spanish Immersion program is set up so that students pick up the language *naturally*, which means the environment and activities are designed as fun, relaxed, interactive experiences that are typical in preschool and primary grade environments. Because children at this age are natural mimics, they begin comprehending the second language quickly and gradually speak more and more of the second language the longer they are in the program. Those with more experience are natural tutors for the others in class and those with less experience are able to learn at their own pace.

Do we, as parents, need to know how to speak Spanish?

It is not necessary that parents speak Spanish. The teachers instruct your child with proper pronunciation, grammar, and accent. Of course, having reinforcement at home is always an advantage, but children with little or no reinforcement of Spanish at home are just as successful in immersion programs as those with native speakers at home. Parents often enjoy learning Spanish at the same time as their children. Most parents observe that the younger students quickly surpass adults in their learning curve.

How much Spanish will my child retain/remember?

It is difficult to quantify exactly how much a child will retain since each child is unique in his/her language development. However, studies have shown that exposure to foreign language at a young age aids in learning a second or third language at adolescence and adulthood. The familiarity with the Spanish language will also help them to "pick it up again" at a later age.

What can we expect the first few weeks?

From day one, teachers will consistently use Spanish, knowing that there may be exceptions based on student needs. Most importantly, the children are made to feel safe and secure. After a few days, students will begin to forget that their teacher is speaking to them only in Spanish. Teaching in an immersion setting is an art. Teachers use motions, pictures, actions, props, and other tools to assist student understanding of the language. History has shown us that the vast majority of children make this transition with ease. Teachers are instructed to speak in Spanish, although students are welcome to

speak in both English and Spanish. Students will gradually speak more and more of the second language the longer they are in the program.

What are specific benefits of a language immersion program?

Research shows second language immersion gives children the opportunity to:

- Acquire the second language.
- Have a greater capacity for listening.
- Learn higher level thinking skills.
- Demonstrate a better understanding of English.
- Develop better communication skills.
- Think more analytically and creatively.
- Express enthusiasm and have an aptitude for problem solving.
- Have a greater awareness of them self and others.
- Gain insights into other cultures.
- Have the ability to adjust more easily to the new and unexpected.

Is this a stand-alone program or enrichment for other Valley Preschool programs?

Our Pre-K Spanish Immersion program is set up to be a regular preschool program that addresses all the social, emotional, and academic preschool goals our English preschool programs offer. Because we are only able to offer this program two days per week, we expect many of our families will choose the Spanish option in addition to one of our other preschool programs. This gives our students the option of attending preschool two to five days per week, depending on the preferences of our families. Although similar goals are addressed, the activities in class will vary so students attending multiple programs at Valley will have different experiences in each class. Our K-1 program will be enrichment to the regular school day your child attends.