

### How do we register?

Families who wish to enroll their child in the Language Immersion Program should do so as part of the Kindergarten Registration process in February, or as soon as other school enrollment forms are submitted.

Non-resident students must first apply for Open Enrollment. The State's Open Enrollment application deadline is January 15. Students accepted through Open Enrollment and their siblings may also enroll in the Immersion program. Contact our Registration Office at 952-401-5009 with other questions.

### Is the Immersion option open to all kindergarten students?

Yes. The Language Immersion Program is open to any kindergarten child whose family values learning a second language during the elementary school years. However, immersion may not be a good fit for every child or every family.

- ★ Families who prefer their children have a profound command of the English language before learning a second language usually choose our Kindergarten program taught in English.
- ★ The Immersion Program is a long-term commitment. Electing immersion because a friend or neighbor made that choice is not wise. Make your decision based on the best interest of your child.
- ★ If your family is not excited about the opportunity to learn a second language, do not elect the Language Immersion Program.
- ★ Immersion programs are designed for students to develop proficiency in a second language and would not be appropriate for students who are already fluent in the immersion language.
- ★ Developing second language skills will follow a similar pattern to a child's first language development. If your child was older than most children in acquiring verbal skills or letter and number recognition in English, your child may be more successful in the English program.
- ★ The Immersion Program may not be a good fit for a child who has a language-based or processing disability.
- ★ If you are not sure whether immersion is a good fit for your child, contact your school principal for further consultation.

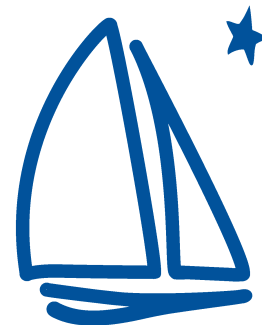
### What role do parents play in the school?

Like all parents, parents of children in immersion programs should maintain an active role in their children's education by providing experiences that help develop their English language skills and enhance their cognitive and affective development. Parents need to read to children daily in English and engage them in activities to extend what they are learning in class.

Families are also asked to make a long-term commitment to the immersion Program for children to experience the great benefits an immersion education yields.

Parents can support their child in these ways:

- ★ Make a long-term commitment to immersion.
- ★ Develop an understanding of immersion education.
- ★ Provide experiences outside of school to develop English language skills.
- ★ Encourage the use of the second language outside of school.
- ★ Most importantly, be sure your child attends school everyday.
- ★ Volunteer at school and in your child's classroom. Various volunteer opportunities exist in the school. Parent involvement in school activities shows the child that education is very important to the family.



MINNETONKA  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

952-401-5000

[www.minnetonka.k12.mn.us/immersion](http://www.minnetonka.k12.mn.us/immersion)

Sources: Center for Applied Linguistics [www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org) and Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition [www.carla.umn.edu](http://www.carla.umn.edu)

## Open to Kindergarten Students



Kindergarten families enrolling in Minnetonka Schools are invited to consider Spanish or Chinese Language Immersion Programs offered as a school-within-a-school at each of our neighborhood schools. Language Immersion options provide children the opportunity to acquire second language fluency during elementary school.

### Why Immersion?

Immersion programs are the fastest growing and most effective type of foreign language instruction currently available in U. S. schools. The goal of language immersion is for students to become proficient in a second language and develop an increased cultural awareness. Students develop proficiency in the second language by hearing and using it to learn all of their school subjects rather than by studying the language by itself. The new language is the medium of instruction as well as the object of instruction.

### Why begin a second language in kindergarten?

The young child's brain is developmentally ready to learn language. A child's brain has twice as many synapses (connections) in the brain as an adult. The young brain must use these connections or lose them. There is a window of opportunity in which a child learns a first language normally. After this period, the brain becomes slowly less receptive. Young children can learn as many spoken languages as you can allow them to hear systematically and regularly at the same time. Children just have this capacity. When children wait until high school to begin a foreign language, the job is much harder.

Learning a second language at an early age:

- ★ Has a positive effect on intellectual growth and enriches and enhances a child's mental development.
- ★ Leaves students with more flexibility in thinking, greater sensitivity to language, and a better ear for listening.
- ★ Improves a child's understanding of his/her native language.
- ★ Gives a child the ability to communicate with people s/he would otherwise not have the chance to know.
- ★ Opens the door to other cultures and helps a child understand and appreciate people from other countries.
- ★ Gives a student a head start in language requirements for college  
Increases job opportunities in many careers where knowing another language is a real asset.

### Spanish or Chinese

All kindergarten families will have the option of English, Spanish or Chinese language. Chinese is offered at Excelsior and Scenic Heights Elementary Schools. Spanish is available at Clear Springs, Deephaven, Groveland, and Minnewashta Elementary schools. Families who wish to enroll in a school other than their neighborhood school may do so through the Parent Option Program, on a space-available basis. Under the Parent Option Program, transportation is the family's responsibility.

#### Chinese

Chinese is the #1 native language in the world, spoken by one-fifth of the world's population. Since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, both the state and federal government have made Chinese language and culture an important educational priority. Minnetonka Schools have a long and positive history in teaching Chinese, and Minnetonka High School was among the first schools in Minnesota to offer Chinese.

#### Spanish

Spanish is the most common second language in the United States, and the fourth most commonly spoken in the world (after English, Chinese and Hindustani). The Hispanic population is the fastest growing demographic within the United States. This presents great domestic career opportunities for bilingual professionals.

### What will the school day be like?

The language immersion classroom will follow the Minnetonka kindergarten curriculum, except 100% of the classroom instruction will be in the second language (Spanish or Chinese). Classroom decorations and learning tools will also be in the second language.

In Minnetonka, families may elect a half-day kindergarten option or enroll in the fee-based extended day kindergarten program.

Although the kindergarten children will speak mostly in English, the kindergarten immersion teacher will only speak in the second language using expressive language, exaggerated gestures and facial expressions, and many visuals. It is helpful if parents reassure children that the teacher can understand English. Children should feel comfortable speaking to their teacher in English in kindergarten.

In grades 1 – 2, all classroom instruction is in the second language, but specials in music, art, physical education and media are taught in English. In third grade, direct instruction in English begins.

### How long will that take for children become proficient in the second language?

After only 2 or 3 years in an immersion program, students demonstrate fluency and confidence when using the immersion language, and their listening and reading skills are comparable to those of native speakers of the same age. While these skills remain native-like, students' speaking and writing skills lag behind those of native speakers (Johnson & Swain, 1997). Research finds that immersion students' second language lacks grammatical accuracy and does not display the variety and complexity produced by native speakers of the language. Achieving high levels of oral and written proficiency in a second language is a long-term process. A long-term commitment is essential, and parents need to understand that native-like proficiency in every skill area is unlikely. Still, immersion students will have a strong second language base upon which to continue moving toward full proficiency and to develop proficiency in subsequent languages.

### How will my child understand what is being taught?

In the early years, immersion teachers realize that their students will not understand everything they say. They use body language, visuals, manipulatives, exaggerated facial expressions, and expressive intonation to communicate their meaning. In kindergarten it is common for students to speak English with their peers and when responding to their teacher. As the years progress, students naturally use more of the immersion language. To draw students into using the language, teachers often use songs, useful phrases, chants and rhymes, and carefully structure the day with familiar routines.

### How will learning everything in a second language affect my child's English language literacy?

Research consistently finds that the immersion experience actually enhances English language development (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). During the primary years, students' English development may lag temporarily in reading, word knowledge, and spelling while instruction is occurring exclusively in the immersion language. However, by fifth grade this discrepancy disappears and immersion students perform as well or better than their English-only peers. It is important to understand that the initial lag is temporary and to be expected.