

Odeen, dva, tri!

Odeen, dva, tri! (one, two, three!) While the majority of ASD's kindergarten students are learning numbers in English, the students in the Russian partial immersion program at Turnagain Elementary this year are learning the same skills, only in Russian! Already they are counting to ten and singing songs about the colors, exclusively in Russian.

This year, the district started the first elementary school Russian immersion program in the United States. Students in kindergarten and first grade are immersed for half the day in Russian. The two Russian teachers are native speakers from Tver and Vladimir, cities near Moscow. Each has an English speaking partner teacher so that by mid day students switch classes and are instructed in English with a different teacher.

The partial immersion model works for students who speak English or Russian. Both groups will develop high levels of proficiency in both languages. This is a "win-win" for ALL students. To date, there are six native Russian speaking students in the Turnagain program. Why do parents choose to enroll their children in a Russian language immersion program? Parent Alex Dirksen would like his son to be trilingual. At home the Dirksens speak Spanish because Nicolas' mother, Lorena, is from Mexico City. Another Turnagain parent says that learning a second language early enhances all learning. This gives his child an advantage that he didn't have growing up.

Students in the Russian immersion program are in for the "long haul." For students to become both bilingual and literate in two languages it takes time. The district plans are for this program to be K-12 as are the Japanese and Spanish programs. Students will leave Turnagain after sixth grade and continue Russian at Romig and West. In 10 to 12 years, these students will be among the very few in the country prepared for Russian college prep courses, such as the International Baccalaureate Program that also started at West High School this year. Now that is planning ahead! Ura! Do svidaniya!

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