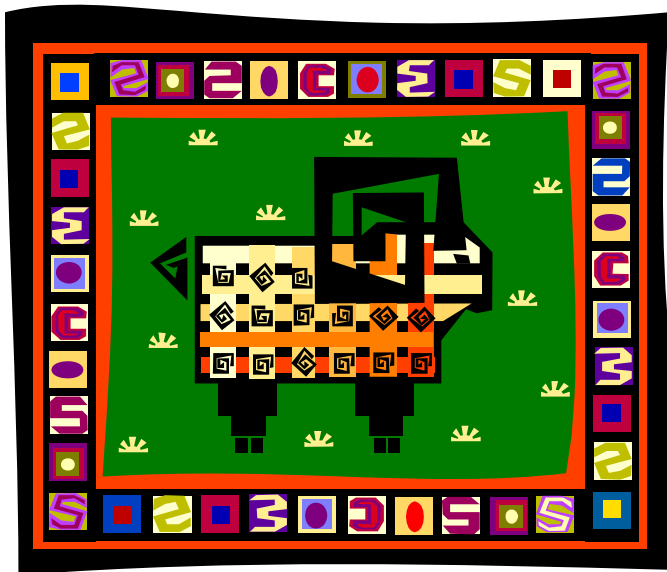


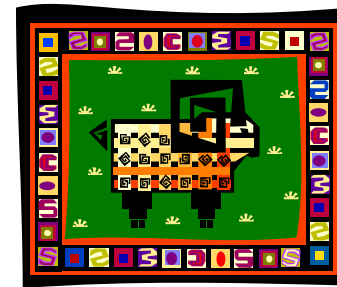
# CHUGIAK ELEMENTARY SPANISH IMMERSION PROGRAM PARENT HANDBOOK

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Chugiak Elementary School is committed to actively integrating the Spanish Immersion program through total school involvement at all grade levels.



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*OLÉ*: Our Language Learning  
(The Spanish Immersion Parents group)

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Chugiak Elementary  
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Eagle River, AK  
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*Home of the Rams*

*Welcome to Chugiak Elementary School's partial Spanish language Immersion program. We are glad you have chose the Spanish Immersion Program for your child, and we know you will be happy with that decision. Our teachers are enthusiastic, positive and friendly, and they welcome parent involvement to help the children meet their goals.*

*OLE, Our Language Education, is a Chugiak Elementary School parent-supported organization that works to complement the hard work of the PTA and offer support to our Spanish-Immersion teachers and teams. OLE meets monthly, generally the third Tuesday of every month, to discuss our goals and progress. In the past we have helped fund and organized such programs as after-school tutoring, visiting artists and musicians, a summer Spanish-speaking cam and a yearly fiesta to celebrate the cultural significance of Spanish-speaking countries throughout the world.*

*We hope that you find the information in this handbook helpful. Other resources are available through the school district and our front office. If you have any questions, stop by the front office and ask, the staff there can also help you get in touch with OLE members as well as other information about the program.*

OLE

## **IMMERSION PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Modeled after the pioneering French immersion programs developed in Canada in the 1960s, foreign language immersion programs in the United States are designed to enrich the education of native-English-speaking students by teaching them all of their academic subjects in a second language. The goal is for students to become proficient in the second language and develop increased cultural awareness while reaching a high level of academic achievement. 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 itself. In the U.S., the immersion language is most often one spoken by large numbers of people, such as Spanish, French or Cantonese. In some cases, it is a heritage language being revitalized, as in the Hawaiian and Yup'ik Immersion programs that serve indigenous communities.

Here at Chugiak Elementary School we have what is often called a partial- immersion program because students are immersed

in Spanish for half of their academic day. In this program students learn English language arts as well as Spanish.

The Chugiak Elementary Spanish Partial Immersion Program provides a total language experience in a multicultural setting for students to become proficient in two languages – English and Spanish – by the time they complete kindergarten through grade five. Spanish is learned in everyday classroom conversational situations and through subject content instruction. This makes language learning more meaningful to them and helps them develop listening comprehension, spontaneous verbal expression, and reading and writing skills.

## **CURRICULUM**

At all grade levels, the Spanish Immersion teacher instructs math, health, science, Spanish language arts, thematic activities, cultural activities and social skills. The partner teacher instructs English language arts (listening, speaking, reading, writing), social studies, thematic activities and social skills. This can vary between grade levels.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

### **1. Why should I enroll my child in an immersion program?**

Immersion programs are the fastest growing and most effective type of foreign language program available in U.S. schools. Most immersion students can be expected to reach higher levels of second language proficiency than students in other school-based language programs. Becoming bilingual opens the door to communication with more people in more places, and increases opportunities in the job market. Also, many parents want to provide their children with skills to interact competently in an increasingly interdependent world community.

Immersion learners also benefit cognitively, exhibiting greater nonverbal problem-solving abilities and more flexible thinking. The very processes learners need to use to make sense of the teacher's meaning make them pay closer attention

and think harder. These processes, in turn, appear to have a positive effect on cognitive development. However, a high level of second language proficiency is needed in order to experience the positive cognitive benefits that come with bilingualism. From the standpoint of academic achievement, over three decades of studies consistently show that immersion students achieve as well as or better than non-immersion peers on standardized measures of verbal and mathematics skills administered in English.

## **2. Does it matter if no one at home speaks the second language?**

The program is designed primarily for children of families who do not speak the second language. Teachers are aware of this when they send home notices or assigned homework. Report cards are issued in English. Support is offered through the many OLE-sponsored programs, such as a conversational Spanish class, an after-school Spanish club, and after-school tutoring.

## **3. Will the immersion students follow the same curriculum as the students in the regular English program?**

The curriculum in immersion programs is the same as the curriculum in English-only programs. Students receive the same instruction in the basic subjects: mathematics, reading, language arts, science, music, etc.

## **4. Is any English spoken in the Spanish immersion classroom?**

Parents often ask if the teacher slips in a word or sentence in English in the immersion classroom. On occasion, if a child needs to be comforted, the teacher can take the child aside and speak softly to him/her in English. In order for students to learn

and gain confidence in Spanish, it is extremely important that only Spanish is used in the immersion classroom.

## **5. How will learning everything in a second language affect my child's English language and literacy development?**

Research consistently finds that the immersion experience actually enhances English language development. Here at Chugiak Elementary School, students in the Immersion program score as well or better than their monolingual peers.

## **6. What about the first days in an immersion program? Is it frustrating for a child to begin school where no one is speaking his/her language?**

For students beginning school in early immersion programs the only difference between the immersion class and the English-only class is that the teacher is using the second language. The children are made to feel safe and secure through skillful nurturing instruction. After a few days they do not focus on the fact that the teacher is not speaking in English. Parents are perhaps more frustrated than their children because they may not know the language in which the children are being taught. The immersion process emphasizes a visual, concrete, and hands-on approach. As receptive skills increase, students gradually substitute the second language into their normal speech.

## **7. Will my child become proficient in the second language? How long will that take?**

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. Immersion students will be able to speak and read in Spanish, but they will not have the grammatical accuracy of a native speaker until late high school. Achieving high levels of oral and written proficiency in a second language is a long-term process and requires a long-term commitment.

### **8. Is immersion an appropriate choice for all children?**

The Immersion program at CES is open to all students: there is no admission test or pre-screening process. Research findings on the effectiveness of immersion education hold true for a wide range of students, including those from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Parents and educators need not assume that learning in two languages will overtax children. Each child's academic progress and ability, in or out of an immersion program, should be considered individually. Many instructional techniques used in immersion are similar to the techniques used for struggling learners. There are, however, many unanswered questions concerning the suitability of language immersion for children with language-based learning disabilities.



Overall, children are made to feel safe and secure and soon find that an immersion classroom is exciting and just plain fun!

### **HOMEWORK**

The intent of homework is to provide the practice to strengthen and reinforce the learning begun in the

classroom. Homework is an extension of what your child has learned in class. Because homework in an immersion program is important to reinforce language use, development and practice, allow your child to his or her homework on their own. Translating the homework into English circumvents and negates the process of Spanish language development. Parents can help their children by looking up particular words in a Spanish-English dictionary. Often teachers provide an English translation of their homework for parents either through a separate handout or a posting on their website. Also, older students (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade) are encouraged to call and ask a classmate for assistance.

### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

#### **What can I do to support my child's immersion experience if I don't speak the second language?**

We are glad you asked! Experience shows that parental involvement is an important aspect of successful immersion programs. Parents 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. They should read to them daily and engage them in activities where they need to apply what they are learning in class. There are many opportunities for parents to become involved at Chugiak Elementary School, from participation in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the Spanish Immersion Parents Group (OLE) or giving volunteer time to PE activities, the Library or individual classrooms. Parents are encouraged to participate in Parent-Teacher

conferences in order to keep abreast of your child's progress. Here are some other ways to stay involved:

- Do not be upset if, after arriving home, your child does not feel like telling all about the day at school. Spending the day in the target language is hard work and students are tired by the end of the day. Give your child some down time when they come home.
- Do not expect your child to start speaking Spanish after the first few days, and do not try to force them to do so. Children will start to use Spanish on their own at their own individual pace. Encourage, but do not force, your child to speak Spanish at home when he/she is ready to do so.
- Get to know your child's teacher either by a phone call or a personal visit. Take the time to get involved in some of the class activities or Field Trips. Students and teachers appreciate your assistance and your interest in the class.
- At all times, be supportive of your child, the program and the teacher. Be actively involved in your child's school.
- Keep informed on immersion education, by attending OLE meetings and reading the monthly publication *Muchas Voces*.
- Do not attempt to correct your child if you are uncertain of the correct expression or pronunciation. Give your child the benefit of the doubt.
- Incorporate functional language in the target language into your home setting.

- Do not ask your child to translate. Students will not understand this concept in the very early grades.
- Do not give in to the temptation to compare your child's progress to that of the neighborhood children. No two teachers and no two students work at the same rate.
- Teach the songs and nursery rhymes that are part of your child's own heritage, in English or Spanish.
- Take advantage of any opportunities to expose your child to the immersion language and culture (s) outside of the school setting (local restaurants and presentations, etc.).
- Encourage children by telling them how proud you are that they are learning Spanish and let your child know that you are pleased with his/her progress.

### **IMMERSION PROGRAM RESEARCH**

Suggested reading if you are interested in reading more about Language Immersion programs:

Johnson, Robert Keit and Swain, Merri. *Immersion Education: International Perspectives*. (1997) Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press

Kanagy, R. and Hai, Genki Desu "Doing fine in a Japanese immersion classroom;" (2001).: In D. Christian & F. Genesee (Eds.), "*Bilingual Education*" (pp. 139-150). Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Genesee, F. "Second/Foreign Language Immersion And At-Risk English-Speaking Children". (1992). *Foreign Language Annals*, 25(3) 199-213.

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de Courcy, M., Warren, J., & Burston, M. "Children From Diverse Backgrounds In An Immersion Programme." (2002). *Language and Education*, 16.112-127.

. Cloud, N. Genesee, F., & Hamayan, E. *Dual Language Instruction: A Handbook For Enriched Education* (2000). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.