

Elementary Compañeros Program Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Compañeros Program?

The Compañeros Program is a two-way immersion setting in which students in grades 1-5 learn to speak, listen, read and write in both English and Spanish. Ideally, two-way immersion classrooms enroll half native English speakers and half native Spanish speakers. In this model, all students have access to their primary language and their secondary language. Students in the Compañeros Program receive half of their instruction in English and half of their instruction in Spanish. Literacy instruction is divided between both English and Spanish.

2. Will Compañeros students follow the same curriculum as the students in the Contemporary Program?

The content in the Compañeros Program is the same as the content in the Contemporary Program. All Minnesota State Standards are embedded in the curriculum for all content areas.

3. Why doesn't the teacher speak any English during Spanish time or any Spanish during English time?

Research on immersion and foreign language learning shows that when a first language is not used for translation, acquisition of the second language becomes solid. In a two-way immersion setting, teachers use many ways to communicate when students do not understand by using actions, visual aids and modeling.

4. How can my child talk in class if the teacher does not respond in his or her language?

The teacher uses one language exclusively during the designated time, but the student will begin by asking and speaking the language he or she knows. Gradually, the students learn the phrases and vocabulary from the teacher and other students.

5. When are students expected to respond to the teacher in the language they are learning?

Students begin to do so on the very first day! In a two-way immersion setting, teachers are very effective at encouraging students to respond using basic words.

6. What about homework?

Homework will be sent home in both languages; it will depend on the purpose of the homework. Homework will be explained in class before students take it home. Students should have a very good understanding of what they are assigned before they are expected to do the work at home.

7. How do students enter the Compañeros Program?

Parents/guardians may choose to enroll their child in the Compañeros Program after kindergarten. The process for enrollment begins with a form where parents/guardians can indicate the preference for the Compañeros Program. A controlled lottery may be necessary to ensure a balance of native English speakers and native Spanish speakers and to keep class size consistent between the Compañeros and Contemporary Programs. If a lottery is necessary, some requests may not be honored.

8. Can students enter the Compañeros Program after first grade?

There will be a literacy evaluation for entry after first grade. Bilingual and bi-literate students can enter the program at any time providing there is space in the classroom.

9. How can I help my child be successful in the Compañeros Program?

Immersion education requires the active involvement of parents/guardians.

- Read, write, speak and listen to your child as much as possible in the language you know best. The more students know in one language, the more they will be able to learn in the second language.
- Encourage your child in his or her learning by asking questions and being interested in the conversation that develops.
- Develop an appreciation for different cultures and languages together as a family. Seek out opportunities to explore the culture of the second language through reading, participation in cultural events, personal relationships, etc.
- Ask your child's teacher how you can support your child's learning in either language at home.
- Ask questions when you do not understand procedures or expectations.
- Make sure your child comes to school every day well rested and ready to learn.
- Volunteer to help in your child's classroom.

10. Is immersion the right choice for my child?

The Compañeros Program offers a unique learning experience. While this program is open to all students, parents/guardians need to give serious consideration to the individual needs of their child. Students should be well grounded in their native language before they attempt to learn a second language. If a child struggles with language learning, to read in two languages will present considerable challenges. A child with language delays or disorders will likely find it very difficult learning to speak, listen, read and write in two language. If a child struggles in math, learning math in Spanish will present a considerable challenge.

11. What happens if my child falls behind?

Support and additional resources will be provided for any student who is falling behind in their classwork. These same resources are available to all students in the District.

12. Can I remove my child from the Compañeros Program?

Since students typically cannot be added to the program, and full proficiency takes three to five years, families should plan to make a commitment for the entire five years of elementary school. There may be situations when a student must leave the Compañeros Program. Before a student exits the program, meetings with the principal, teacher, and parents will be held.

Some information adapted from Bruce F. Vento Elementary (St. Paul Public Schools), Adams Spanish Immersion Magnet (St. Paul Public Schools), and the California Department of Education.