



Spanish Immersion Student Alumnus



What was your favorite part about growing up in an immersion program?

Learning another language is exciting and no other stage of life allows it in the same way that elementary education does. 2nd language acquisition is common later in schooling, but ultimately, nothing works the brain like two languages at such a young age. The challenge of it was exciting.

Have you ever connected with someone else that you otherwise would not have been able to without your immersion education?

It mostly happens in colleague settings. When I was working at Merck in New Jersey, it was exciting to be able to speak with someone in their native language that they might not experience every day. It also helps break invisible walls that inevitably exist and allows you to move past the “water cooler” talks with most other people.

How has immersion education been beneficial to you outside of just the language itself?

When you learn a language you do not just learn a language for the language’s sake, but you gain deeper access to the people, countries, and stories. Translations of books and stories are good, but they do end up being diluted. When you can read classic literature from Argentina or modern poems from Venezuela, you get an authentic access to their stories. It is not simply you are listening to those people’s stories, but you get to be an active participant in them and in that community.

What, if anything, do you think is a need for immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota?

Ultimately, the default should be that you have the option to enroll in an immersion program because they are so beneficial. The state wants to evaluate the education system through outcomes such as Algebra, Writing, Science, and other subjects. A new desired outcome should be a thorough second-language acquisition. There are no unreasonable additional costs (for an immersion program): you are still paying a teacher to teach the same amount of students. A good place to start is for local schools to begin implementing the program themselves.



“Education reform is required regardless, so you might as well have immersion be a central part of that reform anyways”



FAITH



Spanish Immersion Teaching Assistant
Spanish Immersion Student Alumna



What was your favorite part about growing up in an immersion program?

The ability to share your story of being bilingual, the unique entry into the Spanish-speaking world, and that you are able to communicate in two languages.

What is your favorite part about teaching in an immersion setting?

I get to utilize my Spanish skills and it is a good way to keep those skills sharp. I enjoy speaking with students who know more Spanish than English because I can teach them things about English and they continue to teach me things about Spanish I might not know!

Would you recommend that others seek elementary education through an immersion program?

Yes because despite the child not being aware of the long-term positive impact it will have on them, it is "easy" for them at the time (the younger you are, the easier it is to learn a language), and it will also help them into the future!

What, if anything, do you think is a need for immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota?

More resources and materials in Spanish such as curriculum, textbooks, videos, etc. There are countless resources for education in English, but not as many ready-to-use resources available in Spanish as there are in the English world. For example, friends in the English classes were able to experience a read-aloud with First Lady Michelle Obama which simply was not, or an equivalent of a similar type, available in Spanish. A potential solution is even getting educational resources from Spanish-speaking countries themselves.

"Being a Teaching Assistant in an immersion setting has been incredibly eye-opening because I can see how the program functions from a leadership perspective. It's incredibly rewarding to see current students do activities that I used to do when I was an immersion student."



RAYEN



Spanish Immersion Teacher



How did you get involved in teaching/staffing an immersion education program?

I got a scholarship in Chile to go to the United States and teach at a school. I was expecting to teach traditional students. I was impressed with being able to teach the class fully in Spanish and not half in English and half in Spanish. I loved the immersion program because it was not just about teaching the language but also about experiencing the culture.

How have you seen your students grow specifically as a result of their immersion education ?

I see huge growth in students from freshmen to seniors. After four years of being in the immersion program in high school, their grammar is way better, their ideologies are more open-minded, and they are more intentional in the way they talk to other people. They are more aware of the respect needed for communities coming from different backgrounds. I also see how the immersion program is improving year after year by how I see each class of students at the start of their freshman year.

Why do you think it is important to have immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota?

The number of Spanish-speaking people in the United States is increasing everywhere. It is important for everyone to know both of these languages. It is especially important to have people who can speak two languages in areas such as health services and immigration. Whenever you need something, you need to have someone who is bilingual (such as getting a driver's license, visiting health services, or in court). My experience as a person who lives in the country would have been better if there were more people who were bilingual. It is important to be able to support communities who have immigrated or people who were born into families with non-native speakers of English. It helps make it easier to be a part of the community and to show that they are valued members of the community.

Do you have any other thoughts regarding immersion education and/or expanding opportunities for immersion education in the State of Minnesota?

It would be great for Minnesota and the community for there to be more immersion programs available in public schools staffed with teachers both from the United States and from out of the country. It helps make the educational experience more meaningful. Especially in public schools as not all people have the opportunity to pay for private classes or hire a tutor. Even still, the immersion program is such a specific system that it is hard to find sometimes in the public system.

"Students in the program are proud about learning. If they want to keep building their curiosity, Immersion is an area they will want to explore"



Chinese Immersion Student Alumna



What was your favorite part about growing up in an immersion program?

We got really close as a class because it was the same class for the same 12-13 years. With Chinese specifically, it is not an easy language to pick up, but they did a really good job of teaching it. Even though the methods of teaching are so different in China, they really helped support us and not let us sink. When we studied abroad in China, it was beautiful to speak to other people from a culture that was different from my own.

Have you ever connected with someone else that you otherwise would not have been able to without your immersion education?

The immersion program drew a lot of people from different backgrounds I would not have been able to meet otherwise. Our class had many different backgrounds that we would not have been able to meet otherwise. I think specifically, families who choose an immersion education program inherently already understand the benefit of understanding different cultures, languages, and backgrounds. Our teachers from China also brought an authentic teaching experience. It was really special to learn about their Culture from them rather than hear it from people outside of Chinese/Asian culture.

How has immersion education been beneficial to you outside of just the language itself?

I have really benefited from it because I have been able to appreciate multiple perspectives of things, and how important it is to look at things from more than one viewpoint. When I have an opinion about something, I try my best to look at things from multiple viewpoints. I've seen this shine through for myself when I speak with other people on important issues.

What, if anything, do you think is a need for immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota?

There needs to be more support for the students going through it, it can be really isolating at times. It is a really cool thing, especially being able to learn at such a young age. That being said, it can be really challenging because it's almost like you're experiencing culture shock every day while you go to school. It can be very disorienting. I think there needs to be more support for that such as a counselor for students in immersion or the teachers' attitudes towards the program.

"We have a lot of growth to do by learning from other countries; other countries speak more than one language. One way we can do this learning is through immersion education."



Parent of Spanish Immersion Students



Why did you seek an immersion education program for your child(ren)?

Having a second language is important. As a middle school and college student, I attempted two languages: German and Chinese. I was not able to develop proper fluency, and I wanted my children to be bilingual. Being bilingual is a gift.

Our district had the option of either Spanish and Chinese immersion. We were comfortable with either option, but we wanted both boys to be in the same language so they could help each other. It impacted me as a parent because I had a larger responsibility to ensure homework was completed, especially in Spanish, but also again when English was reintroduced. Through research, it was known that immersion students would first struggle with English, but then would quickly bounce back. As a parent, it was important to help foster home-learning activities in English to supplement and support the English reading and speaking ability.

How has your family member(s) immersion made an impact in ways that were a surprise?

The attainment and absorption of global thinking by learning not just Spanish, but learning Spanish from a variety of teachers with different backgrounds themselves. In addition, our elementary school hosted an annual culture week each school year where classes would take time to each learn about that country both in their classroom proper and through an immersive exhibit in the lobby.

What, if anything, do you think is a need for immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota?

There is still a percentage of bias in the population who think that English education is only acceptable because we are "American" and it is tax-payer funded. The state could help provide more research and general education to the populace of Minnesota about the benefits of being a bilingual person. The pathways that are formed in the brain during language development at a young age are completely different (and more beneficial) than when teaching a language to college and high school aged brains. Also, increased funding from the state so that we are investing in more globally-minded Minnesotans.

Do you have any other thoughts regarding immersion education and/or expanding opportunities for immersion education in the State of Minnesota?

If it is not at the preschool level, bringing immersion education into the preschool level for an even earlier start would be great.

"Being bilingual is a gift"



NIKI



Spanish Immersion Teacher



What is your favorite part about teaching in an Immersion program? What can be a challenging part?

Favorite: Watching the kids speak with one another. 2nd grade is when only speaking Spanish is allowed. All of the sudden, they have this whole other world that they can communicate in and do, yet they are still 2nd-grade kids. After 1st grade and after the summer break, they struggle with only utilizing Spanish, but by the end of the year, they don't want to say things in English.

Challenging: Often times a challenge can be finding materials. Though with Spanish immersion, there are usually more materials available than other language immersion programs.

What would you say to a family who is considering immersion education, but is currently unsure of it?

First and foremost, it is a good solid education that your child will receive. We have the same content and expectations as English education. Secondly, look at the research. When you are bilingual, your brain creates so many pathways that create different problem-solving techniques both in and outside of the 2nd language. Being in an immersion program helps foster skills that someone otherwise would not necessarily develop if they were in an English-only setting. It is really great for developing good workers and good thinkers. The magical piece of doing immersion is you have this other way of understanding things. You have two different pathways that work together. Research shows that sometimes there might be a gap in students' performance on standardized testing until 4th grade, and then that gap is closed, and oftentimes, immersion students will often times score higher than their English-only peers.

What, if anything, do you think is a need for immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota?

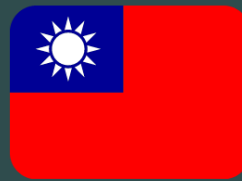
A huge need we have is special education services. As the law currently is in Minnesota, students cannot be assessed for certain academic special education needs until they have had instruction for a certain amount of time in their native language. More impactful aid and learning plans could be given if assessments for special education services are conducted earlier.

Another need is finding materials that are quality and authentic can be challenging and costly. For example, direct translations of a book are helpful when a student can identify a character they already know, but it is also good for students to read a book from a culture outside of what they know in the United States.

"I always thought I would love to teach Spanish to elementary school students."



Chinese Immersion Student Alumna



What was your favorite part about growing up in an immersion program?

The friendships I made. We all still stay in touch to this day. Not a lot of people have the experience of their friends they made in kindergarten as lifelong friends. It helped make a community in a very large school district.

Have you ever connected with someone else that you otherwise would not have been able to without your immersion education?

All of our teachers were from China so it was inherently implemented in the program. The trip to China in 8th grade where we actually got to stay with a host family for 2 days of the program was special: we got to be fully immersed in a Chinese household. You can learn a lot about a culture from textbooks but you do not fully understand it until you yourself experience it.

What opportunities has your immersion education given to you that have surprised you?

As a resumé-builder, it is really fascinating, exciting, and impressive to share you are bilingual in Chinese. I would say it has not offered me a lot of opportunities yet since I have not entered the workforce, but I know it will be incredibly helpful when I graduate College. With China as a strong economic power in the world, it will be helpful to have that skill for trade and international relations.

What opportunities has your immersion education given to you that have surprised you?

Discrimination against people of Asian heritage in the United States has existed for a long time, but it has become an increasing subject over the past couple of years with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I've been able to speak up in a more educated way about why it is not okay to be saying certain things against people of Asian heritage. As a nanny, I've been able to help address inherently learned discriminatory behavior in an educated manner. It is jarring to see that kids are still being taught these discriminatory behaviors. I like that I'm able to call attention to it. My immersion education has also aided me to be more compassionate to people who do not necessarily understand Asian culture, and conversely people who are struggling with culture shock in America.

What, if anything, do you think is a need for immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota?

Assessing and offering the highest spoken languages in Minnesota as an Immersion program would be a great way to help people feel a part of the community. An example that comes to mind is the Somali language and culture. For whichever language, it would allow for a lot less *de facto* segregation in our communities because there are still different stigmas against minority communities.

"I've been able to help address inherently learned discriminatory behavior in an educated manner."



LIAM



Spanish Immersion Student Alumnus



How can Immersion Education be used for service to others?

I really do believe that participants of an immersion program, whether that's the students themselves, teachers, parents, siblings, or friends develop and value articulated compassion. You inherently see the world from multiple perspectives at the same time because being bilingual changes you for the better. Immigrating to a new country, no matter the circumstance is hard. Homesickness is a real thing. Gifting a conversation with someone in their native language is the gift of a little taste of home. May we continue to provide resources to our Minnesota youth to help give these gifts to them and the valued immigrant members of the Minnesota community.

Have you ever connected with someone else that you otherwise would not have been able to without your immersion education?

A couple of weeks ago, I had a challenging flight pattern back home to Minneapolis as a storm system was inhibiting my first plane's arrival at the airport. Many places were delayed on this day, and it seems like many airlines' systems were failing; both the passengers and staff were frustrated. I was speaking with a Gate Agent whose native language was Spanish, and we ended up conversing in Spanish. Although the flight circumstances did not end up working out as intended, it was a special connection between us that we both had this whole other way to communicate. She told me about her family and things that were important to her, and I also did too. It was a brief but beautiful conversation, and it would not have been able to happen without my Spanish immersion experience.

What, if anything, do you think is a need for immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota?

The most important need for immersion education programs in the State of Minnesota is access. Like many other parts of life in Minnesota, the Twin Cities and its surrounding suburbs have many more options and access than Minnesota residents in rural parts of the state. All Minnesotans should have access to an immersion program. I'd like to emphasize here that there is no advocacy for any specific language immersion program. I myself am bilingual in Spanish, but I am a firm believer that you reap the same benefits no matter the language. At the same time, language immersion programs could serve as a means to help support the indigenous languages of Minnesota such as Ojibwe and Dakota; there are current programs addressing this need, but the expansion of these specific programs would further help this effort.

Whatever the case, expanding and funding immersion education is a direct investment back into the Minnesota community to help foster a more globally thoughtful, culturally-aware, and compassionate Minnesota.

"May we continue to provide resources to our Minnesota youth to help give these gifts to them and the valued immigrant members of the Minnesota community."

