

Biliteracy and the Bridge in Dual Language: Closing the Achievement Gap

Woodstock, Illinois

Woodstock Community Unit School District 200, in Woodstock, Illinois began its Spanish/English dual language program over 10 years ago. Initially starting in 1st grade, students now have the opportunity to begin learning in 2 languages at the Pre-K level. Our program extends through high school with students learning biology, world history, global issues, and international business in Spanish. Currently, one-third of the District's student body participates in the dual language program—that's over 2000 students. Next year our first dual language cohort will graduate from high school with the opportunity to receive Illinois' newly adopted Seal of Biliteracy.



In the early years, encouraging parents to enroll their children in the program proved challenging. English speaking parents were concerned that their children would fall behind in English. Even more challenging, the parents of English language learners believed that a dual language program would be similar to the way that they themselves were educated – through ESL



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only or a transitional bilingual program, which, in many cases, they felt had failed them. But now, after 10 years of consistent parent education and the implementation of a successful program, parents throughout the district are excited about dual language, and we consistently have waiting lists for entry into the program. The dual language program has transformed this small community of 25,000 people, and brought with it a commitment to bilingualism and to cultural diversity.

“Thomas and Collier argue that dual language education is the only model that allows English learners to fully close the achievement gap and even outperform their native English-speaking classmates on standardized tests.” (Language Policy, 2013) We are seeing this happen here in Woodstock. For the English language learners, we see that they are overcoming the achievement gap by 8th grade.

In math, for example, former ELLs outperformed their monolingual peers on the 2014 Illinois State Achievement (ISAT) Tests. In reading they came within a few percentage points of their monolingual peers.

Our native English speakers in the dual language program are outperforming their monolingual peers as well. In some grades the native English speakers in the dual language program are outscoring their peers in the monolingual program by 25% and 30% in math and reading respectively on the ISAT Test. Please refer to the graph which illustrates the 2014 ISAT data.

Why are our dual language students doing so well? Consistent and on-going professional development is key. All of our dual language teachers receive extensive training in dual language education, biliteracy, the Bridge, and GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design). Principals are also trained in GLAD and dual language education. At a

District level we are now looking at what specific things are occurring in a dual language classroom that can be replicated in a monolingual classroom to boost their achievement as well.

Advocating for your program and sharing data with school and community stakeholders like principals, district administration, and parents helps everyone understand that language acquisition and closing the achievement gap are part of a process that takes time. It's important to stay the course in dual language education and implement a strong, balanced program promoting biliteracy and cross cultural skills which will benefit all of our students for the future and prepare them for this ever-changing global society.

