

Rock Creek Forest Elementary School

Montgomery County Public Schools

Dear Parents,

Thank you for your interest in the Spanish Immersion Program at Rock Creek Forest Elementary School. The Spanish Immersion Program is a tremendous opportunity for your child to develop language fluency and skills in a second language. We take great pride in our program where our students achieve and excel academically as a result of the immersion experience. Our goal is to provide a rich, rewarding, and exciting learning experience for all children. We are extremely proud of our immersion program and look forward to working with you and your child for years to come.

Sincerely,

David Chia
Principal



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Rock Creek Forest Spanish Immersion Program Mission Statement

The mission of Rock Creek Forest Elementary School is to provide students in the immersion program with knowledge, skills, goals, and work habits that will enable them to become productive members of society. We work to create a warm, caring atmosphere, where all are nurtured and stimulated to learn. We establish and maintain an environment with high expectations, multicultural awareness and sensitivity to one another. We believe that all students can achieve. Rock Creek Forest is a school where it is safe to take risks and learn from them, safe to explore, safe to share, and safe to succeed.

A. INTRODUCTION & BRIEF HISTORY

Rock Creek Forest Elementary School is located in Montgomery County, Maryland. The Spanish Immersion has been at Rock Creek Forest since 1977. A group of first, second and third graders formed the first class of Spanish Immersion when a bilingual teacher was hired. The program has grown from the one multi-age class to two classes at each grade level. We now have twelve classes of Spanish Immersion from kindergarten through fifth grade. In the Spanish Immersion Program students receive their core academic instruction in Spanish. In kindergarten through third grade, Spanish is the only language used in the classrooms. In fourth grade, students receive English instruction twice a week for forty-five minutes during the second semester of the school year. In fifth grade, students receive English instruction for forty-five minutes every day. Art, music, physical education and media center/library classes are also taught in English in all grades.

B. GOALS

Students who complete the Spanish Immersion Program in fifth grade will be able to:

1. Understand, speak, read, and write Spanish with ease.
2. Perform on standardized achievement tests in English.
3. Continue their studies in both English and Spanish at the middle school level.
4. Describe and understand cultural aspects of Spanish-speaking communities around the world.

C. STAFF

Teachers are selected for the Spanish Immersion Program based on:

- Overall teaching skills
- Native or near-native ability in Spanish
- Excellent interpersonal skills
- A strong commitment to the immersion concept of education.

Teachers must also meet the Maryland State requirements for certification. Support professionals are also selected using the three last criteria listed above.

When available, qualified Spanish-speaking substitutes are used. An English-speaking substitute is only engaged when a qualified Spanish-speaking substitute cannot be found.

D. CURRICULUM

The Spanish Immersion Program uses the MCPS curriculum at all grade levels. The core academic subjects (reading/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies) are taught entirely in Spanish at all grade levels and this instruction is supported by the use of texts, novels, expository readings, and other materials that are in Spanish. All classroom

discussions, presentations of objectives, homework, tests, and follow-up activities are in Spanish.

The classroom teachers speak only in Spanish at all grade levels. During the kindergarten year and up to the end of November of the first grade year, students may respond to the teacher in English as well as in Spanish. After the end of November in first grade, children are expected to use Spanish exclusively in the classroom.

A teacher other than the Spanish Immersion teacher teaches reading/language arts in fourth grade (beginning second semester) and in fifth grade. English instruction for our fourth and fifth grade Spanish Immersion students has two areas of emphasis: 1) aspects of language in which significant differences exist between Spanish and English (e.g. capitalization, spelling, grammar, and punctuation); and 2) opportunities for students to read and write extensively through a literature-based instructional program that includes summarizing, creative writing, and research reports.

E. BELIEFS

The Spanish Immersion Program is based on certain beliefs.

1. Most children in immersion programs not only learn the second language, but they achieve skills appropriate to their grade level.
2. Children learn a second language very much as they learn the first. Second language learning should be started early in the child's educational program. To be meaningful, it should involve using the target language in normal, everyday experiences as well as in curriculum content activities.
3. Research indicates that in immersion programs the amount of time spent using the target language is directly related to the student's proficiency. Therefore, the MCPS total Spanish Immersion Program maximizes the amount of time a student is immersed in Spanish.
4. Children must see that they can use the target language to convey feelings, thoughts, ideas, and needs.

F. ENROLLING IN THE SPANISH IMMERSION PROGRAM

Admission to all grade levels of the Spanish Immersion Program is based on expressed interest, on space available, and in accordance with MCPS change of school assignment policy. Only students with approved transfers are admitted. Change of school assignment applications can be obtained at the student's home school and must be submitted between February 1 and April 1 of the year in which the child will



enter the program. This process should be followed for every child entering the program even if a sibling is already in the program. Prospective parents are strongly encouraged to learn about the programs by attending one of our four yearly Open Houses and/or by

speaking to the coordinator before submitting a change of school assignment application. Please contact the home schools directly for this.

While the program is suitable for learners of all abilities, children with delays in first language development, or with auditory processing, auditory memory, or general auditory impairment may struggle to be successful in an immersion program.

Parents of immersion students are asked to show a visible commitment to the immersion program. The commitment can range from volunteering in a classroom on a regular or periodic basis to providing the student with experiences in the Spanish language. These experiences may include exposure to a range of materials in Spanish as well as interaction with students and adults who speak Spanish. One example might be as simple as encouraging the student to borrow Spanish materials from the public library.



Kindergarten and First Grade

In Kindergarten and Grade one, if requests exceed available program capacity, admission will be determined by lottery.

Second through Fifth Grade

In Grades two through five, admission is determined by language proficiency and space availability.



G. EVALUATION

Students in the program are evaluated in a variety of ways. These include informal teacher assessment, MCPS Reading Assessment Primary Reading, classroom quizzes and tests, the Terra Nova Second Edition and the Maryland State Assessment (MSA) (Terra Nova and MSA are the only standardized tests given in English). These assessment procedures evaluate individual performance in the classroom as well as performance in context compared to peers in the MCPS and peers in the State of Maryland at the same grade level. Parents are informed of student progress through the November parent-teacher conferences and the quarterly report cards. Progress updates are also provided.

H. TRANSPORTATION

Bus transportation to the Spanish Immersion Program is provided by MCPS. The Area Transportation Office establishes pick-up and drop-off points. Transportation to the pick-up and drop-off points is the responsibility of the parents.

I. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE IMMERSION PROGRAM

1. What about the first days in the program for new students?

Teachers are very aware that new students in the program probably do not understand what is being said. Thus, they use a variety of techniques to convey meaning. They may use many gestures; they may exaggerate facial expressions; they may bring in real objects and have children manipulate objects; they may use music and sound. Extra efforts are made by the staff to help the students feel secure, comfortable, and relaxed. Although some students may experience frustration initially because the teacher will not speak English, this frustration is quickly resolved. Teachers readily contact parents as necessary, so any classroom concerns can be addressed immediately.

2. What will happen to the child's skills in English?

By the end of their elementary years, our immersion students generally perform as well as, or better than, their monolingual peers. There are certain lags in English language arts skills during the first few years in school, but most children tend to make up for these skills in later years.

3. Does it matter if no one at home speaks Spanish?

No! The program was designed for children from homes where Spanish is not the primary language. Although offering support to your child in the target language is helpful, the majority of our parents do not speak Spanish with their children at home.

4. Is the Spanish Immersion program the right choice for my child?

Most students do well in the program, especially when they start in kindergarten. Children who like to be challenged and try new things are more likely to enjoy the program than children who do not. Parents of children with limited proficiency in English should be aware that their children might face difficulties in learning to read and write in English and Spanish simultaneously.

5. What do I do if I believe that my child has a learning disability?

When you have such a concern, contact the teacher immediately for a conference. Some students who have been diagnosed as learning disabled have successfully completed the program. In other cases, recommendations have been made that parents consider another program for their child. Each case is handled on an individual basis. If a child has a learning disability, the disability will be there regardless of the language of instruction, and the child will also have to compensate for the disability in an English-language or a Spanish immersion program.

6. What program is available to my child after completing grade 5 in Spanish Immersion?

Students who have completed the Spanish Immersion program do not fit into the regular Spanish 1 or Spanish 2 programs offered at most middle schools. Continuation of the Spanish Immersion Program is available at Westland Middle School and Silver Spring International Middle School. The International

Baccalaureate Programs in MCPS could be considered as a logical continuation for any of our students, since fluency in at least one foreign language is an advantage in that program. Several High Schools offer the International Baccalaureate Program, among them Richard Montgomery H.S., Bethesda-Chevy Chase H.S. and Springbrook H.S. Entrance to these programs is not, however, automatic for Spanish Immersion students. Please contact the individual high schools for criteria for admission to these programs.

7. *Whom can I talk to if I want to know more about the Spanish Immersion program?*

You can attend a scheduled open house for a tour and information regarding the Spanish Immersion program. Open houses are scheduled four times a year in the fall and winter prior to the enrollment and lottery deadline. As time and staff are available, you may call the school to set up an appointment with the lead teacher in Spanish Immersion or the principal for a brief information session. In addition, there are a number of parents who will be more than happy to answer your questions from their perspective.

J. TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Encourage your child by telling him/her how proud you are that he/she is learning a language
- Encourage your child to speak Spanish often, but don't force him/her.

K. RESEARCH

- Much of the research on immersion education has focused on the Canadian model and programs. Little research is available on immersion programs in the United States. American programs that have received the most attention are in Culver City, California, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Fred Genesee, of McGill University in Montreal, in his review of immersion and bilingual education in the United States and Canada concludes that immersion programs in the United States “constitute a feasible and effective way for English-speaking American students to attain high levels of second language proficiency without risk to their native language development or academic achievement” (Fred Genesee, *Learning Through Two Languages*, Newbury House, Cambridge, MA, 1987, p. 131).
- Tips for Parents
 - Expose your child to as many opportunities as possible to use Spanish outside school.
 - Get to know your child's teacher through personal conferences or phone calls.
 - Call the teacher or principal if you have any questions about your child's progress.
 - Become actively involved in the Spanish Immersion program.
 - Do not feel discouraged if your child is anxious, frustrated, or upset as a beginner in the program. Many children need to adjust to the challenge.

- Do not expect your child to speak Spanish during the first days or weeks in the program.

L. SPANISH IMMERSION AT WESTLAND AND SILVER SPRING INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOLS

The immersion program should be viewed as a K-8 sequence with approximately 72% of the school time spent in Spanish in kindergarten through third grade, approximately 67% of the school time spent in Spanish in fourth grade and approximately 62% of the school time spent in Spanish in fifth grade. In middle school, approximately 29% of the school time spent in Spanish.

The programs at Westland Middle School and Silver Spring International Middle School are for students who have been enrolled in the Spanish Immersion program and who have an advanced knowledge of Spanish. At both middle schools, one academic block focuses on reading, writing, and grammar in Spanish. In the second academic block, the regular MCPS social studies 6th, 7th, and 8th grade curriculum is taught in Spanish. Upon successful completion of the middle school program, students are usually placed in level 4 in high school.

