

[Making Middle and High School Mandarin Immersion Work](#)

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At this time in language education, a tidal wave of Mandarin immersion students are moving into the middle and high school grades, 6-12. Effectively engaging adolescents and nurturing their academic, cognitive, and social development is a challenge. Many Chinese immersion programs are struggling to retain students; keep them focused on school; and continue to develop high levels of language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and the ability to grapple with more abstract and rigorous content in both Chinese and English.

This Brief outlines the challenges of Mandarin immersion education in the middle and high school years in keeping adolescents engaged and motivated to continue their immersion language studies and move to the advanced level of proficiency. However, despite challenges that might seem overwhelming, middle and high school Mandarin immersion can work and result in positive outcomes. Two educational leaders describe their districts' efforts to articulate a K-12 Mandarin immersion program and give examples of and guidance on how secondary school Mandarin immersion can overcome the challenges and reach the goals that educators and families aim to achieve – in Mandarin immersion programs in a suburban school district in the Midwest (Minnetonka Public Schools) and a major urban school district in the Northwest (Portland Public Schools). In addition to providing the context for and an overview of their programs, they describe their initiatives to make learning meaningful, purposeful, real, engaging, and empowering through these initiatives:

Minnetonka Public Schools

- Immersion expansion programs in high school
- Study abroad opportunities
- The Minnesota Bilingual Seal
- The Bilingual International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma
- Chinese immersion elective courses in high school
- Setting clear learning targets: AP exam results, standards-based integrated performance assessments

Portland Public Schools

- Partnership with the Chinese K-16 Flagship Program and the University of Oregon
- The China Research Residency with a closing capstone project
- Setting clear targets and empowering students to reach them, measuring their progress against the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and established district benchmarks

- Establishing explicit milestones with tangible rewards

They also describe their challenges and ways they are addressing them:

Minnetonka Public Schools

- Recruiting and hiring secondary school teachers
- Providing a wide range of pathways for diverse learners
- Helping all students achieve desired outcomes

Portland Public Schools

- Ensuring that high school students remain engaged and motivated to complete all four years of Mandarin immersion and reach the ambitious target of Advanced-level proficiency in all four skill domains
- Lack of qualified teachers and large class size in dealing with students of diverse proficiency levels and interests

The authors conclude that making Mandarin immersion work at the secondary school level presents challenges for any program or district, but the challenges are not insurmountable. When educators and district leadership commit to articulating a K-12 Mandarin immersion program, success is within reach. The determination and investment in developing multilingual and globally competent citizenry will lead to innovative thinking and practices that empower all stakeholders.

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