

Language Immersion in Minnetonka Public Schools: Overview, Benefits, Outcomes, and Possible Pathways

Introduction to Language Immersion Programs

Language immersion is an approach to second language instruction in which the usual learning activities are conducted in a second language. This means that the new language is the medium of instruction as well as the object of instruction. Immersion classes follow the same curricula, and in some instances, use the same materials (translated into the target language) as those used in the non-immersion schools of their district. The goal of the language immersion classroom is language acquisition. In the early years, immersion teachers realize that students will not understand everything they say. Teachers use body language, visuals, manipulatives, exaggerated facial expressions, and expressive intonation to communicate meaning. In kindergarten, it is common for students to speak English with each other and when responding to their teacher. As the years progress, students naturally use more of the immersion language (Fortune & Tedick, 2003).

Benefits of an Immersion Education

According to the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), at the University of Minnesota, immersion programs are the most effective type of foreign language program. Students can be expected to reach higher levels of second language proficiency than students in other school-based language programs. A great deal of research has centered on second language acquisition in various school settings. Over the past 30 years, due in large part to the success of immersion programs, there has been a shift away from teaching language in isolation and toward integrating language and content. This shift is based on four principles:

- *Language is acquired most effectively when it is learned in a meaningful social context.* For young learners, the school curriculum provides a natural basis for second language learning, offering them the opportunity to communicate about what they know and what they want to know as well as about their feelings and attitudes.
- *Important and interesting content provides a motivating context for learning the communicative functions of the new language.* Young children are not interested in learning language that serves no meaningful function.
- *First language acquisition, cognition, and social awareness go hand in hand in young children.* By integrating language and content, second language learning, too, becomes an integral part of a child's social and cognitive development.
- *Formal and functional characteristics of language change from one context to another.* An integrated language and content model in an elementary school setting provides a wide variety of contexts in which to use the second language.

Starting to Learn a Second Language in Kindergarten

A young child's brain is developmentally ready to learn language. A child has twice as many synapses (connections) in the brain as an adult. The young brain must use these connections or lose them. There is a window of opportunity in which a child learns a first language normally. After this period, the brain becomes slowly less receptive. Young children can learn as many spoken languages as they are allowed to hear systematically and regularly at the same time. Children have this capacity. When children wait until high school to start studying a second language, the job is much harder.

Effects of an Immersion Education

A growing body of research on immersion education has shown that immersion students consistently meet or exceed academic expectations in the following areas:

- *Second language skills:* Immersion students by far outperform students in traditional foreign language classes. They are functionally proficient in the immersion language and are able to communicate according to their age and grade level.
- *English language skills:* In the early years of English instruction (K-2), there may be a lag in English reading and writing skills. By fifth grade, however, immersion students do as well as or better than students in English-only classes. In Minnetonka, student achievement on state assessments has shown that immersion students can achieve at high levels in reading and math earlier than current research would indicate.
- *Content areas:* Immersion students achieve in academic areas as well as students in English-only programs.
- *Cultural sensitivity:* Immersion students are more aware of and show positive attitudes toward other cultures.

Six Immersion/World Language Pathways in Minnetonka Immersion Programs

1. *Immersion Advanced Pathway:* These students perform at or above the District's projections in all four strands of target language fluency (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Students who select this pathway will find highly rigorous courses and a variety of international study options. Students in this pathway may choose from a range of opportunities, including the ability to graduate with an IB Bilingual Diploma, to participate in a VANTAGE course that highlights their target language skills, to earn college credits through partner flagship universities, to challenge themselves on assessments from a country of target language origin, as well as standard college-level credit-bearing exams (AP/IB).
2. *Immersion Intermediate/Advanced Pathway:* This pathway is well suited to immersion students who have competing interests at the high school level and

therefore are not able to dedicate sufficient time to pursue a more rigorous course of study. These students will have many of the same opportunities as students in the advanced pathway, but the student's projected proficiency may not reach ACTFL's advanced level.

3. *Immersion Intermediate Pathway*: This pathway is designed for immersion students who require a more gradual on-ramp to higher level coursework or who have competing interests at the high school level and therefore are not able to dedicate sufficient time to pursue a more rigorous course of study. This pathway does include college-level credit-bearing exams (AP/IB) as well as a variety of international study experiences and study abroad opportunities.
4. *World Language Novice/Intermediate Pathway*: This pathway is designed for students who did not choose immersion but have participated in the after-school language program are interested in accelerating their study of a second language.
5. *World Language AP/IB Pathway*: Students who may or may not have participated in the after-school language program can choose to continue their second-language study in Grade Seven and take college-level credit-bearing exams (AP/IB) prior to graduation.
6. *World Language Elective Pathway*: Students who did not choose immersion or after-school language programming in elementary or middle school can still select world language courses as electives at the high school level. Introductory courses in world languages will be offered based on the level of student interest.

Pathway 1: Immersion Advanced Pathway

Students who have participated in the immersion program and are performing at or above the District's target language fluency projections can select the *Immersion Advanced Pathway* with the goal of reaching the highest level of fluency offered by Minnetonka Public Schools – the *Advanced* determination on the ACTFL assessment. These students will engage in a variety of international study experiences (including study abroad opportunities) and may choose to graduate with a target language assessment from the country of target language origin in addition to college-level credit-bearing exams (AP/IB).

The Advanced-High proficiency level describes a student who speaks with linguistic ease, confidence, and competence. They are consistently able to explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all frames. They can write about a variety of topics with significant precision and detail, and they have good control of a range of grammatical structures and a wide general vocabulary. Advanced-High language learners are able to follow some of the essential points of more complex or argumentative speech in areas of special interest or knowledge. In the area of reading, they are able to go beyond comprehension of the facts in a text and begin to recognize author-intended inferences.

After students pass the *AP Language and Culture* exam in Grade Nine, instruction will align with ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines that will begin at the Intermediate-High level and will graduate students at the Advanced-High level. Efforts to meet the specific needs of students in the Immersion Advanced Pathway will be found in the variety of study-abroad options and in the international exchange and cultural exchange opportunities that will help these students reach a proficiency level that is very close to that of a native speaker in the target language. Another option that will exist for this group of students is the availability of immersed elective and core content courses at the high school. These courses will be developed over the next three years and will be offered based on the level of student interest.

It is the expectation of the District that students who choose this pathway will demonstrate a very high level of commitment to language study and will seek coursework and experiences that contribute to an advanced level of fluency.

Grade	Course Plan for Immersion Advanced Pathway
Six	1. ISS/ILA (Immersed Social Studies / Immersion Language Arts) (87 min – ILA mapped to AP Language)
Seven	1. ISS/ILA (87 min – ILA mapped to AP Language) 2. “Wheel” target-language elective for AP-based cultural studies
Eight	1. ISS (56 min) 2. ILA (56 min– ILA mapped to AP Language)
Study Abroad	Spring Break during Gr.8
Nine	1. AP Language and Culture (Spanish or Chinese) 2. Immersed Civics (Social Studies credit) 3. Online Elective Options in Target Language
Ten	1. AP Spanish Literature OR Chinese HSK Level 5 2. Global International Studies (elective credit) 3. Online Elective Options in Target Language
Study Abroad	Summer Program
Eleven	1. Student Choice: VANTAGE Global Business in Target Language, etc.; Study Abroad; IB Bilingual Diploma; Visiting Scholar Series; U of MN Flagship Program 2. Online Elective Options in Target Language
Twelve	1. Student Choice: VANTAGE Global Business in Target Language, etc.; VANTAGE Abroad; Study Abroad; IB Bilingual Diploma; Visiting Scholar Series; U of MN Flagship Program 2. Immersed Economics 3. Online Elective Options in Target Language

Note: Students interested in adding a third language of study can begin as early as Grade Eight and can continue to dedicate elective slots to their third language throughout high

school. These students could also shift their focus to the third language, thus moving from an immersion pathway to a World Language pathway. This pathway is not articulated in this report, although the flexibility exists for students to choose this option.

Pathway 2: Immersion Intermediate/Advanced Pathway

Students who have participated in the immersion program can also select the *Immersion Intermediate/Advanced Pathway*. This pathway does not culminate with the option of a target language assessment from the country of target language origin, but does include college-level credit-bearing exams (AP/IB) as well as a variety of international study experiences and study abroad opportunities. This immersion-based pathway does not require that the student select the *Honors Language and Culture* in eighth grade while also taking the social studies/immersion course.

After students pass the *AP Language and Culture* exam in Grade Ten, instruction will align with ACTFL proficiency guidelines that will begin at Intermediate-Mid level in Grade Six and will graduate students at an approximate level of Advanced-Low. Efforts to meet the specific needs of students in the *Immersion Intermediate/Advanced Pathway* will be found in the flexibility achieved by demonstrating commitment to language study in an immersion pathway while opting for a non-language Grade Eight elective (or by selecting a third language of study). Similar to the Immersion Advanced Pathway, another option that will exist for this group of students is the availability of immersed elective and core content courses at the high school. These courses will be developed over the next three years and will be offered based on the level of student interest. Students in this pathway are likely to choose from the variety of study-abroad options and international exchange opportunities, but will not be expected to keep pace with the students in the *Immersion Advanced Pathway*.

Grade	Course Plan for Immersion Advanced Pathway
Six	1. ISS/ILA (Immersed Social Studies / Immersion Language Arts) (87 min – ILA mapped to AP Language)
Seven	1. ISS/ILA (87 min – ILA mapped to AP Language) 2. “Wheel” target-language elective for AP-based cultural studies
Eight	1. ILA (56 min– ILA mapped to AP Language)
Study Abroad	Spring Break during Gr.8
Nine	1. AP Language and Culture (Spanish or Chinese) 2. Online Elective Options in Target Language (optional)
Ten	1. AP Spanish Literature OR Chinese HSK Level 5 2. Online Elective Options in Target Language (optional)
Study Abroad	Summer Program
Eleven	1. Student Choice: VANTAGE Global Business in Target Language, etc.; Study Abroad; IB Bilingual Diploma; Visiting Scholar Series; U of MN Flagship Program

	2. Online Elective Options in Target Language
Twelve	1. Student Choice: VANTAGE Global Business in Target Language, etc.; VANTAGE Abroad; Study Abroad; IB Bilingual Diploma; Visiting Scholar Series; U of MN Flagship Program 2. Online Elective Options in Target Language

Pathway 3: Immersion Intermediate Pathway

Students who have participated in the immersion program can also select the *Immersion Intermediate/Advanced Pathway*. This pathway does not culminate with the option of a target language assessment from the country of target language origin, but does include college-level credit-bearing exams (AP/IB) as well as a variety of international study experiences and study abroad opportunities. This immersion-based pathway does not require that the student select the *Honors Language and Culture* in eighth grade while also taking the social studies/immersion course.

After students pass the *AP Language and Culture* exam in Grade Ten, instruction will align with ACTFL proficiency guidelines that will begin at Intermediate-Mid level in Grade Six and will graduate students at an approximate level of Advanced-Low. Efforts to meet the specific needs of students in the *Immersion Intermediate/Advanced Pathway* will be found in the flexibility achieved by demonstrating commitment to language study in an immersion pathway while opting for a non-language Grade Eight elective (or by selecting a third language of study). Similar to the Immersion Advanced Pathway, another option that will exist for this group of students is the availability of immersed elective and core content courses at the high school. These courses will be developed over the next three years and will be offered based on the level of student interest. Students in this pathway are likely to choose from the variety of study-abroad options and international exchange opportunities, but will not be expected to keep pace with the students in the *Immersion Advanced Pathway*.

Grade	Course Plan for Immersion Intermediate Pathway
Six	1. ISS/ILA (Immersed Social Studies / Immersion Language Arts) (87 min – ILA mapped to AP Language)
Seven	1. ISS/ILA (87 min – ILA mapped to AP Language) 2. “Wheel” target-language elective for AP-based cultural studies
Eight	1. ILA (56 min– ILA mapped to AP Language)
Study Abroad	Spring Break during Gr.8
Nine	1. Honors Immersion Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies 2. Online Elective Options in Target Language (optional)
Ten	1. AP Language and Culture (Spanish or Chinese) 2. Honors Immersion Language Literature, Humanities, and Cultural Studies or

	3. Online Elective Options in Target Language (optional)
Study Abroad	Summer Program
Eleven	1. Spanish AP Literature OR Chinese HSK 5 2. Online Elective Options in Target Language (optional)
Twelve	1. VANTAGE Global Business in Target Language, etc.; Study Abroad; Visiting Scholar Series; U of MN Flagship Program 2. Online Elective Options in Target Language (optional)

Pathway 4: World Language Novice/Intermediate Pathway

Students who did not choose immersion but have participated in the after-school language program may be interested in accelerating their study of a second language. These students can choose the *World Language Novice/Intermediate Pathway* and challenge themselves with a college-level achievement pathway that is augmented by international experiences and study abroad opportunities.

After students pass the AP Language and Culture exam, instruction will align with ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines that will begin at the Novice level and will graduate students at the Intermediate-Mid level.

Grade	Course Plan for World Language Intermediate/Novice Pathway
Six	After-school WL
Seven	After-school WL and “Wheel” target-language elective
Eight	World Language Level II Target Language
Study Abroad	Spring Break during Gr.8 (optional)
Nine	World Language Level III Target Language
Ten	World Language Level IV Target Language
Eleven	AP Language and Culture or IB Language SL
Twelve	Spanish AP Literature OR Chinese HSK 5 OR IB Language HL

Pathway 5: World Language AP/IB Pathway

Students who may or may not have participated in the after-school language program can choose to continue their second-language study in Grade Seven and take college-level credit-bearing exams (AP/IB) prior to graduation in the *World Language AP/IB Pathway*.

These students may or may not choose to participate in study abroad opportunities or international/global experiences at the high school. Instruction in this pathway will emphasize success on the AP Language and Culture exam and will graduate students at the Intermediate-Low ACTFL proficiency level.

Grade	Course Plan for World Language AP/IB Pathway
Six	Optional after-school WL
Seven	Optional after-school WL with quarter-long elective in Target Language
Eight	World Language Level I Target Language
Study Abroad	Spring Break during Gr.8 (optional)
Nine	World Language Level II Target Language
Ten	World Language Level III Target Language
Eleven	World Language Level IV Target Language
Twelve	AP Language or IB Language SL

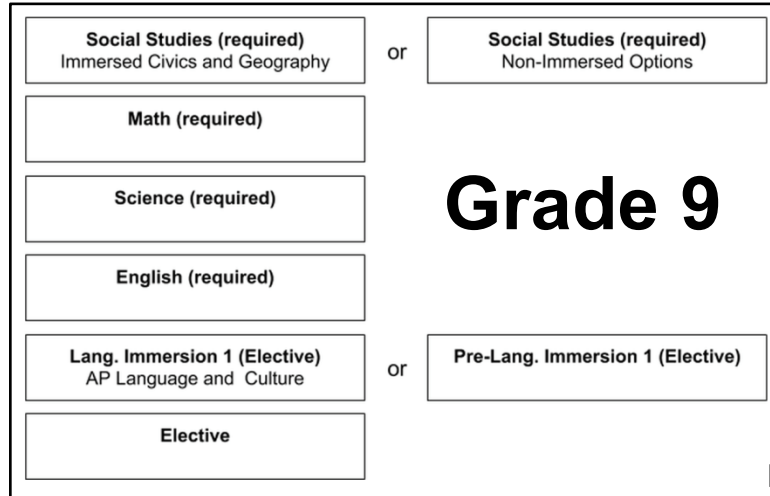
Pathway 6: World Language Elective Pathway

Students who did not choose immersion or after-school language programming in elementary or middle school can still select world language courses as electives at the high school level. Introductory courses in world languages will be offered based on the level of student interest.

Grade-Specific High School Immersion Options

Grade 9: Immersion students entering Grade Nine will enroll in a Language Immersion 1 or a Pre-Language Immersion 1 course, depending upon their language proficiency. Students will make a selection during the Spring 2014 enrollment window, and District staff will provide additional information to families in May 2014 regarding assessment results and student placement. The Language Immersion 1 course will include the AP Spanish Language or AP Chinese Language exam at the end of the year. District placement recommendations will be based on an expectation that these students will be on track for success on this exam. Students enrolled in the Pre-Language Immersion 1 course will be on track for success on the AP exam in Grade Ten.

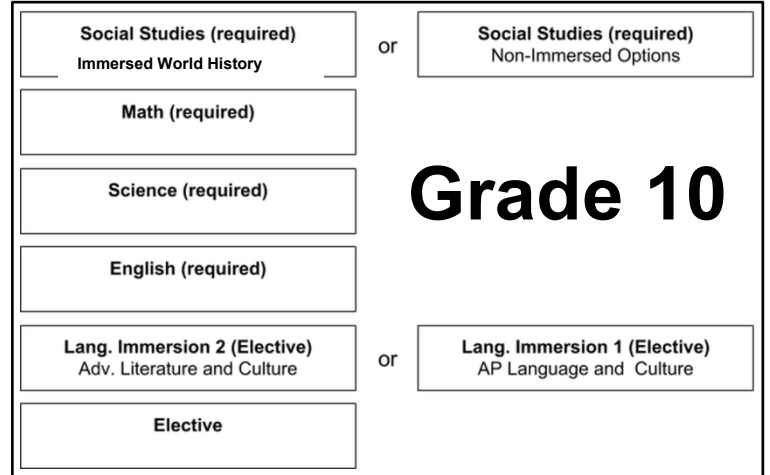
In addition to the above options, immersion students may also enroll in Immersed Civics and Geography. This course will ensure a high level of competency in civics and geography content while also leveraging the target-language skills of this student group. To achieve this high level of competency, the District anticipates the need for a hybrid approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment that ensures all students reach



mastery in the mandated state social studies standards. Immersion students will also be able to choose from the standard non-immersion social studies options. The following graphic shows the six academic slots for Grade Nine students:

Grade 10: Immersion students entering Grade Ten will enroll in a Language Immersion 2 or a Language Immersion 1 course, depending upon their Grade Nine course completion. The Language Immersion 2 course will begin preparing students for the AP Spanish Literature exam or the Chinese HSK 4 and 5 exams in the following year.

In addition to the above options, immersion students may also enroll in Immersed World History. This course will ensure a high level of competency in World History content while also leveraging the target-language skills of this student group. To achieve this high level of competency, the District anticipates the need for a hybrid approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment that ensures all students reach mastery in the mandated state social studies standards.

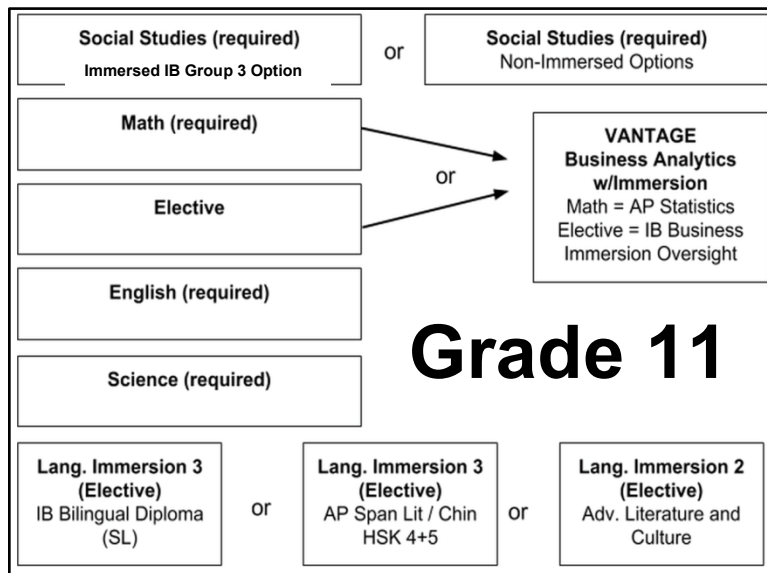


Immersion students will also be able to choose from the standard non-immersion social studies options. The following graphic shows the six academic slots for Grade Ten students:

Grade 11: Immersion students entering Grade Eleven will enroll in a Language Immersion 3 (AP), a Language Immersion 3 (IB), or a Language Immersion 2 course, depending upon their Grade Ten course completion. The Language Immersion 3 (AP) course will finalize preparation for the AP Spanish Literature exam or the Chinese HSK 4 and 5 exams, whereas the Language Immersion 3 (IB) course engages students in International Baccalaureate

curriculum that allows students to be eligible for both the IB Bilingual Diploma as well as the IB Diploma.

In addition to the above options, immersion students may also enroll in Immersed IB Group 3 options. This course will ensure a high level of competency in global social studies content while also leveraging the target-language skills of this student group. To achieve this high level of competency, the District anticipates the need for a hybrid approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment that ensures all students reach mastery in the mandated state social studies standards.

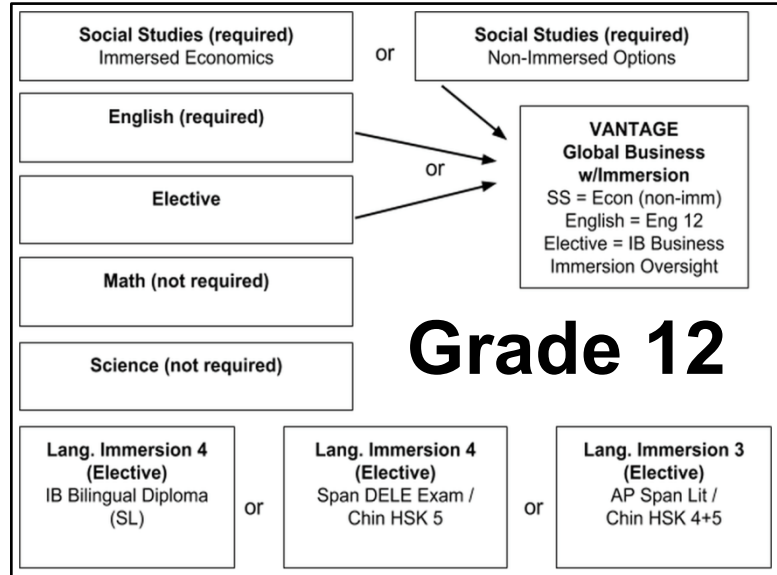


Immersion students will also be able to choose from the standard non-immersion social studies options.

Another option that Grade Eleven students will have is the VANTAGE program. Although this sequence of courses may shift as the program evolves, District staff anticipate that immersion students will have at least one VANTAGE option that will allow them to leverage their target-language skills in a content integration environment where they are given projects that require high levels of competency in either Spanish or Chinese. VANTAGE options require that students commit to specific math and/or elective courses. The following graphic shows the six academic slots for Grade Eleven students and the various options mentioned above:

Grade 12: Immersion students entering Grade Twelve will enroll in a Language Immersion 4 (AP), a Language Immersion 4 (IB), or a Language Immersion 3 course, depending upon their Grade Eleven course selection. The Language Immersion 4 (AP) course will focus on preparation for the Spanish DELE exam (*Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera* or Diplomas of Spanish as a Foreign Language) or the Chinese HSK 4 and 5 exams, whereas the Language Immersion 4 (IB) course continues to engage students in International Baccalaureate curriculum that allows students to be eligible for both the IB Bilingual Diploma as well as the IB Diploma.

In addition to the above options, immersion students may also enroll in Immersed Economics. This course will ensure a high level of competency in Economics content while also leveraging the target-language skills of this student group. To achieve this high level of competency, the District anticipates the need for a hybrid approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment that ensures all students reach mastery in the mandated state social studies standards.



Grade 12

Immersion students will also be able to choose from the standard non-immersion social studies options.

Another option that Grade Twelve students will have is the VANTAGE program. As noted above in the Grade Eleven section, this sequence of courses may shift as the program evolves. District staff anticipate that immersion students will continue to have at least one VANTAGE option that will allow them to leverage their target-language skills in a content integration environment where they are given projects that require high levels of competency in either Spanish or Chinese. VANTAGE options require that students commit to specific social studies, English, and/or elective courses. The following graphic shows the six academic slots for Grade Twelve students and the various options mentioned above:

Reference

Fortune, T. & Tedick, D. (2003). What parents want to know about foreign language immersion programs. *CAL Digest*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.