

# A Study of Three Partial-Immersion Programs of Elementary Schools in the United States

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This paper gives a descriptive survey of three partial-immersion programs in the United States. The development of partial-immersion programs has increased tremendously in the past ten years. This paper identifies common relative aspects and theories of partial-immersion programs from three different states. Despite the different curriculum structure in each state, the basic program designs are very similar.

## History of American Partial-Immersion Programs

The first partial-immersion programs in the United States began in Cincinnati Public Elementary Schools in 1974. Since 1974, there has been a steady increase in implementing partial-immersion programs into other school districts and states. Partial-immersion is where students acquire a foreign language through content matter instruction. Students spend half of the day studying regular grade level curriculum in classes conducted in the foreign language. The other half of the day is conducted in English. Each school district determines what subjects are taught in the target language, the foreign language.

Partial-immersion programs are unique because the foreign language is not taught as a subject. However, the foreign language becomes the

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language for part of the curriculum. Children then acquire the foreign language through interesting and meaningful activities in the language as they learn the concepts of the various subjects included in the elementary curriculum. Table 1 describes the benefits of being bilingual.

**Table 1. Benefits of Being Bilingual**

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Learning a second language at an early age...

1. Has a positive effect on intellectual growth;
  2. Enriches and enhances a child's mental development;
  3. Leaves students with more flexibility in thinking, greater sensitivity to language, and a better ear for listening;
  4. Improves a child's understanding of his/her native language;
  5. Gives a child the ability to communicate with people she/he would otherwise not have had the chance to know;
  6. Opens the door to other cultures and helps the child understand and appreciate people from other countries;
  7. Gives the child a head start in language requirements for college;
  8. Increases job opportunities in many careers where knowing another language is a real asset.
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\*Summary of suggested benefits at Richmond School Elementary Magnet Program, Fairfax County Public Schools, and Oyster Bilingual Elementary School.

Results of research studies indicate that learning a second language at an early age has a positive effect on intellectual growth and leaves students with more flexibility in thinking, greater sensitivity to language, and improved listening skills. This study analyzes partial-immersion elementary school programs in three school districts, Fairfax County in Virginia, District of Columbia in Washington D.C., and Multnomah County in Portland, Oregon. Furthermore, observations of one immersion program from each school district are recorded. The schools chosen from Fairfax County and Multnomah County are Japanese/English partial-immersion programs. The school chosen from

the District of Columbia is a Spanish/English partial-immersion program.

### Program Goals and Design

Table 2 is the program goals for the three school district's partial-immersion programs. First, the schools aim to provide a partial

**Table 2. Program Goals**

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1. To provide a partial immersion program for children with a desire to learn about the target language and culture.
  2. To provide a program that encompasses the benefits of acquiring a second language within the curriculum goals of the Public School District.
  3. To develop a depth of understanding of the cultural/social skills and behaviors of another culture.
  4. To serve children from a variety of neighborhoods, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and ability levels.
  5. To produce students who are proficient in the target language commensurate with the level of instruction provided.
  6. To present the second language in a communication-rich environment, and in so doing draw on a child's natural language learning ability.
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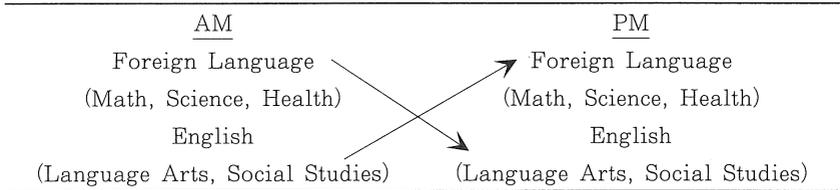
\*Summary of program goals from Richmond School Elementary Magnet Program, Fairfax County Public Schools, and Oyster Bilingual Elementary School.

immersion program for children with the desire to learn about the target language and culture. Second, the schools work to provide a program that encompasses the benefits of acquiring a second language within the curriculum goals of their individual Public School District. Third, the schools want to develop a depth of understanding of the cultural/social skills and behaviors of another culture. Fourth, the schools seek to serve children from a variety of neighborhoods, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and ability levels. Fifth, the schools aim to

produce students who are proficient in the target language commensurate with the level of instruction provided. And sixth, the schools want to present the second language in a communication-rich environment, and in doing so, draw on a child's natural language learning ability.

Table 3 shows a partial-immersion program model. This model has the

Table 3. Partial-Immersion Program Model



\*Two groups of students change teachers for morning and afternoon instruction.

Summary of partial-immersion program models at Richmond School Elementary Magnet program, Fairfax County Public Schools, and Oyster Bilingual Elementary School.

subjects of Math, Science, and Health taught entirely in the foreign language used by the three school districts. Language Arts and Social Studies are taught in English. Two teachers team together to instruct two groups of students, one group during each half of the school day. The teachers plan the implementing of the curriculum together to ensure integration of concepts taught during both portions of the school day.

### Teacher Qualifications

Teachers of the target language in the immersion program are usually native speakers of the target language. If they are not native speakers, they must have a high proficiency level. Furthermore, they must have proficiency in the first language and pass the teachers qualifications examination for the state in which they wish to teach. Table 4 shows academic training for teachers at Oyster Bilingual Elementary School.

Most teachers in all three partial-immersion programs have higher education. For example, Table 4 shows that only 4 out of 30 teachers at Oyster Bilingual Elementary School in Washington D.C. only had a bachelors degree with no continuing education classes. Retention rate for

Table 4. Academic training for teachers at Oyster Bilingual Elementary School.

Number of Teachers	Academic Training
4	BS
3	BS+15
5	BS+30
11	MA
4	MA+30
4	MA+60/Dr.

\*Total of 30 teachers. Summary of Table results from Oyster Bilingual Elementary School.

teachers of the target language in the programs is high. For example, the retention rate for foreign language teachers at Fairfax county showed that only two teachers left out of thirty teachers since it's implementation.

## Facilities

The facilities of each school are quite different. Richmond Elementary School's Partial-Immersion program in Portland, Oregon is housed within the same building as the regular school program. It has separate classrooms with materials to provide a target language environment to learn in for the partial-immersion program students. There is a first grade Japanese classroom and a first grade English classroom. Likewise, there are second, third, fourth, and fifth grade Japanese and English classrooms. However, Fox Mill School's Partial-immersion program is exclusively in one building. Grades one through six have Japanese and

English classrooms with the appropriate decorations to instill a communication rich environment. Oyster Bilingual Elementary School's partial-immersion program is also exclusively in one building, but the Spanish class and English class are conducted in the same classroom with a small, thin, barrier placed between the two sides. Thus, the noise level is very high because Spanish instruction can be overheard while English instruction occurs on the other side. However, students learn to filter out the other language on the other side of the room while studying.

### Enrollment Procedures

The partial-immersion programs at the District of Columbia and Fairfax County's School District place a priority on students enrolled in the following heirarchy; (1) native speakers of the foreign language, (2) siblings of students in the program, (3) students residing within the attendance area of the pilot school, and (4) students residing outside the attendance area of the pilot school. If the number of qualifying applications exceeds the places available, some sort of lottery system is employed to randomly select those students. The program enrollment in Multonomah County's School District however, places more emphasis on seeking a balance between the student population by ethnic background, gender, and location. For example, Richmond Elementary School provides free public bus transportation to students of ethnic background outside of the school vicinity to maintain a balance between many ethnic background students. However, Fox Mill School in Virginia requires parents of children outside the school vicinity to drive their children in to school if they want their children enrolled. Thus, parents

with low income outside the school vicinity can not send their children to the partial immersion program. The programs at all three schools accept students from a waiting list up to one year late, but students can not enroll in the partial-immersion programs if they don't get enrolled within the first year. Once students are enrolled in the program they are expected to continue till they graduate from elementary school. Students who can pass the proficiency test after grade 2 in the target language are allowed to enroll, but these students have usually studied abroad or used the target language at home.

### Academic Achievement

Scores on Mathematics in the first two years at all three schools indicated that there is no statistically significant difference between the performance of immersion group students and the non-immersion group students. Table 5 shows one-year student performance on POS math at

Table 5. One-year student performance on POS Math at Fairfax County Public Schools.

	<u>Mean Pct. Correct</u>	<u>Mean Raw Correct</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Number of Cases</u>
Immersion	89.8	48.5	4.563	617
Comparison	90.6	48.9	4.278	1124
FCPS mean	89.0	47.8	N/A	9685

\*Summary of Table results from Fairfax County Public School Pilot Program Evaluation Report October 1991 Percent (Pct.)

Fairfax County Public Schools. This table shows students at the end of the first grade maintained 89.8 percent correct answers while the comparison group had 90.6 percent correct answers on the math tests. The mean overall score at the end of the first grade was 89.0 percent. Table 6 shows two-year student performance on POS math at Fairfax

County Public schools. This table shows that at the end of the second

Table 6. Two-year student performance on POS Math at Fairfax County Public Schools.

	Mean Pct. Correct	Mean Raw Correct	Standard Deviation	Number of Cases
Immersion	89.8	65.8	7.068	273
Comparison	88.9	65.8	6.794	540
FCPS mean	86.0	63.5	N/A	9685

\*Summary of Table results from Fairfax County Public School Pilot Program Evaluation Report October 1991 Percent (Pct.)

grade, students maintained an average of 89.0 percent correct and the comparison group had 88.9 percent. The mean average overall at the end of the second grade was 86.0 percent. Table 7 is two-year student performance on MAT (reading) at Fairfax County Public Schools. The immersion students scored 603 out of 1000 and the comparison group scored 590.1 out of 1000 on the oral proficiency tests.

Table 7. Two-year student performance on MAT (reading) at FCPS.

	Mean Scaled Score	Standard Deviation	Number of Cases	NCE	Percentile
Immersion	603.0	53.338	281	67.7	80
Comparison	590.1	53.130	446	62	72
FCPS mean	594.4	48.900	2849	63.9	74

\*Summary of Table results from Fairfax County Public School Pilot Program Evaluation Report October 1991. Total of 1000 points possible on the test.

Hence, Scores on reading and oral proficiency tests reported no significant difference between the immersion group and the comparison group during the first two years in the immersion programs. These scores indicate that learning two languages is an effective way to maintain equivalent levels of achievement as one-language learners.

## Summary

This paper shows that all three partial-immersion programs were similar in their design, despite the target language being taught. The actual contents of the curriculum vary from state to state, but the subjects taught in the target language are similar. Language Arts and Social Studies are taught in the the first language and Math, Science, and Health are taught in the target language.

Most teachers in the partial-immersion programs have a bachelors degree and continuing education classes. Teacher satisfaction is very high, thus the retention rate is very high. Facilities at the programs vary depending on the location and public funding.

Finally, achievement on math and reading tests indicate that partial-immersion programs are an effective way for students to maintain their native language skills and prepare for an international society.

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