

Utah's State Initiative for Dual Language Immersion

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In 2008, Utah became the first state to legislate funding for the implementation of dual language immersion education. With 116 programs and 25,000 students enrolled for fall 2014 in Chinese, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish immersion, Utah is a leader in the movement for mainstream immersion education. By offering immersion programs through a state initiative, Utah is helping children reach beyond their borders by immersing them in two languages, two cultures, and two perspectives. Programs begin in elementary school with an articulation of dual language immersion continuing through university level studies. Gregg Roberts, World Language Specialist for the Utah State Office of Education, asserts that “monolingualism is the illiteracy of the twenty-first century” and states that Utah is committed to combatting this illiteracy by increasing access to language education (Roberts, personal communication, May 25, 2013).

Utah's immersion model is standardized throughout the state with core structures that remain unchanged by the school or district. Students spend half of their school day in the target language and the other half in English. Programs usually start in first grade with two classrooms per grade level and two highly qualified teachers: one for the target language and one for English. The teachers work closely together to ensure that the core

curriculum is being taught across the two languages. Collaboration is done both formally and informally on a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis.

Within their classrooms and with their students, target language teachers may only speak in the target language and not in English. Students are allowed to speak some English as they begin immersion but are required to speak in the target language after January 15 of their first year. Each teacher is asked to establish clear expectations that students communicate in the target language and enforce those expectations using a motivational program to encourage student output. Enrollment for the program is open to students of varying backgrounds and all ability levels with no pre-screening process. Administrators are asked to provide outreach to the local community and verify that program enrollment mirrors the demographics of the general school population.

The number of instructional minutes for English and the target language are divided 50/50. Implementing the 50/50 model in Utah has been advantageous for many reasons. First, dedicating half of the school day to English instruction assuages parents' fears about a decline in English academic achievement. Second, the program allows for the participation of double the number of students for each target language teacher. Finally, the model can be replicated and sustained on a large scale because it displaces fewer English teachers and requires fewer target language teachers. It is also inexpensive, costing approximately \$100 per student per year.

The Utah State Office of Education has defined the content areas that are taught in each language during the program with a minimum number of instructional minutes for each area. In first through third grades, most of the English portion of the day is dedicated to language arts. Math, science, and social studies are taught in the target language and

reinforced in English. Time is also allotted for target language literacy instruction. In fourth and fifth grades, primary instruction for math and social studies is conducted in English and reinforced in the target language with science and literacy taught in the target language. In sixth grade, science and social studies switch, with science taught in English and social studies taught in the target language. Beyond elementary school, the Utah State Office of Education plans for dual language immersion to be continued through secondary and post-secondary education.

Leading Utah's dual language immersion program is World Language Specialist Gregg Roberts and a team of language-specific directors and coordinators. Consultants including immersion expert Dr. Myriam Met, language specialist Ann Tollefson, and proficiency specialist Greg Duncan have worked closely with the state team to oversee the implementation of immersion pedagogy and best practice. Curriculum for each language is standardized across the state. Schools are required to adopt and implement the curriculum chosen by the state language director for the target language. Math, science, and social studies materials aligned with the state core have been translated into each language with daily lesson plans to support teachers.

The state immersion team has set state-wide proficiency targets to guide instruction using the proficiency scale established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL). Proficiency reports are given to parents throughout the program as formative assessments. Summative assessments are paid for by the state from third grade through twelfth grade, including the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL), the Advanced Placement (AP) language test, and the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI).

The state also utilizes the expertise of the Dual Language Immersion Advisory Council, composed of principals and administrators from every school and district involved in dual language immersion in Utah. The council meets throughout the year to receive training and discuss pertinent issues of dual language immersion administration. Though schools are required to follow the state model and target language curriculum in order to receive funding and materials, schools and districts retain some liberty to implement the model as they wish. Principals are encouraged to take ownership of their school program and serve as the instructional director of the program with the support of their individual school districts.

Dual language immersion teachers must have a current K–12 teaching license with credentials for elementary or secondary education. Teachers must also prove a certain level of language proficiency, as evidenced by a minimum score of Advanced-Mid on the Oral Proficiency Interview conducted by ACTFL. Mandatory training for teachers is provided by the state through a week-long Annual Utah Dual Immersion Institute (AUDII) in August and other professional development days throughout the year. Teachers are also required to obtain two endorsements to teach in Utah immersion: the World Language Endorsement and the Dual Language Immersion Endorsement. Some Utah immersion teachers are international guest teachers who have come to the United States on a J-1 visa for one to three years because of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that the Utah State Office of Education has negotiated with agencies in six countries: Brazil, China, France, Mexico, Spain, and Taiwan.

Local Utah universities have played a fundamental role in the development of dual language immersion. Seven universities have partnered with the Utah State Office of

Education to identify and train future immersion teachers: Brigham Young University, Dixie State University, Southern Utah University, University of Utah, Utah State University, Utah Valley University, and Weber State University. At each university, the Colleges of Education and Humanities have come together to offer the World Language and Dual Language Immersion endorsements to future dual language immersion teachers. The Dual Language Immersion Endorsement is composed of a practicum and five courses: Foundations of Dual Language Immersion Education; Content-Based Second Language Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Second Language Literacy Development; Methods of Second Language Acquisition; and an elective.

Utah's expanding state-sponsored dual language immersion program is in existence due to the diligent efforts of key people throughout the state. Although Utah has a long history of immersion stretching back to 1979, support for curriculum and funding varied from district to district. This environment changed in 2007 when Utah Governor Jon Huntsman Jr. and State Senator Howard Stephenson requested a meeting with Gregg Roberts, World Language Specialist for the Utah State Office of Education. Passionate about increasing Chinese and Arabic for Utah's future economic success, they tasked Roberts with creating a distance education program to get Chinese and Arabic into high schools. After successfully implementing the secondary program, Roberts suggested immersion as the most effective way for students to reach high levels of language proficiency at a low cost.

Senate Bill 41, "The International Education Initiative – Critical Languages Programs," was passed in March 2008 as a result of the efforts of Governor Jon Huntsman Jr., State Senator Howard Stephenson, World Language Specialist Gregg

Roberts, and then-Deputy Superintendent for the Utah State Office of Education Larry Shumway. The bill stated that the immersion program would offer 50% of school day instruction in English and 50% in the target language, beginning in kindergarten or first grade, with the intention of adding one grade each year. The written legislation provided a total of \$270,000 to the dual language immersion program.

In 2008 and 2009, Governor Jon Huntsman Jr. held a series of three summits to discuss issues of importance relating to Senate Bill 41. The summits united stakeholders from the Utah State Office of Education and local Utah school districts, the Utah Governor's Office, state universities, the Utah World Trade Center, and businesses from the private sector. The purpose of the series was to inform the development of a Utah Language Roadmap, an aggressive language education plan to prepare generations of Utah students to enter a changing global economy. Within the roadmap, eight languages were determined to be essential for Utah's economic future: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

In the fall of 2009, 25 schools were awarded grants to implement Chinese, French, or Spanish dual language immersion. Portuguese was added as the fourth immersion language in 2012 with German currently in the process of being added as the fifth language. In 2010, new Utah Governor Gary Herbert and State Superintendent Dr. Larry Shumway set a goal to create 100 programs involving 30,000 students by 2015. In the fall of 2014, Utah will have 25,000 students enrolled in dual language immersion programs at 116 schools across the state: 60 Spanish, 34 Chinese, 14 French, 6 Portuguese, and 2 German. Approximately half of the Spanish programs are classified as two-way immersion programs because at least one-third of the students are native or heritage

Spanish speakers. Thirteen of the schools will be secondary schools offering a continuation to elementary immersion programs.

Schools who choose to participate in the state DLI model receive special funding allotted by the state legislature. For most schools, this means \$60,000 over the course of six years for the implementation of immersion in first through sixth grades. The state pays for all curriculum development, professional development, and assessments outside of this funding. Currently the legislature has allotted two million dollars of ongoing funding per year to support Utah's ever-expanding dual language immersion programs. National grants have also helped Utah's dual language immersion programs thrive by supplementing the funding from the state legislature. Utah has been the recipient of Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) grants in 2009 and 2010, Language Flagship funding from 2012 to 2014, and STARTALK funding for Chinese and Portuguese since 2009.

In the four years since Utah legislators officially voted to fund a state language initiative, the excitement for dual language immersion has only continued to grow both in and out of the state. In 2012, Delaware became the second state to start an immersion initiative, modeled after Utah's program. Currently, Utah is preparing to host the fifth international conference on language immersion education in October 2014 in an effort to continue national and international collaboration regarding immersion education. The success of Utah's dual language immersion programs is the result of the dedicated efforts of thousands of people in a wide range of positions, including governors, state senators, legislators, superintendents, foreign governments, state employees, consultants, administrators, teachers, parents, and students.