What to Expect: Spanish Language Immersion at John Muir Language Academy

You’ve taken an exciting step by enrolling your child in John Muir Language Academy’s Spanish Language immersion program. While you’re enthusiastic about the lifelong advantages of learning a second language (or even a third or fourth!), it’s natural to have some concerns about the challenges this might present. If your child has been in the program for a few weeks and you haven't yet noticed significant progress, don’t worry—these feelings are common among parents.

It's natural for parents to feel nervous about their decision to participate in an immersive language program. The first few weeks and months can be intense for young students, but year after year, we see our students rise to the challenge and emerge stronger. Learning a new language is a well-documented process, and our expert bilingual teachers are skilled in guiding students through it. Research supports our advice to “trust the process,” but we also want to address any concerns you may have as your child embarks on their first years at John Muir. To help, we’ve compiled a list of helpful tips from seasoned dual-language parents and teachers to assist you in navigating this new adventure with your child.

Be Patient

Trust your child and our proven program. Progress may seem slow, but that doesn’t mean it’s not happening. Research shows that students require 5-7 years to fully acquire a second language. Each student’s journey is unique, influenced by their background experiences, academic and social vocabulary, and exposure to language and literacy.

A Silent Period is Normal

Just as adults may hesitate to showcase a new skill until they’ve mastered it, your child will need time before they’re ready to use their new language publicly. There will be a silent period where your child doesn’t speak the new language. Our teachers are prepared for this and can identify signs of comprehension. Also, don’t expect your child to use the new language at home, especially at first. Children often compartmentalize their experiences, reserving the new language for school.

Supporting Your Child's Language Journey

Be your child’s biggest cheerleader as they attempt new things. Learning a new language takes courage, and your child may look to you for reassurance. Consider taking up a new skill or hobby yourself to experience the thrill and challenge of new learning alongside your child.
Supporting Language Development at Home Without being a Speaking Spanish (for non-native speakers)

Even if you don’t speak your child's new language, you can still support them by working on essential skills in your native language. The work you do on math and reading skills in your child’s first language will transfer to the new language when they’re ready.

There are Many Ways to Communicate

Humans communicate through various means: body language, facial expressions, and gestures. These will help your child communicate with their teachers and peers and comprehend the new language. While confusion may occur, our empathetic teachers know how to support new language learners effectively.

Your Child Will Not Fall Behind in Content Areas

It's normal for students learning in two languages to appear “behind” their peers who learn in only one language. This is temporary. Once their language skills catch up, studies show that bilingual students outperform their peers in all content areas. Gaps in both languages may become noticeable as your child progresses, indicating that their developing brain is fully immersed in both languages. These gaps will even out with time, and your child will develop flexible pathways that enhance problem-solving and creative thinking skills.

Grammar Rules Come Later

In the early stages of language acquisition, your child will learn primarily through hearing, doing, and speaking. Just as they learned their native language by listening and being immersed in a language-rich environment, they will do the same with their new language. At this stage, grammar rules are not the focus, so don’t expect to see worksheets on conjugating verbs in your child’s backpack. Instead, your child will learn to speak correctly by listening to peers and adults around them.

Additionally, your child will start to identify cognates and make connections between their native language (English) and their target language (Spanish). These connections, often referred to by researchers as the “bridge” between the two languages, help children transfer knowledge back and forth between English and Spanish, strengthening their understanding of both.

The Difference Between Understanding and Speaking a New Language

As your child acquires language, you may notice they aren’t able to speak perfectly or translate into their native language immediately. Comprehension, speaking, and translating are separate skills acquired at different times. As your child gains more vocabulary and phrases, speaking and translation will follow.
Expect a Strong School Community

Although learning in two languages can be challenging, the rewards are immense. At John Muir Language Academy, we recognize and celebrate the hard work and determination of our young linguists. We are committed to supporting you and every student as they navigate the path to bilingualism, ensuring a rewarding and enriching experience.

Research on Second Language Acquisition: