

Dual Language Immersion Program

1. I think we can start from sharing the reasons why Gwinnett started to consider establishing the English-Korean dual language program. What kind of outcomes do you want from this?

In 2013, Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) began development of its first dual language immersion schools with two schools offering the program in Spanish and one in French. Since then we have expanded to include an additional five Spanish language programs.

Upon successful development and implementation of these programs we were approached by members of the Gwinnett Korean community to consider development of a Korean program. We researched other Korean DLI program models nationwide and spoke with members of the Gwinnett Korean community to determine the feasibility of adding this program and gauged overall community interest. During this process, we visited another successful Korean DLI school in the U.S. that utilized the same 50/50 two-teacher program delivery model, which we employ in our current French and Spanish schools. We also met with members of Korean government and cultural organizations in Gwinnett County and Atlanta. Following this intensive research period, we determined that a Korean DLI program would be a good fit for both the students of our schools system and the Gwinnett community overall and that this program could be supported through the current professional development and support systems we have in place for our other DLI teachers, leaders, and parents.

Parsons Elementary School was selected to host our first Korean DLI program based on two primary factors. First, the leadership and teaching teams at Parsons elementary school are very well-regarded and they are viewed to be excellent instructional leaders and teachers, and second, the Parsons elementary school community has very close ties to the Korean community.

Our primary goal for all student in DLI programs is that they perform as well as any other student in Gwinnett County Public Schools in all content areas such as Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. However, in the Korean DLI program we have two additional goals. First, we hope to see our students graduate with advanced-level proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing the Korean language; and second, we expect our students to develop global competency and a deep understanding of Korean culture.

2. I heard that the English-Korean dual language immersion program in Gwinnett county will be opened at Parsons elementary school next school year. How is the planning going?

Planning is going extremely well. We began laying the groundwork for the program nearly a year ago and have already begun hiring Korean-speaking teachers in anticipation of program launch with a new kindergarten class in fall, 2019. Additionally, we are currently in the process of purchasing and developing materials for our kindergarten teachers as well as designing professional development and support systems. To further support this work, we have reached

out to Korean government and community groups to learn more about opportunities they may provide to support of this program. To bring these teams together and further strategize we plan to convene a GCPS Korean Community Advisory Team in early October.

3. Could you introduce the program with little bit of the details like the curriculum, how it will be organized all those kind of things?

We selected a successful research-based DLI delivery model know as a 50/50 two-teacher model. In this model, each student is instructed for half the day (50%) in English and for another half of the day in another language. Rather than one teacher delivering all of the curriculum in two languages, two teachers work as a team and split time with the students. One teacher instructs students the first half of the day and the other teacher the second half. Curriculum is divided and the teacher on the foreign language half of the day teaches Math, Science, and reading/writing in the target (foreign language). The teacher on the English half of the day teaches English Language Arts, Social Studies, and reinforces terms and ideas from the Science and Math lessons to ensure student understanding.

4. Did you actually find any certified or qualified teacher who can actually teach everything in Korean and English at the same time? If not, how would you?

People often ask what requirements are needed to teach in a GCPS Korean DLI classroom. We require that our teachers hold a Georgia certificate in elementary education and are native or native-like speakers of Korean.

We have actually hired our first Korean-speaking teacher for the kindergarten classroom and have been contacted by other Korean-speaking teachers who wish to learn more about the program. As the program at Parsons expands every year we will need to hire an additional teacher for that next grade level (and so on, through 5th grade). In all, we will need to hire six Korean-speaking teachers (kindergarten through 5th grade) and one Korean-speaking para-professional for the elementary school program over the next six years. Eventually, we will also need to hire a Korean language certified middle and high school teacher as well to ensure DLI continuation through middle and high school.

5. To start this program, I think there must be some consumptions and requests from the students. Do you think, in Parsons, there are enough students who are willing to take this class enough to create more than one class?

We have received a lot of positive support from the Parsons community about this program; however, we are also aware that not every parent will wish this DLI experience for their student. Consequently, we currently plan to include only one strand (two classes) to begin the program. We anticipate these two classrooms will accept approximately 54 students (around 27-28 per class, perhaps a few more or less depending on our support structures) for the kindergarten year.

6. Do you think the program can be expanded to the other schools in Gwinnett area?

Perhaps. Everything depends on the number and quality of teachers we have to staff these schools. It's of utmost importance to us that every teacher who is placed in front of every student is a highly engaging and highly effective teacher. As you can imagine, the number of certified elementary school teachers who are also highly proficient in the Korean language is limited. We'll know more over the next few years whether we have a sufficient number of teachers who live in Gwinnett county who meet these qualifications. In addition, we would like to ensure that this program is successful before expanding further so we will keep a close eye on student achievement on district and statewide standardized assessments. In GCPS we believe in being innovative, but we also believe in slow, steady, and measured success before expanding our programs.

7. Not specifically English-Korean, are you getting positive reactions from teachers and parents about doing the dual language immersion program? What could be the reasons about your answer?

We have received very positive feedback about our DLI programs from students, teachers, parents and other members of our Gwinnett community. In fact, most of our programs currently have waitlists due to their popularity. We credit that success first and foremost to the amazing, amazing teachers who work so hard every day to ensure that these students not only master the GCPS Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) curriculum, but also succeed in meeting the proficiency targets we have set in speaking, listening, reading, and writing of the new language.

In addition, I want to highlight the wonderful work of our school leadership teams and the GCPS Board of Education as well as our Superintendent/CEO Mr. J. Alvin Wilbanks. For DLI to be successful, leadership must be in support of the program at all levels, and we are fortunate to have leaders in GCPS that support this wonderful work. In addition, I think that the success of these programs has been realized due to the amazing support of parents. It's important to remember that these parents have taken a chance on a program model that is relatively new in the United States. Though extensive research has demonstrated that a well-designed and implemented DLI program can be a successful option for most students, it's still something new to most Americans and most parents in Gwinnett County. Our parents have been wonderful in their honesty and feedback, and we have endeavored to keep the lines of communication open so that we can continuously learn how better to support students, teachers, leaders, and parents. Finally, I'd like to say that media and publications such as yours have been vitally important to help us get the word out about our programs. Thank you for highlighting this exciting work, and I invite other Korean community groups to reach out to us if they'd like to learn more.