

## Dual Immersion shows early rewards

### Thompson schools report literacy, math growth

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Kindergartener Michael Lowry Clare, left, and dual-language kindergarten teacher Yesenia Perez, right, sound out words in Spanish Tuesday afternoon as the class writes sentences in their journals at Cottonwood Plains Elementary in north Loveland. (*Michael Bettis / Loveland Reporter-Herald*)

Erika Tran was delighted when her son, Caden, wanted to correspond in Spanish with the serving staff at a Mexican restaurant.

It showed her how the kindergartener is integrating two languages into his life through dual immersion, a program new to the Thompson School District.

"It's starting to live in him," Tran said in a presentation to the school board on Wednesday. "It's not just a school activity. It's going to be a lifetime activity."

The local school district launched dual immersion programs in kindergarten this year at Truscott and Cottonwood Plains Elementary Schools.

Six months into the program, teachers report they are seeing growth in math and literacy, and the district has a plan to grow the program over these first students' educational careers.

"We feel very honored and privileged to have this program," said Karen Hanford, principal of Truscott. "It may be one of the best things I've seen in education in 18 years."

Kindergartners enrolled in the two schools receive half of their education in English and half in Spanish. Each school has two kindergarten teachers, one for English and one for Spanish, and the students spend half of each day in each classroom.

They focus on literacy and calendar in both languages, science and social studies in English and math in Spanish.

In math, 93 percent of the dual language students were meeting expectations at the end of the first unit while 89 percent reached that mark at the end of the second. That compares to last year's traditional kindergarten numbers of 86 percent and 88 percent respectively.

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And in literacy, the schools have seen growth by students across the board in sounds, capital and lower case levels throughout the year, according to numbers provided to the school board. The district provided numbers in this category comparing what the dual language students grasped at the beginning of the year compared to now, not a comparison of last year's traditional class.

At the start of the year, 21 percent had their capital letters under control. Now, that is 58 percent.

For lower case letters, 39.5 percent had a firm understanding at the beginning of the year — a number that has increased to 82.4 percent.

And for reading, 21 percent ranked deficient going into the program. Now, only 7.6 percent rank deficient, while the amount ranking strong increased from 6.5 percent to 42 percent and those ranking distinguished increased from 0.8 percent to 2.5 percent.

But numbers aside, the teachers at both schools say the students are excelling across the board. They are speaking and writing in complete sentences in both English and Spanish, asking questions and understanding what is being taught, the teachers said.

"It's exciting to see them using their skills, not just sound skills but thinking skills in both languages," said Mindi Maybery, teacher at Cottonwood Plains.

The students showed off some of their skills before the school board, speaking and adding in Spanish.

The skills they are learning will serve them well for the rest of their lives and the students, who go all the way through school in dual immersion, will graduate literate in two languages, according to district staff.

Next year, the schools will again offer dual immersion kindergarten, and the current students will move on to dual immersion first grade. The program will grow this way through elementary school then continue with special classes in middle and high school, according to the district plan.

During their junior and senior years, the students could take advanced language classes at the university and could end up with enough credit to minor in Spanish.

Parent Shelley Robbins said she is excited for her son, Elliott, to continue in the program.

"I'm so excited about what the future holds and what lies ahead for my son," she told the school board. "I see him developing a confidence that I never saw before. He is beginning to understand that what he is doing and learning is truly special."

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Elementary students, from left to right, Caden Tran, Garrett Stilo, Drayk Sanders, and Jocelyn Rodriguez Enriquez work their way through a science exercise Tuesday afternoon in a dual-language immersion kindergarten class at Cottonwood Plains Elementary in north Loveland. *(Michael Bettis / Loveland Reporter-Herald)*