

Kindergartners embrace new adventure, new language

Thompson School District kicks off new year with dual immersion at two schools

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Sitting on a bilingual rug, Truscott Elementary School kindergartner Jacob Hollen, 5, right, raises his hand Thursday, Aug. 20, 2015, during the first day of school and the first day of the new dual immersion program at the school. (Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

The kindergartners in Ida Weber's class at Truscott Elementary learned how to line up, how to sit and how to pay attention on their very first day of school Thursday.

They talked about their pets, their favorite animals and the colors they love.

And they did it all in both English and Spanish on the first day of the district's first dual immersion program classes.

"I'm so excited about the idea of children starting off learning two languages," said teacher Mary Kay Randall, who leads the English portion of the program and who is in her 28th year teaching at Truscott.

"The research shows children become stronger learners because of it."

This year, 82 kindergartners will learn half day in Spanish and half day in English through the dual immersion program at Truscott and Cottonwood Plains, the two schools chosen to launch the program. Next year, the dual immersion classes will be in first grade for this batch of students and in kindergarten for a fresh batch.

Thursday and Friday of this week, Weber talked to the students in both English and Spanish so they would understand the rules and what they need to do. When she taught them how to hold onto the orange lunch tray, she also described "bandeja naranja."

When she talked about her perro (dog) she made the sound effect "woof, woof," so the kids would understand what she was saying.

When she spoke about the color azul, she pointed to a blue bulletin board. Soon, when she repeated "azul," the kids were saying "blue" without a visual prompt.

And almost immediately, the youngsters knew to respond "si" instead of "yes."

When the students return to class on Monday, however, there will be no more mixture of the two languages, just full learning in each for half of the day.

"Next week, it'll be zero English," said Sundell Lepe, who teaches Spanish twice a week to the rest of the grades in the school, "not even in the hallways."

Like any kindergarten class, the students were a mixture of excited and scared. But unlike most of the classes in the district, the months, days of the week and the colors, the labels for the clock, desk and door are all in Spanish. Half of the day is fully Spanish.

The other half, in another classroom with another teacher, is English.

"They're excited," said Randall. "Their parents are excited."

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