



Dual Language site visits are popular attractions for educators

When school officials across Illinois and even the nation consider developing or expanding a dual language program, Woodstock is a common stop for validation, practical wisdom and inspiration.

Since 2010, dozens of school districts from Barrington and Naperville to Champaign and Carbondale have sent representatives to conduct site visits in Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 classrooms.

And educators seeking guidance aren't just coming from Illinois. They visit from California, South Carolina, Wisconsin and Washington. In 2016, District 200 had a record of 16 school districts visiting its dual language classes.

"It's really a variety," said Keely Krueger, assistant superintendent for early childhood and elementary education, who oversees the dual language program. "Some are schools who are exploring the idea of developing a dual language program. It's also some schools who have been implementing dual language programs for a few years, but are looking for ideas on how to improve their program."

Because of the increasing demands, District 200 officials decided to pare down the site visits to twice a year, although they are able to host more than one school district during the visits. A group of administrators and educators from Rochelle District 231 visited on Feb. 1.

"We were one of the first dual language programs at the high school level in Illinois," Krueger said. "We're just considered a strong program because we've implemented a lot of best practices and maintained those practices."

Dual language program site visits are popular in Woodstock schools for one simple reason — the program works. Since the program's inception in 2004 at Mary Endres Elementary School, the number of students enrolled in the program has grown exponentially.

Yesenia Sanchez, chief academic at North Chicago School District 187, made several visits to observe District 200's dual language program as an administrator in Mundelein School District 75. Sanchez said she was so impressed with the program, she moved her family to Woodstock so her children could attend District 200 schools.

Sanchez said she and her colleagues were intrigued by the data presented during District 200 site visits, but seeing children interact in both languages was what really sold it for her.

"It was one thing to read about it, but once you see the kids in the classroom — see it in action — it really brings it together," Sanchez said.

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More than a third of District 200 students, about 2,500 participate in dual language classes, the majority of whom spend half of their day learning in Spanish and the other half in English. Classrooms are made up of a balanced mixed of native English and native Spanish speakers.

District 200 data also explains the popularity of the dual language program. 72% of native English speakers in the dual language program in 7th grade met or exceeded PARCC standards in reading compared to 41% of students across the State of Illinois.

High school graduation rates for Hispanic students also have increased from 65 percent in 2004 when dual language was implemented to 95 percent in 2018. The state graduation rate for Hispanic students in 2018 is 81 percent.

As dual language classes have been graduating from high school, about 90 percent of graduates are earning the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy, which can mean significant college credit.

Krueger said many visiting educators have questions about how to find qualified staff, building momentum for the program and convincing skeptical parents to enroll their students in dual language classes.



(L to R) Marivi Galera, bilingual instructional coach and Keely Krueger, assistant superintendent for early childhood and elementary education, present information on Woodstock Community Unit School District 200's dual language program for representatives from Rochelle School District 231 on Feb. 1 at Prairiewood Elementary School.



Ivan Cisneros, second-grade teacher at Prairiewood Elementary School conducts his dual language class on Feb. 1 as representatives from Rochelle School District 231 observe.



Danielle Quinn, second-grade teacher at Prairiewood Elementary School, instructs her dual language students Feb. 1 as representatives from Rochelle School District 231 observe.