



Salem's Plan for A New Two-Way Dual Language Program: *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)*

Q: What is a Two-Way Dual Language Program?

A: It's a program where speakers of two different languages (in our case, English and Spanish) attend school together and learn both languages, so that all the students leave the program being able to speak, read, and write in *two* languages. There are dual language programs all over the United States, with a variety of languages, depending on the local population.

Q: How is that different from a "regular" foreign or world language program?

A: Besides communication and basic language, students study their academic content (math, science, reading, writing, social studies, etc.) in two languages, which is why their level of language proficiency is much higher. Also, in dual language programs children start learning a language earlier (in kindergarten) and continue up through the middle or high school grades. Students become bilingual and literate in both languages.

Q: What about learning the other subjects? Wouldn't doing it in two languages make it harder?

A: Dual Language programs are standards-based programs, teaching the same content as other district schools--- but they do it in two languages. These programs have been tried around the country, in many different settings and with many different languages. Research has shown consistently that actually dual language students perform *better* academically in the content areas than students who are not in dual language programs---- including English Learners, native English speakers, and low-income students. Because of this research, Massachusetts is encouraging cities and towns to try this model of education.

Q: What are the benefits of being in a dual language program?

A: Knowing a second language *and* being familiar with other cultures are two skills that today's employers are looking for---- so it's a big plus in the job market. Since dual language programs include both native English and native Spanish speakers working together to learn content through each other's languages, students become even more connected to peers of different racial and cultural backgrounds. In today's global society, this is very important! In addition, neuroscientists studying the brain have discovered that learning a second language is actually good for the brain itself----- it makes your thinking more flexible. And of course, knowing another language means you will be able to communicate socially with others who speak that language, here in the US or when you travel.

Q: Didn't Salem already have a program like this? When was that?

A: Yes, the old Federal Street School (which later moved to the Bowditch School) did have a successful Two-Way Dual Language Program for English and Spanish speakers in Salem. It began in 1989 at Kindergarten, then added grades up to the 8th grade, after the move to the much larger Bowditch School. The program was popular with all types of families, and many Salem residents--- English and Spanish speaking---remember it fondly. During that time, Salem's Dual Language teachers met with teachers from other school districts with successful dual language programs (Boston, Cambridge, Framingham) to mutually share their expertise. The students in the program did well academically; for example, in 2004 every child in the program made adequate yearly progress (AYP) as measured by the state of Massachusetts on its annual school "report card."

Q: What happened to that program? Why did it end?

A: In order for a dual language program to work, students need to spend at least half their time in the target language (in this case, Spanish), or they will not develop proficiency. In 2002, a MA state law was passed eliminating bilingual education generally. Although dual language programs (because of their track records of success) were exempted from the new law, district administrators in Salem began soon after to limit the amount of Spanish that could be taught. Over time, this substantially weakened the program; in fact, it was no longer a true "dual language" program, even though for a while it continued to carry that name.

Q: Why is Salem planning to re-introduce a Dual Language program now?

A: There are several reasons this makes sense. First, in 2017 the Massachusetts state legislature passed a bill called the LOOK (Language Opportunities for Our Kids) Act, finally overturning the law from 2002. The new law encourages districts to provide more opportunities for all students to learn and maintain additional languages. For example, students who have met all other high school graduation requirements in MA can now receive a Seal of Biliteracy on their diplomas, if they speak, listen, read and write proficiently in another language in addition to English. The LOOK ACT also charges districts with providing programmatic options for English Learners that best meet the needs of students. Research consistently supports dual language as the most effective approach for English Learners. Finally, parents in Salem (both English and Spanish speaking) have expressed their desire for the school district to provide this type of opportunity for their children. They want their children to have the advantages associated with being bilingual.

Q: When and how would the program be created?

A: Salem has been fortunate to receive a MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education financial grant (in partnership with the Lynn Public Schools) to work on developing a new Dual Language program. A committee of administrators and teachers in Salem is exploring the latest research about the best way to build a new Dual Language program in our city. This group is also visiting successful Dual Language programs in Massachusetts to see them in action--- how they recruit teachers, what methods they use to teach, what curriculum they use, and how parents are encouraged to be involved. The grant money we received pays for this work. The Salem Public Schools is hoping to have a first class of kindergarten Dual Language students in September 2020, and add a new grade each year after that.