

# The PPS Model

The PPS Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program employs a three-pronged approach consisting of: 1) content-based instruction, 2) direct language instruction, and 3) experiential learning to contextualize classroom learning. These components are discussed in detail in the section entitled “Developing a Quality Curriculum” within the chapter “A Facilitative Approach to Developing an Immersion Program,” on page 32. In the elementary grades (K–5), 50 percent of class time is conducted in Mandarin. The amount of time in Mandarin instruction decreases to 33 percent in middle school and 20 percent in high school.

Any family who wishes to enroll their child in a PPS immersion program must apply through a district lottery system. When the Mandarin program began, Woodstock accepted applications from parents outside the district. A few years later, the district determined that they could no longer accept students from outside PPS, as

they were receiving up to two hundred applications each year. Older students may apply to the program and be accepted if openings are available. However, the student would need to pass a language proficiency test if they are not a native or heritage speaker of a Chinese language.

A section from the lottery guidelines for 2015 is shown in Figure 4 below. There are four categories for both King School and Woodstock Elementary School. At Woodstock, the four categories are: 1) in-neighborhood Chinese speakers, 2) in-neighborhood English speakers, 3) out-of-neighborhood Chinese speakers, and 4) out-of-neighborhood English speakers. Siblings and students who meet income eligibility levels have priority. At King School, the four categories are: 1) current students and siblings, 2) Albina Head Start students, 3) Chinese speakers, and 4) neighborhood students in other schools/out-of-neighborhood students. Siblings have priority.

Lottery round order for Mandarin Immersion programs			
At Woodstock Mandarin Immersion applicants are divided into four categories, with designated slots for each category. Each applicant category is processed in the following order:			
Neighborhood preference Native Chinese speakers	Neighborhood preference Native English speakers	Other neighborhoods Native Chinese speakers	Other neighborhoods Native English speakers
1. Co-enrolled siblings (including siblings who meet income eligibility levels). Applies to first choices <i>ONLY</i> .			
2. Students who meet income eligibility levels (up to 45% of total slots).			
3. Students who do not qualify for either co-enrolled sibling or income eligibility preference.			
At King Mandarin Immersion applicants are divided into four categories, with designated slots for each category. Each applicant category is processed in the following order:			
Current King students or siblings of current King students	Students enrolled in Albina Head Start Mandarin Program	Native Chinese speakers	Neighborhood students not currently attending King and students from other neighborhoods
1. Co-enrolled siblings. Applies to first choices <i>ONLY</i> .			
2. Students who do not qualify for either co-enrolled sibling preference.			

Figure 4. Lottery rules Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program enrollment, 2015.

# Methodology

To examine the PPS model, researchers invited K–16 administrators, K–12 teachers, student alumni, current students, and parents to participate in the ethnographic study. Researchers interviewed eleven K–16 administrators, six teachers, three student alumni, five parents, and one current student. In addition to the one-on-one interviews, researchers conducted three parent focus groups. Each group contained 2–30 parents. Six student focus groups that included 2–4 students per group were also held. Interviews and focus groups lasted between five and fifty minutes. The interviews and focus groups took place during April and May 2016.

## Procedures

Prior to beginning the collection of qualitative data, researchers determined interview questions. The questions sought to elicit responses that would address the challenges and successes of the immersion program, reasons for the participant’s decision to enroll in the program, perceived benefits of the program, and advice for others seeking to implement a similar program. Researchers encouraged participants to add information they felt pertinent to the discussion of language immersion. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Interview

questions were conducted in each participant’s native language: Cantonese, English, Mandarin, or Spanish. Cantonese and Mandarin interpreters were used, and bilingual researchers conducted the interviews in Spanish.

One-on-one interviews occurred either in person or by phone. Some research participants opted out of the one-on-one interviews, but provided written responses to pre-determined interview questions.

## Analysis

Researchers analyzed the qualitative data using Dedoose. Data was coded for seventeen themes: administration, affect, challenges, collaboration/communication, community, curriculum, funding, great quotes, investment/attitude, language support/resources, logistics, materials, neighborhood community, program successes, quality of program overall, teachers, and university-level Flagship study. Researchers chose these themes based on preliminary analysis of the main topics that surfaced during the interviews and focus groups, and amended the themes as the analysis continued to account for new motifs. Researchers employed a systems approach to analyze the ways in which different themes from the interviews informed each other.

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# A Facilitative Approach to Developing an Immersion Program

A new immersion program may flounder, and perhaps ultimately fail, without the support of all stakeholders. “Stakeholders” refers to parents, students, teachers, principals, school administrators, district administrators, and community members. To provide the optimal chance of success, we present an approach to building an immersion program that is facilitative in nature.

The objective of this approach is to build systems that provide support for all stakeholders. Taking a facilitative approach does not guarantee success, and beginning an immersion program without all support systems in place does not necessarily mean that the program will fail. However, providing 360-degree support from the beginning increases the likelihood of developing a high-quality program that attracts and maintains the interest of parents and students, thereby making the program fiscally sustainable and successful in the long term.

Portland Public Schools (PPS) began its program with little support in place and, over the course of two decades, has developed the program that exists today. The facilitative approach advocated here, then, is a stance from the vantage point of

extensive prior experience. PPS itself has learned much over the years from refining its own immersion programs and transferring lessons learned in one program to another. This current study intends to disseminate those lessons more widely.

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curriculum implemented with excellent teaching methods and materials. The development of these elements is facilitated by three key factors: communication, collaboration, and commitment. The lack of systems supporting these factors contributes to the challenges experienced by the program. *Communication* refers to the

discourse and understanding between teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Communication is a necessary aspect of implementing a program in a new setting, navigating cultural differences among international teachers, and helping parents feel comfortable investing in the program. *Collaboration* refers to teachers working amongst themselves, with parents, and with administrators, as well as collaboration between the immersion program and any neighborhood program within the school to build a strong

school environment and avoid competition for resources. *Commitment* is the investment of parents and students to completing the program. Parents and students need to be committed to thirteen years of language study, and the district needs to be committed to providing a program that maintains their interest.

These key factors are highly desirable for any educational program, but the need is particularly acute for immersion programs. The immersion model is new for many stakeholders, and fewer still have experience with the day-to-day process of working in such a program. In addition, immersion programs bring a variety of perspectives and practices to the foreground, which can generate conflict as community members and administrators with different languages and cultures work together.

Although there are now many immersion programs that can be modeled, every particular immersion program will be situated in a unique community. Ideas that worked well for one program will need to be adapted for the local landscape of another. District administrators and school principals will spend a great deal of time working to foster support for the program both inside and outside the school. The best way to facilitate the process of garnering support is to encourage and actively build regular communication and collaboration for all participants from the beginning.

## Creating District Support

Initial interest for an immersion program may come from parents, teachers, or principals. Often the initial idea does not come from the district.

Nevertheless, district support is critical for the program to become successful. Staffing, curriculum, enrollment, and student management become particularly challenging in an immersion setting and require high levels of district support.

## District philosophical support

Portland Public Schools (PPS) encountered resistance to the Mandarin immersion program early in its implementation. Many teachers and administrators, including the superintendent, believed that the immersion program was a boutique

program for elite students, considering it a language-focused talented and gifted (TAG) program. They felt that Mandarin was a difficult language to learn and thus

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only the brightest students would succeed. But, as linguists know, any student can learn a language given enough time and intensity. Those who supported the immersion program spent much time educating others about the reality of language learning. Now that the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program has matured, PPS still maintains these educational efforts about the benefits and practicality of second language acquisition.

PPS immersion administrators have aligned their work around district priorities to combat the perception of the program as an elitist outlier. Specifically, they have anchored the program within the core PPS strategic plan for equity, ensuring that the immersion model helps underserved students. Part of the plan is a fundamental shift away from one-way immersion to dual immersion. This shift also counters the skeptics who insist that immersion is elitist or that students do not learn adequate English.

A grant from the Language Flagship, first secured in 2005, has been particularly helpful for providing evidence that the immersion program works and that the program does indeed align with district priorities. The grant has funded regular assessments and the dissemination of those results, which has deepened support for the program. The Language Flagship grant propelled PPS into the national scene, eventually leading to a study conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2015. This study documented that the immersion program model can help close the achievement gap, a key piece of evidence demonstrating that students from all demographics can succeed equally.

PPS' strategy of conducting regular assessment and using those results to document success is effective in lessening any stakeholder resistance. After many years of consistent research and communication, the PPS school board has now endorsed immersion and most see the benefits it offers to students.

The Mandarin immersion program has, at times, received more national recognition than local awareness. District administrators entertained constant visits from state and national dignitaries, legislators, media, and other school administrators wanting to start similar programs. PPS personnel worked extra hours each week to provide information and host visits from other interested parties.

### **District financial support**

For a program to begin, financial resources must back a district's philosophical support. PPS

immersion program administrators have found it impossible to predict the ups and downs of budget allocations or the rise and fall of political support. Over the course of two decades, they have noted years of excellent support and other years with less. PPS has addressed this challenge by building quality programs and making them

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sustainable so that they can function in even the worst of times.

One way they have garnered sustainability has been to apply for federal

grants to support the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program. However, they have been careful not to use grant funds in ways that lead to a tenuously supported program. For example, teacher salaries come from the district, not a grant. Grant funds are instead applied to improve quality of resources, which the district can later fund once the grant concludes. Another strategy PPS employs is ensuring critical mass through enrollments. Even in the best circumstances, student attrition can be expected over the thirteen years of the program, and filling enrollment slots in middle or high school can be extremely difficult. PPS currently fills two kindergarten classes at Woodstock Elementary School while developing the program at King School. These full kindergarten classes generate the necessary budget allocations of teacher time and salary years later. To fill the two classes, a quality program that engages families is required. When families are engaged with the program itself, they are less inclined to leave simply because they do not like an individual teacher. An immersion program is a program of choice, and documented student outcomes encourage students and parents to stay with the program.

Despite administrators' best efforts, budgetary objections to the program remain. For example, PPS has never allocated funding for bus transportation for students who live outside the immersion program's boundaries. As a consequence, students from outside the neighborhood can enroll only if their parents have the means to drive them to school each day, which has led to the program's exclusive reputation.

## **Building Community Support**

### **Choosing a site for the program**

One of the most critical early decisions is selecting a site for the immersion program. For PPS, the decision to locate the program in the same building as a neighborhood school led to long-term, possibly irresolvable, challenges that changed the entire fabric of the surrounding community.

When PPS selected Woodstock Elementary School as the site of the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program, the neighborhood school had seen years of declining enrollment. The immersion program sought to stabilize enrollments and ward off an ultimate closure. In this, the immersion program succeeded admirably. However, two distinct populations were now housed inside the school. Students in the neighborhood program lived a short distance from the school, while parents from all over the city, and even outside of the district during the early years, transported many of the immersion students.

As the immersion program grew and received national attention, the modest middle-class neighborhood changed. Parents from other parts of the country who had economic means moved to Portland and purchased property in the neighborhood, which gave them priority status in the immersion enrollment lottery. The influx of families with higher socioeconomic status changed the character of the neighborhood and

contributed to the perception of the immersion program as an elitist one designed for affluent families. Over the course of two decades, home values increased significantly and disproportionately to the city of Portland as a whole. Some of the gentrification may have happened anyway, but school personnel know of many families who moved into the neighborhood specifically to place their children in the immersion program.

At King School, the lack of adequate community preparation led to major implementation challenges, which will be discussed more fully in the section "Implementing an Immersion Program at King School" in the "Catalysts and Disruptors" chapter on page 43. Although some challenges have been resolved, others still remain. Gathering community support needs to happen several years before a program begins, especially when the community has no prior experience with immersion. Carefully considering the cultural relevance of an immersion program to community members in the school already is critical. When a program is placed into a school, administrators should ensure that it does not further segregate different populations of students. The community should be given input on the immersion program, including the opportunity to select the language chosen. If students speak another language at home, the school would be wise to honor that language and incorporate it into the narrative of the school.

### **Creating a unified school**

Placing the immersion program in the same building as a neighborhood school created an enormous challenge for the principal, who had to build an atmosphere of unity. The attention an immersion program attracts can easily create tensions between two programs. At PPS, neighborhood families often felt that the immersion program was special and received more resourc-

es, despite the fact that both programs receive equitable educational opportunities. The novelty of immersion and the interest from across the nation added to the perception that the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program was more important than the neighborhood school curriculum, teachers, and students.

To help create one learning community, PPS initiated intentional communications and has seen significant improvement as a result. These efforts are focused on unifying students, parents, and staff. With students, efforts have fostered school pride and developed commonalities between the two programs. One strategy gave all students access to culturally enriching opportunities.

Visiting groups and performers interact with both the immersion and the neighborhood program; for example, young performers presented a Beijing opera for the entire school. Another strategy involved students in all-school events and activities, some of which have a Chinese cultural focus. The entire Woodstock Elementary School participated in a Chinese New Year celebration, with a door decorating contest and art work. At King School, where many students are Latino, staff look for ways to make activities inclusive and integrate multiple cultural perspectives. Their Chinese New Year celebration represented all cultures and included a performance by a Latino dance group. A third strategy provided all students an opportunity to learn Mandarin by

implementing a world language offering in the neighborhood program.

Woodstock Elementary further integrates students through scheduling. Students in both programs come together for academic and enrichment classes. Immersion students spend half the day learning in Mandarin. At midday, when they shift to English classes, the grade-level cohort splits in half. For example, with a cohort of thirty

first-grade immersion students, fifteen join one English class and social studies class with neighborhood program students while the other fifteen join a second English and social studies class, also with neighborhood program students. Woodstock staff believe this model has had a positive

impact on the overall climate of the building.

Woodstock Elementary also uses the arts and school assemblies to reinforce the concept of one learning community. Student-created murals grace two walls in the building. Each depicts images of both Western and Eastern cultures engaged in joint activities. At weekly school assemblies, the focus is on schoolwide behavioral expectations, celebration of student achievement, and recognition of students who have successfully taken on leadership roles.

For unifying parents, establishing open and collaborative communication between both the immersion program and the neighborhood

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program parent groups is vital to maintaining a strong, cohesive school climate. Woodstock's Site Council has one elected parent representative each from the neighborhood program and the immersion program. As a result, parents from both programs have an equal voice in the development and implementation of the school improvement plan.

Woodstock has an active parent teacher association (PTA) and a dynamic Mandarin program

parent group called *Shu Ren*. The PTA raises money for the entire school, while *Shu Ren* raises money only for the immersion program. Parents with children in either program often have questions about the allocation of available funds and materials, classroom configurations, and teacher expectations. The principal established monthly meetings with the PTA president and the *Shu Ren* president to discuss these joint concerns. By meeting regularly together to discuss school-wide activities, they proactively address issues that might arise regarding equitable, transparent expenditures of funds.

Another strategy for communication among parents involves frequent presentations for all parents about the immersion program and its activities. These presentations gave the neighborhood program parents a better understanding of the immersion program and helped all parents see how the two programs can work together within the same school.

Forging unity among staff members also requires significant effort from the school principal. In a small school with two programs, staff members can quickly become divided. Ideally, collaboration happens naturally in an authentic and

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supportive way. One strategy for fostering such natural collaboration involves engaging English program staff as colleagues in the immersion program and, at the same time, engaging immersion staff in discussions not specifically related to the immersion program. At Woodstock Elementary School, part of staff meetings are devoted to

school-wide work teams who focus on distinct efforts. At King School, staff organize their data review process by grade level rather

than by program, which allows English and Mandarin teachers to compare content and share resources. These efforts are a good beginning, but there is more work to be done.

### **Institutional partnerships**

Some collaborations involve partnerships with other institutions. PPS has benefited from partnerships with nearby Portland State University; the University of Oregon (UO) in Eugene; the Confucius Institute, a nonprofit public educational organization affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China; and a sister school relationship with a school in Suzhou, China.

PPS' formal partnership with the UO began when the first cohort of Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program students graduated high school. The PPS-UO partnership sought to create a K-16 pipeline of Mandarin study with support from The Language Flagship. Students who chose to do so could transition seamlessly to undergraduate studies and improve their Mandarin proficiency while studying an academic field of their choice. As UO students, they take content courses in Mandarin and complete a yearlong study abroad program directly enrolling at Nan-



jing University in China. For PPS, the partnership facilitated opportunities to learn, reflect, and engage with a postsecondary institution about second language acquisition and pedagogy.

The UO faced its own challenges in maintaining its portion of the Oregon Chinese Flagship Program. Many alumni from PPS choose not to continue their Mandarin study, while others prefer to attend a private college or another university due to other interests.

Even if PPS immersion students do choose to attend the UO, they may not enroll in the UO Chinese Flagship Program. The UO

program has also withstood personnel turnovers, resulting in some student dissatisfaction.

Some of the attrition from high school to college may be related to student motivation and identity. Language proficiency stalls at the Advanced level, causing student frustration and burnout. Together, the UO and PPS are addressing the attrition of students in eleventh and twelfth grade through a course with topics selected by students. The UO incorporated these topics with language tasks designed to push students to the Advanced and Superior levels. Details are included in the section “PPS efforts to maintain a viable program” in the “Sustaining Student Motivation throughout a K–16 Program” chapter.

## Addressing Parent and Student Concerns

Parents are often actively involved in their children’s education, particularly in the elementary years. Although many of the issues would arise in any immersion program, some are particular to PPS.

At the heart of many of the tensions are differences in language, culture, and socioeconomic status (SES). At Woodstock, the dual immersion program now encompasses two different kinds of families: higher SES English speakers who are unable to help their children with Mandarin homework and lower SES Cantonese speakers who are unable to help with either English or Mandarin homework. At King School, English-speaking parents from within the neighborhood tend to have

a lower SES than those from outside the neighborhood and consequently have fewer resources to help enrich their children’s educational experi-

ence. Many neighborhood families speak Spanish at home, so parents are often unable to help with either Mandarin or English homework.

Parents note that, in the dual immersion programs, there are two different teaching communities who even eat lunch separately. The students also self-segregate at recess and lunch, so visually two groups operate in parallel at one school. The group differences have come to the forefront in interactions between parent organization.

### Parent support groups

An active parent group can be an enormous benefit to an immersion program, as students are more likely to succeed when everyone in their lives supports their education. *Shu Ren* is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that supports the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program at Woodstock Elementary School, Hosford Middle School, and Cleveland High School. *Shu Ren* was founded by parents to contribute to the success and continuance of the immersion program by raising money

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to support activities, which it accomplishes through events and parent initiatives and through membership dues. It organizes visits from a sister school in China, supports the classroom teachers, provides Mandarin classes for parents, and maintains a website with links to resources. *Shu Ren* also provides resources for parents to assist their children with Mandarin learning, such as supporting the after-school Mandarin homework help program. Students may stay after school and receive help with homework from parents, Confucius Institute teachers, and older students.

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While *Shu Ren* has provided much-needed support to students and their families, there have been some conflicts as a result of the cultural diversity among the parents. Some Chinese families, whose participation would be valued, do not have a background of working with a parent group nor understand the expectation of doing so. Sometimes there is a language barrier between English-speaking parents and Mandarin or Cantonese-speaking parents. Some parents lack the ability to work in the evenings, while others lack the financial resources to help with fundraising activities.

Some English-speaking parents believe that, since the change to a dual immersion model, the previous high level of parent involvement and volunteerism has plummeted. Many activities that *Shu Ren* had once undertaken have been reduced since only the English-speaking parents volunteer regularly. Cantonese-speaking parents may not have the cultural expectation of parent involvement, may not believe it is neces-

sary for the program to succeed, have not been approached about involvement in the right way, or simply don't understand the language (English) that the group uses. How to connect with these parents and encourage their participation remains an on-going concern.

Clearly, a Cantonese-speaking parent or community member is crucial to organizing communication and activities conducted by *Shu Ren*. For example, the school experienced a lice outbreak, but since information was only available in English, Cantonese

families were not aware of the issue. Previously, a *Shu Ren* volunteer would have provided information and support to parents, but they lack the resources to coordinate efforts bilingually.

Because *Shu Ren* is located in the Woodstock neighborhood, it does not regularly provide services to parents with children enrolled in King School, although the organization has given assistance and materials to King immersion parents to help them organize a local parent group. However, there is currently no parent organization at King School providing specific support for the immersion program, and some parents are extremely concerned about this lack. After observing other successful immersion programs within PPS, they believe that parent organizations are key to guiding students through an entire program rather than a single school, which a PTA cannot do. The King immersion parents want to establish an organization like *Shu Ren* to raise money for field trips to China, since most parents in the program will be unable to pay

for their student's passport applications, much less the travel costs. They know, with a 501(c)(3) structure, they could apply for grants for special resources available to cultural programs and maintain resources such as a homework club and class website.

Unfortunately, from the parents' point of view, PPS has advised them not to raise money only for the King immersion program for fear of dividing the school. Immersion parents have gone to the school-wide PTA suggesting that they mutually work to raise money for all stu-

dents, with perhaps a trip to Washington, D.C., for non-immersion students. These overtures have been rejected by non-immersion parents who are not in favor of an immersion program. Immersion parents have seen the rejection as a missed opportunity, and many who initially offered to volunteer have not persisted. Meanwhile, parents are unable to help their students with homework, see the enrichment opportunities they sought for their children slipping away, and are frustrated over the lack of classroom materials and books their students can bring home, and feel powerless to develop a supportive community.

King School parents would like to have the parent resource training offered at Woodstock Elementary, but they know they would need a robust volunteer parent community to offer the sessions. Although some parents can devote almost full time to volunteering, most cannot. The parent expertise and time to build an organization has not come forth and, when presented, has been rejected by the community.

## The homework challenge

Elementary school parents often described immersion program homework as "the ongoing challenge" that dictated virtually all their students' activities during the academic year and sometimes during the summer as well. Immersion students have a double homework load.

They are responsible for the full English program,

which they receive through an accelerated curriculum, and the additional Mandarin curriculum. Extracurricular activities compound the time management struggles

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that additional homework creates. Parents have to be careful to not overload students and to have enough time for family activities. Although parents desire the enriched program their students receive, they remark that the immersion program magnifies a student's general learning challenges.

All immersion students must work hard to keep up with the course load. Most lack help at home for at least one language in their curriculum. When parents or other family members know Mandarin and are also literate in it, they can easily help their student. But even parents who speak Chinese at home find that Mandarin is not easily comprehensible to them, so it is difficult for them to help their students. Cantonese-speaking parents and their children often struggle, because they speak neither English nor Mandarin.

English-speaking parents feel that students who need extra language assistance consume district resources. Others point out that students may

have entered the program without the required level of English or Mandarin proficiency, an issue that then becomes a distraction in the classroom and impacts the ability of all students to learn. Still others remark that they have seen students' English skills catch up by about third grade. They recognize that all schools must support learners at various abilities, but find that the language issues in a dual language program exacerbate the problem.

Most students report that they enjoy learning Mandarin, but they

feel more pressure with the Mandarin homework than the English homework. Students want teachers to give more dictation practice for the state assessments, and parents argue that more focus on writing should begin as early as kindergarten. Students at all levels say their greatest difficulties are reading and writing in Mandarin, specifically remembering the meaning of characters and stroke order for writing characters. Parents literate in Mandarin try to help, but not all parents write the strokes in the same sequence, which leads to students' confusion. By later grades, students have developed strategies to help themselves learn, such as keeping a notebook of characters and their meanings for reference.

Some students work with classmates after school to complete homework together, either working at students' homes or connecting through social media. Many of them have attended the afterschool homework club, but some who wanted to attend could not afford it. For those who could attend, parents felt that the current homework club schedule of forty

minutes was not enough and would prefer an additional 1.5 hours.

The Mandarin teachers are aware of the challenge their homework presents to students, and many have tried to help students work independently. For example, some teachers have provided sound recordings to accompany the Mandarin

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texts students are learning to read. When students are working at home and do not know how to read a character, they can listen to the audio recording. These

recordings extend students' reading practice, but require a great deal of teacher time to develop. Not all teachers have developed these recordings, and parents suggested that more would be helpful. Parents have also been dismayed that Mandarin teachers did not follow the informal school policy of not assigning homework over three-day weekends or school breaks, thus impinging on time for family activities.

Many of the students with an English language background had more financial resources and were thus able to obtain more homework help in afterschool programs organized by *Shu Ren*. For students who speak Mandarin or Cantonese at home, English homework is the greater concern. These parents note that students may not understand the English directions for homework and that the English teachers do not necessarily take this issue into account. At King School, parents who speak Spanish have trouble communicating with Mandarin teachers, and there has not been anyone available to translate. These parents have had to find innovative ways of communicating, such as using the Internet or their child

to communicate their questions. The teachers have always responded well, but the problem is ongoing and ready solutions are not in place. Ultimately, some kind of support is needed for everybody, no matter what language is spoken at home.

## **Classroom management and discipline**

Student management and discipline in the Chinese classroom have been an issue for parents. On one hand, parents desire a multicultural experience for their child; on the other, some common Chinese practices—such as making comments on students’ personal appearance or publicly shaming students—are difficult for American parents to accept. In fact, some practices common in China violate American policies of privacy. Teachers who have trained and worked in China tend to feel that English-speaking American children are spoiled and that their parents need to accept the cultural differences. PPS principals and administrative staff have worked to educate parents about the different practices they should expect and, at the same time, educate the Chinese teachers about American norms. Maintaining the balance is a constant challenge that can be neglected when other areas of concern draw more district attention. Parents appreciate the principals and other district staff who have worked to temper the cultural practices to a level acceptable to American parents.

Parents at Woodstock Elementary School have had the most experience with different approaches to discipline, thanks to established educational meetings conducted by district staff with support from *Shu Ren*. They also appreciate the experienced teaching staff, both English and Chinese, which they describe as academically excellent with knowledge of the curriculum and teaching methodologies. Nonetheless, parents become concerned when students who did well

and were comfortable with Chinese cultural differences in early grades become anxious in later grades due to high levels of homework combined with the practice of public shaming. Parents commented that they felt reluctant to voice the issue because the teach-

ers’ technical teaching abilities were high, but the classroom management behaviors led them to consider withdrawing from the program. Also, parents of students with disabilities found the English teachers accommodating, but felt the Chinese teachers have sometimes barred them from checking on accommodations.

For the most part, parents with students enrolled in the Woodstock Elementary School Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program generally accept different disciplinary styles and cultural practices. In fact, they value the outcomes of the different approaches. They pointed out that their students acted much differently in the Chinese classroom as compared to English classrooms. They are quieter, more obedient, more orderly,

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*An excellent teaching staff with access to ongoing professional development is at the heart of any educational program. Finding, training, and retaining excellent teachers is an enormous task that can consume immersion school principals.*

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and more likely to be where they were supposed to be. At home, parents try to help their students understand the differences and learn to manage them, thus providing reassurance to their students. Woodstock students described their Chinese teachers as “really strict” and noted that “they have an old fashioned teaching method.” While they did not like the teacher to speak sternly to them, they sometimes appreciated a teacher’s criticism because it helped them to do better work. Students also mentioned that Chinese teachers gave more praise for a job well done.

At King School, parents describe the Chinese classroom as “out of control.” Some of the families have pushed back on the Chinese style of discipline. Many of the Chinese teachers are in their first year of teaching, and they are not able to exert control, especially in the American style that is new to them. Parents have become concerned about disruptive students as they hear about chaotic conditions in the classroom leading to problems for students trying to learn. In King School parents entering the program have not received information on what cultural differences to expect, and there is no parent support group to help them adjust to these differences.

### **Concerns about PPS administration**

Some parents stated their biggest challenge is neither navigating homework in two languages nor balancing cultural expectations in the classroom, but the lack of transparency they perceive at the district level. For instance, they state that the district changes the rules of the lottery admission process frequently, and they view the changes as designed to benefit the district and its goals, not the families in the community. They feel PPS wants to offer a nationally recognized program as a tool to meet its own objectives, such as helping lower socioeconomic status

families, rather than focusing on language proficiency and investing in students.

At Woodstock Elementary, parents believe the district treats Mandarin and Cantonese as the same language, putting students from Cantonese-speaking families at a serious disadvantage since they do not speak Mandarin or English at home. Parents at King School feel the district does not take their immersion program seriously and should focus more on helping students succeed in both language and content areas. Parents at both schools are concerned that the problems that impact student achievement will lead to a less rigorous program and thus the caliber of education they sought for their children will suffer. These concerns and perceptions can cause some parents to question their decision to enroll in the program and to make alternative plans in case the problems become too great.

Despite these issues, parents praise PPS administrators on their ability to explain immersion programs in general and to provide detailed information about the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program. They are supportive of the concept of immersion in general, but find challenges in the realities of their school contexts.

### **Building a Quality Teaching Staff**

An excellent teaching staff with access to ongoing professional development is at the heart of any educational program. Finding, training, and retaining excellent teachers is an enormous task that can consume immersion school principals.

### **Committed administrative staff**

An immersion program is more likely to succeed if it has a focused administrative staff whose only tasks pertain to the immersion program. The number and roles of these staff members

will depend on the size and number of the immersion programs within the district. Even at the beginning, when a program is small, success will come more easily and quickly if there is at least one person whose only role is to grow the program.

PPS has benefited greatly by having a district-level immersion director who coordinates all immersion programs across the district; works with administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and students to strengthen program quality; and addresses challenges particular to immersion education. When no one advocates for programs at the district level, each school program is left to do so for itself, without the time to do an adequate job.

At the school level, PPS has discovered that a local coordinator is one of the keys to success of their immersion model. Running the immersion program cannot fall solely to the principal, as he or she has multiple other duties. Even if the principal speaks the target language, there are many other tasks to attend to, and managing an immersion program well is extremely difficult. PPS employs a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) as the local coordinator.

The TOSA is an expert whose only job should be to oversee the program and support staff at that school. The TOSA should speak the target language, be familiar with the immersion program model, know how to articulate the language instruction with the English curriculum, and meet with parents and teachers to provide information and resolve problems. Faced with severely restricted budgets, administrators may be tempted to stretch resources and eliminate the coordina-

tor, assign non-immersion program duties to the coordinator, or share the coordinator with other schools. These approaches would be a mistake, and these “cost-saving” strategies have not been sustainable for PPS. When coordinators are kept busy with general duties, such as signing late notes, ensuring students get on the bus, and completing secretarial duties, they are not able to focus on supporting the immersion program. Similarly, each school has different demands and schedules, leading to constant time conflicts in meeting the needs of multiple schools. These demands put unreasonable pressure on the coordinator, which ultimately results in high turnover. Additionally, the job qualifications for

the position would be different for different schools. For example, a person with an elementary school background may not be quali-

fied to administer the high school program and vice versa. Even starting with a half-time position was not recommended by PPS administrators. Employees who are good at the job will easily find a better paying full-time position, and the turnover will decrease the program’s quality.

### **Finding qualified teachers**

The classroom teacher can make the difference between a successful program or an unsuccessful one, something that is true in any educational setting, but more so in an immersion program. The fundamental challenge for an immersion teacher is the double burden of having to teach both content and language. The immersion teacher must make the subject matter content understandable for learners with diverse language proficiency, ensure students produce comprehensible output about the content, and propel students to higher levels of language proficiency. Immersion teach-

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ers thus need to be experienced in implementing instructional practices and literate in two languages. They must also obtain state-required licenses and certifications.

Due to the increasing popularity of Mandarin immersion programs, there is a dearth of professionally proficient teachers across the U.S., and

immersion program directors are struggling to locate them. The exact nature of the staffing challenge varies depending on grade level and cultural situation, but there

has always been an insufficient pool of qualified candidates in the Portland area to fill teaching vacancies. At the elementary level, PPS administrators have had an almost desperate struggle to fill vacancies, as the classes are larger and thus openings occur more frequently. The problem is not merely being able to choose the right person with the right certification from a number of applicants, but having *any* number of applicants who are employable. There is not a long line of teachers waiting to apply for immersion teaching positions. At the secondary level, different teachers focus on different content areas, and hiring teachers who can teach more advanced content in the target language becomes especially difficult. King School faced special challenges due to its tri-cultural nature. Its student population is predominately African-American and Latino. Finding Chinese teachers who were familiar with different American cultures *and* English teachers who could work effectively with the Chinese teachers was problematic.

As the immersion program has matured, PPS has employed several strategies to identify appli-

cants and has learned from each approach. The first approach utilized at Woodstock Elementary School involved extensive advertising along the West Coast, but this resulted in few responses. A single teacher was found locally, then as the first cohort approached middle school, the principal encouraged the current educational assistants to earn their degrees and licenses. Three as-

sistants did just that, growing from assistants to full-time teachers. For a period of time, PPS obtained teachers from China through a federally managed program that

brought native Chinese teachers to the U.S. for three years of teaching. Logistically, the need to guide new groups of teachers through the visa process, help them obtain temporary licenses, and support them in a different cultural environment taxed the resources of PPS staff. Some staff felt bringing professionals from China to the U.S. and then giving them tests, especially ones given in their non-native language of English, was unfair. Those involved in the process began to feel that one may need to have studied in a American university to have sufficient skills to teach in an American public school. However, Americans enrolled in education programs do not often plan to work at an immersion school, although native speakers of a language such as Mandarin who grow up in America would have had enough time to acquire the cultural knowledge to be successful.

In the face of growing competition for the limited supply of U.S.-based teachers and the difficulty of consistently training short-term teachers from China, PPS has sought a more sustainable strategy for filling immersion vacancies. It is

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*The fundamental challenge for an immersion teacher is the double burden of having to teach both content and language.*

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now returning to the early strategy of encouraging local residents to become licensed and is implementing this strategy with district-level support. Previously, the principals of Woodstock Elementary School, Hosford Middle School, and Cleveland High School worked tirelessly with local universities and with the Oregon Teachers Standards and Practices Commission to address licensing issues for their Mandarin teachers. They also worked closely with the PPS human resources department and the teachers' union to find pathways for people to gain licensure and certification within the university system. PPS has seen licensure challenges throughout the district with the other immersion programs as well. These challenges have attracted more attention from state- and district-level human resources departments. Currently, the district as a whole, not just the local school principals, understands the challenge of identifying and hiring qualified teaching staff much better today than they did even five years ago. As a result, there is now an effort to put systems in place to assist principals in their quest for qualified applicants.

The “grow your own” approach PPS has adopted is intended to attract highly educated bilingual people who already exist within the Portland community. Many of these people who would be interested in teaching cannot leave their present employment to obtain the required certification. PPS has begun an alternative certification program, which administrators believe will eventually become the best way to expand the PPS program. They currently have a cohort of approximately fifteen people who are working with Portland State University to complete their program. When completed, they will come into the PPS program with a biliterate, bilingual B.A.

The current approach will not only address the licensure needs, but will also help develop other

support systems to assist teachers in becoming effective in the classroom. As in any other educational field, licensure and book knowledge are only one component. The practical application of transitioning on-paper teaching skills to the classroom is a separate challenge. Even if applicants have the right credentials, they still must be a good classroom teacher and have a good management style. PPS will work with participants on a two-year program in which they enter the classroom on a restricted transitional license. For PPS, this approach represents a major shift in finding teachers. It appears workable, in part because Portland is on the Pacific Rim and has a relatively large population of Asian immigrants who are interested in entering the job market.

### **Teacher professional development**

Once hired, teachers need to receive training and support to be successful in the classroom. At the beginning of the PPS Mandarin immersion program, teachers were simply trying to survive. Most of the professional development experiences offered at that time targeted Spanish and Japanese immersion teachers. Woodstock Elementary School was the only school in the district offering Mandarin, so directly applicable professional development was limited. Consequently, teachers were unsure how to best help all students succeed. The targeted language skills were not clear, although a general notion existed that students completing the program should be able to conduct business in Mandarin. The Language Flagship grant permitted PPS to clarify its goals and offer a tremendous amount of professional development to help teachers understand how to develop higher-level proficiency in their students.

Because PPS historically relied on many teachers trained outside the U.S., professional development included training about the cultural differences between educational practices in Asia

and the U.S. Teachers from China had questions about how to teach in an American school, the expectations for discipline and communication, and what information is private and what can be public. As discussed in previous chapters, when not addressed, this lack of understanding can lead to problematic interactions with American parents and students.

PPS has sent teachers to national workshops and conferences and brought in outside expert presenters, but the local professional learning community has more effectively helped shift practice and improve student outcomes. Teachers work together as

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a team, collaborating both vertically in subject matter content and horizontally by grade level. They meet regularly to review assessment data, identify areas for improvement and instructional strategies to address those areas, implement the strategies, and then share the results with colleagues. This continuous, data-driven cycle enables teachers to identify successes and understand how to transfer those successes to other areas. They become more empowered to make changes that benefit students. The learning community meetings are an opportunity for teachers to dig deep and share their work. They are excited to review the data and actively improve practice in the classroom.

Finding the time for teachers to collaborate is the greatest challenge a professional learning

community faces. The Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program learning community meets once each month. School principals allow as much time as possible for teachers to collaborate and later to share their findings, but the total amount of time available is small. The teachers' schedules only 1.5 hours per week for all staff and professional learning community meetings combined.

For middle and high school teachers, the low number of classes taught results in fewer professional colleagues from whom teachers can receive confirmation and support. Hosford Middle School and Cleveland High School teachers meet once

a month, but the challenges of middle and high school programs are quite different. Strategies that work well with one age group may not work for another. In addition, short-term teachers hired from China stay for only three years, and there is not enough time to fully develop these professionals. Consequently, long-term staff find themselves continually helping new teachers.

### **Working in a multicultural environment**

A language immersion program involves interaction among people from multiple cultures and perspectives, which is one of its perceived benefits. On a daily basis, both the school principal and the immersion coordinator must facilitate that interaction and help each group understand the other's perspective. As former Woodstock Elementary School Principal Mary Patterson (2007)

wrote, “Chinese teachers have very different expectations for me as an administrator than do their counterparts in the English program. While the English teachers want and expect to have a high degree of collaboration and a voice in decision-making, the Chinese teachers generally expect a more hierarchical approach. Differences in philosophy about student motivation, discipline, and instructional practices can also be quite distinct. I have learned that I need to be sensitive to these differences both in my interactions with the staff and in my work with the parents. It is important to create opportunities for teachers in both programs to meet together in grade level and across grade level teams to discuss these issues. Targeted staff development must also be provided.”

Over time, many of the initial problems PPS experienced have subsided, but issues still remain and probably always will.

Parents will also need help understanding cultural differences as their children interact with Chinese teachers who came from a culture with different expectations and different methods of interacting with students. When parents do not anticipate or understand the differences, they frequently complain to the principal or the teacher. For example, a parent might complain that a teacher was rude or unkind, and the principal would meet with them to understand the situation and explain that the teacher’s behavior was not intended that way.

PPS currently holds mandatory meetings for parents who want to enroll their child in the

Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program. During the meeting, administrators set program expectations, share information about the school cultures, prepare parents for what to expect in the Chinese classroom, and explain American/Chinese cultural differences. As the immersion program has matured, parents have had the opportunity to talk to each other and attend informational meetings conducted by the district, both of which have given them a better understanding of the immersion program, the Mandarin language, and the expectations of teachers coming from China.

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The mandatory meetings also include an explanation of how learning a new language requires student discipline and focus. In an English classroom, stu-

dents do not need to pay as close attention because they understand the language well; in the Chinese classroom, students need to be looking as well as listening in order to understand, since comprehension depends on expressions and gestures. If the students do not look while listening, they may be lost. When reading and writing, they need to focus carefully, as meaning can depend on a single stroke.

The mandatory meetings have helped improve communications between parents and teachers, but each year there are students who feel they have been unable to attain a teacher’s high expectations and subsequently complain to their parents. This situation happens in both English and Chinese classrooms, but parents are more likely to see the conflict as a cultural difference when it occurs in the Chinese classroom. Al-

though parents say they understand and appreciate different cultural practices, they sometimes feel the teacher has gone “over the line.” Please see “Addressing Parent and Student Concerns” above for additional details.

## Developing a Quality Curriculum

To build a quality curriculum, administrators should first decide on the program goals and then use backwards design techniques to determine how to accomplish those goals. Goals should include both language proficiency targets and state-required grade-level standards. Administrators should also develop a method of continuously setting targets, employing backwards design, implementing adjustments, assessing student outcomes, and using assessment data to inform revisions.

PPS has developed its Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program on a three-pronged model of language instruction, content instruction in the target language, and experiential learning. They incorporate these elements into the curriculum, which they continuously improve by gathering and reflecting on data about student outcomes.

### Language and content instruction

Many mistakenly believe that immersion programs should just bathe the students in language, and they will become native speakers. The programs that have taken this approach have students spend more than half their time in the target language using math, art, or physical education. Although large amounts of target language input are desirable, unfortunately, time itself will not lead to students’ ability to produce oral and written language. For students to achieve high levels of language proficiency, a program must include language arts instruction in the target language in much the same way that instruction is provided for English. Teachers must

focus attention on students’ use of language, which may be as simple as reminding students that they learned paragraph structures in English and explaining paragraph structures in Mandarin. Similarly, just as students need to learn skills for remembering English vocabulary, they need to learn complementary skills for remembering Chinese vocabulary.

When PPS began its program, their stated goal for students’ proficiency was that they would be able to conduct business in China by the time they graduated high school. This goal led to the decision to select Mandarin as the target language, rather than Cantonese, since the large population of mainland China would provide more business opportunities for students, and to use the simplified writing system. The program’s first teachers used both district and state standards to identify academic content required at each grade level and then determined which areas would be taught in English and which would be taught in Mandarin. At the time of the program’s inception, students needed to pass state exams in math and English in the third grade. Teachers looked at what students would need in order to pass, then built the program backwards. From their analysis, they determined that an 80/20 immersion model would not provide enough time in English for students to pass the state tests. As a result, they selected a 50/50 model. PPS initially taught math in Mandarin and added science instruction in Mandarin at third grade. They later refined the curriculum to address questions such as: What are the language forms and functions to be taught at each grade level? What is the related vocabulary? How will instruction be articulated across grade levels?

During the first years of the program, the Mandarin teacher taught half the day and developed curriculum and materials during the other half.

She reviewed American textbooks, adapted thematic units, and translated material into Mandarin. Students learned content in both English and Mandarin, but they received the Mandarin content first in the morning followed by English instruction in the afternoon. This method of curriculum development presented a variety of challenges. The Chinese teachers, who created their own materials based on what they knew from China, had problems synchronizing content with the English instruction and ensuring students received full exposure to all content related to common core and states standards. Some students who started in the early cohorts found that they needed extra tutoring to grasp math concepts when they reached middle and high school. It is unclear if the cause of the problem was that students learned the concepts only partially in Mandarin or if math would have been difficult for these students under any instruction.

As the availability of proficiency data increased, PPS administrators shifted Mandarin instruction from science and math to language arts. The Language Flagship grant served as the force behind this positive shift as the grant provided the opportunity to regularly assess student outcomes. The program director worked closely with teachers to build a curriculum plan that mapped instruction for the entire K–12 program and became the foundation for all teaching within the program.

In recent years, the district has made curriculum adoption part of a formal district process, rather than an independent school or building responsibility. They also developed two professional learning communities: one for grade levels and one for across grade levels within content areas. These groups completed curriculum mapping at each grade level, so both Mandarin and English teachers have the opportunity to review a full

year and work together to ensure students are on target. The vertically oriented group makes sure students are on track with reading and writing skills, organizes tools and resources, and informs teachers about expectations for student work at their current grade level and the levels just above and below. Teachers feel these alignment meetings are useful, but some believe more time is needed to do the alignment properly. Although the process seems to function reasonably well at Woodstock Elementary School, teachers in the new King School program have found themselves unsure of what to teach at times, since they did not know what students had learned in the previous year or what they need to achieve in the current year.

### **Acquiring curriculum resources in the partner language**

Immersion programs, and particularly those for less commonly taught languages, face the challenge of finding curriculum materials that are both linguistically and developmentally appropriate and that also provide the content needed to meet state standards at each grade level.

During the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program's early years, few Mandarin teaching materials were available commercially in the U.S., particularly for the simplified writing system that PPS decided to teach. Teachers either developed curriculum themselves, duplicated something they knew from mainland China, or revised the materials they bought in China and brought back to the U.S. Teachers worked as a team late in the school year to decide what materials they would use the following fall. They also took on the burden of working in grade-level teams to create and develop materials themselves. Developing materials is not a simple task. Teachers could not successfully identify components of the English program and transfer the materials into Mandarin.

When teachers returned to China during vacation, they received extensive budgets to purchase materials and ship them back. Not all of the materials they found in China were culturally appropriate for American students, so once they returned, teachers photocopied the acceptable portions of the materials. Eventually, PPS found a textbook from Singapore that was developed for a context similar to theirs, which they used for many years.

The quantity and quality of Mandarin materials has improved dramatically since PPS began its program, but the issues noted above are still present for many other less commonly taught languages. The increasing number of Mandarin immersion programs has spurred the development of commercial materials aligned to K-12 needs. Publishing companies visited and observed the PPS program, and staff worked directly with publishers to develop materials to meet district needs. PPS is now able to choose from an array of materials, rather than placing the burden of materials development exclusively on teachers. The time teachers were spending on materials development is now reserved for collaboration with each other.

PPS has yet to adopt a textbook at the middle school and high school levels. Although teachers use some materials from textbooks, they often find the language or content is not appropriate for students in their program. Most middle school students in the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program are at the Intermediate High proficiency level, but few of the materials available at these levels and higher are suitable for secondary students; they are designed instead for college courses and include topics not applicable to high schoolers. As a consequence, teachers use much of their collaborative meeting time to develop their own materials. They identify authentic videos and written texts about

topics suitable for their students and then create assignments with focused comprehension questions. The high school teachers in particular have a great need for materials that both capture students' interests and build proficiency.

Teachers have identified two strategies to address the need for curriculum resources at the middle and high school levels. One strategy resulted in a joint program with the University of Oregon to design a course specifically for high school immersion students. The UO polled students on their interests and created content specifically incorporating students' selected topics. The course will launch in summer 2016. A second strategy, which has yet to be explored, is increasing the acquisition of digital collections from China. It may be possible to have a robust collection of materials available to schools across the U.S. in a manner similar to that of university collections. This strategy could be made possible through a partnership with a Chinese library.

PPS is not new to incorporating technology to identify resources and bring China directly into the classroom. An early strategy included a satellite dish plugged into CCTV. Elementary students spent fifteen minutes each day listening to a program similar to Sesame Street in Mandarin. In 2009, a generous grant provided a language lab complete with iMacs and Macbook carts. Keeping pace with technological advances and sustaining devices is problematic, however. The devices purchased in 2009 are aging and the availability of grant funds has all but vanished. At the same time, student learning depends more and more on technology. For example, students rely on Google docs and other online resources, such as movies and audio clips, to prepare for their research residency in China in which they collect cultural comparisons. Teachers are now not sure what devices students will have available when

the current computers are no longer usable. Students from more affluent families may be able to provide their own devices, but lower income students may lose access.

### **Data-driven curriculum improvement**

Curriculum improvement must include regularly assessing student outcomes for both language proficiency and subject matter content, followed by a data review and curriculum adjustment process. This formative assessment approach boosts student outcomes through the improvement of curriculum. Students may be able to show mastery of the subject matter, especially for comprehension, and yet not have enough language for productive communication in real-life situations. For this reason, assessing language and content separately is important.

Although requiring students to meet proficiency targets in order to maintain their place in the immersion program may be tempting, such a summative approach to assessment tends to exclude families whose home language is not English or Mandarin. A more equitable approach is to retain all students in the program as long as they express interest in participating and to improve curriculum to help students build their proficiency at each grade level.

During the beginning years of the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program, no standardized assessment for elementary students learning Mandarin existed in the U.S. PPS teachers created their own assessment using students' writing samples and conducted their own speaking assessments. They rated students' work according to a benchmark, but the ratings were subjective.

Recognizing the need for standardized proficiency assessment in the target language, PPS used

grant funds from The Language Flagship to develop such a test. They partnered with the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon to develop an elementary-level online assessment. High school students take a partner assessment, called the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP), also developed by CASLS. Middle school students in the program also take STAMP, but administering the test to both middle and high school students presents a construct validity issue. Middle school students have difficulty scoring at high levels partly due to their inability to understand English words in questions pertaining to reading and listening passages. The district is currently looking into other assessment options for this age group.

Today, the data review process is part of the collaborative professional development experience for teachers. Teachers meet to review the data, identify areas for improvement, and share ideas about instructional strategies to address issues. They implement those strategies in the classroom, then reconvene to share their experiences and identify where the strategies have been successful. Successful strategies are integrated into practice, while those that are not successful are left behind.

### **Experiential learning opportunities**

PPS currently offers two experiential learning opportunities: an eighth grade trip and a high school summer program in China.

Near the end of eighth grade, ninety-five percent of students in the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program complete a capstone experience in which they spend two weeks in the school's sister city in Suzhou, China. Students complete field studies that they have spent the previous year preparing. Students navigate the city on their own, with adult chaperones who do

not necessarily speak Mandarin. Students conduct inquiry-based projects on topics they have chosen and carry out surveys and interviews. They also live with Chinese host families and take classes such as calligraphy and martial arts. PPS does not bring students to China; they bring themselves.

The trip costs approximately \$2,000 per student, and *Shu Ren*, the parent association, partially funds the trip. Students and their families are typically responsible for less than half the cost. The eighth grade research residency capstone is one of the most impactful learning

opportunities PPS students experience. The trip solidifies what they have been learning for years in the classroom. Students return with a high level of excitement about the program and their learning because they personally connected with the culture. China is no longer confined to a book in the classroom.

High school students may complete a biennial summer program to the Yunnan Summer Institute in China, which has also been successful in increasing students' motivation. The Yunnan Summer Institute is a one-month community service program open to incoming tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students. Students who have graduated are not eligible. The program is expensive, and neither PPS nor *Shu Ren* provide financial support to students. Only fifteen percent of students participate, and a very few who

can afford to do so have gone twice. PPS recognizes that an affordable in-country experience for high school students would have a major impact on the success of the high school program.

The Yunnan Summer Institute begins with a historical tour of Beijing followed by a train journey to Yunnan Province in southwest China, where

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students complete one week of community service in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan. Many service activities support an economically disadvantaged school where, for example, the Portland students help teach the Chinese students. Then, students travel to

a northern region where they perform a second community service, such as cleaning the village temple or farming with villagers. Some students travel three hours by horseback to an isolated village and spend two days there doing similar work in a much more isolated setting; students appreciate this unique experience. The final portion of the program has a cultural focus. The students travel to the well-preserved historical town of Lijiang and stay with a local family. The program concludes with a pilgrimage to Tao Mountain.

## **Sustaining Student Motivation throughout a K–16 Program**

A sustainable program must have enough enrolled students within a single district to be viable across the K–12 continuum. Maintaining enrollment at each stage of the program pres-



ents its own set of challenges. A program must: 1) attract a sufficient number of students and parents to enroll, 2) maintain student and parent motivation in elementary school, 3) maintain student interest in middle and high school, and 4) build interest in a university experience that can draw students from multiple districts across the nation. The challenges faced at each stage are not unique to PPS, and PPS' past and present efforts to confront these issues offer insights into what strategies may ultimately succeed.

### **Overview of the PPS experience with enrollment**

The PPS Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program began with a list of twenty parents who expressed their interest in such a program to the district. In July 1998, the Woodstock Elementary School principal called each parent and compiled a list of those willing to start their child in the program that September. The program began with one combined kindergarten/first grade class and added a grade each year. As the first cohorts moved to middle and high school, those schools found that the cohort was not large enough to sustain a full program. Woodstock therefore expanded its program by adding a second kindergarten class. Knowing that attrition would occur, they strove to set a class size that would generate enough students to maintain a balance.

The elementary-level program is currently robust. Parents wait in line to enroll their children and become frustrated when the spots fill. Once accepted, parents and students are excited, and their excitement drives a large investment of time, energy, and focus on building a vibrant program. Parents are willing to drive their student across town to be in the program. The elementary program spends fifty percent of the day in Mandarin, and students with no Mandarin

background are soon able to speak, sing songs, and write simple characters. As many studies of acquisition have shown, learners gain proficiency quickly at first, especially when half of the school day is devoted to language study.

By middle school, however, some of the families who worked so diligently to get into the K–5 program do not want to move to the 6–8 program. At high school, the group becomes smaller still. A cohort of sixty students at the elementary level typically drops to forty by middle school and then twenty-five by high school. The attrition is frustrating for the district trying to maintain a viable program, and adequately staffing a limited program is expensive. Currently, PPS is focusing its efforts for program improvement on maintaining student interest and enrollment during the middle and high school years. They have tried a variety of innovative strategies with mixed success, and continue to experiment with new approaches.

### **Parent and student motivation in the elementary years**

Parents enroll their children in the elementary Mandarin immersion program because they believe it will provide a course of study that is more educationally enriching than a traditional neighborhood elementary program. The double curriculum of the dual language program is consequently attractive. Many parents are also seeking a culturally diverse classroom and additional enrichment experiences for their children, such as the eighth grade research residency trip to China. They often feel that knowledge of a language other than English might be a good fit for their children's future interests and job skills, and they want their children to be equipped as global citizens. Some parents are so highly motivated that those with the economic means to do so move to Portland specifically for the immersion program.

When a family has no heritage connection to China, their choice of the Mandarin program is often influenced by their belief that: 1) China will be a significant economic power in the future and that knowledge of Mandarin will open a variety of opportunities for future employment for their child, 2) the PPS Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program has a reputation of quality and a supportive community, and 3) others they know who have studied Mandarin feel fortunate to have been able to do so.

For families with a heritage connection to China, the choice of the Mandarin program is multifaceted. The family may have immigrated from China and want their children to speak Mandarin in addition to learning English. Mandarin skills will allow their children to communicate with families and communities back in the home country. By learning Mandarin, their children will have a solid foundation for the future job market and, in their immediate environment, be able to help their parents in daily communication. In other cases, a child may be adopted from China and the parents seek to connect the child with his or her heritage. For some adoptive families, providing a cultural connection is a requirement of the adoption.

Parents keep their students in the program when their children are both gaining language proficiency and happy at school. Ideally, students have a quality, experienced teacher as they enter the program. Parents talk with each other; when they see good results, they tell other parents.

They also share negative experiences, and these comments among parents are often the most convincing. Parents withdraw their children when they are not happy with the classroom environment, which threatens the viability of the program.

One of the strengths of the PPS elementary program is that the students themselves are happy

to be in the program, highly motivated to learn Mandarin, and enjoy what they are learning. Students say that learning to speak in a different language is fun and, even at this age, believe studying Mandarin is a way “to get really smart.” Children enrolled in the new King School program are just as motivated as their peers at Woodstock Elementary, but some of the King School parents are uncertain about the program. On one hand, they express gratitude to the district for providing the opportunity for their children to learn a second or third language. They are proud of PPS for putting an immersion program in an underserved school and feel that the lottery enrollment rules are written in ways that prioritize children in poverty. On the other hand, although they do not expect the program at King to compete with Woodstock, some parents believe that their child is not receiving the enriched program of study that they had hoped for. This belief, combined with the high level of violence in the neighborhood and opposition toward the program from some neighborhood parents, has resulted in their reconsidering the program. For example, parents expected to organize and raise funds for students’ trips abroad, but PPS asked

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them to only raise funds through the PTA, which then rejected their efforts for fundraising. As a result, parents are concerned that the benefits for their children will not come to fruition.

Some King School parents believe the actual class time in Mandarin is thirty-five percent, rather than fifty percent, and that homework assignments and homework help are not well structured. These parents compare the King School program to other immersion programs within the district. They want to do more that will extend the program and create other opportunities, but feel thwarted both by the district and the neighborhood program.

### **Keeping middle and high school students interested**

Although developing an elementary immersion program is not easy, developing and sustaining middle and high school programs is even more challenging. Increased demands on students' time and decreased parental pressure to stay in the program combine to create hurdles teachers and administrators must overcome. In addition, students' motivation decreases as their language proficiency begins to slow, which is a result of fewer instructional hours and students' cognitive development surpassing their ability to express their thoughts in the target language. There are few students in the U.S. who have reached high school through an immersion program, and no truly effective model of instruction is available. PPS is working toward identifying an effective model, despite encountering obstacles.

Parent and student preferences seem to drive attrition. As the excitement of being in the program tapers off, an increasing number of academic and extracurricular opportunities come to the foreground. Students begin to express their independence in decisions related to their education and extracurricular activities, and parents who carefully chose the immersion program for their kindergarten child are now willing to listen to their children's desires.

Keeping students motivated when their target language skills are more limited than their cogni-

tive abilities and developing interests is especially difficult. This problem occurs in all immersion programs, not just Mandarin. During high school, students' cognitive development becomes much more

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*Increased demands on students' time and decreased parental pressure to stay in the program combine to create hurdles teachers and administrators must overcome.*

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abstract and nuanced. They experience frustration with their second language learning because they can no longer express their thoughts in the target language. They can make progress, but an experienced teacher must be available to stretch and refine students' language skills—a difficult challenge when they only see the teacher one hour a day on average.

PPS teachers at the middle school level have experimented with different teaching strategies, attempting to provide a fun and challenging environment and enriching activities. Teachers' efforts are an improvement from the program's beginning years, which some alumni remember as "lost years" in terms of language learning due to the lack of quality curriculum and adequately prepared teachers.

The amount of time students spend in Mandarin at the middle school and high school levels also presents challenges. In middle school, two classes a day are taught in the language, with just one class in high school. Since the high school schedule is an A/B schedule, students receive only ninety-minutes of instruction every other day. Thus, just as students are working to acquire Advanced language skills, which can only be achieved with time and intensity of instruction, they receive less instruction. One ninety-minute Mandarin class every other day does not allow students sufficient time to even sustain previous language skills, much less succeed at the harder task of improving those skills. The reduced time in Mandarin content classes leads to reduced literacy and student frustration, as they cannot read Mandarin texts related to their current interests. Teachers are challenged to find authentic reading materials that are both interesting to students and at their proficiency level. Even finding quality teachers for these advanced content courses taught in the target language is challenging.

In addition, the work students are doing in their Mandarin courses is, quite simply, difficult. They need to put forth great effort to master paragraph-like discourse, develop control over grammatical features, learn advanced vocabulary, and understand the subtleties and nuances of language. Faced with hard work, lack of progress, and unengaging content, students can burn out on learning Chinese. They may find themselves exhausted from trying to stay focused on learning a language they have been studying since kindergarten.

The reduction in Mandarin instruction and engaging course materials, as well as the sheer amount of work required to make progress, decreases students' motivation at the same time

that other opportunities arise. Cleveland High School, for example, is an International Baccalaureate school. IB is a rigorous program with many requirements, and the immersion program has to be tailored to meet them. If a student takes the whole IB course load, their schedule will fill with IB courses and leave little room for electives. IB classes, other academics courses, sports, and extracurricular activities become a much greater draw on students' time. Without a strong and exciting program, Mandarin study begins to feel like a burden.

Disparities among proficiency levels within a given cohort widen in high school. Students with high proficiency become frustrated when they don't see improvement, and teachers must differentiate instruction to challenge them without leaving behind lower proficiency learners. Students complain that they are given content they learned in middle school, which further challenges teachers to identify other interesting topics or to explore previous topics more deeply.

Teachers, as well as highly motivated students, have turned to technology to improve language proficiency. Teachers reported using Google classroom and Quizlet, viewing current news videos, and playing games to balance the steady diet of reading and writing activities. Sometimes these efforts work, but the greater lesson is that teachers must constantly try different strategies to identify effective approaches. What works for one cohort may not for another.

Exactly what would high school students like to see in their immersion program? Alumni say they would have preferred more content classes in Mandarin, such as math, history, and science. They would have also liked to use their Mandarin to study an area of their own choosing. Alumni would have appreciated more time for Mandarin

classes and programs during school breaks. Those who completed the Yunnan Summer Institute report that the trip helped them refocus on the Mandarin language, and feel that work should be done to make the program more affordable for all students.

### **Retaining students through postsecondary programs**

About one-third of PPS graduates from the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program continue their study at

the University of Oregon (UO). Others choose to attend universities farther from home or universities with specialties in other areas of interest. Alumni who did choose to continue noted that many of their peers grew bored with Mandarin in high school or college, no longer seeing the point of continuing since their proficiency gains stalled. Sometimes students had interests in other areas of study that did not require Mandarin, and they were unable to make a connection. Some students who chose to enroll in classes at the UO did not feel their language proficiency improved significantly enough to warrant their time investment.

As previously noted, a dedicated program coordinator is essential for a K–12 program, and a parallel coordinator at the university level is equally needed. The critical nature of each of these positions became evident each time a transition in program coordinators occurred, both at PPS and UO. For example, at the UO, a series of three coordinators in two years led to gaps in consistency, communication, and program support. To maximize success, a postsecondary program

needs a long-term, dedicated coordinator to provide reliable information and to advocate for students.

### **PPS efforts to maintain a viable program**

As this chapter has discussed, PPS administrators and teachers at all levels have worked hard

to develop and sustain a continuous K–12 program. Their work has pioneered innovations and improvements in immersion education. The Mandarin Dual Language Immersion

Program has a deserved reputation for quality, and the emphasis on data-driven improvements to curriculum and instruction is admirable.

Despite these efforts, attrition remains a challenge for the PPS program. Some efforts, such as doubling the number of kindergarten students admitted, have not been sufficient to maintain a high number of students in high school. Consequently, until very recently, only one teacher was hired at the high school level. Thus, students worked with the same teacher during all four years of high school, a situation that has proved exhausting for both parties. PPS also transcended conventional teaching practices to offer additional course options for high school students. For example, it developed courses on sustainability and Chinese film, both of which use an asynchronous, blended online format. The asynchronous format requires students to be independent learners, which not all students are capable of doing at this age. A small group of students did pilot these courses with success, but they were high achieving students who would have likely succeeded in courses of any format.

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*About one-third of PPS graduates from the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program continue their study at the University of Oregon.*

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The experiential learning opportunities (discussed in detail in the section “Developing a Quality Curriculum” of the previous chapter) help maintain student interest and motivation in Mandarin study. The research residency in eighth grade is strategically positioned at a point where many students make a conscious decision to continue studying Mandarin. The trip provides a motivation boost that increases retention.

The high school Yunnan Summer

Institute also leads to dramatic changes for the students who are able to participate. For example, three of the seven students who returned from a recent institute applied to the University of Oregon Chinese Flagship Program, and another plans to apply upon graduating. Making these

experiences more affordable and accessible to all students could potentially sustain enrollment.

A recent PPS effort involves a partnership with the UO’s Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) to develop a bridging course

designed for eleventh and twelfth grade immersion students. A student advisory group selected the topics for the course to ensure that it will be congruent with student interests. PPS

and CASLS hope that students will thus find the content engaging. The accompanying language tasks should push students to the Advanced and Superior levels, making them eligible to attend any Flagship Program. The course debuts in summer 2016.

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*A postsecondary program needs a long-term, dedicated coordinator to provide reliable information and advocate for students.*

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# Catalysts and Disruptors

## Implementing an Immersion Program at King School

During the 2015-16 academic year, King School had proportionally more African-American and Hispanic students and less Non-Hispanic White students than PPS as a whole. King also had more students with Limited English Proficiency and more students eligible for free or reduced lunch than district-wide rates. Tables 4 and 5 compare the district-wide demographics with those of King School overall, the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program, and the neighborhood program. As can be seen, the immersion program attracted proportionally more Non-Hispanic White enrollees than would be expected based on the overall rates. Limited English Proficiency and Special Education students are also less represented in the program than in the school overall.

It is within this demographic context that PPS sought to establish a second Mandarin Dual

Language Immersion Program. Approximately one-third of the neighborhood population speaks Spanish in the home. The Mandarin immersion program is, contextually, a trilingual program involving Mandarin, English, and Spanish. Few programs in the country can support the diverse language and culture needs of trilingual students. There are no models available showing how to implement a Mandarin program in a historically African-American and Latino population. The immersion program at King School is thus a trailblazing activity, but PPS hopes that the immersion model success will ultimately disrupt the dominant culture education model and increase the achievement levels of historically underserved students.

Despite good intentions, neither the community nor the King School teachers initially wanted the program. The neighborhood community viewed the public school system with skepticism, and the sudden implementation of the program fueled

**Table 4. Comparison of Student Race/Ethnicity by District, School, or Program**

Racial/Ethnic Category	PPS Total	King Total	King Mandarin	King Neighborhood
African-American	10%	43%	31%	46%
Hispanic	16%	29%	17%	32%
Non-Hispanic White	56%	14%	31%	9%
Asian	7%	1%	4%	0%
Other	11%	13%	17%	13%

**Table 5. Comparison of Student Categories by District, School, or Program**

Student Categories	PPS Total	King Total	King Mandarin	King Neighborhood
Special Education	14%	14%	7%	16%
Talented and Gifted	10%	2%	1%	2%
Limited English Proficiency	7%	21%	9%	24%
Eligible for free/ reduced lunch	46%	100%	100%	100%

their distrust. The selection of Mandarin seemed illogical to the community, many of whom spoke Spanish in the home and had hoped the immersion program would be in Spanish. Parents were concerned that already limited resources at the school would be siphoned off for the immersion program, leaving the neighborhood program further impoverished.

To counter initial resistance, PPS administrators held several meetings in which they presented information about the program and why the district had selected Mandarin. Dual language immer-

sion itself was an unfamiliar concept in the community, so administrators first explained the purpose of immersion in general and

then Mandarin immersion in particular. The first principal at King School spent months explaining the program to parents and the community. Now, two years after the program started, parents still ask why PPS selected Mandarin as the language.

For its part, PPS selected Mandarin as the language for the King School program because the

district lacked capacity to maintain additional Spanish immersion programs. Access and transportation for families seeking Spanish immersion already existed. Nearby Albina Head Start previously advocated for and implemented a Mandarin program, basing their argument on raising the academic achievement of historically underserved students and increasing their success at school. Eventually, some English-speaking parents did acquiesce, and several Spanish-speaking parents enrolled their children in the King School program as well.

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*Parents share that their students, for whom Mandarin may be a third language, love the program.*

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PPS sought ways to bring Mandarin to all students at King School, thereby assuaging some parent concerns that two programs

would divide school resources and disrupt unity. King School thus implemented Mandarin as a world language for all PreK–3 students and created activities, artwork, and community events to engage all students. Academically, teachers meet by grade level to review assessment data so that immersion teachers work alongside neighborhood program teachers.



Conflicts have arisen between the neighborhood PTA and the Mandarin immersion parents. The Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program at King School is not part of *Shu Ren*, the powerful parent group that supports Woodstock Elementary, Hosford Middle School, and Cleveland High School. The PTA has a limited budget, and immersion parents foresee expenses related to trips to China that they cannot afford. These parents would like to conduct additional fundraising efforts and are willing to volunteer, but they experience logistical and organizational challenges.

Other parents of children enrolled in the immersion program, particularly those from outside the neighborhood, are concerned about the location of King School itself. One parent in particular felt she could not recommend the program due to the gun- and drug-related violence she and her child experienced in the neighborhood surrounding the school. There have been multiple shootings at or near the school during school hours, some of which the children have witnessed. “Other parents think I’m crazy to stay in the program when my child has had a gunman twelve feet away from them,” she shared during an interview. The Chinese teachers also remarked that this violence is difficult to witness and adds to their distrust. Parents report that the response from PPS, the city, and the neighborhood has been extremely inadequate regarding the violence, and that the district and city of Portland must take immediate steps to ensure the safety of all children and fami-

lies at King School, regardless of whether they are enrolled in the immersion program.

Resistance also came from King School teachers and administrators. They felt excluded from the decision-making process, so the immersion

program implementation became one more high-level decision which they had no control over. Because Mandarin language instruction at a school with a high Latino population did not feel like an intuitive match, a perception grew that the pro-

gram was good for the district, but not for King in particular. In retrospect, insufficient collaborative leadership around the initiative prior to the start of the program contributed to staff’s resistance. Hiring a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) to coordinate the program has helped immensely.

In addition to the neighborhood and contextual conflicts, the immersion program itself faced a number of programmatic challenges. Like Woodstock Elementary School, King School experienced difficulty recruiting and hiring experienced teachers. King School had the added challenge of needing teachers who were culturally aware. Cultural differences among the teachers and parents created tension, which the district has softened by allowing parents more access to teachers to address their concerns and reach mutual understanding. Parents reported the desire for additional access to teachers before school starts so that they can get to know them better and build trust. The process of parents getting to know the teachers has been arduous as a new

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*The Mandarin immersion program is, contextually, a trilingual program involving Mandarin, English, and Spanish. Few programs in the country can support the diverse language and culture needs of trilingual students.*

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program results in new staff arriving each year as grade levels are added. Problems securing visas for Chinese teachers have prevented them from participating in pre-service activities and getting to know parents early in the school year.

Fortunately, parents and community members have begun to see that the program is working. As students came home speaking Mandarin, the program became easier to promote. The school hosted community events to engage the neighborhood, which increased buy-in. Parents state that their students, for whom Mandarin may be a third language, love the program. Parents appreciate the diversity in the classroom and have high expectations for the program. Students who did not initially succeed in the Mandarin program were not moved to the neighborhood program, as some parents feared. Creating teacher teams that brought together the immersion and the neighborhood teachers helped bring unity and combat the perception of competition between the two programs. Implementing Mandarin as a world language for the neighborhood program assuaged fears that language learning is an elitist endeavor. The program's second year was much easier than the first. The process of acceptance will be ongoing as families learn about Chinese culture and Chinese instructors learn about diverse American communities.

As the program continues to unfold, some parents feel the King School program lacks a focus on success and that lower levels of success are accepted. Others are concerned about students meeting state content standards. Out-of-neighborhood parents feel that their participation and input is not welcome. Many feel that interactions with PPS have been racially insensitive. PPS administrators will need to both address issues related to the immersion program specifically and to build unity among the immersion program,

the neighborhood program, and the surrounding community.

### **Lessons learned from King School**

- Secure community investment, teachers, and curriculum before beginning. Five years of preparation is ideal.
- Be aware of community context and be ready to answer questions about the program's relevance.
- Address how an immersion program sited within an existing neighborhood school can create unity, rather than separation.
- Focus on resolving cultural issues early and encouraging collaboration.
- Persist.

### **The Language Flagship**

The Language Flagship is a federally funded national initiative that seeks to change the way Americans learn languages. Many U.S. students only complete two years of a foreign language in high school, and some receive no language instruction at all. To address this shortfall, The Language Flagship has systematically made K–12 investments nationwide to improve access to outcome-based foreign language learning.

Portland Public Schools (PPS), in partnership with the University of Oregon (UO), has been a recipient of Flagship funding since 2005. Earlier that year, when the Institute of International Education released the request for proposals for a Chinese Flagship Program, PPS Immersion Director Michael Bacon approached local institutions with ideas for improving the curriculum and assessment system and adding a second program in the district. At the UO, Center for Applied Second Language Studies Director Carl Falsgraf thought the project was a good fit for the center's resources. He garnered interest and support from UO administrators for the UO's participation in the Chinese Flagship Program.

## Flagship support at PPS

The Language Flagship funding has supported innovations in immersion education at PPS, which has impacted the field nationally. Many states and districts have since implemented similar programs.

First and foremost, the grant funding allowed PPS teachers, administrators, and students to focus on language proficiency goals and to monitor progress toward achieving those goals. The grant provided funds to develop a standardized Mandarin assessment, which helped PPS adjust and improve curriculum. The focus on curriculum revision based on assessment outcomes catalyzed a change in methodology and curriculum that could not have happened otherwise. PPS' curriculum coordinated student learning of written characters with oral language practice, which integrated reading proficiency into a functional ability to express meaning. For K-12, these changes were revolutionary and have helped all immersion programs.

The Language Flagship funding also strengthened PPS' connections with the UO, which provided them with an outside partner that could advocate for the value of language learning and immersion education. PPS also valued the opportunity to learn and reflect on its program in collaboration with UO. This allowed administrators to step back from daily implementation, learn from others, and disseminate information about their program.

## Flagship support at the UO

PPS alumni and their parents have experienced confusion over the years about how to continue

Mandarin study at the university level. Parents did not know whether their students would be eligible for Flagship. The national Chinese Flagship Program allows for students to become part of the program at any stage in their college career and with any incoming proficiency level, but the original idea at the UO was that students would enter with advanced proficiency.

Once at the UO, the program must maintain enrollment. Scholarship support drew students to the program, but not all were focusing on the program mandate to complete a yearlong capstone component. Initially reluctant to place too much stress on students, administrators did not push students to develop their proficiency and maintain coursework in both the Flagship program and their major. UO program administrators now recognize they must both push and support students in order to help them advance their proficiency. The program now provides rigorous academic tutoring and regular advising, although work is still needed in this area.

The Language Flagship funding has significantly enhanced course offerings at the UO, which has helped increase students' proficiency levels. Prior to Flagship, the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures (EALL), which provides Mandarin language and Chinese cultural instruction, targeted Intermediate High to Advanced Low proficiency as the goal for graduating majors. The Language Flagship thus created an opportunity to expand the existing Chinese program at the UO and target higher proficiency outcomes.

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*The Language Flagship funding has supported innovations in immersion education at PPS, which has impacted the field nationally.*

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The present program should help Chinese majors improve their proficiency at a pace that will allow them to participate in capstone during their junior or senior year.

Students who are not Chinese majors may need a fifth year to complete the capstone and graduate, which places a financial burden on students and their families. Regardless of students' majors, the UO program helps students plan carefully so that they can complete both their major and The Language Flagship requirements.

The UO has had some success expanding the Flagship model to other languages, particularly to

Japanese. Flagship funding also provided professional development instruction to the faculty teaching the classes, which increased the quality

of course offerings. The UO Flagship Program was central in the development of a residential immersion hall where students interested in Mandarin live together on the same floor and explore their place in a multicultural world. Other languages

have since created similar residential immersion programs, and the Department of Romance Languages is incorporating Flagship principles in its development of a course for Spanish heritage speakers.

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*At some universities, deans and presidents provide all support and additional funding. Other universities, seeing low enrollments or few credit hours, hesitate to add support, funding, or other resources.*

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# Stakeholder Perceived Benefits of an Immersion Program

Why bother? Implementing an immersion program can be an arduous, complicated process. But, as shown through our interviews, the work is worth it!

## Global Awareness

During our interviews, students stated that learning about the existence of different cultures and languages, and learning deeply about one of them through the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program, allowed them to broaden their global awareness. Being a part of the immersion program revealed different beliefs, ways of thinking, interacting, perceiving, and celebrating. As a result, students felt they could relate to more people and build cross-cultural competence, a critical skill. Students have more knowledge of cultural nuances and believe they are more open-minded. The immersion program will continue to help children be inquisitive, not only about different cultures and

people, but also about information in general, which can build a more compassionate, global society.

## Cognitive Benefits and Skill Building

Respondents to our research claimed that learning an additional language helps them think more critically. It also helps build students'

confidence, open-mindedness, creative thinking, problem-solving, and other skills that make them more responsible and persevering. The learning process is more challenging in an immersion program, requiring students to figure out what the teacher is saying, find resources themselves, ask for help from classmates, pay close attention, listen actively, and work hard. As a result, students develop skills that will help them through-

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*“I felt that the half-day Chinese in elementary school was the best and most efficient Chinese language instruction I’ve ever received. It was truly immersive, exposing me to both the language and culture at a young age. I was able to absorb the most fundamental aspects of the language that allowed me to continue learning it as an adult, which I’m thankful for.”*

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—Alumnus

out their lifetime.

## Academic Benefits

The skills that immersion fosters can help students in other content areas, such as science and math. Research now recognizes that the immer-

sion model boosts overall academic achievement. Students in the the PPS Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program learn topics twice, once in English and once in Mandarin, and thus benefit from the additional input.

At PPS, the number of students studying Mandarin has increased greatly, and teachers report that students want to start learning early and are highly motivated to continue. The immersion program provides academic rigor and exposure, and as a result, students are better prepared for collegiate studies, expect to work hard, and learn to work as a team. The Chinese classes, particularly at the university level, are often smaller so students receive more individual attention and support. Students also feel more comfortable asking for help in a small class.

Students also become eligible for scholarships to attend college or study abroad. Former students of the UO Language Program reported their participation in the program opened doors for them. The most important benefit of a university-level Chinese Flagship Program is achieving a higher level of Chinese, and while the UO program is still weaker than other Flagship programs, it pushes students to achieve academically.

According to the people we interviewed, immersion enriches not only individual students, but also the school and district. In PPS, immersion schools initially started to combat declining enrollment in neighborhood schools, which may have eventually lead to their closure. The immer-

sion program boosted enrollment and exposed the entire school to different cultural practices through shared events and classes.

### **Benefits for Heritage Speakers, Adopted Children, and Underserved Students**

The Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program provides benefits for students with limited English proficiency. When the target language is the same language spoken in the home, native and heritage speakers who are part of the immer-

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*“ I wouldn’t feel in the right place if I wasn’t in the Chinese immersion program. I would feel I wasn’t learning enough just being in the same class all day.”—Student*

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sion program get help in accessing the full curriculum. Chinese-speaking parents report that they hope their students will be able to communicate with family and friends living in China, can help translate for

the family, and have global employment opportunities. PPS recently updated their lottery system to facilitate native and heritage speakers joining the program.

In addition, the program provides adoptive parents not of Chinese descent an opportunity to connect their Chinese children to their native language and culture. In some cases, providing cultural education is a contingency of the adoption itself. This benefit will increase in importance as the number of international adoptions continues to rise.

For district-level decision makers, the potential for immersion programs to realize greater academic outcomes for students serves as a strong motivator for developing programs in communities with a significant number of underserved students. The implementation of the Mandarin

immersion program at King School has the potential to disrupt the achievement gap and could have a national impact if successful. As the immersion program at King School boosts enrollment, more district funds and resources will be allocated—a much desired effect for an economically disadvantaged area. The program, however, must have successful outcomes in order to draw parents and maintain enrollment.

### **Community Benefits**

At the time the immersion program began, Woodstock Elementary School had such low neighborhood enrollment that PPS considered closing the school, and the neighborhood had a low value within the greater community. Now, the Woodstock neighborhood is one of the most desired areas of Portland, partially driven by parents who bought property in the neighborhood in order to receive priority in the immersion lottery.

Parents in the immersion program also report other successes: children who are able to interpret for people in the community. Children appreciate serving in the important role of interpreter, and teachers and parents alike appreciate having a bridge allowing them to communicate and collaborate.

### **Career Benefits**

Business and government industries have a need for professionally proficiency bilingual employees. Being able to conduct business in a language other than English requires high levels of proficiency (Advanced or Superior), and immersion programs have the best opportunity of helping students achieve these levels.

Even in elementary school, students believe they can secure a better job because many people in

the world speak Mandarin and businesses seek people who are fluent. At the university level, The Language Flagship Programs actively foster students' ability to use the target language within a specific content area, producing students who can use Mandarin for business, international communications, government relations, or research.

### **Linguistic Benefits**

The immersion program provides a successful model for language education, one that focuses on a curriculum relevant to real-world contexts. The Language Flagship Programs have driven the need to connect students' learning of grammar, vocabulary, and cultural constructs to practical applications, and K–12 immersion programs across the country are following the national trend. The immersion program model is a novel way to teach language, which helps students realize the many benefits, including the linguistic benefits, that accompany advanced levels of proficiency. Flagship programs focus on the instruction of critical languages, but the innovations developed in these programs diffuse to other languages.

Parents discussed research they conducted when making the decision to raise their children bilingually. The literature they cited for us advocated for at least twenty hours per week of exposure to another language, and an immersion program makes achieving that amount of time possible. In addition, immersion programs begin early in students' academic careers, allowing them sufficient time to grow their native and target language at the same time.

### **Travel Benefits**

Many who have learned another language comment on how their study has revealed a new world. Traveling to areas in which the target

language is spoken facilitates this revelation, and the research residency students in the PPS Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program complete in eighth grade, and the Yunnan Summer Institute for high school students who are able to afford it, are transformative experiences for students. These trips allow students to apply their language and cultural learning and to see China for themselves. Students begin to draw connections between the classroom and the world for the first time, and they discover how they can succeed in a new cultural place. Students connect with native-speaking peers and often make lifelong friendships.

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*“The best thing is that you can talk to more people in the world.” —Student*

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### **Other Benefits**

Stakeholders we interviewed firmly believed that every school should have an immersion program, regardless of the language taught. Parents, comparing the U.S. to other countries where most students are bilingual, see their children as having fewer opportunities as a result. Parents appreciate when immersion programs are implemented in a public school setting, thus making them accessible without paying tuition to a private or charter school. Students report high levels of confidence, saying they are proud of their abilities, feel special, and love the language. Parents report that their children are thriving.



# Resources

## **Woodstock Elementary School Curriculum:**

These curriculum examples provide insight into what students learn in Mandarin in each year. Note these examples are from 2008, and curriculum revisions have occurred since then.

[www.pps.k12.or.us/schools/woodstock/228.htm](http://www.pps.k12.or.us/schools/woodstock/228.htm)

## ***Shu Ren:***

*Shu Ren* is a non-profit 501(c)(3) parent organization that supports Woodstock Elementary School, Hosford Middle School, and Cleveland High School. *Shu Ren* hosts workshops and events, organizes after-school help, provides grants, and organizes and supports students' trips.

[www.shurenofportland.org/about/shuren](http://www.shurenofportland.org/about/shuren)

## **RAND Study:**

Recently, the RAND Corporation conducted a study on dual language immersion programs at PPS with funding provided by the Institute of Education Sciences and the U.S. Department of Education. The links below present the results of the study.

[www.pps.net/immersion](http://www.pps.net/immersion)

[res.cloudinary.com/bdy4ger4/image/upload/v1446848442/DLI\\_Year\\_4\\_Summary\\_Nov2015v3\\_1\\_jwny3e.pdf](https://res.cloudinary.com/bdy4ger4/image/upload/v1446848442/DLI_Year_4_Summary_Nov2015v3_1_jwny3e.pdf)

[www.opb.org/news/article/study-portland-immersion-students-become-better-readers-english-speakers/](http://www.opb.org/news/article/study-portland-immersion-students-become-better-readers-english-speakers/)

## **Lottery Process:**

This PDF explains the 2016 lottery guidelines for entrance into PPS special programs, including the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program.

[www.pps.net/cms/lib8/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/182/Lottery\\_Logic\\_16-17-Rev.%202-11-16.pdf](http://www.pps.net/cms/lib8/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/182/Lottery_Logic_16-17-Rev.%202-11-16.pdf)

## **Patterson, M. (2007, May).**

“Reflections on Administering an Elementary School Mandarin Immersion Program.” *The ACIE Newsletter*, 10(3). Retrieved from [carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol11/no3/may08\\_immersion101.html](http://carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol11/no3/may08_immersion101.html).

## **Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO):**

APANO is a statewide non-profit 501(c)(3) that unites Asians and Pacific Islanders to achieve social justice and advance equity. APANO provided support to the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program.

[www.apano.org/](http://www.apano.org/)

## **Confucius Institute:**

The Confucius Institute is a public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education with a goal to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. They provided resources and support to the Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Program.

[english.hanban.org/](http://english.hanban.org/)



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## **Place and Date of Publication:**

Eugene, OR, August 2016

## **Funding:**

The Oregon Chinese Flagship Program and this study are a public-private partnership sponsored by the National Security Education Program (NSEP). The content of the information provided does not reflect the position of the U.S. government nor imply endorsement.

## **Demographic Map Credits:**

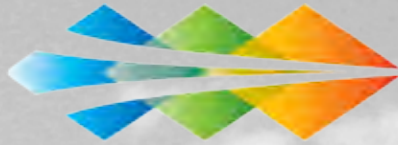
Demographic maps are based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 U.S. census.

Maps were created by [StatisticalAtlas.com](http://StatisticalAtlas.com).

Portland Public Schools enrollment data were compiled from the October 2015 report at [www.pps.net](http://www.pps.net).

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## THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP



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