

# Dual Language Education FAQs



## **What is HoLa?**

HoLa is a free, public dual language charter school serving students in grades K-8. Students achieve grade-appropriate mastery of all core academic subjects while becoming bilingual and biliterate (Spanish-English).

## **What is HoLa's educational approach?**

HoLa adheres to the immersion model of dual language education to provide a traditional core curriculum through instruction in both Spanish and English, with a range of opportunities for creative expression and experiential learning. Teachers in immersion classrooms utilize a variety of innovative strategies to facilitate comprehension and communication, integrate linguistic and academic content within a single lesson, and differentiate instruction.

## **What is Immersion?**

Considered the most effective model of dual language education, immersion is an approach to instruction whereby content is provided in a target language, with the goal of achieving academic excellence while developing or maintaining bilingualism. Students acquire knowledge and skills in all core content areas through instruction in both languages, with the added benefits associated with learning a second language at a young age. HoLa implements the immersion model following the 90-10 approach.

## **What is 90-10?**

90-10 is the approach to dual language classroom instruction that has demonstrated the highest levels of academic achievement and linguistic development for both native Spanish-speakers and English-speakers alike. 90-10 refers to the proportion of time teachers utilize Spanish vs. English as the language of instruction in early grades (90% Spanish / 10% English). HoLa utilizes a graduated 90-10 approach, whereby the majority of instruction (90%) takes place in Spanish for grades K, 1 and 2, with the ratio tapering to 50% English and 50% Spanish by 4th grade.

## **What are the goals of the program?**

HoLa students will:

- Develop high levels of verbal and written proficiency in both Spanish and English
- Achieve grade level (or above) academic performance and mastery of core content across all subject areas, in both Spanish and English
- Take advantage of the optimal window for learning a second language
- Benefit from an academic and competitive edge in continued education and the workplace
- Reap the many cognitive, academic and social benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy
- Develop positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors

## **How do students in immersion programs compare academically with those in English-only classes?**

Both English- and Spanish-speakers perform at comparable or superior levels compared to same-language peers in other educational settings. On norm-referenced standardized tests of reading and math achievement in English, native English-speakers outscore their peers in English-only classrooms. English language learners who learn English in an immersion program score significantly higher than their English language learning peers in other kinds of programs and also perform on par with native English-speakers in English-only classrooms (Lindholm-Leary, 2005; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, in press).

HoLa students are required to take the same mandatory standardized achievement tests as students in other public school districts across the state, along with program-specific measures of academic achievement and linguistic development.

### **Does the curriculum sacrifice academic instruction in other subjects in order to provide more time for language instruction?**

No. The HoLa program is fundamentally academic, and fulfills the same New Jersey Student Learning Standards as all public schools in NJ. Bilingualism is a key goal that will result from specific teaching strategies in an immersion setting. The language component does not replace instructional time; rather, academic content is delivered primarily in Spanish in the early years so that language is a tool of instruction, not a subject in and of itself. Teachers are trained in specific strategies that have proven effective in immersion settings. Language lessons are incorporated intrinsically into content throughout the day and strategies facilitate communication and understanding even when students are first exposed to a second language—but none of this is at the expense of academic content (rather, they are complementary). Differentiation of instruction is key in any classroom, but especially so in dual language classrooms. Immersion classrooms are rich, dynamic learning environments where students are challenged and stimulated on many levels: cognitively, academically, creatively and linguistically.

### **What does the research say about dual language education?**

Leading researchers have established the benefits of acquiring a second language during the primary years, including the following:

- Participation in early foreign language shows positive results in areas of standardized testing (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997)
- Children who have studied a foreign language show greater cognitive development (Hakuta, 1990)
- Foreign language study has been shown to increase listening skills, memory, and a greater understanding of one's own language (Lapkin, et al., 1990)
- Children studying foreign language have an improved self-concept and sense of achievement in school (Caine & Caine, 1997)
- Children in dual language programs develop a sense of cultural pluralism, openness and appreciation of other cultures (Met, 1995)
- Children have the ability to learn and excel in the pronunciation of a foreign language, thus achieving more native-like levels of proficiency (Krashen, et al., 1982)

### **Are the advantages the same for native speakers of both Spanish and English?**

Yes. Research demonstrates that the advantages are the same for both English-speakers and native Spanish-speakers. The immersion model allows students in both groups to master a second language while maintaining a challenging academic curriculum, and full immersion has been found to be the most successful model for helping English Language Learners succeed academically (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

### **How do I know if HoLa is right for my child?**

Students from different ethnic, social, and language backgrounds, and with varying academic strengths and needs, have all benefited from dual language education. There is no particular type of student that can (or cannot) flourish in a dual language program.

### **How long does it take students to start understanding and speaking in Spanish?**

Students new to Spanish generally start understanding classroom routines and simple phrases a few weeks after starting the program. They are exposed to basic vocabulary and commands in Spanish from the first day they arrive in school. Comprehension generally precedes production when it comes to language acquisition.

Two or three weeks after starting the program, students answer simple questions such as "How are you?" and "What day of the week is it?" with one word answers, such as "Fine" and "Monday." By repeating what the teacher or another student says, the second language learner begins to internalize vocabulary and language structures, and the learning curve tends to increase rapidly over the course of the first year. By the second year in the program, most students can express themselves in full sentences. Progress continues at a steady pace until children reach a new level of confidence and proficiency by the third year.

**Will learning Spanish interfere with the development of my child's English skills?**

No. In fact, in most cases, learning another language enhances a child's native language ability. Studies have shown that no long-term delay in native language development occurs in children participating in immersion programs. In fact, children enrolled in immersion programs score statistically higher on standardized tests conducted in English. A number of reports have shown that children who have learned a second language earn higher SAT scores, particularly on the verbal section of the test (which is delivered in English). One study showed that by the fifth year of an immersion program, students outperformed all comparison groups and remained high academic achievers throughout their schooling.

**Will my child be at a disadvantage if s/he enters the program after Kindergarten?**

Students are welcome to enter the program at any grade, space permitting, and all children will receive academic and linguistic support according to their individual needs. If an English-speaking student enters the school after 1st grade, s/he will likely benefit from SSL support (Spanish as a Second Language). However, literacy skills transfer readily from one language to another, so that once a student has learned to read in English, s/he can quickly learn to apply these skills to reading in Spanish, and vice versa.

**What if my child has trouble initially learning the second language?**

HoLa provides ESL and SSL support as necessary. ESL (English as a Second Language) is offered to students who arrive with little or no English exposure. These students are identified upon enrollment, and monitored through ongoing assessment. SSL (Spanish as a Second Language) is offered to students who arrive after 1st grade and have little or no Spanish, or who need extra help with language acquisition; these students will be identified by teachers through observation and classroom assessment.

**When my child leaves HoLa, will s/he have trouble transitioning to an English-only school?**

No. Upon completion of the program, HoLa graduates will have high levels of academic proficiency in both Spanish and English, and will be able to transition into any type of educational setting. If a child leaves before completing the program, academic content and literacy skills acquired will transfer readily from one language to another.

**Is English used in Spanish immersion classrooms?**

On rare occasions, if a child needs to be comforted or cared for, this can be done in English. Otherwise, it is extremely important that only Spanish be used during designated Spanish instruction time, and vice versa (the ratio of Spanish/English instruction time varies by grade). Breaking the consistency of the immersion environment is a hindrance to second language acquisition.

**I don't speak Spanish. How can I help my child with homework?**

Speaking Spanish at home is not necessary for your child's successful language acquisition or academic development. Parents may discuss academic concepts in the language spoken at home, giving students the opportunity to explain assignments in their first language. Students will develop second language skills independently at school. Your child's teacher will also offer specific suggestions and support to help you assist your child with assignments and reinforce classroom lessons. Continue to read to your child regularly in English (or other native language). Reading skills readily transfer from one language to another, and the reinforcement of reading practice in the home is invaluable, regardless of the language in which it occurs.

**How can I remain involved in my child's school experience if I don't speak Spanish?**

Communication between school and family is an essential element of the HoLa program. Open access to teachers and administrators will strengthen the home-school connection. Parents are encouraged to participate in a variety of ways to enrich the dual language experience for both students and their families.

**Does HoLa offer the same amenities and resources as other public schools?**

Yes. HoLa offers aftercare, enrichment classes and meal programs, and Friends of HoLa has a very active Parent Committee that organizes a range of schoolwide events and initiatives.

**Does HoLa offer support for children with special needs?**

As a public charter school, HoLa welcomes all children, and accommodates each student according to his or her individual needs. Children with special needs are provided with the resources they

require, and HoLa has both dedicated, certified Special Education teachers on staff, as well as a contracted Child Study Team for evaluation and provision of additional services.

**May students from other districts apply for admission to HoLa?**

As a public charter school, HoLa must provide admissions preference to Hoboken residents, but students from other districts may apply, and will be admitted if space permits in a given grade.

**What is the admissions process?**

Applications are available on our website ([www.holahoboken.org](http://www.holahoboken.org)) and are accepted for grades K-8 starting in October of each year for the following school year. A public lottery is held in January of each year.