

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Dual Immersion Magnet Program at Oakridge

History: In the mid-1970s, Provo School District, Nebo School District and Brigham Young University entered into a partnership to serve special education students. That partnership resulted in the construction of the Oakridge building on BYU property. The building is jointly owned by Provo and Nebo School Districts and BYU leases its property for one dollar a year to the school districts. For about 30 years, the resources of the three partners came together to benefit special education children. However, in the early 1990s, public education began to move away from the “institutional” model and began mainstreaming special education students into the regular school system. By the year 2003, the population at Oakridge had declined to about 55 students (both districts) and the joint Boards of Education voted to close Oakridge as a special education facility.

In that the property lease with BYU specified special education only, the closing of the special education programs in Oakridge resulted in the breaking of the lease with BYU. In the fall of 2003, the Superintendent of Provo suggested that instead of vacating the building, we should consider using it for an emerging issue, namely, language instruction. The Board of Education encouraged exploration of this possibility. In the summer of 2004, after numerous conversations with BYU, the Dean of the McKay School of Education joined Provo School District in interest in a dual immersion magnet program at Oakridge and offered assistance. After review at the highest levels of the university, BYU agreed to change the lease to accommodate this program. This was an important step in the process because it allowed the district to work with various entities at BYU to develop a plan for a dual immersion magnet program.

In the fall of 2004, the Provo School District Board of Education tabled action on Oakridge and the dual immersion proposal as the master plan was being developed. In January 2005, the Board of Education directed the Superintendent to complete the study of the proposal and report to the Board. The administration and staff included in its study the ramifications of a dual immersion program at Oakridge, the involvement of Brigham Young University in the project and the purchase price on Nebo School District’s share of the building. The full report to the Board was presented in the April school board study session (the presentation is found on the PSD web site, www.provo.edu).

What is dual immersion and how does it differ from more traditional bilingual programs?

Dual Immersion is also called two-way immersion because two language groups (native-English speakers and non-English speakers) are being schooled bilingually through each other’s language. Both groups stay together throughout the school day and serve as peer tutors for each other. There are different models of dual immersion programs, but the most common are 90-10 and 50-50. Timpanogos Elementary, in our district, has a 50-50 model. In this program, half of the instructional time is in English and half of the instructional time is in the minority language. Successful programs require students to be in the program for a minimum of four to six years, focus on the core academic

curriculum, and have quality language arts instruction in both languages. Maintaining a separation of languages is also an important part of the program.

Bilingual education programs are segregated models that target instruction to non-English speaking students. Students receive instruction in their native language in all subject areas as well as instruction in English as a second language. Time in the program is limited to two to three years with a gradual transition to all-English instruction. A common misconception with this transitional model is that two years is sufficient time to learn a second language.

Why is Provo School District proposing a dual immersion program?

After careful examination of assessment data, district administrators have recognized a significant achievement gap between Anglo and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. This gap is consistent with data found in other districts throughout the State and Nation. Noting that it is unlikely that the District will close this achievement gap with its traditional bilingual programs like ESL (English as a Second Language) strategies, our curriculum specialists examined programs that show great promise to assist LEP students learn English and at the same time strengthen skills in their own language (Spanish). As is discussed below, dual immersion is a program with the greatest potential to positively impact the children of Provo School District.

What do you know about the effectiveness of dual immersion for LEP students?

The research on the effectiveness for students whose first language is either English or Spanish is significant. Generally speaking, in well-implemented programs, both native English speakers and language minority students tend to do as well or better than their peers in other educational programs while becoming fully bilingual in two languages. This web site lists a few of the more significant works. A comprehensive literature review can be found at: <http://www.cal.org/twi/BIB.htm>

Who benefits from this proposal?

It is important to note that a dual immersion program is equally populated with students who have either English as their first language or Spanish as their first language. While there are different models for dual immersion, all provide significant instruction in the non-English language (in our case, Spanish) for a significant portion of the day and integrate language minority and language majority students for all or most of the instruction. Dual immersion allows each student to be a "first language model" and a "second language learner." We recommend the pamphlet "Why, How and When: Should My Child Learn a Second Language?" that is found on our web page. The benefits of learning two languages are significant. Throughout the world, knowing more than one language is the norm, not the exception. Research shows that continuing to develop a child's native language does not interfere with the acquisition of English, but actually facilitates the process. A child who knows more than one language has personal, social, cognitive and economic advantages that will continue throughout his/her life.

What is a magnet school and why is Provo School District proposing a magnet model over the “strand” model found at Timpanogos Elementary School?

A magnet school is a school with a particular curricular focus. In Utah County, magnet schools have opened for the performing arts, Montessori, and science, math and technology. Provo School District has identified literacy as being central to its mission and proposes a dual immersion (literacy intensive) program at the Oakridge building. While the proposed program will not be a “stand alone” magnet school (as with the special education program that is exiting Oakridge), Wasatch Elementary facilities will be shared (lunch, playground, etc.); it is magnet-like in its approach.

There are several dynamics at play in the District related to this proposal. While clear evidence suggests that patrons desire to retain neighborhood schools in the District, a significant percentage of people also desire choice options within their public school system. Timpanogos Elementary has operated a “strand” of dual immersion for several years. The strand draws students from the regular program into the dual immersion program. Without going into the details, strand models present several organizational challenges that limit their effectiveness. (Timpanogos Elementary has experienced these issues.) Across the nation, we have been told that strand models most often convert to full magnet schools. Honoring the important neighborhood school concept and pursuing a dual immersion program leads to the magnet concept. The Oakridge building allows both goals to be met.

Will this proposal jeopardize neighborhood elementary schools? Is the District moving away from the neighborhood concept?

The Provo School District administration and Board of Education values the neighborhood elementary concept. The dual immersion program will draw students from across the District much like the opening of the elementary charter school in East Bay two years ago. The charter school took students from all schools in the district and did not create a threat to the neighborhood system. With about 40 portables in our neighborhood schools (the equivalent of a full elementary school), it is highly unlikely that opening a dual immersion program would threaten a local neighborhood school. A more likely impact would be to move some students out of portables and into school buildings (a goal of the Provo School District Master Plan). The dual immersion school will not threaten neighborhood schools but rather will address a serious education need and augment current educational opportunities for children.

Why have you chosen the Oakridge building for this program?

The Oakridge building is jointly owned by Provo School District and Nebo School District on the property of Brigham Young University. The choice of this building for the dual immersion program is two-fold. First, the University has a strong interest in partnering with Provo School District on a dual immersion project. Their interest is such that they were willing to change the lease agreement on the property to allow this project. As one of the nation’s premier teacher education institutions, BYU’s involvement in this program is noteworthy. We have significant offers of curriculum, pedagogy, materials, research and student volunteers from members of the McKay School of Education, the College of Humanities and the Department of Linguistics,

among others. It is important to note that the school will be equally populated by students who either have English or Spanish as their primary language. Analogous to the Edith Bowen School at Utah State University, the close proximity of Oakridge to the University provides extensive opportunities for collaboration and increases the potential for success. There is little doubt that BYU's commitment to this project will be high quality and will grow over time. Their assistance will not only help us leverage high-quality instructional programs at Oakridge but also at Timpanogos Elementary. The contributions of Brigham Young University are further elucidated in the dual immersion PowerPoint presentation given to the Board on April 12, 2005, and can be found on the PSD web site.

Second, as half-owners of the Oakridge building, we have the ability to acquire the building at about one-fourth the cost of new construction. While our negotiations with Nebo School District are confidential, the Board has been briefed on a proposed method whereby we can acquire the building. With BYU's participation, federal money for innovative programs and the sharing of Wasatch facilities, the on-going cost to operate a dual immersion program at this site provides an extraordinary opportunity to increase both educational and building capacity with very efficient use of tax dollars.

How will students get to the dual immersion program each day?

Similar to the special education transportation system to Oakridge, students will be transported to the school using a "quadrant"-bussing bussing model adjusted to fit the needs of where students are actually located in the City. State transportation budgets pay the costs of transporting students to and from school, thus there is no local budget impact on student transportation to the proposed program.

What are your plans for continued instruction beyond the elementary model?

When the Timpanogos dual immersion strand was initiated five years ago, a commitment was made by the District to support fully bilingual students in the middle school (and eventually high school). Dixon Middle School will begin offering content courses (math, science, social studies) in 2007 that will continue to strengthen bilingual literacy skills of students. As with the dual immersion program, the District will use multiple resources (Brigham Young University, the Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C. and schools with actual experience) to elucidate appropriate programs for secondary bilingual students. It is assumed these programs will expand as students from Timpanogos and Oakridge enter secondary schools.

Is there a larger district goal into which this plan fits?

Absolutely. The Provo School District administration has adopted the management plan as outlined in the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. Provo School District has identified literacy as its "hedgehog" concept. From the research of Jim Collins, a hedgehog is that which you believe you can be best at and that which you have passion for. Provo School District has many years of experience and an extensive professional development program for teachers to improve teaching strategies that strengthen literacy in students. The dual immersion proposal supports the Board-approved goal of literacy improvement. The proposal also is a serious effort to address

an identified "brutal fact" of our organization, namely, that our programs to assist English language learners are not keeping pace with the substantial change in Hispanic/Latino demographics in Provo City. We believe that dual immersion as proposed is a significant next step in closing the achievement gap experienced by LEP students and a first step in moving from a good school district to a great one.

While the Board of Education chose not to include Oakridge in the original work of the master plan, it was never far from their minds. A major element of the facilities master plan is to refurbish aging buildings and add high-quality space for teaching and learning. The acquisition of the Oakridge building meets this goal. The Oakridge building provides quality space for teaching and learning well into the future.

Dual immersion programs require stable populations to operate successfully. Is the Hispanic/Latino population stable enough to operate the program?

Research shows that students who enter a dual immersion program must stay at least 4-5 years to receive the benefits of dual language instruction. Spending just a year or two in the program, especially in the early grades, would actually have a detrimental effect on literacy achievement. While many would presume that the Latino population is transient, we know that the Anglo population experiences transience also. The truth is that the Latino population is here to stay with many Latinos/Hispanics calling Provo their home. At Timpanogos Elementary, parents are counseled prior to entering their children into the dual immersion program. Parents who believe they will not be stable in their living arrangements are strongly encouraged not to enroll their children in the program. Such tactics are common among immersion schools. There is anecdotal evidence that enrolling students in dual immersion schools actually increases their stability, especially when they see the value of such programs for their children. Provo School District currently has a 20% Hispanic/Latino student population. There are over 2000 students whose primary language is Spanish in the Provo School District system now. It is important to note that besides the program at Timpanogos Elementary in Provo, dual immersion programs are currently offered in Alpine and Salt Lake School districts.

What are the on-going costs of this program?

The cost analysis is provided in the dual immersion PowerPoint presented to the Board of Education. Because of the help received from BYU, federal funding, and the sharing of facilities with Wasatch Elementary (potential grants not included), the overhead costs of running this program are roughly 60% of the operating costs of a full elementary school even though full services will be offered at Oakridge. We believe the cost vs. educational value is extremely favorable, but the costs of this program are real and should be carefully considered by the Board of Education and the public.

How do you know students will actually enroll in the program?

We have several evidences that would make us believe that the program will fill with students. Christine Rossell, a professor at Boston University, has studied the introduction of magnet schools in America. Citing data from the National Center for Education Statistics, magnet schools have grown from about 1000 schools in the early

1980s to over 3000 schools today. Rossell states that it's "not quite as simple as 'build them and they will come,' but magnet schools have proved to be a lasting element of American education."

The high interest in Utah charter schools (that are very similar to magnet schools) is another evidence. Charter schools continue to expand and compete successfully with neighborhood schools as parents exercise choice options. Our strongest evidence comes from the high interest we have received over the past several months from both Anglo and Latino parents. Coupled with multiple e-mail inquiries, many Latino parents expressed support for the dual immersion program at Oakridge in the public input session of the April 2005 Board meeting, including the presentation of a petition to support the proposal. In addition, the Superintendent's Hispanic Advisory Committee has discussed dual immersion in multiple sessions over the past year and has voted to support the proposal. Anglo parents, many of whom have lived in Spanish-speaking countries, have also expressed a desire to have their children learn Spanish. Finally, the dual immersion program at Timpanogos is very popular as are other programs in the State. From these lines of evidence, we believe there will be sufficient interest to populate the program.

Why are you waiting until 2006 to open the school?

As a district, we have contacted Brigham Young University, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), and the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) to provide expertise regarding best practices in designing and implementing Dual Immersion programs. CREDE publishes a very helpful book entitled *The Dual Language Program Planner: A guide for Designing and Implementing Dual Language Programs*. Chapters in the book include the following:

- Clarifying your Mission
- Gathering Information
- Choosing a Program Model
- Assessing Readiness
- Action Plan

Each chapter details important issues that need to be addressed before beginning a dual language program. Documenting the information, resources, and support needed takes time. CAL and CREDE have both indicated that this beginning process should take about a year. But the time placed into a well-planned program will result in long-term success that will best meet students' needs.

What are the broader community benefits of this proposal?

Besides the educational advantages offered students, a two-way immersion program offers opportunities for mixed communities to better understand and appreciate each other. Both English-language and Spanish-language dominant students need to learn to depend on each other in a dual immersion program. When the native language is maintained, important links to family and other community members are preserved and enhanced. By encouraging native language use, parents can prepare their children to interact with family and the native language community. In addition, Brigham Young University is currently working on the Peaceable Schools grant that targets numerous safe school objectives. Peaceable Schools is currently being piloted at Grandview Elementary with intentions to expand to many schools. BYU and the Provo

administration believe that placing this program at the dual immersion school provides a new opportunity to unite our community.

What challenges does the District forecast if the project moves forward?

While many have initiated two-way immersion projects, the project will place considerable demands on the district staff to be successful. Even as we are confident of our ability and the resources that are available to us, we recognize that implementation problems will emerge and will have to be addressed. We recognize that dual immersion will be successful in Provo only if it is well implemented.

A further challenge is to help our patrons understand the strengths of the proposal in terms of its focus on our organizational goals, student needs and potential to provide new educational capacity to Provo School District. We desire to address the challenges to the proposal. It is important to note that any educational program we adopt will have downsides. These must be carefully weighed against the opportunities the program provides.

Finally, Provo School District is not a wealthy district and must measure any new program against the needs of other programs in the district. The current district administration has demonstrated a strong fiscal management record. However, our district is not without its financial challenges and the administration has been open with the Board of Education about these challenges. As directed by the Board of Education, the administration has negotiated with BYU and Nebo School District in regard to this proposal. Our negotiations have focused on plans to allow the dual immersion proposal to move forward without significant negative impact to other schools or long-term negative impact to the District.

The administration believes its obligation is to bring to the Board strong proposals that have a high potential for success. That is what we have done in this case. While under financial pressure, we believe this proposal represents a wise use of tax dollars to address a significant community educational need.