



VANCOUVER BOARD OF EDUCATION
School District No. 39
ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT
1580 West Broadway
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 5K8

October 20, 2011

Dear Parents of Children in the Mandarin Bilingual Program

Thank you so much for your comments about your child's experience in the new Mandarin Bilingual Program at Norquay. It is great to hear so many positive comments about how this year has begun. We hope you continue to feel this way about the program. At the same time, we do acknowledge that there are concerns, and we are committed to addressing them to the extent possible.

In our planning for this program, which took over two years of work, we considered all aspects of Mandarin second language learning and teaching. We examined models from across North America. We worked with the Chinese Language Institute at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Members of the Task Force visited Edmonton and Portland. Staff from Coquitlam came to visit the Task Force. Over that time we did make a number of decisions, but we also left some work for the ongoing implementation of staff in the program.

Some things are in policy. For example, from grades kindergarten through seven, there will be 50% instruction in Mandarin. We did not follow exactly either the Edmonton or the Coquitlam models, but through their example decided to teach in Mandarin the subjects that they had found to be the best for bilingual learners. These are Mandarin Language Arts, Music, Mathematics, Physical Education, and Career and Personal Planning.

One important decision made by the Task Force, and which is in policy, is that the program is for students who have English fluency. This is quite different from the programs in Edmonton and Coquitlam, for example, where many – sometimes most – of the children enter the program with Mandarin fluency and little English.

Another decision made early on was that this would be a bilingual program – not an immersion program. We set as our ultimate goal that students would be at a level of B1 in the Common European Framework of References for Languages by the end of grade twelve. This level is briefly described in the following language:

"Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and

explanations for opinions and plans. Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans."

We deliberately did not choose the immersion model for our Mandarin program. The model of instruction for language learning chosen is for 50% of the day starting in kindergarten through grade three. This is different from full immersion in French where, as you probably know, the immersion program is 100% French in the primary grades.

Mandarin is a very difficult language to learn. We understand that given the difficulty of the language and the developmental level of the students, the teachers are not yet teaching at the full 50% target. As students become more comfortable with the language, and in the case of kindergarten students with school routines, teachers will gradually be increasing instruction in Mandarin until the four subjects will be taught wholly in Mandarin. We know from research that a model where a separate part of the day is identified for one language or the other is the most effective for learning a second language. That is the model the teachers are moving towards.

We are working with UBC on best practice as supported by the research. We have a commitment to continue to implement the program on this basis. We are also working with the teachers to make ongoing professional development and networking opportunities available so that they can continue to refine their practices. We will continue to communicate with parents about our plans and your experiences in the program.

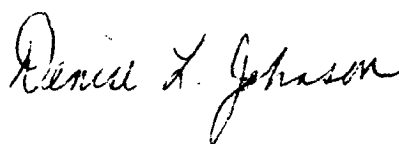
One question was asked that was not related to the program content, but to the process. To be clear, it is in policy that there is "sibling priority". That means that if you have a child in the Mandarin Program, any siblings coming up will have immediate entry to the program. We are delighted that parents are already thinking ahead to this possibility!

Thank you again for your interest. We hope that you will continue to be happy with your child's experience in the Mandarin Bilingual Program. If you have questions about your child or their progress in the program, please let the principal, Tricia Rooney, know. We know she appreciates all your support. If there are other questions of a district nature, we are happy to follow up with you.

Yours truly,



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