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Dual Language Program integrates English and Spanish-speaking students

DEER PARK - Deer Park ISD announces a new pilot program for a select group of kindergarten students who will begin school in August. The Dual Language Program will be housed at Carpenter Elementary and will include English and Spanish-speaking students receiving instruction in both languages. Students selected for the program will continue it through the fifth grade.

According to Director of Bilingual/ESL Programs Patty DeLaCruz-Valenzuela, about half of the students will be English-speakers and half will be Spanish-speakers. "You'll have both groups of kids in the classroom learning both languages," DeLaCruz-Valenzuela said. "We'll ask that parents commit to the program through the fifth grade so that the kids will come out of it bilingual and biliterate. They'll be able to read and write in both languages."

Dual Language provides several advantages for students:

- it offers, according to current research, the best educational model for Limited English Proficient [LEP] students;
- it presents an enrichment opportunity, based on parent interest, for English-speaking children to learn a second language;
- students can become fluent in a second language while maintaining and further developing their first language;

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- early elementary school is the best time for children to learn a second language;
- participating students will have the chance to learn a third language in high school; and
- the ability to speak, read, and write a second language enhances the student's future employment opportunities.

"In many countries around the world, particularly in Asia and Europe, people speak more than one language," DeLaCruz-Valenzuela said. In the coming decades, it will become more important for students to be bilingual. In 2000, about 32 percent of Texas' population was Hispanic. Officials predict that this number will increase to more than 53% by 2040.

The program will include 22 English speakers and 22 Spanish-speaking students in two kindergarten classes. All students will be admitted based on parent interest and a basic screening. Students who reside in the Carpenter Elementary attendance area will receive first priority, and a lottery system will be used to fill remaining seats for students from other attendance areas. If the program is successful this year, another kindergarten class will likely be added for the 2009-10 school year.

Parents who want to learn more about the Dual Language Program and its requirements are invited to attend a parent information meeting on Monday, May 12, at 6:30 p.m. in the Carpenter Elementary library. Although the program will be located at Carpenter, students from all attendance areas in the district may apply for participation in Dual Language. Application forms will be available at the information meeting. Because the program has a limited number of spaces available, attendance at the informational meeting does not guarantee participation in Dual Language. For more information about the Dual Language Program, contact DeLaCruz-Valenzuela at (832)668-7128.

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