

Capistrano Unified School District's

MANDARIN IMMERSION PROGRAM

at Marian Bergeson Elementary School



How CUSD's School of Choice Policy impacts MIP



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Executive Summary

CUSD's School of Choice Policy and the Mandarin Immersion Program

The Parents of MIP and Friends of MIP are extremely concerned with the revisions to CUSD's School of Choice Policy and request that the CUSD Board of Trustee Members please consider how a blanket policy written for the entire CUSD population will negatively impact the specialized Mandarin Immersion program.

If MIP families are faced with the lack of enrollment security for their younger children, the program will lose not only future students, but also existing, highly motivated students whose families have committed to CUSD and MIP.

More importantly, with this potential lack of enrollment security, families will no longer invest in the future of MIP which will create a significant decrease in the Friends of MIP fundraising ability. Without successful fundraising, Friends of MIP cannot support the Mandarin Curriculum which is required based on the Board of Trustees' approval of the Mandarin Immersion Program as being cost-neutral to the District.

The parents of MIP request that the CUSD Board of Trustees' create a separate policy for MIP that would include the following...

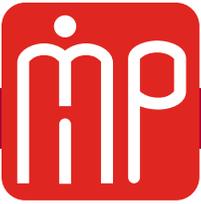
Sibling priority: once a family (no "parent", no "sibling", no "student", but "family") is in, whether living in CUSD or out of district, each member of the family should be guaranteed a spot as an incoming Kindergartener until the last member of the family is done.

K-5th Grade Enrollment Policy:

- Incoming Kindergarten – Placement based on lottery
- 1st – 5th Graders – Placement based on assessment
- Order of Priority:
 - 1st Priority: siblings of all previously enrolled families
 - 2nd Priority: students residing within CUSD
 - 3rd Priority: students residing out-of-district

6th -12th Grade Enrollment Policy:

- The Mandarin Immersion Program will become the enrolled students "home" school
- 5th grade MIP students shall be given priority into the middle and high school selected by CUSD to support MIP.



Capistrano Unified School District's Mandarin Immersion Program

What is MIP?

The Mandarin Immersion Program (MIP) at Capistrano Unified School District's Marian Bergeson Elementary School is the first public school Mandarin language immersion program in Orange County. Immersion is a unique educational experience with the goal of developing bi-literacy, bilingualism, and bi-culturalism in elementary students. It is an educational model that provides academic instruction in English and the "target language" Mandarin Chinese. The goal of our language immersion program is for students to develop high levels of language proficiency and literacy in both Mandarin and English, to demonstrate high levels of academic achievement, and to develop an appreciation for and an understanding of diverse cultures. Simultaneous translation is never used.

MIP is considered a Magnet Program with students coming from all over South Orange County to participate. Each family has sought out and chosen to be in this program. We sign a contract with CUSD to commit to MIP through 5th grade. Most families drive a distance of 3-15 miles to come to Bergeson. Because of this commitment, each family has a vested interest in the future of MIP and our program has a high level of parent support both financially and with volunteer hours.





Differences between Mandarin and Spanish Immersion at CUSD

Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) has two types of language immersion programs starting at the Elementary level – Spanish two-way Immersion and Mandarin one-way Immersion. Within CUSD, the Mandarin Immersion Program is different from the Spanish two-way immersion program in several ways.

Student Population

Most MIP students are native English speakers with approximately 10% being heritage speakers. All are fluent English speakers coming into Kindergarten. Our students are in this program to acquire a 2nd language through immersion with 80% immersive Mandarin language time in both Kindergarten and 1st grade. Most do not enter the program with any experience in Mandarin nor do they have anyone speaking the language at home. On the other hand, the Spanish program includes 50-60% native Spanish speakers and 40-50% English speakers for a two-way language experience. With this two-way model, English-dominant and Spanish-dominant students are purposefully integrated with the goals of developing bilingual skills, academic excellence, and positive cross-cultural and personal competency attitudes for both groups of students. One of the reasons why two-way Spanish immersion is offered at Las Palmas, San Juan and Viejo Elementary schools is because of the high population of native Spanish speakers in the area.

Current Enrollment Policy

All MIP students entered a lottery to receive one of approximately 60 spots (2 classes) as an incoming Kindergartener. Students who reside within Bergeson's feeder pattern are not given priority over another student residing within a different CUSD school feeder area. Historically, our priority has been as follows 1) Student with sibling in MIP; 2) Student residing within CUSD; 3) Out of district students. In 2014 we had 25 siblings entering Kindergarten. In 2015 we anticipate 20 siblings.



Parent Commitment

There is a high level of parent commitment to MIP. When the CUSD Board of Trustees approved the Mandarin Immersion Program in 2011, they set it up so that it would be cost neutral to CUSD. This means that everything above and beyond the cost of an English-only classroom will not be funded by CUSD. The Friends of MIP, a parent run foundation, was set up to raise funds to offset the cost of the program. For the 2014/15 school year, Friends of MIP raised \$197,000 to directly support MIP. This high level of fundraising is driven by our parent community with over 75% of these funds directly given by MIP families.

The money that we raise and spend on the program not only affects the year it is spent but also is an investment for the future of the program. MIP's first year was 2012/13 and in the last 3 years the Friends of MIP have consistently funded the following:

- All Mandarin Curriculum Materials
- 1-day/week program support from Dr MC Barossa
- 1-day/week classroom sub so Mrs Loh can do curriculum development
- SmartBoards in 6 classrooms
- 30 Chromebooks and a cart
- Mandarin Speaking Instructional Assistants
- Singapore Math
- Professional Development including out-of-state conferences and on-site training
- Mandarin Library Books

In addition to the list above, we are looking to fund a full time Mandarin Curriculum Developer/ Program Coordinator beginning in the fall of 2015. This is an annual \$100,000+ investment by Friends of MIP to ensure the future strength and viability of MIP thereby raising our proposed annual budget to \$288,000 for 2015/16. Without a commitment from CUSD to the many families with younger siblings, it will be difficult to request donations to reach this level of investment for both short-term and long-term goals of CUSD's MIP.

Conversely, the elementary schools with Spanish Immersion Programs receive Federal funds including Title 1 to offset the cost to CUSD. For various reasons, including the high percentage of ELL students, the Spanish Immersion schools are able to maintain their Title 1 status and funding from year to year. We at Bergeson do not have this funding option.



Historical Open Enrollment/ School of Choice Policy

For the last 3 years, potential MIP incoming Kindergarten students have received placement through a lottery process with the following priorities:

- 1) Sibling of enrolled student
- 2) In-district students
- 3) Out-of-district students

Historically we have added 2 Kindergarten classes per year. In the 3rd year (2014/15), we accepted 64 students, gave 25 siblings priority, offered the remaining 39 seats to students residing within CUSD. We had a waiting list with 15 in-district students and 20+ out of district students.

For a student entering in 1st grade or older, our teaching staff conduct a language assessment as they will need to be at the same level as their peers in the classroom. Our program has become sought after and we have had several students transfer from other MIP schools as well as join our program after living in Asia.

Students are not given priority because they live in the Bergeson feeder pattern nor because they or their parents speak Mandarin.



What we want

The parents of the Mandarin Immersion Program would like to have a separate, specific School of Choice Policy for our program. Because we are a different type of program than the Spanish two-way Immersion Program and have different priorities than the English-only School of Choice schools, we feel that it is in the best interest of CUSD and the program to have a policy that gives MIP families the same level of commitment from CUSD that we, as Friends of MIP, have given to CUSD. MIP would not be the program it is today without the consistent support from our families and to deny them the basic right to gain access to the program that they have invested in would be truly unfortunate. We are a niche program and should be treated as such and not lumped into a general policy for School of Choice in CUSD. Given the above information, **we feel strongly that in order for MIP to have continued financial support from its participating families, we need to ensure that our families have a strong commitment from CUSD.**

We would like the following to be included in the MIP School of Choice Policy:

Sibling priority: once a family (no “parent”, no “sibling”, no “student”, but “family”) is in, whether living in CUSD or out of district, each member of the family should be guaranteed a spot as an incoming Kindergartener until the last member of the family is done.

K-5th Grade Enrollment Policy

- Incoming Kindergarten – Placement based on lottery
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- Priority:
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6th -12th Grade Enrollment Policy

- The Mandarin Immersion Program will become the enrolled students “home” school
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Consequences to not having enrollment security

As outlined earlier, the Mandarin Immersion Program is heavily supported by the families in the program. Many parents have showed concern over the potential loss of priority enrollment for their younger children. Without this commitment from CUSD, the MIP program will not only lose many existing families, but will have a difficult time finding families who are willing to make a 6 year commitment for only one of their children. Also, many students currently enrolled will leave the program early when their younger siblings cannot get in. Many concerned parents have said that it will be too much of a hardship to take their kids to different schools all over South Orange County with the same start times. This will create openings in upper grades which are more difficult to fill due to the language level the student must be at for entry. From a financial point of view, without enrollment security from CUSD, MIP families will not invest in the future of the program, causing Friends of MIP to not have the necessary funds to support Mandarin curriculum which allows this one-of-a-kind CUSD program to be successful at no extra cost to CUSD.



Parent Testimonials

Audrey Shaw

Founding Family of MIP
Executive Board Member
Parent of two 2nd graders

"It was a dream of the founding families to create a Mandarin Immersion Program for our children with the hopes of providing an excellent bi-lingual education. We would have never guessed that 4 years later, after rallying families to sign the petition and showing our support at the first CUSD Board of Trustees meeting seeking approval for a Mandarin Immersion program, that we fully realize the positive impact this program is providing not only for the children, but for the Bergeson community as a whole. Personally I have seen my twins learn and grow beyond my expectations with the language, the culture, and their education and take great pride in the accomplishments the parents have been able to do together to make this program a success. After all, we are a cost-neutral program and believe we have shown that our parents are willing to financially support this through countless hours of volunteerism in various fundraising events including the Annual Gala which typically generates an average of \$50,000.

However, with the changes in the School of Choice Program, I fear that we will be taking a huge step backwards with the growth and success of MIP. The longevity of MIP depends on ensuring sibling access to this great program along with the needed financial stability that comes with invested families. I, personally, did not invest 4 years of my own personal time, monies, and hard work to watch this program wither away. Please consider our unique family needs and consider our proposal seriously. Thank you for your continued support!"

Sally Lu

Parent of a MIP Kindergartener and 3 year old

"My son got into MIP as a CUSD student for 2014-5 school year. We do not reside in Bergeson boundary. We have a younger child who will be entering K in fall of 2016. We moved to Irvine after our son got into MIP in 2014 and we were in the process of selling our Laguna Niguel property. Now, we put the sale on hold so our younger daughter has a better chance of getting into MIP. Despite our financial risk, our daughter's acceptance to MIP is not guaranteed under the new district policy. Our commute to school is about 20-30 minutes depending on traffic, which mean my total commute is ~2 hours per day. Yet, my son has never been late. We are giving up our spot in a highly desired Irvine Unified School District. So we are committed to the school, the program, and the bilingual education of our children. However, if my daughter doesn't get into the program, we would have no other option but to take our son out of MIP."



Agustin Del Alamo

Executive Board Member

Parent of a 2nd grader, Kindergartener and 3 year old

"Giving the gift of a language to some of your children and not to others would be something extremely sad. This is a very subjective statement, I know, but I am sure many families feel the same way. We all know that not all families value speaking more than one language the same. We, MIP families, are familiar with the classic questioning from friends and family about "Why are you enrolling your kid in an immersion program?" "What are you thinking?" For parents like me who put "polyglot" in a whole different level, and getting the goose-bumps when we listen to our kids speak more than one language, having two of my kids speak Mandarin, and not my youngest, would simply break my heart. I, personally, would even consider to just switch them all to an English-only program, and keep things equal, and be done with it... with tears in my eyes.

I am not even talking about "convenience". In my very personal opinion, "convenience" is real, is true, but has a "lazy" connotation. If convenience was REALLY important, then we all would have our kids in the neighborhood's school, and case closed.

New rules/laws as impactful as the ones being discussed, should not be retroactive (just like many laws everywhere else, in any field, any industry, any matter). It would be way too unfair. Current MIP families, especially the first ones, bet on the program when starting with all the risks and extra work it involved and continues to involve. Our classrooms were actual laboratories and still are, in some senses. Original risk takers, which in essence, made this program what it is right now, should be somehow protected from a sad kick in the butt."

Mabel Wan

Parent of a MIP Kindergartener and 3 year old

"From the moment the MIP program started I've been counting the days for my son to turn 5 so that I could enroll him in this unique program. When he got accepted I was jumping with joy, because he and his younger brother will also have a chance to learn Chinese in America. There is nowhere else my children can learn proper Chinese unless they lived in China. Before I knew of MIP, I had planned to have them attend Saturday Chinese School but I knew it wouldn't have been successful because I grew up with that routine and it was ineffective. It's very difficult to learn a language by just attending class once a week, for an hour. After 6 months immersed into the MIP program, my son sings Chinese songs to me, teaches his younger brother how to count in Chinese, and recognize colors. He's recognizing character's he's learned from class in Chinese menus and best of all he challenges my Chinese skills. Sometimes he chooses to speak to me in Chinese, he wants to know more about the Chinese culture and he's proud of being Chinese. He is able to translate English to his father what I told him in Chinese. He is attempting to speak to his Grandparents who don't speak any English (Only Cantonese) and somehow they understand him in Mandarin and he tries to translate or decipher the differences between the two/three languages. That was a huge milestone for our family. The MIP program is amazing and it produces results. I see it in my child everyday and I'm constantly excited with the new materials that he's learned from class. The community of friends from his peers, their parents, and teachers from school are just as amazing. When a student with blond hair is correcting my Mandarin in front of their parents. That's amazing!!! I love this program and my family is blessed to be a part of it and grow with it."



Rebekah Paullus

Parent of a MIP Kindergartener and 2 future MIP Scholars

"My husband and I are English-only speakers and there are no opportunities for our children to practice Mandarin outside of school. The ONLY way this program will be successful for us is if our 3 children are able to practice together. Any language expert would tell you it needs to be supported beyond school hours for proper development.

We recently moved to this area from AZ specifically for the opportunity to join the MIP program. There was a lot of stress involved in getting our oldest child accepted, but then relief followed when we 'thought' we had a secure plan in place.

Our families are financially committed as well as emotionally committed. We give \$1,000 a year to the Friends of MIP with the understanding that we are supporting future development. This is a very large amount of money for our family as we live on a tight budget. We need to be guaranteed that siblings not yet in the program will benefit from this money. If not, donations may diminish and the MIP program will suffer.

If siblings are not guaranteed priority then we would consider pulling our Kinder student and moving to a more affordable area. Our families are making huge sacrifices and are very dedicated to the MIP program, but that won't continue if you take away our security. Parents are already feeling deflated and defeated by the proposed changes in policy."