

**Whittier Elementary School Khmer
(Cambodian) Bilingual Program**

Long Beach Unified School District John G. Whittier
School 1761 Walnut Avenue Long Beach, California: 1989

1. WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KHMER (CAMBODIAN) BILINGUAL PROGRAM

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1.1. I. HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT PROGRAM

This program began at Whittier School with two kindergarten classes in the fall of 1993. In the fall of 1994, two first grade classes were added. In the fall of 1995 we will add two second grade classes. We will continue to add a grade level each year. Each class is staffed with a bilingual/biliterate Khmer teacher and a bilingual/biliterate Khmer instructional aide.

Curriculum and translations are prepared by the teachers each summer for the grade level which is being added the following year. Teachers are paid for translating and preparing curriculum during the summer. The district provides support for this program by paying for translation of materials and development of curriculum. A variety of strategies are utilized to provide children a language/print rich environment. We also have a full time Khmer Community Worker.

1.2. II. DESCRIPTION OF TOTAL PROGRAM

- **KINDERGARTEN:** Students will learn reading readiness, phonics skills, science, social studies and math in Khmer. Students will be taught oral English through direct instruction.
- **FIRST GRADE:** Students will learn to read in Khmer. They will continue to learn content area materials such as science, social studies and math in Khmer. Students will continue to learn oral English through direct instruction
- **SECOND GRADE:** Students will continue to read in Khmer. They will continue to learn content area materials such as science, social studies in Khmer. They will begin to do math in English. They will continue to receive English as a Second Language instruction.
- **THIRD GRADE:** Students will continue to read in Khmer but they will also begin to transition into English reading. They will begin to do content area learning in English with assistance in Khmer. They will continue to do math in English. They will continue to receive English as a Second Language instruction.
- **FOURTH GRADE:** Students will do most of their reading in English. They will do more of their content area assignments in English while still receiving assistance in Khmer.
- **FIFTH GRADE:** Students will do most of their reading in English. They will do most of their content area assignments in English while still receiving assistance in Khmer when needed.

1.3. III. QUALIFICATIONS FOR PROGRAM

1. Home language is Khmer. Student demonstrates a language dominance in Khmer.
2. Family plans to stay in area for next three years.
3. Space is limited, students are placed on a first come basis.

1.4. I. WHY? RATIONALE FOR BILINGUAL PROGRAM

1. **READING:** Learning to read is the most difficult thing children learn to do in school. It is very difficult for them to learn to read in a language that they do not speak or understand.
2. **SKILL AND CONCEPT ACQUISITION:** Children who begin kindergarten not speaking English or very little English spend most of the year learning to understand what the teacher is saying. Therefore, they miss many of the concepts that the teacher is teaching. English speaking students learn their alphabet and letter sound relationships which prepares them to read in first grade. Non-English speaking children are still learning the language and do not learn the readiness skills. This puts them behind when they begin first grade. When the English speaking children are learning to read in first grade, limited English speaking children are just getting ready to learn reading readiness. They get behind and usually never catch up.
3. **LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:** Research shows that language is learned first by listening, then speaking, then reading and then writing. Khmer speaking children come to school ready to learn to read in Khmer because they already speak it. They need to be taught to speak English before they are asked to begin to read it. Once they learn to speak English, everything that they have learned in Khmer, including how to read will transfer.

4. **TRANSFER OF SKILLS:** Research shows that the more children know in their own language, the easier it is for them to learn in a second language. Example: If a child knows what a triangle is in his own language, you do not have to teach him in a language he does not understand that a triangle is a shape with three sides. You only have to teach him the word “triangle”.
5. **ACADEMIC SUCCESS:** Research shows that children who learn to read in their own language first, learn English oral and written language much more efficiently and are more successful in all academic areas.
6. **POSITIVE SELF CONCEPT AND CULTURAL PRIDE:** They also have a more positive self concept and improved self esteem because they do not spend their early years frustrated and believing that they can not learn. Young children do not have a concept of language. All they know is that the teacher is talking and the other children are understanding but they do not understand. Children who learn to read in their primary language also value and have more pride in their culture.

1.5. IV. PROBABLE QUESTIONS:

1. **What happens if parents move?**
Because this is the first bilingual Cambodian program in the district, parents will be given the option of bringing their child to Whittier School to continue in the program. If those arrangements cannot be made and child is placed in an all English program at another school, he will still learn more effectively because his Khmer language skills will be stronger and will make it easier for him to transition into English.
2. **Will the students learn to speak English?**
Yes, they will be taught oral English every day, and will begin English reading when the teacher determines that he has enough oral English and is reading well enough in Khmer to be successful in English reading.
3. **Is this program mandatory? Do parents have a choice?**
No, program is not mandatory. Space is limited and children are only placed when requested by parents.
4. **What if a child speaks English, can they and should they be placed in this program?**
Even when a child is conversational in English, if the language in the home for five years has been Khmer, their best understanding and learning skills are probably in Khmer. At parent request, we will test the child and give parents a recommendation as to whether this program is appropriate. Hopefully, when we are able to find more Khmer teachers, we will be able to offer this program to English speaking children as well.

For additional information please call Mary Marquez or Outey Khuon at (310) 599-6263