



The Language Nest Program

What is it?

A language nest is a preschool program for children where they are immersed in their language and culture. No English is used in a language nest. In language nests, young children are surrounded by their language, parents are encouraged to participate, and staff, volunteers, and Elders carry out daily activities in the language with the children.

What is the goal of a language nest?

The goal of a language nest is not simply to provide childcare; **the goal of a language nest is to create fluent language speakers.**

What are the benefits of a language nest?

- Young children develop proficiency in their language.
- Young children develop a strong cultural identity.
- Intergenerational connections are made between young children and Elders who visit.
- Parents have the opportunity to learn along with their children.
- A language nest is a stepping stone to the development of an immersion school.

What is the outcome of a language nest?

Children who are absolute beginners when they start attending a language nest may reach mid/high-beginner proficiency in 1 year of full immersion in the nest. In 2 or 3 years of participation in the nest, children will achieve low/mid-intermediate proficiency. When starting a language nest, we recommend that at least some of the children are 12 months old or younger so that they have the chance to attend for 3-4 years. Children exposed to a language for only 1 year before entering kindergarten will have limited proficiency gains.

Is a language nest right for my community?

Your community may be ready for a language nest if you have:

- Young parents who are interested in having their children become fluent speakers of their language. Ideally, the parents are interested in learning too.
- 5-10 young children who can attend the nest full time. We recommend no more than 10 children. Numbers need to be small in order to maintain an immersion environment.
- 2 fluent speakers who can work full time in the nest. There should be a maximum of 4-5 children for each fluent speaker. 2 fluent speakers are recommended because if you only have 1 fluent speaker, s/he has no one to speak with in natural conversation.
- If the only fluent speakers in your community are Elders, it is not reasonable to expect them to work full time in a nest. Before starting a nest, you could use the Mentor-Apprentice strategy to increase the fluency of younger people who can then work full time in a nest.