

**Wharton Elementary**  
**A Model School for the Country**  
**From a Parent's Perspective**

*“We could not be prouder of the effort put forth by everybody.”* While this statement and the “Congratulations” may have been more prominently displayed on another school’s website; we don’t seem to be the kind to boast. The note of congratulations was well earned. Any school earning an accreditation of “Recognized” by the TEA should be commended, especially if you read on. Consider that *“the overwhelming majority of our non-Hispanic Dual Language students, who took the TAKS standardized tests, leading to our Recognized status, did so in Spanish!!”*

We are extremely proud of the school’s performance. Still, we tend to put too much emphasis on test scores. Sometimes, even we tend to downplay or overlook the incredible accomplishments of our English speakers. Likewise, while enhancing and refining a child’s native-Spanish dialect, they are also learning English. The ability to function, comprehend or take tests in another language is a commendable talent. Being bilingual/bi-literate in third grade is a skill that may be used throughout a lifetime. In our circle, these things are commonplace. We have shared the frustrations and excitement amongst our group. We are very proud of our success, but there are others that need to know more about us. In fact, we have created a model school for the country!

On August 14, 2006, Wharton Elementary became the only exclusively, dedicated Dual-Language school in the Houston Independent School District; one of few in the nation. Our dual-language program is based on an underlying mission *“that by placing importance on both languages we are not only preparing our students for the multi-lingual, multicultural world we are living in, but they are also learning the importance and value in respecting other cultures in our increasingly global society.”*

The Wharton program begins in Kindergarten with a 90/10 plan; 90% of the day is in Spanish; 10% English. The program tapers each year, currently through sixth grade, to a 50/50 plan in fourth grade and beyond. The success of the program is evidenced in the student’s class work, tests, and social skills. With sometimes more than half of the class being native-Spanish speakers, these students are able to converse in either language. This interaction has an incredible impact on the fluency of both languages for students.

While Wharton offers the only dedicated dual language school, there are three other HISD schools listed as Magnet schools with a ‘foreign language’ program. Given that 30% of HISD students have a limited-English dialect, and that Hispanics account for 58% of the 210,000 students of HISD, it would be exponentially beneficial to create several more programs. It is our hope to expand and share our proven dual-language program.

We’re making it work. The Wharton Elementary Dual Language program is producing Spanish/English bilingual/bi-literate citizens! We are here to be a model school for not only HISD, but the country!

By Terri Blackwood