
Piedmont Language School: Toward a K-12 Vision for Language Learning

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“Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. We must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad.”

-ACTFL

Overview

Research shows that second language learning results in significant gains in cognitive flexibility, creativity, divergent and higher order thinking skills as well as gains in standardized test scores. It should be a part of the core curriculum, not an elective. Families move to Piedmont for the quality education the schools provide. By taking on the challenge of integrating a state-of-the-art, forward-thinking world language curriculum K-12, the Piedmont Unified School District can continue its growth as a high achieving district and embrace the opportunity to meet the broad academic needs of our students while preparing them to be globally competent citizens.

What does a comprehensive language program look like?

National standards developed by the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language (ACTFL) emphasize communication skills rather than grammar rules and note that regardless of methodology, learning a second language takes a long time. “To put U.S. students on par with students in other countries, foreign language must become part of the core curriculum from K – 12th grade.” A successful language program begins in the elementary school and must be a part of a comprehensive, long-range district plan for seamless language instruction that includes foreign language programs in the middle and high schools.

- ▶ Enjoyable, meaningful language lesson materials and activities
- ▶ Curricula based on the national foreign language standards
- ▶ Clear program goals
- ▶ Regular program evaluation
- ▶ Accessibility for all students
- ▶ Communication and coordination across content areas
- ▶ Articulation among grades: elementary -> middle -> high school
- ▶ Well-qualified teachers who participate in regular professional development

Successful Program Characteristics

- Language study is part of a comprehensive K-12, long-range, district-wide plan and included in core curriculum.
- Language study starts in elementary and continues sequentially through high school.
- Language study acts as an extension of current curriculum: thematic and content based.
- Language instructors are credentialed classroom teachers.
- Language is taught through context, using authentic materials.
- Language learners interact creatively among themselves and with a proficient speaker of the language.
- Language teachers differentiate instruction as needed.
- Language labs and technology are used to support and enhance classroom practice.

Evolving World Language in our Schools

World language programs are a priority in schools all around us: in public schools, private schools, large districts and small. It's often the curricular spark in the building of both independent and charter schools, many of which are bilingual or immersion. It is happening nationally and locally, district-wide, school-wide, and through afterschool enrichment. While some of the more established programs have had the benefit of a healthier economy and available funding, the push towards foreign language inclusion continues as more and more schools are realizing the immediate and long term benefits of early language learning on student achievement.

We researched a variety of language programs across the U.S. both established and developing, spoke to principals, teachers and parent groups. One thing stood out: a commitment to provide second language learning as a part of the instructional day regardless of the hurdles. The following three examples illustrate districts and schools that have all achieved some measure of this commitment. The demographics, funding, and approaches are different, but the common thread is the ability to build on current strengths and the flexibility and willingness to be creative.

Glastonbury, CT has one of the oldest continuing public K-12 model programs in the country. It is also a national model. This sequential program begins in the early grades by introducing language into the core curriculum in a comprehensive yet manageable way. For example, in first grade all GPS students begin studying Spanish in two fifteen minute classes each week. Spanish instruction is based on the five C's of language learning and centers around one 'essential question' per grade. The 'essential question' guides instruction for the year. Students continue learning Spanish in this design, increasing instructional time each year until grade 5 (30 minutes/day) when they are speaking, reading and writing in Spanish. This model transitions seamlessly into middle and high school where the language instruction becomes more rigorous and the breadth of language offerings increase. Students have the opportunity to become multilingual, not just bilingual.

San Francisco Unified committed to second language learning and passed a resolution in 2006 that "all students will have the opportunity to learn a second language". SFUSD maximizes its linguistically diverse student population and employs multiple approaches to realizing its long term goal. They currently have 20 immersion/dual immersion, 30 biliteracy, 12 newcomer and 5 FLES schools. Over 80% of the district's elementary schools currently offer a second language. Clarendon is only one of many examples. Using a teacher-led FLES approach, students are given Japanese language instruction 30-40 minutes a day. The classroom teacher delivers both language and core subject instruction. This allows teachers the flexibility to integrate language instruction into their real classroom situations, across content areas throughout the day. As a result, students acquire language in a more meaningful context and are provided critical opportunities for two-way communication in Japanese.

"Knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom"

All the linguistic and social knowledge required for effective human-to-human interaction is encompassed in those ten words. Formerly, most teaching in foreign language classrooms concentrated on the how (grammar) to say what (vocabulary). While these components of language are indeed crucial, the current organizing principle for foreign language study is communication, which also highlights the why, the whom, and the when. It is the acquisition of the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages that is the ultimate goal of today's foreign language classroom.

-ACTFL, *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*

Types of Programs

Competitive colleges and universities require 2-4 years of language study. Results from the SAT show that students who studied a foreign language for 4 or more years outscored other students in the verbal and math portions of the test. Language learning IS a factor. How do we get there?

Immersion: combines foreign language instruction with grade level content from curriculum.

FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School): provides a sequential language learning experience aiming for proficiency.

FLEX (Foreign Language Experience or Exploratory): designed to provide limited exposure to one or more foreign languages.

In our own backyard, Montclair Elementary has incorporated Spanish language instruction into the regular school day. All Kindergartners receive Spanish instruction 30 minutes a day, four days a week. The parent led Language League helped to acquire funding through parent donations and grant monies to support the K program. They worked with administration and classroom teachers on scheduling and content alignment. Language instruction (Mandarin, Spanish, French, Italian) continues through a before/after school enrichment program for grades 1-5 and is also run by the Language League. Over 50 % of the students continue in the language program through grade 5 as a result of the strong start K program. A Montclair parent shared, "My daughter transitioned confidently into the middle school Spanish class at Julia Morgan because of her experience with Montclair's Language League program. She would have struggled, as some students do, had she not received a language foundation in K-5."

Where Else is it Happening?

The Japanese Magnet Program (Portland, OR) began in 1989 with two kindergarten classes at Richmond Elementary School. It is now a complete Pre K – 12 language immersion program. The Bay Point Magnet Elementary School (St. Petersburg, FL) program provides daily Spanish instruction integrated with technology across all grades. The foreign language program in Prince George's County Public Schools (Capitol Heights, MD) offers ten languages including American Sign Language. St. Louis Park, Minnesota (population 45,000) is one of two districts in the state that is currently in the process of implementing the IB program for students preschool through high school. These schools have been named National Schools of Excellence by the U.S. Department of Education. They are the top of their class and their language programs were the key contributing factor. These are not Cinderella stories, however, but the result of years of hard work, advocacy, innovative problem solving and creative funding.

Many of the local private and independent schools introduce foreign language curriculum during the elementary years. Below are some of those schools that have found ways to weave foreign language into their daily instruction: Greenwood Elementary (Mill Valley), Mills College Children's School (Oakland), Northern Light Elementary (Oakland), Park Day School (Oakland), Ecole Bilingue de Berkeley (Berkeley), Head Royce (Oakland), Bentley (Oakland), Shu Ren International (Berkeley), Escuela Bilingue Internacional (Berkeley), Chinese American International School (SF), Saint Mary Chinese Day School (SF), Deutsch-Amerikanische Schule (SF), and Adelante (Redwood City).

There are many other local public schools on the path toward implementing World Language programs. Fiesta Gardens (San Mateo), Hatch Elementary (Half Moon Bay), Manzanita SEED (Oakland), McKinley Elementary (Burlingame), Encinal School (Menlo Park), Castro Elementary (Mountain View), River Glen (San Jose), Meyeholz Elementary (Cupertino), in addition to larger districts like San Francisco Unified, Berkeley Unified, and San Ramon.

International Baccalaureate (IB)

The IB program is K – 12. At the high school level, IB is an alternative to AP. Beginning in the primary grades (PYP), the program teaches the children how to think and approach learning with a global perspective. This continues through Middle School (MYP). For the teachers, there is a strong emphasis on collaboration, training and assessment as well as language learning and being part of a greater worldwide community. It is a rigorous program, which at the same time, allows the teacher to address the needs of the full range of children in the classroom. The program integrates learning and understanding issues from multiple perspectives to promote global thinking. The pedagogy focuses on questioning and searching for answers.

Changing AP Exams

Beginning this academic year (2011-12) and continuing in coming academic years, the College Board will be changing to the AP World Language exams. The changes are intended to focus students more on communication (interpersonal, interpretive and presentational), increase their awareness of the target culture, and engage them in cultural contexts through the use of contemporary, authentic multimedia sources for instruction and real-life interaction.

Many of these examples currently have established World Language programs, but they too had to make the decision that language learning is a key part of the core program, commit to a long term plan, acquire funding, and begin one class, one grade at a time. We don't have to re-invent the wheel, we just may have to build it one spoke at a time.

IB Programs in Action

Sierra Elementary School (Rocklin, CA) is an IB World School public elementary school offering the Primary Years Program (PYP). Sierra Elementary School has remodeled its curriculum to fit International Baccalaureate standards including language instruction in all grades to support the larger philosophy of preparing children to compete in the globalizing 21st century.

Park Side School (Sebastapol Unified) is another K- 5 International Baccalaureate PYP School. The program provides an inquiry based instructional program that develops critical and higher-order thinking skills and incorporates second language and cultural instruction. The aim of the IB PYP is to engender "international-mindedness" in its students so that they gain an understanding of the global impact their actions and values can and do have on the larger society.

Technology Can Aid Language Acquisition

Teachers, together with today's adaptive technology, can provide the dynamic environment required for effective language instruction in context. Computer labs and iPads can be used as portals to present, extend and enrich language learning by providing access to web-based programs.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) encourages technology as a tool to support and enhance classroom-based language instruction. Technology offers a variety of benefits and options:

- Enables teachers to differentiate instruction.
- Provides opportunities to engage students in target language and culture authentically.
- Capabilities exist to connect PUSD classrooms with classrooms in other countries (cyber penpals)
- Leverage student-centered approach to introducing content. Solicit, affirm, and leverage student skills and resources (e.g. Podcasts, iPad apps, everyday technology, etc.)
- Educational Technology: Smartboards enhance oral interactions in the class, support teacher organization and presentation and actively engage students
- Supplemental Educational Software for independent practice on site. Tell Me More, Kid Speak, Aurolog, Rosetta Stone
- Reinforce Home-School Connections with programs like Live Mocha and Rosetta Stone Classroom

Examples of Technology

LiveMocha: can be used schoolwide and across all language levels. It provides support, critical interaction, as well as instant feedback and data reporting. Most importantly, it extends the classroom by providing our students with home-access to content and key progress monitoring tools. It integrates fluency, comprehension, and writing to help develop students who are biliterate... not just bilingual.

Rhinospike: an online tool that enables language learners around the globe to exchange language audio files.

MyLanguageExchange: uses the Cormier method of language exchange where small, mixed groups of native speakers spend half the time speaking in one language and half the time in the other. Activities are structured to ensure all areas of language acquisition are exercised, including vocabulary, pronunciation and listening comprehension. Activities are designed to enable students to discover the "conversation culture" - how native speakers of the other culture interact naturally and effectively.

Professional Development

Professional development must be an ongoing process regardless of the skills and knowledge that foreign language teachers possess when they begin teaching. Education is not static, neither are the needs of the students receiving that education. Instructional practices, curriculum implementation, and technologies are constantly evolving and improving. Educators must keep pace. The successful implementation of these new programs and strategies are significantly increased, however, when teachers are actively invested in the content of the professional development they receive. Collaboration is essential. Professional development for language educators is more likely to promote student success when it:

- Is embedded in the daily lives of teachers.
- Reinforces a high level of proficiency in all of the modalities of the target language which include speaking, listening, reading and writing.
- Addresses issues of language, culture and/or pedagogy
- Aims to develop aural comprehension, enhance speaking, reading and writing skills; and to promote communicative proficiency.
- Supports teachers using the National Standards as a guide for instructional planning.
- Encourages innovation and the use of new technologies
- Receives strong administrative support.
- Involves the chance to participate collegially and collaboratively.
- Supports current programs and new program implementation

Support in the form of funding, release time, prep time, and teacher input is needed in order for any professional development to have a significant impact on language instruction and student learning.

Piedmont Language School (PLS)

PLS is committed to partnering with the district to develop the world language program at PUSD.

PLS can raise monies through community events and donations to support PUSD's efforts towards the implementation of a comprehensive World Languages Program.

PLS can researching and pursue additional alternative sources of funding outside the community through educational and language foundations, corporate grants, and local businesses.

PLS can also serve as a technical resource for language teaching and acquisition in the K-6 range that it serves.

Funding Sources and Technical Support

Private Foundations/Grants

Inspired Teacher Scholarships:

Inspiration Software funds this \$1000 scholarship which is given to 25 teachers to use for personal development or new technology.

Grants for Foreign Language Training and International Studies

The U.S. Department of Education's International Education Programs Service (IEPS) offers funding to promote expertise and competence in foreign languages and international studies.

Fund for Teachers

The Fund for Teachers provides funds for direct grants to teachers to support summer learning opportunities of their own design (professional development).

Federal and State Grants

FLAP Foreign Language Assistance Program (although cut from the federal budget for 2012, the possibility exists for following years).

International Grants

The South Korean Government is funding the Korean language program in San Ramon.

Italian Consulate provided funds to support the Italian language program at Montclair elementary.

Partnerships / Collaborative Ventures

Consider partnerships with Mills, UCB, CalState EastBay teacher training programs for possible language teachers/independent contractors to deliver language instruction at the elementary level, support PMS and PHS foreign language teachers with integration of technology in the classroom as paraprofessionals (internship and/or salary).

Consider partnering with other schools/districts to share costs of part-time hires, professional development.
