

## Position Paper

### Foreign Language Instruction in Elementary Schools

#### A) INTRODUCTION

Research indicates the most successful language learning takes place between birth and age ten to twelve. At this young age, the child will have an easier time of learning and retaining the language.

When children study foreign language, they develop higher cognitive thinking skills. Foreign language study helps students gain a better understanding of the grammar/ structure of their native language. As a result they usually perform better on standardized tests (Terra Nova, HSP/AT, SAT, ACT).

Two or three years of foreign language study in high school do not always provide fluency in a foreign language. Fluency will more likely be reached if the child has started foreign language learning much earlier and continues to advanced levels in high school.

With the increasingly multinational character of American society itself, and the growing involvement of the United States in international business, the importance of foreign languages in nearly every type of occupation is evident, and is expected to grow in the coming years. Hence, the study of a foreign language creates citizens who will learn to accept, understand and appreciate the diversity of cultures. In our global society, as the world becomes more interdependent, students' knowledge of foreign language is crucial for expanded career opportunities. The student's ability to think globally will, in turn, help to promote world peace. It will also aid in developing responsible citizens of the world community and bring us closer to realizing the Kingdom of God on earth.

#### B) CHALLENGES

The greatest challenges at this time include providing additional instructional time in the school day, creating available space for classes, financing an additional salary and locating qualified teachers. Although these may collectively appear as obstacles, with planning and the proposed timeline for implementation, these challenges can be attained.

**TIME:** As we strive to provide more integrated curriculum opportunities, administrators and teachers can study their existing schedules to determine if the schedule will allow for minutes to be devoted to foreign language instruction, while maintaining the required time allotments. If schools are merely meeting the minimum time allotments, this may provide the opportunity to stretch beyond the minimum by adding time to the school day.

**SPACE:** If an additional classroom is not available, the foreign language teachers may need to travel from class to class. Ideally a location for materials and supplies can be provided for the teacher.

FINANCES: Given the proposed schedule for complete adoption of the foreign language program, schools should be able to budget accordingly for the additional salary and materials over the implementation phase.

QUALIFIED TEACHERS: Past experience has revealed that teachers desire full time teaching positions rather than part-time positions. It is believed that the ultimate goal of offering a full time position may lure teachers into accepting a part-time teaching schedule, which they will see being expanded to full time.

### C) GOALS

1. The elementary schools in the Diocese of Arlington will provide foreign language instruction at each grade level that will position students to move into high school foreign language programs at the second level of high school foreign language instruction according to the following outline.

a) Curriculum instruction will be offered at each grade level according to the following plan:

Grades 1-2: Exposure Program      40-60 minutes per week  
(allowing for instruction 2-3 times per week)

Grades 3-5: Intermediate Program      60-90 minutes per week  
(allowing instruction 2-3 times per week)

Grade 6: Academic Program      90-135 minutes per week  
(allowing 2-4 times per week)

Grades 7-8: Academic Program      120-180 minutes per week  
(allowing instruction 4-5 times per week)

b) Schools will work towards full implementation over a three year period according to their preferred schedule, i.e., starting with the exposure program or the academic program to the full program.

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| Phase I   | 2004-2005 | Starting with exposure or academic program   |
| Phase II  | 2005-2006 | Implementing intermediate program            |
| Phase III | 2006-2007 | Offering the complete program for grades 1-8 |

2. The Foreign Language Committee will continue to work to identify resources that will supplement recommended primary texts by

- a) Soliciting resources used by current foreign language teachers
- b) Creating list with information to acquire resources
- c) Incorporating list within the current listing contained in the existing guidelines