

Elementary French Immersion Proposal

The Problem

For the past several years a group of parents in Hanover have advocated the introduction of French into the early elementary grades. The research on the benefits of introducing language at a young age is persuasive and difficult to argue against from an educational perspective. The arguments against the introduction of foreign language in Hanover are largely logistical and budgetary:

- ❖ **Limited time:** The curriculum in grades 1 through 3 is already crammed. Adding an additional subject would force teachers to reduce instructional time or force administrators to reduce the amount of time students spend in supplemental programs
- ❖ **Limited funding:** Adding foreign language would require hiring additional staff, which would add substantially to the operating budgets.
- ❖ **Practical Logistics:** If the foreign language program requires additional classroom space it could be problematic in Hanover given the current room usage. If the foreign language teacher floats into classes, it will prevent that time from being productive preparatory time for the regular classroom teacher.
- ❖ **Curriculum logistics:** If the program is offered in only one town, when students from Norwich and Hanover merge at the middle school level there will be disparities in the level of preparation.

When asked to assess the viability of introducing foreign language at an earlier grade level in the context of our current program and the Duncan Report issued in October, 2001, the K-12 World Languages Committee listed five issues from the Duncan Report that are relevant today, most of which are covered by the broader topics listed above. Their concluding paragraph, stated that “it would be wise to revisit the ‘other options’ considered by the Duncan Task Force as part of the discussion”, and listed a “French total immersion program” as an example of a potentially viable alternative.

Elementary French Immersion: A POSSIBLE Solution

After issuing a preliminary prospectus on this concept to board members, it is evident the SAU Board is the best forum to present the proposal to introduce a French immersion program for elementary students. This proposed immersion program would not only address the problems outlined above, but would also address some of the enrollment issues in both Norwich and Hanover. Here’s the way the an elementary immersion program could work:

- ❖ **Program:** The French immersion program would be housed at the Marion Cross School in Norwich. It would offer the SAU 70 core curriculum for all subjects in French. The program will span grades 1-6 at which point students would receive full credit for French and would be able to enroll in Spanish beginning in grade 7.

- ❖ **Enrollment:** Enrollment would be voluntary and limited to parents in Hanover and Norwich. Students enrolled in the French Immersion Program would count in the ADM for Norwich, thereby reducing the per pupil costs in Norwich and modestly reducing the enrollments in Hanover. The teacher's compensation would be based on the Norwich pay scale.
- ❖ **Phasing:** The French Immersion Program would begin in 2006-07 and would include only first grade students. In 2007-08 the program would be offered to both first and second grade students. In subsequent years the program would add a grade level per year through 5th grade. If space becomes an issue at Marion Cross School, an "upper school" might be offered at the Ray School, which will presumably have space available due to the enrollment of Hanover students in the French Immersion Program at Marion Cross. The 6th grade French Immersion Program would be offered at Richmond Middle School. If the French Immersion teacher is housed in Hanover or Dresden, the teacher would be compensated on the appropriate pay schedule.
- ❖ **Tuition:** A tuition arrangement would be devised so that the costs to each town would be neutral. The assumption is that a teacher would be shifted from the Ray School to provide direct instruction and that teacher's assignment would not require additional staffing beyond that needed for projected enrollment increases. It is possible that grant funds might be available to help with the launch of this program and could be used to supplement the budget to avoid adding costs for learning materials.

There are several questions that need to be addressed before this proposal can be adopted. The two most pressing issues are whether there is a sufficient pool of qualified immersion teachers available and whether there is sufficient interest among parents. Other questions will emerge in the weeks ahead.