

World Language Task Force report

Executive Summary

After reviewing the literature and discussing the opportunities for the Maynard school system, the Global Competency Task Force has found there is clear consensus that multiple language acquisition is critical to ensuring that our students will be competitive and successful in a global society. As such, the Task Force recommends that Spanish instruction be made available to all students beginning in kindergarten and continuing through grade 12. Additionally, we support retaining the Latin program in grade six and expanding the French program starting in grade seven. The cognitive benefits of language acquisition, coupled with the need to ensure that all Maynard students remain competitive with their national and international peers, affirms that the structural and financial changes required for this expansion will pay dividends for *all* students.

Rationale

In reviewing the literature on language development, the Global Competency Task Force identified the following areas of advantage for multiple language acquisition.

Cognitive

There is significant evidence in the literature that dual language learning facilitates development of multiple aspects of intelligence. Studies conducted from the 1970s through today illustrate the positive impact language development has on cognitive skills—including literacy development, mathematical and scientific reasoning, memory, and problem solving. One such study in 2012 indicated that six-year-olds who spoke two languages demonstrated an increased ability to manage attention (Barack, Bialystok, 2012). In another study, Antonella Sorace from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland found that “[bilinguals] can pay focused attention without being distracted and improve in the ability to switch from one task to another,” (NPR article <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/11/29/497943749/6-potential-brain-benefits-of-bilingual-education>). These executive function skills are essential for success both in and out of school.

Additional studies illustrate the connection between bilingualism and improved verbal, spatial, and problem-solving abilities. Literature going back to the 1950s concludes that learning multiple languages provides significant benefits beyond the ability to communicate in those languages. Sorace contends that bilingual children have an advantage in “tests of perspective-taking and [theory of mind](#)—both of which are fundamental social and emotional skills” (NPR article). Although it is clear that the more time spent with language instruction, the greater the increase in ability, students benefit in both immersion programs and more traditional foreign language programs. These benefits last well beyond the school years as studies have found that multilingualism slows cognitive decline later in life (CITATION-ACTFL).

Academic/Career Benefits

Multiple studies address various academic benefits of language acquisition for both secondary and postsecondary study. Multilingual students have seen gains over their grade level peers in a diverse range of skills, including native language vocabulary acquisition and grammar, complexity of writing, and the ability to develop a scientific hypothesis. Language study of just 30 minutes three times per week was shown to increase math and language standardized test scores (ACTFL). Additionally students who have studied a language for four years have increased scores on the SAT tests as compared to students who studied another language for one year or less.

(http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/Curriculum/Curriculum_Root_Web_Folder/BenefitsofSecondLanguage.pdf). Based on this research, it makes sense that school districts invest in providing instruction in foreign language.

The Center for Applied Linguistics conducted a review of foreign language teaching in U.S. schools. They found a significant reduction in elementary foreign language programs since the passage of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. Additionally, there appeared to be a socioeconomic relationship between access to foreign language instruction, particularly at the elementary level. Students of low socioeconomic status were less likely to have access to world language programs. In addition, the study identified a significant increase in the disparity between access in public as opposed to private schools (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2009). As the World Languages and Dual Immersion Specialist for the Utah Office of Education Gregg Roberts stated in 2013, “monolingualism is the illiteracy of the 21st century.”

Just as an inability to read and write has long impacted career trajectories, career growth in the 21st century will increasingly depend on one’s cultural and language skills. Higher Education is taking note of these increasing demands. Colleges such as the University of Rhode Island, Northern Arizona University, and Valparaiso have all created dual-degree programs where students earn a degree in a STEM field in addition to a specific language. Providing Maynard students with multiple opportunities to develop world language skills will allow our students to compete for these programs, increasing not only their postsecondary education opportunities, but their career opportunities as well.

Maynard students will be entering an economy where their success will likely be influenced by their ability to interact with other cultures. Brad Jensen of Georgetown University has developed a futurecast for the U.S. economy. He claims that “future U.S. growth will increasingly depend on selling U.S. goods and services to foreign consumers who do not necessarily speak English” (Alden, 2012). In order to meet that need, workers will need facility in interacting and conversing with diverse cultures. Former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan pointed out that

only 18 percent of Americans report speaking a language other than English, as compared to 53 percent of Europeans (Skorton & Altschuler, 2012).

Cultural Benefits

Cultural competency is imperative for living in a diverse local environment, and an increasingly interconnected world. It is therefore imperative that Maynard Students develop the skills to engage across cultures. Curtain and Dahlberg identified that 10-year-olds are developing an awareness of “the other.” Additionally they found that “exposure to foreign language serves as a means of helping children to intercultural competence” (2004). While multiple research studies demonstrate the cultural benefits of studying world languages, the Task Force felt that the real cultural benefit was to the Maynard School Community. Having all students involved in Spanish language development in some capacity starting in Kindergarten will help to unite our school community as globally competent citizens. Starting with our youngest learners, Maynard students will be receiving social benefits of language acquisition, influencing their interactions with each other as classmates in addition to the diverse residents of Maynard and our larger community. As one Task Force member put it “this is our town and this is what it means to be educated in Maynard.”

Implementation

Elementary Recommendation

The Task Force recommends that World Language instruction be introduced at the elementary (K-5) level as a Spanish class in the elective rotation for the 2017-2018 school year. While the Task Force believes that World Language should be afforded the same amount of instructional time as the other core academic subjects, the members recognize the limitations imposed by financial resources and time constraints in the school schedule. As such, the Task Force recommends evaluating the impact of increasing the amount of World Language instruction at the elementary level over time. The Task Force agrees with recommendations from other community groups that the Maynard Public Schools analyze the overall elementary programming over a period of three to five years with an eye to balancing the academic and developmental needs of our students.

Grades 6-8 Immersion Program Recommendation

The Task Force recommends that the immersion program be continued through grade 8 using the model that has been adopted by our model program in Millis, as well as the other immersion programs throughout the state. In consultation with the World Language teachers, the Task Force feels confident that with minor modification to the K-5 program, students in the Spanish Immersion Program will be able to continue to develop their fluency if instructed in an approximate 80 percent English/20 percent Spanish split. Additionally, this will allow for greater

integration of the students in the Spanish Immersion class with their peers. The Fowler Scheduling Committee has drafted multiple staffing scenarios based on this and other programming needs. Based on their work, the Task Force is recommending the district invest in a 1.0 Spanish teacher for FY19. This provides the needed staffing for the immersion program expansion through grade eight. It would allow for the Spanish elective offering in grades four through six that was part of the elementary recommendation offered by this Task Force.

Grade 6-12 Sequence Recommendation

Currently all students in grade six are provided with a year of Latin instruction. This program began in the 2015-2016 school year and has had a great deal of success, leading to the development of an afterschool club for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. The Task Force recommends that Latin remain a World Language taught as a core academic class for sixth graders. That said, the Task Force is committed to ensuring continuity in Spanish instruction and recommends providing a Spanish elective to all sixth graders in the elective course rotation.

One of the priorities for the Task Force was to provide multiple years of access for language development. The Task Force therefore recommends that French and Spanish be offered as core subjects beginning in grade seven to students starting in the same year. Students would select either Spanish or French as the World Language in their core academic schedule in seventh grade and would continue with that language in eighth grade. Upon moving to the high school in grade nine, students would be able to continue with their current language, switch to the other language, or take both languages if their schedule allowed. Maynard Public Schools should be committed to ensuring all students have an opportunity to engage in advanced language study throughout their secondary education program.

Resource Needs

To fully implement the recommendations of this Task Force, Maynard Public Schools will need to invest in 2.2 FTE staffing increase for K-12 World Language. This would allow for a K-6 Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) Spanish Program, a K-8 Spanish Immersion Program, a grade 6 Latin course, and a 7-12 French and Spanish program.

The Task Force was mindful of the budgetary concerns that have been raised over the last several years. There were many recommendations and programs the Task Force considered but did not make as a result of these concerns. The Task Force strongly believes that these investments are necessary to ensure that all students in Maynard will be locally, nationally, and globally competitive both in a financial and social capacity. The Task Force urges the Maynard School Committee and the Maynard Board of Selectmen to understand these investments as essential components of a 21st century school system.

Conclusion

Research is clear that language development is a key component of a high quality education. Not only is fluency in multiple languages beneficial for future personal and professional success, language development also helps to develop a variety of cognitive skills. The Global Competency Task Force would like to recognize the admirable commitment Maynard Public Schools has made to the World Language program. This investment has led to a culture that values not only language instruction but has facilitated the development of a vision for our schools. Maynard Public Schools seeks to help students develop the skills necessary to be comfortable in a global community and thrive in a global workplace and the World Language program is a key component of that goal. The Task Force encourages members of the School Committee and Administration to continue that development and increase opportunities for all students.

The Administration would like to thank the members of the Task Force. These 15 community members participated in hours of meetings, discussing very difficult issues of programming and funding. This group represented a true cross section of the Maynard Public School Community and they openly, honestly, and thoughtfully made recommendations based on the needs of all students. We hope this is a start to heal the divide in Maynard and begin again to celebrate the incredible education that we provide for all students in Maynard.