

# Time for World Language?



## Northbrook District 28 Report on World Language and Learning Time

Prepared for the Board of Education  
February 16, 2012

Dr. Larry A. Hewitt, Superintendent  
(Updated 3/9/12)

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## Preface

“Time for World Language?” is a compilation of reports, insights, and proposals designed to uncover the opportunities and challenges associated with expanding world language study into the early primary classrooms.

The purpose of our exploration is captured in this report’s title, “Time for World Language?” We are attempting to answer two questions:

**Is it time for world language instruction to be introduced earlier in a child’s school experience?**

and

**Is there time in the school day to expand the world language program?**

This report will review historical work completed in the District, current research on the study of a second language, as well as work completed by the World Language Curriculum Mapping Task Force and the Commission on the Study of Learning Time.

In documenting this journey of exploration, it is my intent to make brevity my ally without sacrificing clarity. The meaning and intent of many ideas can be lost in the wordiness of a lengthy report. The documents included as appendices are intended to provide additional information for those who are so inclined to delve into such detail.

This culminating report would not have been possible without the keen insights, probing questions, and deep discussions that were raised by many stakeholders. I wish to acknowledge each one for their time and devotion to this process of study and exploration and thank them for their diligence and commitment.

Members of the World Language Curriculum Mapping Task Force:

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Members of the Commission on the Study of Learning Time:

Carol Currie (Board of Education)	Sara Loeb (Communications Coordinator)
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Kerri Edwards (Teacher)	Bill Norris (Teacher)

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Chris Finch (Elementary Principal)  
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Katy Wetter (Teacher)

## Introduction

The lifeblood of any organization is ongoing, thoughtful evolution; it keeps us vigorous, vibrant, and alert. In order to do so, we must engage in ongoing study, evaluation, and, when prudent and warranted, action that challenges the status quo - all for the purposes of attaining higher levels of performance and providing enhanced experiences for students. In so doing, we adjust and improve our instructional programs to address the ever-changing and evolving landscape at the local, national, and international levels that clearly impacts our children's futures.

There is virtually no disagreement that...

the world is flatter,

the speed of change is livelier,

our international connectedness is more entwined, and

our challenges and opportunities are more explosive.

One organization that has been on the forefront of identifying what students need today in order to be successful in the future is the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.

"Founded in 2002, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) is the leading national organization that advocates for 21st century readiness for every student. P21 brings together the **business community, education leaders and policymakers** who believe that our education system must equip students with rigorous academic coursework and the skills to be productive employees and citizens."

Through their ongoing work, they have highlighted three areas as key components of education that directly relate to world language study.

They cite...

- world language as one of the nine essential core subjects;
- the interdisciplinary theme of *Global Awareness*, specifically “understanding other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages;” and
- “communicating effectively in diverse environments (including multi-lingual)” (Appendix A).

## **The Study of World Language Curriculum in District 28**

### **Historical Review: Advisory Committee on Education**

In January 2005, the District’s Advisory Committee on Education (ACE) began a study of foreign language. Its work was completed in June of 2006 and was summarized in “Foreign Language Study Report of Recommendations” (Appendix B), which was presented to the Board of Education. The designated purpose of this study was “to explore the feasibility of expanding foreign language into earlier grades as indicated in the Strategic Action Plan.” The document presented the group’s process, findings, and recommendations.

While many of the short-term and long-term goals have been achieved, the primary recommendation remains unaddressed. The report states,

“It is our recommendation that District 28 include foreign language instruction as early as feasible in the primary grades and do so without sacrificing the current program. Please note that any after school enrichment programs are not to be construed as a supplement to foreign language instruction.”

This historical review is presented as one component of this report. It must be viewed with “current eyes,” because as time progresses, circumstances may change, opportunities may fade or grow, and challenges may diminish or magnify.

### **Current Review: World Language Curriculum Mapping Task Force**

Approximately every five years, each of the District’s curricular areas will undergo a complete and total examination. The purpose is to ensure we are periodically reviewing, updating, and improving our programs. The curriculum development process is led by Assistant Superintendent Kathy Horvath. The team usually includes an outside “expert in the field” and always includes administrators and teachers. Components of the process are comprehensive (Appendix C).

The World Language group began its work in September 2010. As had occurred in 2005, the question of early world language instruction naturally emerged. While the ideal

answer to this inquiry is made clear by the research, ideal answers tend to clash with the limitations of reality. The members of the Task Force knew this was not a decision they could make, given the complexity of implementing such a recommendation. Another group, the Commission on the Study of Learning Time, was subsequently formed to address the feasibility of expanding the program. Its work shall be highlighted later in this report.

## **Research-Based Benefits of World Language Instruction**

### **Why Consider Expansion of the World Languages Program?**

The first and primary question to consider is “Why should District 28 spend the time and effort exploring expansion of the program?” Of what benefit to the student is this area of study? What insights can we glean from the research?

One of the nation’s premier organizations devoted to world language instruction is the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Their position is best captured in their own words:

“Language and communication are the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English-speaking backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language.”

ACTFL identifies the following research-based claims (Appendix D):

### **How does language learning support academic achievement?**

- Language learning correlates with higher academic achievement on standardized test measures.
- Language learning is beneficial to both monolingual English and English language learners in bilingual and two-way immersion programs.
- Language learning is beneficial in the development of students’ reading abilities.
- There is evidence that language learners transfer skills from one language to another.
- There is a correlation between second language learning and increased linguistic awareness.

- There is a correlation between language learning and students' ability to hypothesize in science.
- Language learning can benefit all students.
- There is a correlation between young children's second language development and the development of print awareness.
- Heritage learners who use their language skills to interpret and translate for family members experience higher academic performance and greater self-efficacy.
- There is a correlation between language study and higher scores on the SAT and ACT Tests.
- There is a correlation between high school foreign language study and higher academic performance at the college level.

### **How does language learning provide cognitive benefits to students?**

- There is evidence that early language learning improves cognitive abilities.
- There is evidence bilingualism correlates with increased cognitive development and abilities.
- There is a correlation between bilingualism and the offset of age-related cognitive losses.
- There is a correlation between bilingualism and attentional control on cognitive tasks.
- There is a correlation between bilingualism and intelligence.
- There is a correlation between bilingualism and meta-linguistic skills.
- There is a correlation between bilingualism and memory skills.
- There is a correlation between bilingualism and problem solving ability.
- There is a correlation between bilingualism and improved verbal and spatial abilities.

### **How does language learning affect attitudes and beliefs about language learning and about other cultures?**

- Research suggests that language learners develop a more positive attitude toward the target language and/or the speakers of that language.

There exist clear and beneficial documented outcomes for students when they begin experiencing world language instruction sooner rather than later. The research suggests that these benefits are not simply isolated to second language acquisition, but instead have far-reaching implications, covering many areas of one's life. Due to these positive studies, it was readily apparent and imperative that our school community explore, in depth, the possibility of providing the world language experience beginning in first grade.

### **Staff and Parent Feedback**

While District 28 cannot conduct surveys for every exploration or change initiative under consideration, there are times when such feedback is enlightening and crucial. Both the Curriculum Mapping Task Force and the Commission felt obtaining data about parent and staff perceptions would be beneficial to their work. This data is part of a broader collection of information, which was used for evaluating options and developing solutions. We are very appreciative of the involvement of the wider community, both inside and outside the organization, in this discovery process.

The data gathered from the Curriculum Mapping Task Force's survey (Appendix G) helped to guide us toward two decision points: what language to focus on and when to start instruction.

Parents/community members and staff felt strongly that Spanish should be the language taught with 92.7% of the former and 97.3% of the latter selecting Spanish as their first or second choice. In like manner, both groups favored 1<sup>st</sup> grade as the ideal starting point for instruction.

Information about the Commission's survey will appear later in this report.

### **How Many Languages Should Be Offered?**

One important question we had to tackle was how many languages should be offered? This determination was made by evaluating cost and class size implications. A single language will be less costly if our goal is to keep class sizes lower, rather than ballooning to 25 or more. It is our strong belief that better, higher quality instruction and deeper learning will occur if lower class sizes are a fixture of the program, just as they are with all other special area subjects (art, music, and physical education).

Another area of concern that arises when more options are offered has to do with scheduling of all the elementary subjects and teachers. If students are split 50-50 between the languages, there is no issue. However, historically there has been as high as a 70-30 split between 5<sup>th</sup> grade French and Spanish. In order to not have class size discrepancies between the languages, at least one additional Spanish teacher may be needed, thereby increasing the program's overall cost.

### **Why not Chinese?**

In reviewing the NBJH program, one issue to be addressed was whether to pair French or Chinese with Spanish. There were two major concerns that surfaced with Chinese. The first dealt with the availability of excellent, highly qualified instructors. The shortage of Chinese teachers in the United States is well documented. According to Educational & Professional Resources (EPR), an organization established to help school districts comply with the No Child Left Behind Act,

“Despite the fast growing interest in learning Chinese, the number of existing school programs is small and the present educational infrastructure that would enable these schools to meet this demand is inadequate. According to the Asia Society, a steady supply of highly-qualified Chinese teachers is one of the key factors to building a strong infrastructure that is able to sustain supply and demand simultaneously.

Teachers hold the key to the making or breaking of a program. Due to the non-alphabet-based orthographic nature of the Chinese system, the teaching of Chinese language is particularly demanding in the United States. As is true with any language-teaching professionals, to become a Chinese-language teacher requires specialized, rigorous training and ongoing professional development. The shortage of qualified Chinese language teachers is the major roadblock to building a sound infrastructure for Chinese language programs in the United States. “

([http://www.recruitteachers.org/chinese\\_teacher\\_program.htm](http://www.recruitteachers.org/chinese_teacher_program.htm))

The second consideration, touched upon in the above quote, involves the difficulty of Chinese when compared to Spanish and French. The Chinese language is very different from English and, therefore, the amount of time needed to devote to the language in order to become fluent is approximately three to four times as long. This is due to the nature of the language being more discrepant from English, whereas the Romance languages of French and Spanish have more comparable structures to that of English.

Even with this knowledge, we felt it was important to determine our stakeholders perceptions related to language difficulty. One of the survey questions asked, “How much would the level of difficulty to become proficient in a language affect your/your child’s/your students’ language choice?”

The following percentages indicate those who felt **a more difficult language would be discouraging or would make students disinterested in studying such a language:**

Students	64%
Staff	87.4%
Parents	82.4%

A final consideration focused on the fact that there is no correct or incorrect language to study. Each one has benefits that are similar and disparate. The research findings discussed previously apply to any second language being studied. We also know that if a child studies one language for several years, the ability to learn a third language is enhanced simply because of one's early second language exposure.

For these reasons, the recommendation is to continue offering both French and Spanish at NBJH.

## **The Challenges of Expanding World Language Instruction**

### **Falling Dominoes**

Many children have a set of dominoes at home. One game they routinely play involves standing up the dominoes close to each other in either simple or elaborate designs. With great anticipation, they push the first one forward, which crashes into the second. To the child's delight, the chain reaction begins. In a matter of seconds, the event is over, and the once vertical dominoes lay in a horizontal array across the floor.

Figuring out how to add world language to the elementary curriculum is similar to the effect of cascading dominoes. In order to expand the world language program, decisions have to be made. As soon as one path is taken, the chain reaction begins. Just like the falling dominoes, other areas are impacted, sometimes dramatically and adversely, depending on the route taken.

An interested team of stakeholders was needed to wade through the various challenges, discuss the pros and cons, and reach consensus on the best path to take, if indeed a path even existed. The Commission on the Study of Learning Time was formed to accomplish this task. As one member of the group wisely stated early on,

“Even if we go through this whole process and end up with no changes,  
that will be what is best,  
because we will have gone through a comprehensive process  
with a lot of smart people.”

Fortunately, we have identified an option that provides major and minor benefits, while limiting adverse effects.

### **Commission on the Study of Learning Time (COTSOLT)**

With the evidence overwhelmingly pointing to the benefits of providing world language instruction as early as possible, COTSOLT was established to help wrestle with the monumental challenges of such an endeavor. We had to determine if it was even possible

to design a workable proposal, while also identifying the benefits, drawbacks, and unknowns (to the extent that is even possible) that would inevitably emerge.

The Commission began its work in the fall of 2011, meeting on the following dates:

September 22, 2011

November 2, 2011

November 30, 2011

February 1, 2012

Its charge was to...

uncover, understand, and articulate the complexity associated with adding time to the school day.

The scope of work included brainstorming ideas, asking questions, uncovering potential potholes, seeking feedback from various stakeholders, and identifying potential solutions.

Five subcommittees were formed to explore various questions that had been identified as crucial to completing our charge. Their work was completed between the dates of the full Commission's meetings. A summary of each subcommittee's findings follows.

### **Community Impact Subcommittee**

Many students are involved in after school activities. We felt it was prudent to ask pertinent organizations for input on how an extended elementary day might impact their programming. We sought input from several groups covering many different types of activities, including hockey, soccer, aquatics, dance, football, basketball, baseball, YMCA, religious education, and Northbrook Park District. Overwhelmingly, the responses came back that the organizations felt there would be little or no impact on their programming.

### **Comparable Schools Subcommittee**

One aspect of our study focused on comparable schools in the area. We specifically wanted to know when they started and ended school and what types of special area classes, such as art, music, and world language, they offered (see Appendix E). Currently our 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade students are in school the least amount of time (six hours and 20 minutes) of any of the comparables. Five of the eight districts surveyed offer some level of world language for elementary students.

### **Transportation Subcommittee**

The District has been bidding bus transportation services with three local school districts for many years. This has provided each of our districts with additional buying power. Since the last bid, two of the four districts, and possibly three of the four, will have made

major changes to their original bus routes. We are exploring whether or not it is time to rebid services for the 2012-13.

District 28's bus transportation routes have been designed as double-runs. This arrangement means, for the morning, any particular bus will pick up NBJH students and then go back out to pick up elementary students. For dismissal, the bus first picks up at an elementary school, transports children home, and then returns to NBJH for a second run. This system works only if elementary and jr. high start and end times are sufficiently staggered.

Adding time to the elementary day would necessitate single-run service, meaning more busses would be needed but for a shorter time period. One option explored was to create kindergarten through grade 8 routes, instead of segregated elementary and jr. high routes. Due to the fact that a combined K-8 bus would need to drop off and pick up at two schools, it was deemed not a viable option for almost all of the District's routes.

Two benefits emerge if we use the single-run bus system, which would address current logistical issues. The first deals with Meadowbrook School, which has been dismissing 5-6 minutes early in order to load busses and get them on the road. If Meadowbrook does not do this, these busses are prohibitively late in arriving at NBJH for dismissal.

The second logistical issue deals with transporting elementary band and orchestra students from NBJH after morning rehearsals to their home schools. At times, these students are late for the start of school, as they wait at NBJH for busses to return from their last route. Single-run service will enable busses to be waiting at NBJH for the students to be dismissed, instead of the students waiting for busses to arrive.

The District has presented the single-route option to the bus company and asked how this would impact transportation costs. The bus company is still working on our request. As noted above, it may be time for a rebidding of services.

**UPDATE: After this report was presented, the District's Bus Company has since indicated the proposed change to the elementary day will result in no additional transportation costs.**

### **Scheduling Subcommittee**

One of the last subcommittees to meet was Scheduling. Their task was to take the parameters laid out for lengthening the day and determine if a viable student/teacher schedule could be built. This was by far the most complex undertaking of our journey. Their four primary questions and responses appear below.

**1. The first question: Can a schedule be built that provides for world language instruction 25-30 minutes per day, four to five times per week?**

The Answer: Yes

- 5 days per week for 30 minutes can be done.
- No efficiency is created by changing to 25 minutes.
- 4 days per week allows for some additional instructional minutes for other subjects.
- This requires 2 FTE teachers at MB and GB and, minimally, 1.6 FTE teachers at WM.

**2. The second question: Can a schedule be built that adds 30-45 minutes to the student day?**

Answer: 30 minutes – No  
35 - 45 minutes – Yes

- 40 minutes is the ideal amount of time to provide maximum benefit.
- 45 minutes only adds a minimal benefit academically.
- 35 minutes impacts academic time, but potentially minimally.
- 30 minutes is not feasible to provide the needed instruction.

**3. The third question: Can a schedule be built that eliminates or minimizes “dead time?”**

“Dead time” is the time in the schedule where, for example, a class is returning from a special, such as art, and then has only eight minutes until lunch. While teachers make the best of the eight minutes, it is undesirable.

Answer: Eliminates “dead time” – No  
Minimizes “dead time” – Yes

- The mock schedule allows some minimization of “dead time” but cannot eliminate it.
- These short time slots are created due to the priorities placed on certain scheduling requests.

**4. The fourth question: Can a schedule be built that provides common plan time for teachers?**

Answer: Yes – for classroom teachers

- 50 minutes, 2 times per week are in the mock schedule.

- Requires 2 FTE world language teachers at each building.
- Cannot be guaranteed from year to year for all grade levels in certain circumstances (example – 5 sections of one grade).
- Does not provide common plan time to specialists and has some logistical pieces to work through.

### **Other Features of the Proposed Schedule Change**

- Provides for large instructional blocks for literacy with minimal interruptions (2-hour blocks) with opportunities to write daily.
- Supports the 6 weeks on/off model for science and social studies.
- Provides planning time for PE within the day.
- Maintains grade levels together for specials to minimize transitions and provides transition time, in most cases.
- In the 40-minute model, there is potential to lengthen lunch/recess to 45 minutes, from the current 40-minute allocation.
- By using 4 days per week for world language, an additional 30 minutes of instructional time could be added per week.
- Traveling teacher schedules would need to be reworked (already necessary for science).
- Can add 15 minutes to each Kindergarten session.

### **Survey Subcommittee**

The survey subcommittee was tasked with creating an online survey for both parents and staff members. The goal was to provide the specifics of a program and ask whether they would prefer the status quo, the new option, or had no opinion.

The parent and faculty explanation letters and surveys are located in Appendix F.

The survey opened on Monday, February 13, and closes at Noon on February 16. Results will be compiled and presented to the Board at the February 16 Committee of the Whole meeting.

**UPDATE: The staff and parent survey results are included in Appendix H. A summary follows:**

### **Parent Survey Results**

**We received responses from 251 parent households who were e-mailed a survey to complete. Of the parents who responded, we learned the following:**

- **83.7% would prefer to lengthen the school day and add world language starting in first grade,**
- **12.7% would like to maintain the current day, and**
- **3.6% have no preference.**

We also asked parents about the impact of an early day on band and orchestra participation. Specifically, we asked if band and orchestra were to start 10-15 minutes earlier in the day to accommodate the expanded school day, would this scheduling affect your child's participation?

Of the parents responding, 50.4% said they do not have a child who participates in band or orchestra. Of the remaining parents:

- 38.3 % said starting 10-15 minutes earlier would not affect their child's participation,
- 10.1% said their child might be less likely to participate, and
- 1.2% said their child might be more likely to participate.

### Staff Survey Results

We e-mailed a survey to certified and support staff at each of the District's elementary schools. We received responses from 114 faculty and staff members. Of the 114 faculty and staff members who filled out the Staff Survey, we learned the following:

- 51.8% expressed a preference for lengthening the school day and adding world language starting in first grade,
- 34.2% would like to maintain the current school day, and
- 14% have no preference.

## How Early Can Elementary School Begin?

In order to establish the start and end times of an expanded day, the Commission spent considerable time focusing on the before-school rehearsals of elementary band and orchestra. This aspect of our programming would establish the morning parameter of any revised elementary school day.

### **Elementary Band and Orchestra**

When discussing an earlier start to the elementary day, of primary concern was the morning rehearsal time for band and orchestra for third, fourth, and fifth grades. District 28 has one of the most highly regarded music programs around, and it was the intent of the Commission to ensure there would be no adverse effects on the program.

Consultation with the Music Department focused on how early the program could begin without having a deleterious impact on participation.

While there is no way to definitively make this determination, the experience and expertise of the staff were tapped to identify a start time of 7:45 a.m., meaning students would need to be at rehearsal by 7:30 a.m. The greatest impact would be on 3<sup>rd</sup> grade orchestra and 4<sup>th</sup> grade band and orchestra, which currently begin at 8:00 a.m. with arrival at 7:50 a.m.

We believe that if elementary rehearsals end at 8:15 a.m., students will have an appropriate amount of time to board busses and arrive at their school before or very close to 8:30 a.m. It was the consensus of the Elementary Principals that even if the music students were two to three minutes late two or three days per week, most of the school would still be settling into their classrooms and there would be no loss of instructional time. Thus the earliest possible start time was set at 8:30 a.m.

### **Known Unknowns**

While “known unknowns” seems oxymoronic, there are some items where we are unsure of the impact of on at least two areas: the NBJH French program and transportation costs.

Currently, world language instruction begins in fifth grade with students having a choice between French and Spanish. If, in fact, the District moves ahead with Spanish beginning in first grade, with French not available until sixth grade, the question remains, “What will happen to the enrollment in the French program at NBJH?” This is a legitimate question, which cannot be answered at this time.

However, there is some information that is helpful. First, we know any second language that children study early on will only help them with any other language that might be in their future. It is expected that a student who takes Spanish from age six through age ten, and then transfers to French in sixth grade will have an advantage over never having had intense world language study at an early age. Second, there are opportunities the District can take when a student reaches fourth and fifth grade that may include afterschool French club for those who may have an interest in taking that language in sixth grade. Regardless, we know that all students will be better off having begun a second language as early as possible.

A second “known unknown” is the cost of transportation services. This was discussed in greater detail beginning on page ten of this report.

### **The Viable Scenario**

After taking all of the variables into account, the Commission was able to identify one scenario that was superior to all others. The major points of this scenario are as follows:

1. Leave unchanged the NBJH world language program, as well as the start/end times of school.
2. Add Spanish language instruction in grades 1 – 5 for 30 minutes daily and eliminate 5<sup>th</sup> grade French.
3. Add 40 minutes to the elementary school day, resulting in a start time of 8:30 a.m. and an end time of 3:30 p.m.
4. Adjust Instrumental Music rehearsals so that instruction begins at 7:45 a.m.

## **Impacts**

1. Four additional world language teachers would be needed, bringing the total to two for each building. Annual cost is estimated at \$275,000 - \$300,000 per year or roughly 1% of the district's total budget.
2. Adjust bus transportation routes from a 2-runs-per-bus schedule to a 1-run-per-bus schedule.
3. Although the kindergarten day does not have to be lengthened, it may be adjusted in order to add 15 minutes to each session, a.m. and p.m. Administrators will be meeting with the kindergarten teachers to discuss this opportunity in detail.
4. Elementary Learning Team time would be adjusted. Instead of occurring prior to student arrival, it will occur while students are in session. Additionally, this necessitates a reduction from two one-hour sessions per week to two 50-minute sessions per week.
5. Lunch-recess would be expanded from 40 minutes to 45 minutes, addressing many parental concerns that children do not have enough time to eat lunch.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The processes that have brought us to this point have been comprehensive in nature and thoughtful in approach. We have utilized the experience and expertise of all stakeholders and have sought wide participation by surveying parents/community members, staff members, and former students. While the challenges associated with this undertaking were extremely complex, a workable solution has been identified should world language study be expanded. While doing so produces numerous benefits, there are always some changes that must take place in order for any new practice to be put in place. Some of these changes are benign, while others require some adjustments to current customs and habits. The final question remains: "Are the reported trade-offs acceptable given the proposed benefits that will begin accruing?"