

Foreign Language Program Review
March, 2014



Department Philosophy

The philosophy of the Foreign Language Department is to prepare all of our students with foreign language skills and intercultural expertise so that they may function successfully in today's globalized society and economy. This overarching premise supports the mission of Hingham Public Schools "... to provide challenging and comprehensive educational programs in a safe and supportive environment, **enabling all students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for success as local and global citizens.**" It is imperative that a student's education include an emphasis on acquiring both proficiency in a second language and also knowledge about its culture in order to be able to function as a productive member of society.

There are certain underlying principles to this philosophy including but not limited to:

- Increasing global interdependence which necessitates the ability to communicate in a language other than English.
- Proficiency in a foreign language that will provide in-depth understanding of a different culture's values and beliefs as well as respect for differences from our own culture.
- Proficiency in a foreign language that will promote a deeper understanding of one's own language and culture.
- Latin students acquire an in-depth awareness of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the English language.

As stated in the **Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century** published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages:

"Possession of the linguistic and cultural insights which come with foreign language study will be a requisite for life as a citizen in the worldwide neighborhood. "

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages states:

"Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United

States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped 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. “

Linguistic proficiency combined with cultural knowledge will enable students to interact in a variety of personal and professional settings. Ultimately a citizen of the 21st century will find that effective communication based on knowledge of language and culture will be a vital life skill and the key to success and prosperity. As a department, we strive to educate our students to their highest level of linguistic potential so that they may become capable, responsible members of today’s fast paced, constantly changing world.

Department Goals

Our goal is to graduate students with the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills that allow them to communicate in languages other than English and to appreciate and understand other cultures.

To accomplish this goal, the program will focus on the five “C’s” as designated by both the National and State standards for foreign language learning. Endorsed by ACTFL, they provide the context in which our foreign language program has been developed. Students will know how, when and what to say, and to whom as they acquire communication skills.

1. Communication
Students will communicate in languages other than English
2. Cultures
Students will gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures
3. Connections
Students will connect with other disciplines and acquire information
4. Comparisons
Students will develop insight in the nature of language and culture
5. Communities
Students will participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world

In addition, foreign language education develops critical thinking skills and expands one’s educational experience by connecting with other disciplines through the study of geography, history, current events, literature, music and art. With the five “Cs”, students develop an interdisciplinary perspective while gaining intercultural understanding.

Moreover, the program will work to inculcate a respect for diverse views and backgrounds of others as stated in the Hingham Public Schools mission.

Department Objectives

In order to achieve the stated goals, the objectives of the Foreign Language Department are:

- To provide students with the necessary skills in written and spoken form to be able to communicate in a foreign language both within and beyond the school settings.
- To provide students with the cultural knowledge of the language studied in order to gain an appreciation of the similarities and differences between our culture and the one being studied.
- To assist students in their ability to make connections between the language being studied and other academic disciplines as well as between the culture being studied and our own.
- To assist students to become life-long learners in language study.
- To meet the needs of diverse learning styles by utilizing a variety of instructional strategies.
- To develop the skills necessary to read Latin and to understand the contributions made by the Roman civilization to modern Western culture.

Benefits of Studying a Foreign Language

Over the past several decades, dozens of research studies of students from kindergarten to grade 12 have proven that proficiency in a foreign language:

- Increases cognitive and general academic abilities
- Improves scores on aptitude tests, particularly SATs
- Leads to enhanced career opportunities
- Develops greater cognitive flexibility
- Enhances higher order thinking skills
- Results in improved performance on standardized tests
- Improves reading scores in children with average and below average intelligence
- Develops better listening skills and sharper memories
- Reinforces learning in other disciplines
- Develops superior problem solving skills
- Leads to more tolerance and appreciation for people whose backgrounds and traditions are different than our own
- Results in life-long benefits from the linguistic and cultural proficiency

Instructional Strategies

With the premise that all students can be successful language and culture learners, the Foreign Language Department members employ a broad repertoire of teaching strategies in order to engage all students. Conducted primarily in the target language, classes are active, student-centered and performance based. Differentiated instruction maximizes the opportunities for all students to learn and to begin to communicate. At the elementary level, the teachers focus on a multi-sensory approach that incorporates audio, visual and manipulative materials with much repetition, review and reinforcement. Abundant use of songs, pictures, stories, basic synonyms and TPR (total physical response) creates a positive learning environment that engages all students. The students learn conversational phrases and expressions in context – a natural format on which to base communication and to develop both productive and receptive abilities.

At the middle school level, the teachers continue to differentiate instruction as they introduce grammar and linguistic structures. The students use a textbook that supports a more formal approach to language learning. They begin to present information both orally and in writing in the target language as they frequently work in pairs and small groups. They demonstrate an ability to use the spoken and written target language on a variety of topics. Level appropriate tasks and assignments enhance their linguistic and cultural understandings. In 8th grade, advanced learners are taught at a more accelerated pace. Enrichment activities, more difficult tasks and higher expectations are incorporated into the curriculum.

At the high school, the foreign language teachers conduct classes which continue to be active, student-centered and performance based. The teachers incorporate more reading and writing assignments while also providing many opportunities for individual and group communicative activities. This balanced approach of all 4 skills encourages students to become proficient in interpretive, interpersonal and presentational communication in the target language. Although English is occasionally necessary, the target language is the language of instruction. While the Latin teachers focus on some oral aspects of the language, they stress grammar, vocabulary development, and reading skills in their classes. Further, the use of technology is integrated into all levels of instruction. With its state of the art software, the language laboratory is used every period of every day, usually by 2 classes per block. AP classes occasionally can use the lab more than once per 7 day cycle. All of the teachers have worked diligently to learn the capabilities of the new software and to develop aural, oral and research exercises which are integrated into the curricula. In the lab, the students have access to a multitude of digital media as they strive to improve their oral and aural proficiencies.

Foreign language acquisition is cumulative in nature. The department members strive to support all students in their efforts to master linguistic proficiency and cultural knowledge.

Changes Since the 2009 Review

1. Expansion of Chinese

The Chinese courses offered at the high school continue to be well supported. With thanks to the teacher's efforts and ingenuity, the first and third years of language study are offered in alternate years to the second and fourth years. In addition, the teacher has developed an independent study curriculum for students motivated to complete a 5th year of the language. For the first time, the teacher is offering an AP Chinese course to a dozen students who elected to pursue this advanced level of study moving directly from Chinese III last year.

2. AP Courses

Much to our chagrin, the College Board canceled the French Literature exam four years ago. The AP French course now focuses on the Francophone culture and language in one year of study. Beginning this year, the AP Spanish Language and AP Spanish Literature courses will be offered independently of one another for 11th and 12th grade students. The AP Latin course is offered when there are a sufficient number of qualified students. The AP Chinese course is being taught for the first time this year.

3. Additional Staff

This year the HMS foreign language staff has been increased by a .8 position. Although class sizes are still too large, this addition has alleviated some of the pressures on overcrowding which significantly impedes foreign language teaching and learning.

4. High School Language Lab

The upgraded hardware and state of the art software which was purchased 3 years ago have significantly improved the smooth functioning of the language lab and greatly enhanced the learning experiences of all students. Prior to their acquisition, several carrels would malfunction at random on any given day resulting in only partial recordings of class oral assessments or AP exams.

This chronic unreliability caused great frustration and stress for staff and students alike. The hours for the lab coordinator were increased this year so that she will now be better able to assist and train staff as well as to monitor and support students. With her formidable computer knowledge and skills, she is still underutilized by the school district.

5. New Textbook Adoptions

A series of new Latin textbooks have been purchased to replace the ones which were more than 30 years old. In addition, the new texts have an on-line component enabling Latin classes to access a wealth of curricular and research support sites. The department is currently researching new textbook series for both French and Spanish. Readers for Chinese classes have also been purchased.

6. Spanish 1-A Class

This course has been added for 8th grade students at the middle school to accommodate those students who are new to Hingham; those who were not able to schedule a foreign language course prior to their final year at HMS; and those who need remedial instruction and reinforcement prior to completing the first year of language study. Students who take this course will move to Spanish 1-B in 9th grade and fulfill their graduation requirement upon successful completion of Spanish II in 10th grade.

7. AP Scores

The scores on the AP French and AP Spanish exams have continued to improve over the past four years. The teachers have attended AP workshops where they learn about the changes in the exam and become familiar with the new requirements and material. Their intense efforts and curricular modifications have resulted in outstanding scores which for the most part are far above the national and state averages. They are to be commended on their dedication.

Elementary School Foreign Language Program

The Spanish program in the 4 elementary schools is a modified sequential curriculum to teach students in grades one through five. The objective is to create a foundation from which students can develop, reinforce and refine communicative competency in listening, speaking, reading, writing and culture. Moreover, students acquire vocabulary that is appropriate and useful in their everyday environment. With a classroom dedicated to learning a second language and culture, each teacher is a specialist whose training has focused on elementary school foreign language instruction. Using a variety of instructional approaches including whole group, individual, and small groups/pairs, the teachers engage students using the four key methodologies: total physical response (TPR) which promotes the use of nonverbal communication in the acquisition of a second language; TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) which focuses on using high-frequency words; the natural approach which includes an extended period of listening, positive reinforcement, meaningful and effective communication in a non-threatening environment; and the use of cognates or words that are similar in both Spanish and English. The

teachers meet regularly to develop lesson plans and to collaborate on projects that are based on the curriculum. In addition, they pick a Hispanic cultural event to celebrate each year as well as develop activities for the celebration of World Language Week. The teachers coordinate assessments and the opportunities for integration of the foreign language curriculum with the regular elementary curriculum. Moreover, the elementary program is closely integrated into and vertically aligned with the rest of the HPS foreign language program. The Spanish teachers communicate regularly with the classroom teachers and parents via email, phone calls, letters home and school websites as appropriate.

In first and second grades, the students meet once per 6 day cycle in week one and two times per cycle in week two. This schedule alternates throughout the year. In grades three through five, students meet once every six days for 40 minutes. It is important to understand that the classes meet for the equivalent of 2 months each year. Therefore, in the aggregate, Spanish instruction in 1st grade through 5th grade is the equivalent of one year of Spanish instruction. Research has consistently proven that the benefits of second language study begun at an early age are far reaching and long lasting throughout an individual's life. There is a proven positive link between second language proficiency and cognitive ability resulting in improved overall school performance and superior problem-solving skills. Further, foreign language learners consistently outperform control groups in core subject areas on standardized tests – often significantly. Early second language study promotes achievement in English vocabulary and reading skills. Early foreign language learners have better listening skills, sharper memories and exhibit enhanced higher order thinking skills than monolingual students. Brains in elementary school aged children are more receptive to second language study than those of older students who begin learning another language later in their school careers. Consequently, they absorb and retain material in a more facile manner than older students. Foreign language learning at this level reinforces regular elementary curricula because it overlaps many basic concepts. However, it is critical to bear in mind that language acquisition is the most successful with repetition and increased time on task, which can be achieved only with additional class time.

Hingham Middle School Foreign Language Program

The middle school program is a more formal approach to foreign language learning. Students may continue with their study of the Spanish language and culture, or they may switch to French in 6th grade. Based on the National Standards for Foreign Language and the Massachusetts Foreign Language Curriculum Frameworks, the courses address all four language skills, speaking, listening, reading, writing as well as a focus on Spanish and Francophone cultures and customs. In 6th grade students may either continue with Spanish or switch to French. 6th grade students meet on alternate days for 47 minutes. 7th and 8th grade students meet daily for a 47 minute period. Qualified students in 8th grade may be taught in an advanced class. Textbooks are

introduced in 6th grade in both languages. Although not prescriptive, they do provide the structure for a more comprehensive approach to language learning in which students begin to read and write in the target language. Successful completion of the 7th and 8th grade curricula constitutes the first year of language study such that in 9th grade students are able to move directly into the second year of the language. Teachers continue to emphasize oral proficiency with a myriad of speaking activities and role – playing opportunities. The HMS curriculum is vertically aligned with both the elementary and high school programs. In addition, the HMS teachers collaborate closely on unit plans and assessments. A superb opportunity for 8th grade French students to use their language skills in an authentic setting is offered each spring with a 3 day trip to Quebec City. In the recent past, more than 30 students have participated each year accompanied by faculty and administrators.

Hingham High School Foreign Language Program

The high school foreign language program is a successful, well developed sequence of courses offered in four languages. Students arriving from the middle school may continue with the language which they have been studying for the past three years. In addition, they may switch to or add Latin or Chinese. Courses offered from the second through fifth years of language study are organized in both upper standard and advanced formats. The former focuses on reinforcement of skill acquisition at a deliberate pace. In a faster paced learning environment, the latter focuses on a more demanding set of expectations. All students have the opportunity to achieve a degree of proficiency in the four skills.

High school students are required to fulfill a graduation requirement of two years of successful completion of study of the same language. Since most colleges and universities prefer to see a minimum of three years, increasing numbers of students pursue language study as an elective in the 11th and 12th grade years. Unfortunately, in their senior year, many students face the dilemma of singleton courses in other disciplines meeting at the same time as singleton advanced language courses. AP courses are offered for qualified students in French language, Spanish language, Spanish literature, and for the first time this year Chinese. When there is sufficient enrollment, AP Latin is offered as well. Chinese I and Chinese III are offered in alternate years with Chinese II and Chinese IV or AP Chinese. There is more than sufficient demand for Chinese to be offered on a full time basis rather than the part-time basis as it currently exists.

Assessment in French, Spanish and Chinese focuses on proficiency and student performance. The emphasis is on students' demonstrations of what they can do with the language and what they know about its culture. Latin students are assessed on their reading comprehension and interpretation as well as on their insight into and analysis of the grammar and syntax.

Those students who opt to continue language study through their senior year greatly enhance both their college admissions prospects and their career options. Those who pursue language

study at the post-secondary level are regularly placed in 200 and 300 level college courses – a testament to the rigor and strength of our foreign language program.

Program Strengths

Highly Qualified Faculty

The success of the foreign language program in the Hingham public schools is directly related to the exceptional quality of the department members. The high degree of competency of these experienced, well-trained educators is the foundation for the outstanding results and achievements of students at all 3 levels. A group of consummate professionals, the foreign language teachers all possess a depth and breadth of knowledge of their subject matter which enhances the linguistic and cultural learning experiences of all of their students. Their energy, enthusiasm and creativity are evident in their classrooms every day. Close collaboration leads to engaging lessons and performance based assessments for all of their classes. Committed to excellence, they all work long hours during the school year and avail themselves of professional development opportunities during the summer in order to stay abreast of current research and innovative instructional strategies. The department members are regularly available for extra help before, during and after the school day. They review and amend the curricula annually, resulting in an extremely well organized vertical articulation of the program from the elementary schools through the high school.

Further, having embraced the use of technology in their teaching practices, they have developed creative activities which are integrated into the curricula through the use of Smart Boards and the language lab at the high school. All of them maintain high expectations both for themselves and also for their students – a testament to their exemplary professionalism and their dedication to their students and each other. Additionally, many are involved in the school community beyond the classroom. They serve as coaches, mentors, and club advisors. They organize trips to museums, plays and performances, as well as to authentic restaurants in Boston and New York. They organize and chaperone trips abroad. During the past four years, there have been 2 trips to France, 2 trips to Spain, 2 trips to China, 1 trip to Italy, 1 trip to Greece and annual trips to Quebec for 8th grade French students. There is no better form of authentic assessment than observing a student who is speaking a second language in another culture. These first hand experiences meet all 5 “C’s”; communication, culture, connection, comparison and community. Gratifying for the teachers, such a trip is exhilarating for the students.

Curriculum Alignment

One of the very real strengths of the entire program is its vertical articulation, referenced in the prior paragraph. The close coordination of each grade's curriculum with the next level and also between and among schools results in the smooth functioning of the department, the appropriate accountability of the teachers and the sequential learning for the students. Exceptionally well organized, it is reviewed annually by the department to insure that it continues to provide a stable framework for teaching and course development. The teachers confer with each other both within a level and also at the next level to maintain the overall structure. This professional collegiality and respect is a huge asset in the successful functioning of the department each year. Having a grade 1 – 12 department director who oversees the staff and the curriculum is also instrumental for our continued success.

Language Lab

The state of the art software in the language lab at the high school is an extension of each foreign language classroom. Exercises and assessments which are administered there constitute an integral part of each language's curriculum and an essential tool for students to improve their oral proficiency in French, Spanish and Chinese or to practice grammar and reading skills in Latin. With 30 carrels, a master console and the new software, the lab affords every student the opportunity to listen to native speakers, record his/her own responses to situations, work in pairs or small groups, and learn about different cultures.

Foreign language textbooks including those used in Latin classes all have an on-line component. Students are each assigned a log-in password that allows them to access exercises which are linked to the chapter being studied in the text. The high school teachers have worked diligently over the past two years to learn the capabilities of the new software so that they can create new activities and assessments for their courses. Many have participated in workshops and webinars which are presented during the school year. All foreign language classes are scheduled in the lab at least once per 7 day cycle. In addition, with prior notification, the lab is available during study halls or after school to make up missed assignments or to do research.

With the department goal of developing oral proficiency, the lab is an essential component in foreign language instruction. As students record themselves individually or in small groups, the teacher can now monitor what they are saying in real time and provide immediate feedback to correct pronunciation or grammar. The same is true for short written activities such as simulated text messages in the target language.

The lab can be used in a myriad of ways: individual or group listening and speaking exercises; grammar and vocabulary review; internet research; cultural projects; power point and VID student presentations.

The lab coordinator performs an essential role. Not only does she oversee the daily mechanical functioning of the lab, she also schedules classes and make up work, supports the teachers in creating innovative, interactive exercises, and assists with the development of oral assessments. Importantly, she works closely both with Joe Andrews and Chester Technologies, the software vendor, for maintenance, trouble shooting and upgrades. She is an invaluable resource to the department and to the district. Fortunately, her hours were increased for the coming year so that she now is available 25 hours per week. The language lab at the new middle school will also afford a unique opportunity for the students to practice oral and listening skills as well as to access online resources in order to improve their linguistic and cultural competencies.

Classroom Technology

The use of technology has completely transformed foreign language instructional strategies over the past several years. All four elementary schools' foreign language classrooms have Smart Boards that are an integral part of each teacher's daily lessons. The middle school teachers either have LCD projectors or Smart Boards in their classrooms. Those with the latter have created exercises, activities, projects and assessments for each of their classes. In the new middle school building, all foreign language teachers will have Smart Boards in their rooms. This year six of the foreign language classrooms at the high school have Smart Boards with the plan to add four more next year. A class that meets in a room without a Smart Board must be taught completely differently from a different section of the same course that meets in a room that does have a Smart Board. This lack of technology creates an inequitable learning environment for the students and additional work for the teacher.

Election of Higher Level Courses

Continuing a trend that began several years ago, many juniors and seniors are continuing their study of foreign language in the higher level elective courses after they have satisfied the high school graduation requirement. They recognize that most colleges and universities prefer to see three years of language study rather than two years. Equally important is the understanding that proficiency in a foreign language and culture is a valuable asset on a résumé. Many more career options are available to those who possess this linguistic and cultural knowledge. Thus, the number of upper classmen who continue with foreign language study after completing the graduation requirement continues to grow every year.

AP Scores

The number of students receiving a score of 4 or 5 on the AP language exams continues to increase. This improvement attests to the strength of the foreign language program and to the superb quality of the teachers. Our AP students score consistently higher than the state and national averages.

Program Concerns

Chinese Program

The Chinese program is still only part time. Although over the past couple of years it has increased from a .4 to a .8 position, there is significant demand every year to have a Chinese I course offered. The teacher is superb and has been nationally recognized as an outstanding resource in the teaching of the Chinese language and culture. Further, minimal proficiency in the language is only achieved after a significant increase in the number of contact hours of instruction versus the Romance languages.

Class Size

Until this current year, foreign language class sizes at the middle school were unacceptably high. It is not possible for any teacher to focus on communicative skills and oral proficiency in a classroom with upwards of 30 students. Pursuit of these goals requires consistent checking, correcting and reinforcing of all students by the teacher throughout the class. This kind of necessary support is impossible with large class sizes. Efficient learning is severely impeded. The addition of a .8 Spanish position at the middle school this year is sincerely appreciated. Consequently, class sizes are reduced to far more productive, manageable numbers. It is hoped that this new position will be retained in future years.

Lack of Common Planning Time

The lack of common planning time at the middle school significantly hinders the ability of the teachers to collaborate and to develop common assessments – a requirement of the new teacher evaluation system. The teachers would like to create common assessments for each term, grade and level for every course. In the past, one of the most valuable characteristics of the foreign language program at the high school has been the scheduled common planning time for teachers of the same languages. However, with increased class numbers, this is not always possible. It is fervently hoped that it will be added back into the schedule.

Future Directions

FLES

The elementary program as it is currently structured provides minimal exposure to students once every 6 days. In other words, it is, in essence, an exploratory program. ACTFL recommends that FLES classes be taught three to five times a week for 30 – 40 minutes per class. Although this introduction provides a base, increased class time will reap substantial rewards in terms of the students' oral skills and cultural knowledge. Further, there will be ancillary benefits for other disciplines in terms of reading, writing, problem solving and linguistic comprehension. The research is incontrovertible on this point. Children who study a foreign language beginning at a young age have higher levels of cognitive development earlier than those children who do not. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this report, the long term benefits of early introduction to foreign language study provide a compelling rationale for expanding our program. In addition, it is a specific request to expand the elementary level exploratory program to one in which students meet with their teachers three times per week or on alternate days. Further, it is a request to restore French to the elementary program. The success of such an initiative will be readily apparent on standardized test results and in language capability when the students enter middle school.

Chinese Program

With significant demand to offer a Chinese I course every year, it is strongly recommended that the Chinese program become full time. In other words, the current teacher will be 1.0 rather than .8. The impact of the Chinese economy on our own and indeed, the international economy at large, will continue to increase in the coming decades. With a mission of preparing our students to become productive members of a global society, it is incumbent upon us as professional educators to prepare to our best ability as many students as possible who want to study the Chinese language and culture. The current structure of our program does not maximize that opportunity for half of our Chinese language learners.

Interdisciplinary Coordination

It is the intention of the Foreign Language Department to explore the creation of an interdisciplinary approach to certain courses in collaboration with other departments. At the elementary school level, foreign language and culture might be coordinated with segments of the social studies curriculum. At the middle school, they might be coordinated with segments of the social studies and English curricula. At the high school, they might be coordinated with the foregoing as well as with the courses offered by the Music and Art departments. Some overlap

exists already on an informal basis. However, a more structured approach will provide insight and depth to student learning in a more authentic format than currently exists.

Community Outreach

The support of the community for the foreign language program has been crucial to its success. In order to foster an even better appreciation for what we do as a department, we would like to expand our outreach to the community in some more visible ways at each level. For instance, the elementary schools might hold Spanish spelling bees in the spring. The middle school might hold a “Foreign Language Night” where students would present some of their linguistic and cultural accomplishments. The high school might present skits, increase the number of foreign language movie nights, and invite community members with links to different cultures to make presentations to the student body. These efforts, in whatever format they develop, will enhance communication and collaboration with the entire Hingham community.

Conclusion

The foreign language department continues to strive to support the mission and expectations of the school district. Our department works diligently to develop content and knowledge to enhance the students’ communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving capacities as well as their respect for different cultures and heritages. Indeed, the ability to communicate in another language and understand its culture is an indispensable asset in a globally interdependent society in which we are all connected. We are currently doing an excellent job and look forward to the expansion of our programs in the years to come.