



## In Other Words

Remember foreign languages? Apparently that term has itself become, well, *foreign*. In a nod to the increased value we place on respecting all cul-

tures and in an effort to be more inclusive, we now speak of *world languages*.

At all grade levels, the Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) District provides a variety of approaches to world languages. At the elementary level, 56 schools offer instruction in either French or Spanish. French, Spanish, or Latin is available in 13 middle schools. At the high school level, nearly 12,000 students are engaged in the study of these three languages plus German, Japanese, Chinese, or American Sign Language. Spanish courses also are offered through JCPS*eSchool*, which is especially helpful for students whose serious illnesses or injuries have placed them on home instruction.

Most language scholars concur that the best and quickest way to learn a language is through full-time immersion. Through this method, a person spends the entire day for several months or longer not only studying the language in a formal fashion but also being exposed informally to the language in everyday situations and not hearing any language other than the one being learned. This is the way a child learns a native tongue. Realistically, such an approach is outside the realm of most public school settings. However, Hawthorne Elementary School offers an exciting program called dual-language immersion, in which classes are composed of both native English speakers and native Spanish speakers. Half of the day's instruction is presented in each language, and the students assist each other in learning both languages.

In most other JCPS schools, students

study a world language an average of one to five hours per week, with instruction being provided at the elementary level by a native-speaking bilingual associate instructor and at the middle and high school levels by a certified language teacher (who oftentimes is also a native speaker). In a new program being piloted this year at eight schools, primary-level students rely upon the use of videotapes and manipulative materials to gain an initial exposure to Spanish. The district also is studying the variety of world language offerings in our middle schools to determine if greater consistency is needed in order to provide all students with an exploratory experience and/or to lay a firmer foundation for language studies at the high school level.

While many students, by studying a language over a number of years, do achieve a degree of spoken fluency, there are additional goals that also are worth noting.

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***World languages offer an excellent means of bridging social, cultural, economic, and political gaps.***

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Students gain knowledge and an understanding of other cultures, expanding their views of the world and generating an appreciation for the customs of other lands. They also develop deeper insights into their own language and culture as they compare and contrast the practices and traditions of other countries.

Through close attention to the district's *Curriculum and Assessment Maps*, world language teachers can collaborate with teachers of other subject areas. For example, they can enhance students' performance in social studies, science, and arts and humanities by addressing the inventors, explorers, artists, history, and geography of other countries and eras. Even at the elementary level, research studies have shown a positive correlation between the

study of languages and students' academic achievement in such subjects as mathematics and language arts.

Probably one of the most rewarding experiences that students have is the opportunity to apply their emerging language skills in real-life settings. JCPS, with its growing population of students from non-English language backgrounds (the number now exceeds 4,300), represents a rich community resource. Over the course of their JCPS careers, students of world languages typically have access to numerous native speakers among their classmates. Thus, they can hone their speaking and listening skills during classroom interactions, as well as through casual conversations in the hallways, cafeterias, and locker rooms.

So, whether the students' goals are to become fluent in another language or to be more proficient in their own, to learn the nuances of another culture or to understand the roots of American customs, to gain a competitive edge in the job market or to communicate more freely with a neighbor, world languages have a role to play in school and in society. As society becomes more global, there is a need for individuals to expand their skills. World languages offer an excellent means of bridging social, cultural, economic, and political gaps. Let's encourage students to take full advantage of the many language-learning experiences that our schools provide. It would be unfortunate indeed if our students were to regard the study of world languages as something that is foreign to them.

*Stephen Daeschner*

—Stephen Daeschner  
Superintendent

Jefferson County Public Schools