

## **BOARD-APPOINTED STUDY COMMITTEE'S REPORT TO THE WESTFORD BOARD**

**December 7, 2009**

**CHARGE:** The Committee studying “the desirability and capacity to offer a World Languages/World Culture program to Westford Students in some or all grades K–5” is requested to meet as necessary to address the following issues, and to deliver a written Committee report and presentation to the Westford School Board not later than December 7, 2009. It is the Board’s interest to learn through the Committee’s work about established research, best practice, and examples from other school districts on this topic. The Committee is encouraged to enlist available resources and experts to assist its work. The board has not provided a budget to the Committee. The specific interests of the board include:

- Should world languages/culture be formally offered to Westford Elementary School students not now receiving such instruction?
- If so, what grades should be included?
- If so, which language(s)/culture(s) should be included?
- If so, what should be the frequency of such instruction?
- What are the implications of any such recommendation (costs, staffing requirements, materials, scheduling, etc.)?
- Other topics thought relevant by the committee

**RECOMMENDATIONS and RATIONALE:** The Committee’s collective research reveals that successful world language programs take into consideration:

- brain and linguistic research;
- developmental instructional best practices for language study;
- the benefits of language study on achievement in other content areas;
- technological advancements in language study; and
- the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners.

By incorporating varied instructional strategies, up-to-date technologies, formative assessments for communicative competency, and opportunities to participate in multi-culturally, authentic immersion experiences, public schools can offer a program of study that prepares students not only for advancement in language proficiency at the secondary and post secondary level, but also prepares students to meet future challenges in a global society. The study of world languages and cultures facilitates mutuality and understanding among the world’s peoples, expands post secondary learning and workforce choices, and enhances student performance in other essential skills such as vocabulary development and reading proficiency. The study of a target world language allows students to recognize their own distinct culture and language and enriches the learning community as well as the larger community experience. Based on our study, the Committee recommends that instituting an elementary World Language program of language and cultural study be an integral part of Westford’s core curriculum for all students. (See attachment for synthesis of research.)

**PROPOSED VISION FOR WORLD LANGUAGE STUDY IN WESTFORD:** World Language is the study of languages and cultures. Implementing such a K-8 program in Westford supports the transformation goal of shifting the core curriculum and program of studies to a 21<sup>st</sup> century design in order to prepare students for global citizenship. Contemporary foreign language study exemplifies such a shift and can provide Westford students with the opportunity to develop capacity for inter-linguistic and inter-cultural communication. Through such a program, Westford students can acquire knowledge of the structure and function of languages and cultures. A K-8 seamless study of a target language can provide Westford

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students with greater access to the knowledge and skills necessary to function in a global community, marketplace, and workplace. Such a program can ostensibly "bring the world to Westford."

Toward that end, the vision for the Westford program is to develop linguistically literate students who are part of a multinational community and who:

- communicate across cultures in a way that makes ideas and information understandable;
- develop insight into one's own language and culture;
- develop a greater capacity for cultural sensitivity;
- recognize language learning as a lifelong process;
- acquire new information/content;
- make connections with other disciplines;
- participate socially and economically in a national, multinational, and international community;
- demonstrate familiarity with contributions of other cultures; and
- understands and values diversity. (See endnote)

**PROGRAM PROPOSAL:** The Committee recommends that the Westford Board consider offering a World Language program in grades K-4 with French as the target language. Focusing on a seamless learning experience in the target language along an articulated curriculum continuum will allow for increased and facilitated opportunities for both fluency and meaningful application of the language. Such learning experiences should be relevant to other curriculum areas to the greatest extent practicable.

The Committee recommends that the Westford Board consider implementing a model for elementary second language study that emphasizes oral skills (utilizing partial immersion techniques in the target language), reinforces literacy through a gradual introduction of writing and reading in the target language, and focuses on 21<sup>st</sup> century dimensions of language study by building background knowledge in world geography and world culture.

In addition, the Committee recommends that the Westford Board consider that the over-all design of the K-8 program utilize available technological resources in Westford, as well as other exploratory techniques, to introduce curricularly aligned vocabulary of other languages beyond the target language. Exploratory and reinforcing opportunities for world language study should also reflect opportunities for thematic integration (classroom curriculum alignments or school-wide focus), project-based learning experiences, and community partnerships that explore and engage community resources.

The Committee further recommends that the Westford Board consider framing the program in such a way that allows for the potential integration of Spanish into the K-8 world language curricular program, if and when the Board determines such a programmatic shift would be feasible. The committee's research supports this potential transition.

The Committee recommends that the frequency of language study reflect the equivalent of weekly study for each K-4 class for as many consecutive weeks as possible within a 36 week school year.

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The Committee recognizes that language skills and cultural knowledge are essential to a student's intellectual and social growth, and promote life-long learning. Because acquiring a second language is time-consuming, the Committee recommends that language classes in grades K-4 be scheduled in a way that reallocates currently scheduled learning time to 1) maximize the connection to aligned curriculum study, 2) allow for classroom teachers to participate in the program to the greatest extent practicable (considering other school-based improvement initiatives), and 3) facilitate for the greatest continuity of learning opportunities for students.

**FEASIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY:** The Committee recommends that the Westford Board consider an increase of the current foreign language FTE teaching allocation from .61 to .72 (at a cost of approximately \$7,069). Such a reallocation of FTE within the Westford PreK-8 educational program would allow for the following scheduling of the Westford World Language Program in alignment with the program proposal:

- Grades K-2 : 25 minutes, 1 day each week, for 36 weeks;
- Grades 3-4: 30 minutes, 1 day each week, for 36 weeks;
- Grades 5-6 : 45 minutes, 2 days per week, for 36 weeks; and
- Grades 7-8: 45 minutes, 5 days per week, for 36 weeks.

(Please refer to the proposed FY 11 budget for further feasibility implications of this proposal.)

### Endnotes:

- **Fairbanks Alaska North Star Borough School District World Languages Curriculum** (introductory statements adapted for *Recommendation and Rationale* section of the report)
- **World Languages Curriculum, Michigan Department of Education** (information on “linguistically literate” students in *Proposed Vision for World Language Study in Westford* section)