

Unapproved Minutes

District Foreign Language Committee Meeting
Thursday, January 10, 2008
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.
Humiston Building, Meredith

MINTUES

Meeting called to order by Dan Cunningham at 4:05 p.m.

In attendance:

- Corey Henderson (Foreign Language Teacher)
- Nancy Stetson (Foreign Language Teacher)
- Meg Bedford (Foreign Language Teacher)
- Kelly Cox (Sandwich parent)
- Dan Cunningham (School Board member)
- John Hansen (Sandwich Principal)
- Phil McCormack (Superintendent of Schools)
- Kathleen Burke (ILES Elementary Teacher)
- Nicole Ainsworth (ILHS Student)
- Lily Newton (ILHS Student)

Mr. Cunningham asked all in attendance to introduce themselves. He then indicated that we would try to establish what our overall goal should be for the committee.

Mr. Hansen passed along comments from Sandwich parent Lobin Frizzell who could not attend. She asked that we consider focusing on the foreign language needs in grades kindergarten through grade 7 since there is already a foreign language program in place from grade 8 through high school.

Ms. Stetson indicated that the high school foreign language teachers concur with this idea of focusing on earlier grades.

Ms. Ainsworth thought the concepts covered in a level A-1 course could be taught at younger ages.

Ms. Newton said that she felt that continuation of a language was important, so whatever language is offered at the K-7 levels should also be offered at the high school.

Ms. Burke agreed with Ms. Newton and also stated that additional languages should be offered at the high school level in addition to a continuation of the language offered K-7.

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Mr. Hansen reported on some information gather by Ms. Frizzell regarding the language program at Moultonboro Central School. Both French and Spanish are offered beginning in grade 3, two times a week for forty minutes each session.

Dr. McCormack wondered what material we would not cover in Inter-Lakes if we added a language at grade 3. Ms. Burke noted that other elementary teachers have asked the same thing, but some also believe it can be integrated. For instance, in math learning to count by fives is taught through repetition. Students could count in two languages perhaps. Mr. Hansen inquired what our goal would be if we were to institute a two day a week program. He noted that he would be more comfortable with a program that has a goal of fluency, rather than an introduction to a culture.

Ms. Bedford noted that without complete immersion in a language, a student will not become truly fluent anyway, so the amount of time per week is not really the issue. There was further discussion about what “fluency” meant – Ms. Bedford felt that most people think of fluency as being able to carry on a conversation.

Dr. McCormack urged the group to focus on the task of the committee, and whatever is decided, needs to be productive, efficient and effective pedagogy for the instruction of foreign language. He challenged the foreign language teachers to continue to help the rest of the committee members with the pedagogy.

Ms. Newton noted that she began Spanish instruction in the first grade in another school district. She said the basics she learned in the early grades helped her when she took Spanish in grade 7. Ms. Stetson noted that a goal of an elementary language program should be to instill a passion to continue study of the language.

Dr. McCormack shared some information about SAU 29 in the Keene area. There are seven separate districts. A few started foreign language instruction in kindergarten; a few others waited until grade 5; one district had no foreign language before high school. He remarked about the Wells Memorial School in Harrisville, NH, where there is a comprehensive Spanish program, taught from Kindergarten through sixth grade.

[The students receive approximately 40 minutes of instruction per day Monday through Thursday. The program goals are to have students complete an equivalent of a Spanish level I high school course. As the program is largely oral based, students can expect to be highly conversant by its conclusion. These goals are realized through songs, games, poems, as well as traditional vocabulary building. – Italicized words taken from Wells Memorial School website after this meeting.]

Dr. McCormack noted that a problem was that when these students arrived in grade 7, they could speak rather fluently, but had few skills in writing Spanish. There were several issues with the foreign language program in that middle

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school due to the different skill levels of the students from various sending schools. These issues tended to smooth out by the time students reached high school, where there were more foreign language course offerings.

Mr. Cunningham asked that if fluency is not a realistic goal, then what should the goal be? Mr. Cunningham asked the students what they want(ed) from their foreign language study.

Ms. Newton inquired what are the outcome expectations of a level 1A language course in the Inter-Lakes School District and could that help us to develop a goal? Dr. McCormack noted that most of the SAU 29 students who had foreign language instruction in the elementary grades were able to enter a second year high school course. Ms. Newton said that she wanted to truly comprehend writing and speaking in another language. Ms. Ainsworth agreed, and emphasized being able to communicate well with others.

Ms. Bedford noted that most college bound students complete a level 3 course.

Mr. Hansen said that one goal of a K-7 program would be to take advantage of the elasticity of the brain at a young age. Students seem to have an easier time picking up a language, often without an accent, if they begin instruction at an early age. Ms. Ainsworth concurred that lots of what she remembers in school is from her elementary education.

Ms. Burke noted that the study of a foreign language might also help in learning English. She also suggested a goal for an elementary program would be to complete the equivalent of a level 1A high course by the end of grade 7.

Dr. McCormack noted that the district's current foreign language model allows students to complete a level 4 course. Ms. Bedford said that actually they can go as high as a level 5 course. It is more of a scheduling issue that limits students. Dr. McCormack noted that scheduling is a problem at the elementary level as well. What will be eliminated to make room for language? Ms. Newton said she would like to know more about how Moultonboro does it. Ms. Cox mentioned that it had been suggested at the first foreign language forum that time might be found during the snack time. Ms. Burke shared how excited her students are when a foreign exchange student visits her room and teaches the students some basic words and phrases.

Ms. Bedford noted that previous foreign language committees had established goals of offering an exploratory program at the elementary level. Apparently this idea ran up against the problem of cost and the instructional time to do it.

Ms. Burke noted that a foreign language program should at least meet the prerequisites for all students to attend college.

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Ms. Stetson offered a goal for the committee to consider. As the meeting progressed, her goal evolved into the following: **All students should be comfortable with a foreign language and travel; respect other cultures, traditions and customs; develop basic conversation and aural listening abilities of the target language; and complete a level 1B course by the end of grade 8.**

Ms. Newton noted that by the time students finish grade 7, they should have mastered the basics of a level 1A course. We would then offer a level 1B course in grade 8.

Ms. Cox inquired about requiring students to take courses, such as foreign language, that prepare students for college. Dr. McCormack did not necessarily agree that this was required for all students, such as those who might choose to enter a trade, for instance, as a mechanic or electrician. Ms. Ainsworth noted that some of her friends wish they had been told more forcefully when they were in 8th and 9th grade that taking a foreign language in high school is necessary for admittance to many four year colleges.

Next meeting date was set for Thursday, January 31, 2008 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. at the Humiston Building (SAU 2) in Meredith.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,
John Hansen