

## **Starting an Elementary Level Foreign Language Program**

### Illinois School Code and Illinois Learning Standards

§105 ILCS 5/34-1.01. Intent Sec. 34-1.01. makes it a goal of schooling to assure "that students are better prepared to compete in the international market place by having foreign language proficiency and stronger international studies." K-12 foreign languages are included as Goals 28-30 in the [Illinois Learning Standards](#).

### Educational issues

Beyond all the obvious benefits of an active, internationally competent professional life for Illinois graduates, learning of additional languages while very young expands learning capacity and helps to assure future academic progress. In fact, since all students, regardless of social background, start a new language at the same point, this can also mean educational equity. [Click for district planning rationale](#).

### Planning

The strongest predictor of long-term program success is thorough planning and involvement by all constituents, including corporations and the community. If a district cannot allow itself three or four years to assure solid support of the goal to teach foreign languages in all elementary schools, it surely needs to go through all the stages. The district also needs to reach out to a college level teacher preparation program to assure that professionally prepared teachers are available when needed. With support by an expert consultant, planners need to convene groups, possibly including cooperating districts, in order to implement all steps of the planning sequence. The firm commitment to continuation of study of the language(s) beyond elementary school must be part of planning, in order to facilitate the long sequences of study known to result in professional level language command required for the envisioned employment opportunities. [Click for a case study](#).

### Year or Level One

1. The planning group must
  - a. study a variety of models of language program implementation from comparable school districts across the nation and
  - b. have a parent component.
2. The group needs to get the widest possible local input to decide on the language(s) to be taught in each participating school. Considerations include opportunities for continuation in high school/other accessible solutions. This is also the year for awareness/PR events to develop readiness in participating K-8 schools, among their teachers, throughout the district(s) and the communities.
3. At the participating university, a matched number of teacher candidates may need to be recruited for preparation to teach and be certified in the desired languages in K-8. Some of them can be district teachers who add a foreign language as a new area of certification, possibly if planning includes incorporating the language(s) into the school day in kindergarten and the early grades.

### Year or Level Two

1. Districts must adjust schedules and align all foreign language curricula by the Learning Standards/Descriptors to facilitate coordination with existing programs in participating schools. Districts also need to plan for the resources to employ the new teachers in the following year and assemble core teaching materials and supplementary resources, including on-line. Teacher training in the use of all resources also needs to be planned.
2. The university foreign language department graduates and certifies a matched number of teacher candidates with elementary specialization in the desired languages.
3. For the planning group this is the year for authentic community contacts with areas of the world where the planned languages are spoken, such as a Sister City program, cultural presentations, and community events and other programs to strengthen community support.

### Year or Level Three

1. The district(s) implement language teaching as planned.
2. The university foreign language department provides professional development and other support.
3. The planning group is continued as an oversight and outreach body and holds show-case events for the community along with school-based contacts with school programs in other regions where their language is taught, as well as foreign exchanges with the countries whose languages they are learning.