

# Pelham Union Free School District

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## **Pelham Schools Consider Adding Spanish to Elementary Curriculum**

The Elementary World Language Task Force presented two options for incorporating Spanish into the elementary curriculum to the Pelham Board of Education at its Dec. 13 meeting.

The task force, co-chaired by Dr. Steven Garcia, assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and personnel, and World Language Supervisor Angela Calvelli, includes Board of Education member Madeline Smith, all four elementary school principals, six teachers and five parents. The group's charge was to make good on a key action step of the District's Strategic Plan: "Determine viability of world language implementation at the elementary level (K-5)."

Dr. Garcia explained that there are many advantages to beginning world language instruction at an early age, including better retention of language skills, developing empathy and obtaining a better understanding of foreign cultures and ideas.

"Research has shown that students who are involved with a second language are more creative, better at solving complex problems, have greater cognitive flexibility and have higher order thinking skills," said Dr. Garcia.

Ms. Calvelli said the program would have a positive impact on the world language programs at the middle and high schools as well, even if students decide not to continue with Spanish and pursue a different foreign language, such as French, Italian, Latin or Mandarin Chinese.

"If they decide they are going to switch languages, they will already be exposed to language, they'll be embracing it, they'll understand connections of languages," she said. "I think it's a win-win for everyone."

The task force studied three different elementary language programs and determined that the Foreign Language Elementary School (FLES), which is used by the Rye City and Scarsdale school districts, is best suited for Pelham because it can be seamlessly integrated into current programming.

Rather than replace class time for other subjects, such as English/language arts or math, FLES uses Spanish to supplement students' current coursework. Students would learn the language in 30-minute sessions three times each cycle, during which the language teacher would work alongside the class's regular teacher.

“This has been a topic of discussion for years in Pelham, and it really pleases me to be able to finally be in a position to make it happen,” said Superintendent Dr. Peter Giarrizzo. “Teaching a second language at the elementary level is a key component of our Strategic Plan and would be a huge benefit to our students.”

Dr. Garcia explained that this method helps teach the language while also providing reinforcement in other subjects.

For example, students may practice counting, addition and subtraction in both Spanish and English or discuss what they are reading in both languages.

“It’s not a standalone experience in learning the Spanish language,” Dr. Garcia said. “It compliments and supports the core curriculum.”

There would be no additional homework associated with the Spanish program, he said.

If approved by the Board of Education, the FLES program would be integrated over several years. The task force proposed two options for beginning the program in the 2017-18 school year. One option calls for hiring one full-time Spanish teacher for second graders in all four elementary schools. In the following school years, new teachers would be hired to expand the program to third, fourth and fifth grades.

Under the second option, the District would hire two new Spanish teachers to implement the program in both second and third grades next year with each teacher responsible for two schools. More teaching capacity would also be added in the ensuing years as the program expands to fourth and fifth grades.

It is estimated that one FTE teacher would cost \$112,500 annually, including salary and benefits.

Dr. Giarrizzo said he and the Board of Education would examine each proposal during the budget development process and determine how best to move forward.

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