

TO: School Committee

FROM: Kathleen Baker, Director of World Languages

John Gibbons, Middle School Principal

Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning

DATE: November 15, 2019

RE: World Language Program at Middle School

The Middle School World Language Committee, comprised of 12 elementary and middle school parents, John Gibbons, Middle School Principal, Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Marla Schay, Head of Guidance for Grades 6-12 and Kathleen Baker, Director of World Languages for Grades 1-12 offers the following information and recommendations for our Middle School World Language program.

Background information and data:

In 2014, the World Language Program Review recommended that we consider offering three, rather than four, languages at the middle school level to stabilize staffing and enrollment, given that we have a projected decrease in student enrollment in the next few years. In an effort to stabilize language enrollment in 2017, the language selection switched from 6th grade to 5th grade, requiring students to choose the language they study in March of 5th grade. For the following two years, enrollments in Mandarin and French increased.

As enrollment projections continued to indicate declining enrollment, parents/guardians, students and faculty were surveyed in 2018 about which languages to keep in the Middle School program if a change became necessary. The results indicated the following:

Parents/Guardians (502 respondents):

- Spanish: 93.8%
- Mandarin: 71.3%
- French: 68.1%
- Latin: 51.2%

High School Students (86 respondents):

- Spanish: 95.3%
- French: 70.6%
- Mandarin: 70.6%
- Latin: 56.5%

World Language Faculty (14 respondents):

- Spanish: 92.3%
- French: 84.6%
- Mandarin: 69.2%
- Latin: 38.5%

The results indicated that Parents, Students, and Faculty reached a consensus that the schools should continue to offer Spanish, Mandarin, and French.

Enrollment History:

The enrollment data for each language has fluctuated from year to year. Below is the enrollment in each language for the past seven years.

YOG	Students enrolled in a language	Percentage in French	Percentage in Latin	Percentage in Mandarin	Percentage in Spanish
2026	133	34%	17%	9%	39%
2025	161	23%	19%	14%	44%
2024	145	19%	27%	14%	40%
2023	139*	18%	24%	6%	51%
2022	159*	10%	21%	13%	56%
2021	157*	14%	37%	Didn't run	49%
2020	145*	10%	28%	9%	53%

Notes:

- * designates years when students chose a language for grade 7. YOG 2024-2026 chose language for grade 6.
- Two MS trips are going this year: China (28 students enrolled, including seven 9th and 10th graders) and France (16 students enrolled)

Current Charge and Related Data:

In October 2019, additional data from the community on our Middle School Language program was requested. Another survey was sent to parents/guardians of Pre-K-12 students to collect more information and a committee was convened to explore the issues. As stated above, the committee was comprised of 12 elementary and middle school parents, John Gibbons, Middle School Principal, Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Marla Schay, Head of Guidance for Grades 6-12 and Kathleen Baker, Director of World Languages for Grades 1-12. That committee met on three occasions to review the survey responses and determine the best course of action for our Middle School program.

As part of its work, the committee articulated the strengths that each language brings to our World Language program. Those strengths included:

French:

- Spoken in many countries around the world
- Useful in business and other sectors
- Projected to be one of the most spoken languages in the world by 2050, given that it is

widely spoken in sub-Saharan Africa and the population in those countries is growing.

- Considered an in-demand language for many NGOs, such as the Peace Corps and Doctors without Borders
- Useful when travelling internationally as many people speak it as a second language

Latin:

- Provides a base for the study of other languages
- Helps to build vocabulary and an understanding of how language works
- Offers a different choice for students that might prefer to study a classical language
- Engages students that are interested in Ancient Rome and/or mythology
- Prepares students for further professional study in many fields influenced by Latin: law, medicine and music, to name a few

Mandarin:

- Most spoken first language in the world (about 900 million native speakers)
- Meets a critical need and its study is encouraged by the Department of State
- Is the language spoken by the second largest economy in the world and one of the main trading partners of the U.S.
- Adds a different choice for students that are interested in East Asian languages and cultures
- Provides a conduit for learning about one of the world's most ancient civilizations

Spanish:

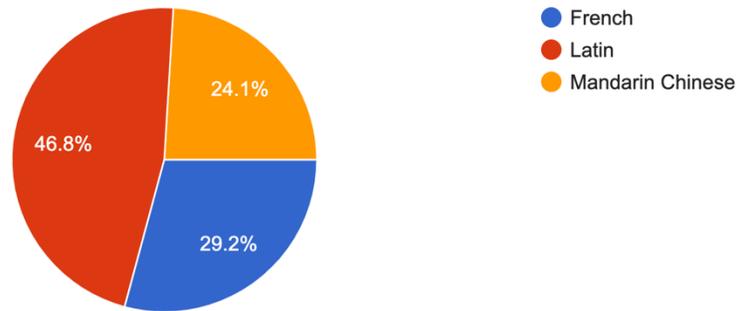
- Second most spoken language in the U.S.
- Spoken in over 20 countries, many of which are main trading partners of the U.S.
- Useful for many careers, such as medicine, law and education
- Facilitates travel to many other countries, including most of North and South America
- Is a phonetic language, making it accessible to many learners

Survey Data:

After reviewing the World Language program and the strengths of each language, the committee reviewed the results and comments from the survey. 370 parents/guardians from the PreK-12 community responded and the results are below.

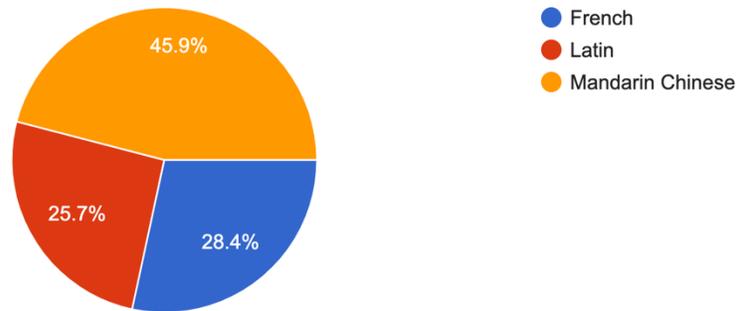
If we had to eliminate one language at the Middle School only, which language would be most appropriate to eliminate?

370 responses



Which language is most important to keep in our Middle School program?

370 responses



Continued discussion by the committee revealed recurring sentiments that parallel the ideas articulated by survey respondents as to why the district should keep a particular language in the Middle School program. The ideas most repeated included:

- French has seen increased enrollment in the past few years
- Latin, Mandarin and Spanish complement each other in the program as they represent a Classical, Eastern and Romance language
- Mandarin is a level 4 language and requires a longer time to achieve proficiency
- Latin offers a foundation for all future language study

Cost-savings Data:

The Committee examined the potential cost savings resulting from the elimination of each of the languages in 6th grade for the Classes of 2024, 2025 and 2026. The elimination of any language yielded a cost savings of one section about half of the time. Otherwise, it remained cost neutral since an additional section of at least one other language had to be created to absorb

students being displaced from the eliminated language.

When calculating the cost savings, projected enrollment was based on the percentage of students who had chosen the specific languages that year. We also assumed an average teacher salary of \$80,000 (1.0 FTE).

Based on the data, there is no guaranteed savings from reducing the number of offered languages as the number of sections would not necessarily decrease. The number of sections would only decrease if there was enough room in other languages to absorb displaced students. Additionally, in the two years that are closest in size to upcoming Middle School classes (YOG 2026 and 2024), it was much more difficult to determine if we would actually save a section by reducing language choice. The size of the Class of 2025 is not comparable to projected class sizes for upcoming classes.

As language choice projections are difficult to predict, the only way to guarantee a number of sections and classes within the range of School Committee's class size policy would be to not guarantee students their first choice of languages. If students were asked to sign up for their top two choices of languages, class sizes could be more easily balanced so that all languages meet the range established by School Committee. This has not been the past practice at the Middle School, however, and families may not be amenable to the change.

Recommendation:

Given that there is no guarantee that there would be a cost savings, the Committee recommends maintaining all four languages in the Middle School program. The average savings would be about \$20,000 over three years if a language were eliminated. Although savings could conceivably be higher (\$8,000 in year 1, an additional \$16,000 in year 2 and an additional \$16,000 in year 3), it would only happen about 50% of the time. The Committee believes that a possible savings of \$20,000 does not justify the elimination of student choice from the Middle School Language program.

However, understanding the charge to recommend which language to eliminate from the Middle School program, the Committee reluctantly concluded that removing Latin would have the least negative impact. The Committee's rationale included:

- Students would benefit more from seven years of French, Mandarin and Spanish than they would from seven years of Latin.
- While Latin is a very worthwhile language to learn and offers multiple benefits for students, the Committee concluded that many of these benefits would still apply if students were to study Latin for four years in high school.
- Latin might be better learned at the high school level as students are more mature and able to focus on the academic benefits of Latin.
- Lastly, the Committee considered the survey results, which suggest that Latin is the language to eliminate from the Middle School program if that is necessary.

As mentioned above, however, this recommendation is not made enthusiastically. The Committee strongly feels that the community values a choice of four languages at the Middle School. This sentiment was voiced repeatedly in the comments of the survey. In fact, many people suggested that languages should be **added** to our program rather than eliminated.

Finally, if Latin were eliminated from the Middle School program, the Committee recommends exploring the possibility of offering Latin in grades 7 and 8 as an elective or as a required course for all students. Doing so would allow students who really want to study Latin the opportunity to do so while simultaneously providing the many benefits that Latin offers, such as vocabulary

acquisition and an understanding of sentence structure, to all students.

Conclusion:

The Committee recommends that Weston Middle School continue to offer four languages to students if at all possible. The community values choice and flexibility in the schools and believes that a robust Language program with numerous offerings is one of the attributes that makes Weston Public Schools unique and sets us apart from other districts. If this is not possible, the Committee recommends that the Middle School World Language program continue to offer French, Mandarin and Spanish as its primary offerings, but to find a way to offer some Latin as an elective or as a required course for all Middle School students.