

# **M.S.A.D. No. 75 - World Language Review 2018-2019**

## *Introduction*

MSAD 75 has a long tradition of promoting the study of a second language. The district recognizes the value in not just studying a new language, but understanding the culture and heritage of the people who share the same language. Over the years, even though budgetary constraints have continued to affect the world language programming, the district has continued to offer world language courses beginning at the middle school.

What follows is a review of current programming and language-specific participation trends. The report articulates the outcomes of this review with generalized findings and proposed next steps.

## *Context*

Beginning in 2010, Mt. Ararat Middle School included a sixth grade Cultural Literacy class into its varied curricula, enabling all students to learn about world cultures. This course is structured the same way currently. The addition of the sixth grade Cultural Literacy course allows for an introduction to second language study that can continue for all three years of middle school. All students are currently required to take a world language class in each year of middle school, as part of the middle level exploratory program. Taking a second language course at the high school, however, has always been an option.

Beginning in 2014-2015, at the seventh grade level, students rotated through each of the three languages offered: French, Spanish and German. Again, the organizational structure for the seventh grade program is still in place currently. Students experience a total of a semester in the world language course, getting an exploratory study of each language. Students learn about basic cultural information, beginning conversational phrases and key introductory vocabulary from German, Spanish and French.

When students reach the eighth grade, they self-select one of the three languages to study. Since students have theoretically been exposed to more than one year of the same language, there was the hope that the students would be at a linguistic level of a Novice Mid proficiency at the conclusion of their eighth grade year. Even though eighth graders who take a language would, by the end of middle school, have slightly more than a year's study of a language, due to the infrequency of class meetings over the course of the two year language cycle, students entering ninth grade still begin their language study in the high school by taking level I.

*Participation Counts*

SY 2013_2014									
Grade	French	Spanish	German	Ind. Study Japanese	Ind. Study Chinese	Totals	# Students per Grade	Percentage by Grade	
9	52	73	38			163	216	75.46%	
10	42	57	26	2	1	128	196	65.31%	
11	21	45	25		5	96	222	43.24%	
12	10	15	11		1	37	248	14.92%	
	125	190	100	2	7	424	882	48.07%	
SY 2014_2015									
Grade	French	Spanish	German	Ind. Study Japanese	Ind. Study Chinese	Totals	# Students per Grade	Percentage by Grade	
9	56	63	22			141	197	71.57%	
10	41	60	37			138	209	66.03%	
11	35	40	22	1	1	99	190	52.11%	
12	11	16	16		4	47	216	21.76%	

	143	179	97	1	5	425	812	52.34%	
SY 2015_2016									
Grade	French	Spanish	German	Ind. Study Japanese	Ind. Study Chinese	Ind. Study Latin	Totals	# Students per Grade	Percent age by Grade
9	37	62	22				121	185	65.41%
10	61	56	18				135	202	66.83%
11	31	47	28			1	107	205	52.20%
12	16	22	15	1	1		55	191	28.80%
	145	187	83	1	1	1	418	783	53.38%
SY 2016_2017									
Grade	French	Spanish	German	Totals	# Students per Grade	Percent age by Grade			
9	40	87	22	149	194	76.80%			
10	28	49	23	100	176	56.82%			
11	40	42	14	96	195	49.23%			
12	13	19	27	59	204	28.92%			
	121	197	86	404	769	52.54%			
SY 2017_2018									
Grade	French	Spanish	German	Totals	# Students per Grade	Percent age by Grade			

9	62	96	21	179	191	93.72%			
10	40	79	24	143	185	77.30%			
11	19	49	20	88	178	49.44%			
12	17	14	17	48	190	25.26%			
	138	238	82	458	744	61.56%			
SY 2018_2019									
					# Students per Grade	Percent age by Grade			
Grade	French	Spanish	German	Totals					
9	41	73	21	135	196	68.88%			
10	41	67	15	123	190	64.74%			
11	25	48	2	75	182	41.21%			
12	10	15	12	37	175	21.14%			
	117	203	50	370	743	49.80%			

The data indicates that while enrollments have been on a downward trend (# Students per Grade), participation in world language courses has also decreased (Totals). Some of the decrease in participation is due to scheduling conflicts as a result of the scheduling constraints of the former Ninth Grade Academy. Changes to the scheduling of shared staffing between the middle school and high school has also created a challenge. In the past two years, the limited availability of multiple sections of German I, for example, prevented some freshmen from being able to take a language course. Since 2017-2018, there is one teacher for all of German, the eighth grade level as well as the high school levels I through IV. Due to only having one section available to teach each course and the overlap in bell schedules and travel times between the middle and high school, there are students who wish to take German who are unable to do so. For example, in the 2018-2019 school year, 31 students signed up to take the German I course, but since there is only one section offered, ten students were not able to take the course for which they registered.

The data also indicates that students in higher grades are less likely to participate in a language course. This decline is attributed to staff and course scheduling conflicts. There is usually only one section of the upper level courses available, so if students have other courses that are scheduled concurrently, students will typically have to choose. In addition, many of the students

who are considering a level IV language course often carry AP courses in their schedules. The AP courses for twelfth-grade students are single offerings and occasionally are scheduled concurrently with the Level IV world language course. Some students may opt to select an AP course over a non-AP course if they are building a strong transcript for competitive colleges. Of note, there are approximately seven point five percent (7.5%) of the students in a world language level III course this year with Individual Education Plans (IEP), eight percent (7%) have a Section 504 plan, and 26 percent (26%) have taken one or more Advanced Placement course.

Currently there are no graduation requirements for world language credit at the high school. Due in part to these requirements (or lack thereof), the number of years of a world language taken by students varies, and this variation is typically based on post-secondary plans.

The Maine Department of Education has consistently encouraged districts to offer two or more world language courses as part of the high school's secondary program. It is important to note that over the last two years of the transition to a proficiency-based diploma with a state-mandated requirement of proficiency in a world language, the participation of grade nine students in a world language rose to ninety-three point seven percent (93.7%) This increase is attributed to the diploma requirements that were mandated by the state. When the requirements for a diploma that listed an "Intermediate Mid" level of proficiency were announced, almost all ninth graders chose to enroll in a world language. After the state chose to de-fund the new diploma requirements and amend its former world language requirement, there was a marked decrease in ninth grade students beginning a Level I language course at the high school. The percentage decreased from the ninety-three point seven percent (93.7%) high that was in the 2017-2018 school year, to a sixty-eight point eight (68.8%) in the current 2018-2019 school year.

Currently, requirements for admission to a post secondary, baccalaureate program differs by institution; however, for comparison, the following Maine colleges require anywhere from two to four years of language study:

- University of Maine system: 2 years
- Colby College: 3 years
- Bowdoin and Bates College: not required but most prospective students will have 4 years

*Proficiency-based learning:*

In June 2012, Maine lawmakers mandated a proficiency-based system for grade reporting and achievement of diploma requirements, where the graduating class of 2021 would have diplomas that recognized the achievement of learning goals with a proficiency-based scoring system.

In order to prepare for this transformation, the world language department spent several years reviewing and collaborating on the development of clearly defined learning goals for all language courses. Once defined, this work enabled teachers and students to communicate with one another about the expected goals of each unit, with established benchmarks for each level.

Shared learning goals among the three languages has also helped to provide consistency among teachers of the same course, while at the same time furnish students with explicit expectations for their own learning. Also, responsibility shifted more toward students, where they became more involved in their achievement and worked toward their proficiency. The department also created and implemented common assessments that provided students with the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to reach these learning goals.

Even with the state's recent move away from the proficiency based score reporting, the world language department will continue to use common assessments that are aligned to specific learning goals in order for a more cohesive, consistent approach to teaching and learning.

Over the last three years, the World Language Department worked on aligning the grades 8-12 language curriculum to the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages) Guidelines. These standards outline a progression of proficiency and strands of knowledge that students need to achieve in the following areas: Interpersonal Communication, Interpretive Listening and Reading, Presentational Writing and Speaking, and Cultural Awareness. For each of these of these communication modes, a range of performance, beginning with Novice, moving to Intermediate, then Advanced were established for each level:

Grade 8 World Language – students will reach the Novice Low proficiency level  
High School Level I – students will reach the Novice Mid proficiency level  
High School Level II – students will reach the Novice High proficiency level  
High School Level III – students will reach the Intermediate Low proficiency level  
High School Level IV – students will reach the Intermediate Mid proficiency level

It is important to note that the guidelines set forth in the ACTFL Guidelines are not based on any particular theory, pedagogical method, or educational curriculum. Regardless of teaching style or methodology used, the World Language Department has adopted the ACTFL Guidelines to clearly delineate the expectations for learning at each of the language levels.

### *Findings and Proposals*

*Middle School Program of Study:* The goal of offering students a seventh grade Exploratory language course that touched on all three languages taught at the high school was to increase the contact hours of students learning a specific language at the middle level. The purpose of that increased language instruction was for students to enter high school having reached a proficiency level commensurate to the high school Level I. Unfortunately, due to the non-consecutive time with the same language between seventh and eighth grade, and with only a seventh grade semester course that delved into all three languages, students were unable to make the jump to Level II.

It is clear that consistent language instruction matters. Since students in the seventh grade only have one semester to sample all three languages, the material gets repeated in the eighth

grade. In addition, students who were enrolled in the world language class the first semester of their seventh grade year may have been exposed back in the early fall to the language they chose to study in the eighth grade. Therefore, it makes sense that there doesn't seem to be any retention of the material learned from that early seventh grade experience. There were no measurable gains in language proficiency with the additional seventh grade world language course.

In order to modify existing middle level language programming where seventh grade students are provided with more than one-third of one semester of each of the three languages, additional staffing will be required. If there is a goal to have the majority of students leave the eighth grade with the equivalent of a Level I language proficiency level, then there needs to be an increase in the consistent contact hours of the one language the student selects for focused study for the eighth grade and beyond.

If there were to be the addition of instructional time dedicated to the study of one language, then students would be able to matriculate into the Level II high school world language course. Those students would then achieve a higher level of language proficiency and reach that level faster. There would then be the opportunity and the student population to offer Advanced Placement courses for world language students their senior year.

*Proficiency-based learning:* The World Language Department will continue to provide consistency among teachers of the same course, while at the same time provide students with explicit expectations for their own learning. Common assessments will continue to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate students' abilities to reach these targets.

*Programming:* Due to the shared German teaching position, with one German teacher teaching all levels of German at the two schools, the German program has been affected. In the 2018-2019 school year not all incoming ninth graders who selected German during course registration were able to be scheduled for the German I course. Due to overlapping bell schedules, travel time between schools and teacher workload, the one teacher can only offer one section of each level, which poses scheduling difficulties for some students.

*Alternate Options for Language Study:* The last few years have seen a sharp decline in the number of independent language course offerings as well as students taking online courses for languages other than those offered in our program. One reason indicated by world language teachers at the high school was that they cannot find the extra time to devote to overseeing an independent study course.

There continue to be international student experiences and exchanges that are offered by the high school's world language department. The 2017-2018 school year saw a reciprocal exchange with students at a French school; fifteen French students visited Mt. Ararat High School and stayed with host families and later in the year our students traveled to France for the same experience. In the 2018-2019 school year, a group traveled to Costa Rica, and another

group of Mt. Ararat French students traveled to Quebec for a short cultural experience. The Mt. Ararat World Language Program will continue to offer alternative and unique opportunities for its language students.

### *Next Steps*

If there is a desire to increase the middle level world language instruction, to focus the language study more than what is currently offered, planning as well as considerations for additional staffing, will need to occur at the administrative level. Collaborative planning as well as creative problem solving will continue to be utilized by department members in order for our students to have access to language courses in both middle and high school.

The world language proficiency guidelines will continue to form the backbone of our courses. Students will become more aware of learning goals and the measures to which they are accountable for the achievement of their learning.

In light of the results of the data analysis which shows a larger percentage of ninth graders registering for a world language class when it was a mandatory graduation requirement in 2017-2018, it would be worthwhile to revisit the Mt. Ararat High School graduation requirements to consider including a world language credit(s) as part of its diploma requirements.

The MSAD 75 World Language Department has been a stalwart in the district for years. It will continue to provide challenging, consistent, and invaluable instruction that opens its students' eyes to the world beyond Maine.