

What language should my child take?

Let your child decide. This is difficult, because every parent has his/her own opinions and wants what's best for the child, but language teachers will tell you that studying a language is serious business and takes a great deal of determination and perseverance. A student who is not interested or motivated may not succeed. Besides, you may have the impression that one language is more useful, but nobody knows at this point what job your child will have ten years from now. He/she may be transferred to Poland and have to learn Polish! The best preparation for the future is to have a successful background in any foreign language. Learning a second or third language later will be much easier.

Why that first year is vitally important

The first year of foreign language is the foundation that subsequent years are built on. Students who typically learn only enough to “get by” are at risk in the second and future years of language study, and many drop out. Why? Because if they haven't learned the material from the first year well enough, they will have to learn it all over again in the second year—in addition to the new material taught in the second year. This is very stressful for student, parent, and teacher alike, and can leave the student with a negative impression of languages in general.

I personally believe that students who do not receive a B or better average in the first year should not be passed on to the second year because they are at risk. However, at

Maumee High School, C students are allowed to take Spanish II.

How to help your child succeed in high school foreign language class

“I took French in high school 20 years ago, and I don't remember any of it. . . .”

“I can help my child with most subjects, but not Spanish.”

Do these comments sound familiar? Parents often ask what they can do to help their child succeed in a language that they themselves do not know. Actually, there are many things a parent can do to assist their children. Some suggestions by veteran language teachers:

- Take an active interest in what your child is learning. Ask questions. Make sure s/he brings home the notebook every day.
- Provide and encourage a quiet place to study, away from distractions like television, Internet, and phones.
- Help your child learn to manage his/her time wisely. Students who work too many hours at part-time jobs often come to class sleepy and unprepared. Make sure they realize that school is top priority at this point in their lives.
- Encourage your child to teach other family members (including you) what s/he has learned.
- Work with your child to label your home with Post-it notes in the language.
- Invite your child to attempt to use the language whenever possible. . . with you, the rest of the family, and his/her friends.
- Make sure that s/he eats breakfast and gets enough sleep.
- Recognize that learning another language

is a lot more like learning to play a musical instrument than it is like learning most academic subjects. It requires daily practice above and beyond mere completion of homework.

- Becoming “fluent” in another language takes five or more years on average. Two years of study is not sufficient to achieve this level of language proficiency, although it is a good beginning.
- Most students find flash cards tremendously helpful. Put a picture on one side and the Spanish/French/German word on the other side.
- Offer to quiz your child using his/her flash cards. Only study for 10-15 minutes, then do something else. Return to the cards after a half-hour or so. If you are showing the picture side, ask them to say and spell the Spanish answer. If s/he gives the wrong word, there is a problem with comprehension and memorization. Spelling errors indicate a different issue. Make sure the student knows the word both ways: English-Spanish and Spanish-English (or French or German).

**Those who know
nothing of for-
eign languages,
know nothing of
their own.**

Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The best way to learn a language is to surround oneself with the language.

Today's students are fortunate because they have technology to help them practice the language without having to travel to a foreign country. Some suggestions:

- Internet: watch television programs, listen to radio programs and music, read articles and books, write to keypals, practice vocabulary and grammar, and much more.
- Purchase music in the language and listen to it regularly.
- Watch a program on the Telemundo channel (if you're studying Spanish) on a regular basis. Suggestions: a soap opera (telenovela) or *La Corte del Pueblo* (the *People's Court*). Don't be surprised if you can't understand much at first. If you watch long enough, you'll find yourself understanding more and more of what's going on.
- Host exchange students, make friends with people who speak the language you wish to learn.
- Purchase foreign magazines/books (Amazon.com).

What learning a foreign language can do for you

- Most colleges have foreign language entrance and/or exit requirements.
- Foreign language study helps us understand our own language. The more foreign language one studies, the higher one scores on the verbal parts of college entrance exams.
- Foreign language study increases problem-solving skills and can improve

memory, self-discipline, and self esteem.

- Language study helps us better understand and appreciate our neighbors in the world. America can no longer live in blissful ignorance about what goes on in the rest of the world.
- A foreign language is an important adjunct skill for many of today's careers. Many workers with good foreign language skills earn higher pay than their monolingual co-workers.

Business reasons for learning languages

- Each year, 200,000 Americans lose out on jobs with business because they do not know another language.
- Additionally, one third of all the corporations in the U.S. are either owned or based abroad.
- One out of every six production job in the U.S. depends on foreign trade.
- One half of the top profit making companies on Fortune magazine's "500" list are foreign controlled.
- The U.S. government employs 30,000 people with working knowledge of a foreign language.
- Four out of five new jobs in the United States are created as a result of foreign trade.
- One in twenty Americans worked at foreign-owned American companies in late 1990. Their paychecks averaged 20 percent more than those of the nation's overall private workforce.
- U.S. airlines have difficulty finding personnel with foreign language skills.
- The majority of American employers, according to a national survey, consider the command of a foreign language a useful skill.
- The U.S. is the third largest Spanish speaking country in the world.

*Former Senator Paul Simon
The Tongue-Tied American:
Confronting the Foreign Language Crisis (1980)*

- "The workplace of tomorrow is a world of many cultures and languages. . .with new forms of global commerce we can't even imagine today" (Kiplinger Washington Editors, 1996).



A Parent's Guide to High School Foreign Language



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