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Elementary School Foreign Language Classes

After almost two decades of discussion, the proposed school budget will support Scarsdale's first elementary school foreign language classes in academic 2005-06.

Plans currently call for two new teaching positions, one in first and one in second grade, to offer children in all five elementary schools sixty minutes a week of introductory Spanish. Over the next several years, the program will expand to include all children in grades one through six.

The benefits of early language instruction are well known. As recently as 2001, a district committee outlined the reasons for introducing a program, citing gains in fluency, pronunciation, and ease in speaking. Spanish is the language of choice both because of its position as a common second language in this country and because it is a good foundation for those wishing to study other Romance languages later. The decision to teach one language instead of several is a result of interest in giving children depth of exposure and the possibility of greater insight into a single culture that may be different from their own.

The program will be evaluated by teacher observation and record-keeping and through external consultant reviews.

Despite its benefits, foreign language hasn't been included in the elementary day in part because of concerns about how much it would impinge on teaching in other subjects. The FLES (foreign language in elementary schools) approach addresses this concern by teaching other subject matter, such as social studies, through foreign language. District personnel will also look for ways to use existing time more economically.

The goals of the program are consistent with the District's strategic plan objectives of educating children to reach their potential, preparing them for an interdependent world, and strengthening human connections for decency, respect and responsibility.