

UNION 54 School Committee  
Thursday, January 28, 2016

Present for the Committee:

Brewster: Dave Telman, Claire Gradone and Jessica Larsen

Eastham: Ann Crozier, Joanne Irish, Mary Lou Sette, Amy Handel and Judy Lindahl

Orleans: Josh Stewart, Hank Schumacher and Gail Briere

Wellfleet: Jan Plaue, Jill Putnam, Betsy Pontius, and Mort Inger

Call to Order

Chair Crozier called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Citizen Speak

None

Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools

Superintendent Conrad indicated he had some interest in looking at an immersion program and foreign language in the district. Orleans Elementary School has been involved with a Spanish program. He met with Emily Edwards, P.T. Spanish Teacher and distributed a packet of what he is working on and what she is teaching at Orleans Elementary School.

Gail Briere gave a brief history of the comprehensive study that took place before introducing foreign language at Orleans Elementary. Gail indicated she was a Foreign Language Teacher in a Middle School and High School prior to being a Principal. When she came to Orleans as the principal, she was approached by the school committee desiring to implement a foreign language into the elementary school. It was her first year and she did not want to jump into an immersion program. She put together a committee and did a year-long study, reviewing models that could be used in a foreign language program. The program began as an after school enrichment program at OES. During that year, parents were surveyed as to what language they would want if OES was to offer a language. The program started in 2001 and has undergone a number of transitions. At that time, Spanish was given in 20 minute blocks twice a week beginning in Grade 1. Presently the program is once a week for 50 minutes. Some teachers and Parents felt their students were being taken away from more important subjects. At one point parents, whose children needed extra help in reading and math, approached her and asked if they could opt out of Spanish and that during that time their child be tutored in subjects that were giving them difficulty. So while their class went to Spanish, they stayed in class with the classroom teacher and received extra help.

Personally, Ms. Briere thinks teaching foreign language at a young age is wonderful; however, it does present scheduling challenges such as finding time in the schedule and finding an appropriate and competent teacher.

Judy Lindahl indicated that Eastham Elementary School offered French for a quite a while but the Middle School did not support that program in Grade 6. Ms. Lindahl felt the students could have been in an 8<sup>th</sup> Grade French class but that was not the case, so Eastham stopped offering foreign language.

Ms. Briere indicated that this was a school committee decision in Orleans. She also indicated if Union 54 wanted a language, the Middle School would have to make adjustments. She felt there were pros and cons to offering a foreign language program at the elementary schools. She felt the committee should look at neighboring schools for models, expenses, and what proficiency level students are achieving. Is it scheduled more than once a week and what is the trade-off?

Discussion about sharing a teacher in the elementary schools took place.

Superintendent Conrad indicated that he is visiting Millis to see a foreign language program at the elementary school and middle school on February 29<sup>th</sup>. He will have a more in depth report after the visit. He distributed a handout on the program at the Clyde Brown Elementary School in Millis, which has a Spanish Immersion program. He indicated that the Middle School was part of the program and coordination between the two schools is a must. He indicated it is a very intense program Grades K-12 and they even have work study experience in Spanish. He reported that in Phoenix they have an immersion program that begins in Grade one and it is by lottery. They have a half day in Spanish (Math, Science) and half the day I English with ELA. The phoenix models are built into the student day.

Superintendent Conrad said the district must look for a certified Spanish teacher with a background in Elementary Education. If students get proficient, then they could move to a third language, like Mandarin. Nauset must look at what we want to do with extended day. It would be 40-50 more minutes more of school. Going forward, the Superintendent stressed the need for elementary schools to hold onto their enrollments perhaps by offering STEM Academy or Arts Academy based in one of the schools. He questioned the Committees if IB was wanted at the elementary level. He would like to look at more options, as that was his take away from surveys and meetings with parents. He stressed the need to talk to all stakeholders. He looks at the class of 2030 and wonders what we are planning for their future.

Jill Putnam indicated that she has witnessed full and part time language programs in preschool and upper grades. She visited a PreK and Kindergarten program in Cambridge, Mass. where foreign language was part of the student day. A specialist came into the classroom that had an elementary background and everything was center based. Stories were read in Spanish and students had a good experience. Songs and poetry were also performed in Spanish.

Joanne Irish indicated that the Spanish Teacher in Chatham, Christine Prince Hughes, works at the elementary school and would be a good resource for the district. She is willing to speak with the Superintendent about the program at his convenience.

Jessica Larsen indicated that Spanish was her first language, living in California, but she lost most of it when she moved east. You lose the language if you do not use it.

Superintendent Conrad indicated the program would have to fit with the Gr. 6 program because if we do not have consistency, there will be a problem. He would work with the Principal at the Middle School. He felt the parents should be included in the conversation to see what they think.

Ms. Briere stated if you were looking at the four towns wanting a language program, for consistency, it should be a similar amount of time and a similar curriculum. When the student goes to the Middle School, a level of proficiency must be demonstrated. She stressed that there must be a defined curriculum.

Superintendent Conrad mentioned that the Mandarin Teacher, Taidge Tang, wants to bring that program all the way to the Kindergarten level. He also stated if we partner with the Chinese, we will bring a teacher here and expand the program. These are thoughts in their early stages.

Jan Plaue stated that parents would like their children to have more enrichment programs. The district would have to extend the day to provide all the things that parents want at the elementary schools. She felt the schools must move beyond the tight constraints of the present student day as they need more time for art and language. She would like to see the School Committees work really hard to extend the day. Ann Crozier stressed that all schools must be the same and offer all students the same curriculum and

opportunities. Superintendent Conrad stated that next year is a negotiating year and perhaps flex scheduling will be discussed.

Josh Stewart stated that in Orleans, he often would bring up the question, what does having Spanish at the elementary level get our students. He feels if they go into Grade 7 without being exposed to a language; it is a challenge for kids. He feels the exposure to Spanish at the elementary level is a huge benefit in confidence and curiosity. It takes academic stress off of the Middle School experience. He supports the Orleans program but admits it has been hard to keep Spanish Teachers. He suggested when the Superintendent visits Millis he ask them about the first few years of the program. What did years 1 -3 look like for numbers and turnover rate? What were some of the challenges?

Committee members were in agreement that the early years were optimal for learning a language and it is worth looking into a foreign language program at the elementary level.

The meeting adjourned at 6:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ann M. Tefft

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Ann M. Tefft  
Recording Secretary