

## A new foreign language? At what cost?

By **FRANK SCHULTZ**  
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Janesville School Board members would like to add a new foreign language to help students face the changing global economy.

They're also keen on saving taxpayers money during difficult economic times.

Adding courses costs money, so board members may feel torn when they consider foreign-language options Tuesday night.

The board commissioned a task force to consider the options, and the group's report was discussed at two recent board meetings.

The task force recommends that Mandarin Chinese be added to the current French, German and Spanish. The group also laid out options that would allow for several new languages or expand current offerings.

The task force also suggests that kids start learning languages earlier than the current seventh grade.

Finding qualified teachers in Chinese or other new languages will be difficult and limit any program, said Donna Behn, director of instruction. The district now employs one teacher of Chinese who is working under an emergency license and is working to get certified.

The teacher offers Chinese to students in the Challenge Program for the gifted and talented and at the Janesville Academy for International Studies, which serves a small number of high school students.

On Tuesday, the board will be asked what options it prefers. The board's direction would lead to planning over the coming year. New programs could start in September 2009.

The options include:

-- Continue the current, limited Chinese offerings.

Cost: One certified Chinese instructor. The average cost of a teacher's salary and benefits is \$54,500.

-- Start an elementary program, one school at a time.

Cost: \$10,580 per year for one grade level, or \$63,500 per building once it's in all grades, or \$763,000 for all 12 elementary schools.

-- Establish an elementary charter school. Students would study several different languages for one half hour, three times a week.

Cost: Depends on the number of languages and whether the language was integrated into art, music and physical education classes, which could hold down costs. Charter-school grants would help in initial phases.

-- Offer online classes in various languages through the Janesville Virtual Academy. The academy is part of a consortium of online schools that could buy courses from the Florida Virtual School.

Costs vary and would be lower if a local teacher could be found to teach the online course.

-- Expand middle-school programming in French, German and Spanish. Now, students learn two to three days a week in seventh and eighth grades. Few learn enough to continue into second-year courses in high school, Behn said.

Cost: Minimum \$89,925 for three days a week for seventh-graders; minimum \$226,800 for five days a week for eighth-graders. Costs would increase if another language was added.

-- Offer a sixth-grade exploratory course.

Cost: Depends on how many sign up. Minimum \$21,800.

-- The Youth Options program, which is available now to students who qualify. It requires school districts to pay tuition for high school students to take college courses when those courses are not available at their high schools.

-- Add summer-school language courses.

-- A suggestion from board member Bill Sodemann: Buy off-the-shelf language-teaching software, and hire a teacher to be a resource and handle testing and grades.

### **Cut French or German?**

How about paying for a new foreign language by dropping one of the current foreign languages?

The task force that studied the Janesville School District's options decided that wouldn't be a good idea.

The task force report shows Spanish is the most popular among local parents. It also suggests that French and German remain important in international trade.

But global economic shifts suggest that Asian languages will be in high demand for decades to come.

Tim Cullen, one of the school board's most ardent backers of a new foreign language, appeared disappointed that the task force didn't recommend cutting French or German. He sees those languages as less important than some others in the 21st century.

At the last board meeting, Cullen said he knew that cutting a language is a sensitive topic, but he said that some day the board will face that decision.

Some of the task force's recommendations would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, Cullen noted, and "we don't have that kind of money."