

Spanish Staffing for SY 2015-16 – Initial Update

In the updated version of the ANCS strategic plan, we have laid out a three-year objective of enhancing the educational program in “the arts, technology, foreign language, and health/wellness”. Budget constraints brought about by funding reductions from 2009-2014 forced us to reduce staffing, increase student-to-teacher ratios, and hold off on material purchases in many of these areas. Now that we are entering a period of relative financial stability, we are able to focus on strengthening these aspects of the student experience over the next three years. The board has asked for an initial update about foreign language in particular, and so this report aims to give preliminary thinking about the Spanish program and staffing for next school year and beyond. First, though, a bit of recent history about the program at each campus for context:

Elementary campus:

- *2007-10*: Core class for all students - 30 minutes twice per week (1 FTE staffing)
- *2010-12*: Core class for all students - approximately 45 minutes once per week due to six-day related arts rotation (1 FTE staffing)
- *2012-present*: No foreign language offered during regular school day; Spanish and French class option in after school program

Middle campus:

- *2007-08*: Spanish offered for first time as an elective class to interested 8th grade students - one hour daily (0.25 FTE staffing)
- *2008-09*: Elective for interested 8th grade students - one hour daily (0.25 FTE staffing)
- *2009-present*: Core class for all 6th and 7th grade students - one hour twice per week; elective class for interested 8th grade students - one hour daily (2 FTE staffing 2009-12; 1 FTE staffing 2012-present)

With an emphasis in our mission on preparing students to be “informed citizens in a global society”, it is critical for all students at ANCS to gain foundational foreign language skills before they matriculate to high school where they hopefully continue their foreign language studies. As it stands, the current staffing and structure of the Spanish program in the middle school grades could be bolstered, and our attention will be placed there first by prioritizing the addition of another Spanish teacher FTE for next school year, with any changes to the structure of the program to be determined once a decision has been made regarding IB authorization. Beyond next school year, our focus will continue to be on developing students’ Spanish skills through more intensive and frequent instruction in the upper grades rather than in the lower grades. Why? Because a review of research on second language learning¹

¹ For more on this research review and its implications see *Three Misconceptions about Age and L2 Learning*, Stefka H. Marinova-Todd, D. Bradford Marshall, & Catherine E. Snow (Harvard University) *Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESOL) Quarterly* Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 9-

reveals that:

1. There is not necessarily a critical period for acquiring the skills of a second language. Students who begin receiving foreign language instruction as adolescents are not at a disadvantage. In fact, adolescents may be better equipped to make more meaningful progress than elementary school-aged students. Adolescents have more developed cognitive skills and better command of their primary language, both of which make learning a second language easier.
2. The early learning demands at the elementary school level usually mean that foreign language instruction can be offered in small doses (a few times a week for 30-45 minutes) that show no long-term impact because of an inability to retain vocabulary and sustain conversation in the second language.

For these reasons, all ANCS students will receive Spanish instruction in the middle school grades—and potentially eventually in the upper elementary grades—as the best investment of time and resources towards the goal of second language acquisition for students prior to high school.