

Information for Incoming Sixth Grade Families about World Language Study in the Newton Public Schools

Dear Families of Incoming Grade Six Students,

In Middle School, your child will have the opportunity to choose a world language to study in grades 6-8. We have tried to anticipate your questions below, however, should you have further questions please contact Alison Mulligan, Middle School World Language Coordinator, at 617-559-6166 or alison_mulligan@newton.k12.ma.us.

Why is it important to learn another language?

Today's college or career ready students must be prepared to collaborate with people of diverse backgrounds and languages. The study of world languages helps prepare students to be responsible members of our global society and gives them a competitive advantage in today's global economy.

Learning a world language reinforces understanding of one's first language, develops communicative competence, strengthens reading and writing skills, and opens the door to a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the richness of diverse cultures.

Who studies a World Language in middle school and which languages are offered?

With very few exceptions, all incoming middle school students are expected to study a world language as a major subject. Chinese, French, and Spanish are offered at all four middle schools, and Italian is offered at Day and Bigelow. When families choose a world language, they are committing their child for the duration of the student's middle school experience. Three years of middle school language study will prepare most students to advance to a Low Intermediate/Level 2 course upon entering high school.

How many years of world language study do students need?

A lengthy, well-articulated, high quality instructional sequence is essential for the development of proficiency in a world language. While there is currently no language requirement for graduation from NPS, many colleges like to see at least three years of high school level study of a World Language. Students who begin to study a world language in grade 6 have the opportunity to study the language through grade 12 at advanced and AP levels.

In high school, students may choose to study a new world language in addition to the one they study in middle school or they may choose to switch to learning another language. Additionally, high school students are offered the opportunity to earn the *Seal of Biliteracy* on their diploma by demonstrating their proficiency in both English and another language. The seal indicates intermediate high to advanced proficiency in two or more languages which is attractive to colleges and many employers.

What if my child wants to study a language that is not offered in his/her school?

If a student entering grade 6 would like to study a language that is not offered at the neighborhood school, the student's family may elect to apply for an out of district placement to go to a different middle school.

What if my child is a heritage speaker of a language taught in the Newton Public Schools?

While some heritage speakers (students who speak a first language other than English) may wish to follow a sequence that allows them to further develop their first language, we encourage heritage speakers who are have above novice proficiency in Spanish, French or Italian or Chinese to try a new language in middle school as our sequence is geared towards the novice learner. Once in high school, students can be assessed and placed at the level most appropriate for the continued development their heritage language.

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Which language should my child study?

There are compelling reasons for a student to choose to study any of the languages we offer. Please read about each language and consider conducting further research before making the choice with your child.



Chinese

Asia is a global economic and political player, with China representing the world's oldest continuous civilization. Mandarin Chinese instruction reflects Newton's commitment to participation in a multicultural society. Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken language in the world, with a significant number of speakers in the Greater Boston area, including Newton.



French

French is more than the language of diplomacy and government; it also provides opportunities in international business, as Paris is the fourth largest financial center in the world. Learning French opens a rich world of literature, art, film, and other cultural activities. French is spoken in France, Canada, West Africa, Haiti, New Orleans, and many other places around the world.



Italian - Offered at Bigelow and Day

Italy is a major player in the European and world economy. It is a world leader in the culinary arts, interior design, fashion, and more. Italian is spoken throughout the United States, including Newton. It is the language of music, art, literature, film, and food. The study of Italian can create links to family heritage and open opportunities to travel and study abroad.



Spanish

Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language in the United States. Its influence will continue to grow in areas of interest to all ages: sports, music, entertainment, for example. The Spanish language is spoken in more than 20 other countries, each with a rich history of literature, art, and cultural activity. Spanish language skills will increase career opportunities in many fields, both at home and abroad.

What opportunities are there to travel abroad?

While we endeavor to connect students to classrooms abroad digitally, the district currently does not offer programs abroad to middle schoolers. There are many district sponsored opportunities for travel abroad at the high schools, and scholarships are available to qualifying students. For information about opportunities to travel abroad in high school, please contact, Samantha Mandel, Global Programs Manager: samantha_mandel@newton.k12.ma.us.

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What is the *Communicative Approach* to language learning?

Over the past 20+ years, language instruction has shifted from an almost exclusive focus on the components of language, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, to a focus on the development of communicative proficiency, the ability to communicate in the target language in real-life contexts. This teaching approach aims for a high level of proficiency in the language, with an initial emphasis on developing comprehension, pronunciation and oral language skills. Teachers and students are expected to engage in target language use from the moment they enter the classroom.

The below chart, provided by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (available at ACTFL.org) demonstrates how language classrooms looked in the past as compared to what we strive for today.

In The Past	Today
Students learned about the language (main focus on grammar)	Students learn to use the language for communication
Teacher-centered class	Learner-centered with teacher as facilitator
Focused on isolated skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)	Focus on the three modes: interpretive, interpersonal and presentational communication
Coverage of a textbook	Backward design focusing on the end goal
Using the textbook as the curriculum	Use of thematic units and authentic resources
Emphasis on teacher as presenter/lecturer	Emphasis on learner as “doer” and “creator”
Isolated cultural “factoids”	Emphasis on intercultural competence
Use of technology as a “cool tool”	Integrating technology into instruction to enhance learning
Only teaching language	Using language as the vehicle to teach academic content
Same instruction for all students	Differentiating instruction to meet individual needs
Synthetic situations from textbook	Personalized real world tasks
Confining language learning to the classroom	Seeking opportunities for learners to use language beyond the classroom
Testing to find out what students don’t know	Assessing to find out what students can do
Only the teacher knows criteria for grading	Students know and understand criteria on how they will be assessed by reviewing the task rubric
Students “turn in” work only for the teacher	Learners create to “share and publish” to audiences beyond the teacher