

3 Steps Parents Can Take To Support Elementary Language Education In Their Communities

by Anneke Forzani Many parents and teachers are concerned about cutbacks in funding for foreign language programs at the elementary school level. Is there anything a parent can do to support early childhood language education in their communities? Yes! I recently attended a presentation given by Janis Jensen, the NJ Coordinator of World Languages and the President of the National Network for Early Language Learning. During her talk, she made these suggestions for parents and teachers who are being faced with potential cutbacks in their school's foreign language programs.

1. Be an advocate. Many of the teachers at the presentation agreed that active and vocal parents can play a very influential role (sometimes more than teachers) in convincing school boards to support funding for early language learning. Consider organizing concerned parents, and presenting a compelling case to the school board for maintaining adequate funding for early language learning. Sending articles to the local newspaper about the benefits of early language learning also can help generate support for funding language programs.
2. Stay informed. To make a case to administrators, you must clearly state the benefits of early foreign language education. Research has shown cognitive, academic, and social benefits to early language learning. Furthermore, the nation as a whole benefits from developing kids who have a global understanding and can communicate with people from other countries and cultures. You can learn more by visiting the website of the National Network for Early Language Learning (<http://www.NNELL.org>). If you are concerned that language programs in your school are being cut or are substandard, find out if your school is meeting state standards. You can find out more about your state's world languages standards by going to the Department of Education website for your state.
3. Consider alternatives. You may want your school to offer a great Spanish program, but keep in mind that the specific language offered is less important than the opportunity for the child to learn ANY foreign language. Note that the Bush administration recently announced a National Security Language Initiative to increase the number of Americans who can speak what they deem to be "critical" languages (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Arabic). Recognizing the need to start teaching these languages in the Pre-K and elementary level, the government is offering funding for schools to offer programs in these critical languages. If funding constraints are keeping your school from offering a quality program, suggest they develop a program in one of these critical languages, utilizing the federal government's new grants. One such grant is through the Department of Education's Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) and provides incentives for teaching critical need languages in K-12. \$24M has been earmarked for these grants. For more information on the FLAP grants, go to the following website for funding updates (click on Chart 1): <http://www.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html>. With active advocacy on the part of informed parents, there are many opportunities to support robust early language learning programs.

About the Author

Anneke Forzani is President and Founder of Language Lizard, LLC. Language Lizard offers bilingual children's products in over 40 languages, multicultural lesson plans, and a complimentary e-newsletter to help parents and teachers expose children to other languages and cultures at <http://www.languagelizard.com>.

Source: <http://www.edarticle.com>