



June 18, 1997

Via Facsimile: 515-965-9607
Danny Freshall, President
Ankeny Community School Board
Ankeny Community School District
P O Box 189
Ankeny, Iowa 50021

Dear Mr. Freshall:

I am aware that you are going to be making some important decisions concerning the future of foreign language education in your school district. Specifically, you will be considering whether or not to continue your support for French and Spanish programs at the elementary school level.

Before you make your decision, I would like to make sure that you have access to the latest research on the benefits of early language learning. This information leaves no doubt that children ages 5-10 are the best candidates for learning a second language. I'm sure that you probably have the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Education Update (Vol. 37, No. 7, Sept. 1995), on hand at your district office. I quote from page 4 of the "Understanding the Brain" article that states, "the complexity of the brain's learning means that educators should orchestrate complex experiences...[which] means that the children have hands-on experience. They have the potential to engage in dialogue with other people. They have the opportunity to express something orally, the opportunity to express something in written form, the opportunity to touch, to recreate." Also, ASCD's Curriculum Update, Winter 1996 edition features a spread on "Foreign Languages: Learning to Communicate in the Real World." Page two of this issue refers to data collected in Fairfax County Public Schools which reveals that "just having the experience of learning a second language helps you better analyse and reflect on your own language."

Also, Languages and Children: Making the Match (Curtain and Pesola, Longman Publishing Group, 1994) is among many published research documents that supports foreign language study in the elementary grades. One of the most striking pieces of information that is cited in this and other documents is that research shows that students who study foreign languages over a period of years attain higher SAT scores than their peers who do not have this exposure.

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p.2

The fact that Ankeny Community School District has offered instruction in foreign languages in grades 1-12 speaks highly of your commitment to providing the best possible education for your school children. I also work in a school district that has embraced foreign language as a core curricular subject, which is in accordance with Goals 2000 (1994). The advent of national Standards for Foreign Language (available through the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 6 Executive Plaza, Yonkers, NY), supports a long sequence of foreign language study. Such a program of study fosters critical thinking skills when it adopts the goals of: "Communication" in a second language, making "Connections" with other content areas, "Comparing" the second language with the first language. The goals of the study of "Culture" and the encouragement of foreign language students to apply what they have learned in the "Community" prepares them for the global business opportunities that await them after their education.

I realize that you have a difficult task ahead of you at the June 19th School Board meeting. As a member of the Executive Board of the National Network for Early Language Learning, I would be happy to speak to you further on this matter. I have included my home address and phone number for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Kay Hewitt
National Advocacy Chairperson
National Network for Early
Language Learning
109 Westridge Road
Eglin, South Carolina 29045