

The Loss of Elementary World Language - A Symptom of Serious Problems

I am deeply disappointed and distressed that our school district leadership has eliminated World Language instruction for K through 5th grades. The process that led to this decision was problematic: it was lacking in sufficient transparency (e.g., the 2023 override messaging led parents to believe World Language was getting a financial infusion), cherry-picked and did not fully convey the meaning of program review data, and disregarded community input. The decision is symptomatic of a misalignment between what our community wants and where the district is going.

Those of us who follow school issues closely know World Language was not cut because of a sudden decision or event. Rather, the program has been suffering from benign neglect for some time, such that it could no longer be delivered with excellence district-wide. World Language teachers have been begging the School Committee and School Department to allow them to operate the program properly - in the way it was designed and funded (by an override approved by voters) - for several years. It has been painful to watch these educators screaming into the wind, trying to save a hallmark academic program in Brookline (while watching other initiatives be supported and expanded).

During the budget development process, the current School Committee did not engage in robust public discussion about options to save World Language. There was some hand-wringing, but the public saw no substantive pushback, no deep questioning about spending choices and trends, and no proposal to prioritize this program. Acquiescence allowed a distinctive feature of the Brookline education - one valued by community members and residents for myriad reasons - to be pushed aside. This brought back memories of how the Enrichment and Challenge Support (ECS) program (formerly "Gifted and Talented") was also shifted out of existence as a "tough choice," never to be heard from again.

If I'm elected to School Committee, I intend to continue the conversation about World Language; too many people are too distressed for us to let this go. This might mean an ad hoc subcommittee or task force that explores how World Language can be revived and creates an action plan. It might mean a deep analysis of the budget to identify potential ways to fund the program (ways the public could not identify with the sparse information provided). And it will certainly mean elevating the voices of parents, students, and teachers. No one should feel ignored and disregarded on a matter of such importance in our school district, and too many people are too upset with this decision for us to accept it without further discussion and work.