

Why Should All Children Begin to Study a Foreign Language When They Start School?

"Many of the reasons that a foreign language should be studied at all are also the reasons why such study should begin as early as possible. Most of the purposes of learning languages cannot be achieved by short-term efforts. The economic, political, social, and intellectual benefits are gained, in most cases, when students achieve advanced levels of language skills and cultural proficiency. One way of achieving this is through foreign language programs which begin in the elementary school and continue through high school. Since language learning takes time, it is important that as much time as possible be devoted to learning a language."

Helena Curtain, *Languages and Children: Making the Match*

Children need to begin to study a foreign language when they start school in order to

- have enough time to achieve fluency in the language.
- maximize the brain's window of opportunity between birth and age 10 for easy language acquisition.
- take advantage of the time when they are more receptive to learning about other cultures.
- increase achievement in all other subject areas, thus increasing scores on tests such as the SAT and ACT.
- develop stronger communication skills in their own language.
- develop a higher degree of creativity.
- encourage a higher self-concept.
- reinforce skills and connect concepts being taught in many other subject areas.
- broaden their career possibilities
- have a complete education that includes foreign language, along with English, mathematics, computer science, social studies, and natural sciences.

A Nation At Risk: The Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education

"Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical."

ACTFL: Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century (1996)

Americans are searching for a competitive edge in the expanding markets of the global village. Europeans are redefining themselves with the advent of the European Union. Asian markets are being enhanced by global participation and Africa is emerging on the horizon of technological interdependence. What will happen next? How will the world reshape itself in the new millennium? The answer is not simple, but many people are realizing that language is the key. Global interdependence and interconnectedness mean that communication skills are needed.

Christopher Gwin and Michael Nentwich, Goethe Institute (1999)