



Community-Based Program

Background Information

Institution: German Language School of West Michigan

Program address: 4748 Blue Grass Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Web address: www.germanlanguageschool.us

Contact person

Name: Ralf Scharnowski

Title: Director

Email: scharnowski@comcast.net

Languages/dialects taught: German

Grades taught: PreK-12

Program Description

Purposes and goals of the program: The German Language School of West Michigan is a parent initiative promoting the German language and culture in the Grand Rapids area. The school offers children the opportunity to learn the German language in a formal classroom setting and provides a network for families to expand their knowledge of German culture and engage in cross-cultural exchanges.

Type of program: Immersion, partial immersion, bilingual program, foreign language program, Saturday academy (classes meet on Saturday afternoons during the school year).

Program origin: It was founded in the year 2004 by a parent initiative.

Parents

Parents' expectations for the program: Provide children with a fun opportunity to learn and maintain German language skills in a group of similar aged children.

Students

Students:

- First-generation immigrants, 33%
- Second-generation immigrants, 33%
- Non-ethnic background, 34%

Countries of origin: Germany and the United States

Total student enrollment: 15 students

How the program identifies heritage speakers: Students are grouped into two groups; fluent speakers and non-fluent speakers. The fluent speaker group is split into further subgroups based on level of language skills and age. Teachers interact with the students to determine the students' skill level. The interaction includes an evaluation of both written and oral skills. The process is informal.

Percentage of students who complete the program: 75%

Possible reasons for student withdrawal: Time conflicts and insufficient parental interest in having child commit to program

Students' attitudes toward the language varieties they speak: Students show a combination of excitement and disinterest. They are generally excited about their second language; However, US cultural influences can result in a lack of desire to continue working on improving or maintaining second language skills. Also, spending part of Saturday in class can be difficult after spending the week at school.

Instructors

Number of instructors in the program: 5

Languages in which instructors are proficient: German and English

Proficiency level: Native or professional German speakers

Credentials: Doctorate in German, Sociology; Chemistry credentials; BS in Biology

Professional development opportunities instructors have: Self improvement. There are not organized development opportunities.

Professional development opportunities instructors need: Curriculum planning and development; access to teaching resources

Additional comments: All teachers and parents of students volunteer.

Instruction

Total contact hours per week: 1.5

Times per week: 1

Student grouping: Non fluent, fluent beginners, fluent intermediate and fluent advanced

Hours devoted to language teaching: 75% of the time

Hours devoted to culture teaching: 25% of the time

Language skills

Heritage language skills: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing

Levels of language proficiency reached by the end of the program: The goal is fluency in German reading, writing, and speaking.

Culture

Aspects of culture taught: Geography, history, festivals, customs, folktales, songs, rhymes, social and cultural norms, cultural appropriateness, and literature

Methodologies

Methodologies and instructional strategies used in the program: Language immersion when possible and focus on fun in the classroom

Materials

Textbooks: Deutsch Mobil, Klett Verlag and Loewenzahn U. Pustebblumen, Schroedel Verlag

Other materials used for instruction: German audio, video, games, and literature

Technology used for instruction: Audio and visual presentation

Assessment

Assessments used to evaluate students' progress: Teachers' observations

Articulation

Connections with other institutions: Colleges

How the program develops home/school connections or promotes parent involvement: We require parents to help teach or assist with class financial support.

What the program has in place

Financial support the program receives: Parents

Other support the program receives: Financial support for class materials

Solicitation of funding: The program director and school principal

Assistance or funding the program would like to receive: Additional access to learning materials

Monitoring of overall achievement in school: Teacher observations

Special challenges

Challenges the program has experienced: Integration of non-fluent students into classes for fluent students (difficult to achieve proficiency); difficulty to meet every student's needs with only 3-4 class levels and a limited number of teachers