



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #643

Grants for World Languages Instruction (DPI -- Categorical Aids)

Bill Agency

[LFB 2007-09 Budget Summary: Page 468, #11]

CURRENT LAW

No provision.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$500,000 in 2008-09 in a new, annual appropriation for grants for world languages instruction. Provide that beginning in 2008-09, the State Superintendent would award grants to school districts to promote world languages instruction in grades one to six. Grants would be paid over a six-year term and would be non-renewable. Require the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to promulgate rules to implement the program and require those rules include all of the following: (a) a definition of world languages eligible for inclusion under the program; (b) criteria for selecting recipients of a grant award, including the quality of the application and the ability of the applicant to continue teaching world languages at the end of the six-year grant; and (c) the schedule of payments to be made pursuant to each award. DPI would be required to strive to distribute grants among urban, rural, and suburban school districts.

Provide that a school district may apply to DPI to receive a six-year grant to teach world languages in grades one through six. The State Superintendent would award grants and each school district receiving a grant would use the grant moneys for teachers to teach one or more world languages as follows: (a) during the first year of the grant, \$30,000 to assign one teacher to teach one or more world languages in first grade; (b) during the second year, \$30,000 for one teacher for first and second grades; (c) during the third year, \$60,000 for two teachers for first

through fourth grades; (e) during the fifth year, \$30,000 for two teachers for first through fifth grades; and (f) during the sixth year, \$30,000 for two teachers for first through sixth grades.

Require that in each year of the grant, each school board receiving an award would be required to use a portion of the grant to send the following three teachers to twice-yearly professional development workshops offered by DPI: (a) one teacher funded by the grant and who is teaching a world language in the grade level added in that year, pursuant to the schedule specified; and (b) two teachers who do not teach a world language, but who teach at the same grade level as the teacher specified in (a), for the purpose of integrating a world language into their curricula.

Require that if in any fiscal year appropriated funding is insufficient to fully fund the grants awarded under the program, DPI would prorate the available moneys among the school districts receiving grants. Add eligibility for the grant program to the list of statutory provisions that apply to Milwaukee Public Schools as a first class city school district.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The Budget in Brief states that the United States continues to lag other nations in teaching students other languages. Research is cited that shows that students learn other languages more easily in elementary school than in high school. The proposed program would provide school districts interested in developing these programs with start-up funds to hire teachers, offer professional development, and purchase curriculum materials.

2. Research cited by DPI in its 2007-09 agency budget request has shown that world language students from disadvantaged backgrounds had SAT-Verbal scores equivalent to their more affluent peers. Another study found that young language learners performed better on state standardized tests than their peers who were not studying world languages. The Department noted that pupils who begin to learn languages in elementary grades tend not only to reach higher levels of proficiency in their second language, but also better understand the grammar and structure of their first language, English.

3. According to DPI, Wisconsin compares favorably with its Midwestern neighbors, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan. Of the five, only Wisconsin requires instruction in world languages in the middle school grades. Wisconsin has the nation's third highest percentage, 53.9%, of students enrolled in world language courses in grades 6-12. However, DPI points out that at least five states now require world language instruction in at least some elementary grades: Louisiana, Maine, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Wyoming.

4. The Department indicates that the number of elementary schools offering world language instruction is declining in this state. In 2002-03, 63 school districts reported teaching languages in at least some elementary grades. By 2004-05, the number of districts had declined to 54.

5. Proponents of the proposal have argued that financial constraints, including revenue limits, are the primary reason that more school districts do not offer elementary language instruction. Therefore, some have argued that categorical grants would encourage more elementary schools to offer language instruction. Because categorical aids are outside revenue limits, they provide additional resources to school districts.

6. On the other hand, in the DPI budget request, it was indicated that the federal No Child Left Behind Law might also play a role in schools' decisions not to offer world language instruction. The federal law mandates testing in reading and mathematics in grades three through eight and once in high school. Schools and school districts face sanctions if their students fail to meet benchmarks for proficiency in those subjects. DPI indicated that as schools place more emphasis on reading and math proficiency, other subjects, including world languages, might be marginalized. Curriculum decisions are made at the local level, and it is unknown whether local officials would be influenced by the availability of a world languages categorical aid.

ALTERNATIVES TO BILL

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$500,000 in 2008-09 in a new, annual appropriation for grants for world languages instruction.

ALT 1	Change to Bill Funding	Change to Base Funding
GPR	\$0	\$500,000

2. Delete provision.

ALT 2	Change to Bill Funding	Change to Base Funding
GPR	-\$500,000	\$0

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