

# Satellite links language students



Farmington High sophomore Eric Eslinger laughs at a skit broadcast to 1,300 Japanese language students across the country. In the background is Sumiko Capeling, a bilingual aide who helps students with their language lessons.



Farmington bilingual aide Sumiko Capeling listens and watches as her four students observe a satellite transmission from Nebraska.

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

Kiran Arora told her parents last spring she wished the Farmington school district would offer Japanese language classes.

Her wish came true this fall.

"It was something I definitely wanted to take," said the Farmington High School sophomore, who is also taking second-year Latin. "I like it because it's so different. Most people don't have the opportunity to learn such a different language."

Arora is one of four Farmington High students selected to participate in a beginning Japanese language course transmitted to the school via satellite. They are part of the 1,300 students in 257 schools across 20 states participating.

Other school districts in Southeast Michigan, including Clarenceville, Detroit and Pontiac, use this language program or other satellite offerings.

A RATHER animated teacher, Ann Arbor native Tim Cook broadcasts his Japanese lessons from Lincoln, Neb. Unlike the on-TV class image of a bland speaker on a screen to an auditorium full of students, Cook uses role-playing and props and interacts with different schools on an audio basis during each session. He also wears hats and T-shirts representing a variety of high schools while on the air to make kids feel at home.

Farmington High students had the chance to go national once and are scheduled to do it again in December.

Class is taught in the newly revamped Farmington High School media center, where a new satellite dish allows transmission. Students spend 50 minutes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday with a satellite class, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays work with a telephone tutorial before taking quizzes or tests.

There is also time for them to work with Farmington bilingual aide Sumiko Capeling, who sits in on all sessions to help students along and personalize the lessons.

"It's not an easy way to step into language," Capeling said. "It (the



photos by SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Students learn the basics of Japanese language and culture daily in a satellite teaching pilot at Farmington High School. Pictured

clockwise, from left, are juniors Tracey Kuffel and Sarah Host and sophomores Kiran Arora and Eric Eslinger.

workload) has been piling up a lot — some of the students are taking two languages.

"THEY'RE DOING more than I expected. They can speak (Japanese) now."

The course is "rigorous," but the students seem to like it, said district media resources director Peggy Schmidt.

The course, one of four Satellite Educational Resources Consortium projects funded partially through the U.S. Department of Education, is designed to teach students to speak, write, be conversationally adept at Japanese and to learn the culture as well, she said.

"There's a commitment to looking at Japanese" in the Farmington district, she said. "One of the reasons we put a satellite dish here is to pro-

vide opportunities for kids."

Students agree it's a chance to learn a language which is more worldly, especially in light of today's economic marketplace. Farmington High Junior Tracey Kuffel said Japanese is easier to learn than Spanish, in which she is also enrolled this year. "I always wanted to learn the Japanese language," she said, adding that it will "look good on my resume."

"Altogether, it's easier. The sentence structure is easier than any other language."

ERIC ESLINGER, a Farmington High sophomore, said he hesitated giving up his French class this year to take Japanese, but he is happy he did. "You've got to study," he said, explaining that there is not only language but "thousands of symbols" and a different alphabet to learn. "I'm going to be working with com-

puters the rest of my life. I think it will help."

Assistant superintendent for curriculum and staff development, Judith White, said the Japanese pilot offering came after students, parents and some staff approached her showing an interest in offerings of Japanese and Russian languages. The district is taking care not to flood the curriculum with too many languages, she said.

"Every time you add a language, it draws from the same student population," she said. "We have to be careful of that."

Despite the uncertainty of the district's budget because of recent state cutbacks, with more projected, she is encouraging staff to continue looking at language options. "We have to keep working toward that goal," she added.

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