

# Plan seeks inclusion for bilingual students

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Public Schools is trying to take the "bye" out of bilingualism.

Bilingual students are often pulled out of regular classes a half-an-hour at a time for special instruction. That will cease under a new plan being presented by Director of Bilingual Education Samir Haddad.

Instead, bilingual students will remain in the regular classroom, receiving instruction from teachers with help of paraprofessionals. Bilingual students would avoid the stigma of being taken out of a regular classroom, Haddad said.

"What I want to do is have the instruction take place where it should take place," said Haddad, who joined the district from Hamden schools this summer. "We no longer can look at a classroom of 30 homogeneous kids. We have to look at a diverse classroom."

Phase One would include "newcomer centers" where children receive intensive English instruction for one semester, sometimes less. Then they would be moved into the regular classrooms.

The move to inclusion from a native language support program is also practical, district officials said.

Some 68 different languages are spoken in the district. To provide specialized instruction in each of those languages would be unrealistic.

And Farmington schools continue to grow more diverse.

While Arabic/Chaldean (22 percent) and Albanian (11.5 percent) students comprise a large portion of the ethnic population, they are being joined by those who speak Indian languages (8.9 percent), Russian (9.45 percent) and Japanese (8.10 percent).

There's also a substantial Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Hebrew student population. The highest concentration of bilingual students is in kindergarten through grade six, Haddad said.

A telling statistic, though, is the 26.9 percent listed under "other." Those languages include Armenian, German, Czechoslovakian, Greek, Polish and Turkish.

Farmington school is also seeing a greater number of "zero English" students, Haddad said.

"We should send a message out: Just because the child doesn't speak English doesn't mean he doesn't know anything," Haddad said.

"We are living in a shrinking world. I think we should be exposed to people who are, quote unquote, different from us, and be able to work collaboratively with people who are, quote unquote, different from us."

Just because we have a diverse population doesn't mean it's a problem. It's a challenge.

Inclusion for bilingual students in kindergarten through grade 12 includes having trained paraprofessionals in the classroom and training for teachers. Third-grade teachers are already in training.

Classroom teachers would also have resource materials and a resource teacher available. They would also have planning time with paraprofessionals.

The plan calls for clustering of students at elementary while secondary bilingual students would be taught transitional English.

Bilingual student progress would be monitored through report cards, MEAP scores and teacher reports.

The district's Bilingual Program has also become a support network for families of non-English speaking students. That will continue, Haddad said.

Haddad's direction has board support as well as the superintendent's.

"Essentially what we're saying, whether we're talking about gifted education, special education or bilingual education, whatever that is, the real of the program is to support what's going on in the regular classroom," Superintendent Bob Maxfield said, "and get the kids into the regular classroom."

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