

Mervan Osborne for School Committee  
PANGEA Questionnaire  
October 15, 2013

Dear PANGEA Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to explain my position on World Language study. I have made this issue a central focus of my campaign and believe deeply that it ought to be an integral part of a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum for Cambridge students.

I am a vocal supporter of our World Language program, and would like to see it expanded and improved. Research demonstrates that the study of a foreign language can have an impact on a child's developmental trajectory as early as three or four years old. As compared to their monolingual counterparts, bilingual children have sharper executive function skills, such as the ability to solve complex problems or hold one's attention on a specific task. It is for this reason that I am advocating for the introduction of a World Languages program at every elementary school in Cambridge. We don't have time to waste – our children's brains are like sponges, and I think it is important to provide even our youngest students with the opportunity to study a foreign language from the moment they enter a classroom.

Studies also show that learning a second language has benefits on a child's primary language skills, and that there is a strong correlation between bilingualism and academic achievement in other subjects. Further, students who study a foreign language tend to score higher on college entrance standardized tests, like the SAT and the ACT. The research is clear: there is a multiplier effect to the study of multiple languages, and crafting a curriculum that builds in such opportunities is an investment in our children and their future. The money we spend today on implementing our World Language program will return a panoply of gains at every level of our school system.

To ensure that the World Language program receives adequate attention, I believe we should encourage the Superintendent of Schools to commit resources to bringing a proposal for a World Languages curriculum before the School Committee within the 2013-14 school calendar. World Languages in Cambridge is an issue that needs to remain in the public discourse, and our Superintendent must continue to advocate for the development of a comprehensive plan as part of the fulfillment of the Innovation Agenda commitments relative to World Languages. Ultimately, a fully realized strategy will include a "recruitment" plan to attract a diverse group of students – and teachers who would like to participate. The strategy would also call for a study of our existing program's results thus far and recommend possible improvements, grounded in research-based pedagogy and successful language study departments elsewhere in the country. This approach would not only ensure that the program's needs are being met, but would encourage the convening of great minds in this field of study, making sure that our efforts are best serving the children of Cambridge.

To conclude, I believe that part of our job as parents and teachers and a School Committee is preparing our students to excel in a world that is constantly evolving. We live in an international era, where the boundaries of a city no longer determine what affects our lives. World Language and Dual Immersion Specialist Gregg Roberts asserts that “monolingualism is the illiteracy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” and I agree. Our students need to be global citizens with a global perspective. They need to be curious about engaging with other cultures, and learned enough to understand. Whether it’s Mandarin or Spanish or Arabic, it is important that our students’ horizons not be limited by their ability to communicate, and that is why I am proud to support the expansion of the Cambridge World Language program.

Best,  
Mervan Osborne