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District Can'T Find Spanish Teacher

By **Michele Nelson**

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Payson Unified School District board members expressed amazement that the district can't find a qualified Spanish teacher.

As a stopgap measure, Superintendent Greg Wyman at a meeting on Monday asked the board to make an agreement with Mesa Community College Distance Learning.

"I'm just astonished we cannot find anyone to teach Spanish," said board member Jim Quinlan.

All universities require high school students to have at least two years of foreign language study to apply, although students don't need a foreign language to graduate from high school.

Currently at Payson High School 150 students wish to take Spanish.

Without a teacher, they cannot.

Wyman said the district has tried in vain to fill the teaching slot for the past year. He said many districts throughout the state are having trouble filling teaching slots.

"We have been talking to all three universities (to find a teacher)," said Wyman. "I can't stress this enough — there is a shortage of teachers ... there is a 600-teacher shortage in Arizona."

After much discussion, the board agreed to the inter-governmental agreement with Mesa Community College.

This means, if students wish to take Spanish, they will have to pay \$150 per semester, said Wyman.

In comparison, Gila Community College has a Spanish class that completes two years of Spanish in one year at a cost of \$190 per semester.

Not only was Quinlan shocked by the lack of applicants, he bemoaned the need to rely on distance learning over a computer.

In response, Wyman said the experience could be positive.

"I have used Mesa Distance Learning," he said. "As part of the evaluation system, they must respond to kids within a 24-hour period. (However), it is not the same as getting a course through college."

Wyman did say his two daughters took distance-learning classes with good results.

The bigger issue Wyman touched on in the presentation, was the deterioration of the teaching profession by putting so much pressure on teachers to give assessment tests, provide data and take the blame for pretty much everything, all while slashing salaries.

"We only have ourselves to blame," he said.

Quinlan then asked if Spanish could be a dual-credit course like the NAVIT career technical education courses in fire science, medical assistant and cosmetology.

PHS Principal Brian Mabb said it would cost too much. The money for community college dual enrollment came from NAVIT and the regional vocational education district has already determined which courses it will cover.

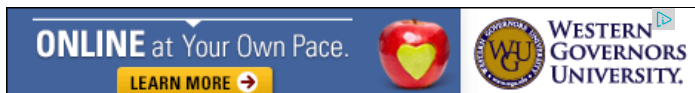
Then Quinlan mentioned that the Cave Creek school district has enough money to offer Chinese classes starting at the kindergarten level.

"It's a full immersion program," said Quinlan.

The United States is the only industrialized country that does not offer a full-immersion second language course of study. Most other countries teach their students English as a second language.

Wyman said as he works with the community to establish a vision for future students, the district will need to set priorities. In the meantime, Wyman said he would continue to search for another Spanish teacher.


"Our goal would be to find a teacher in the spring," he told the board. "Our long-range plan is to find a solution this year. We'll be aggressively looking."



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It is a big deal because these students will soon be entering a professional world that is more global than ever before. Being able to communicate in a second (or third) language is a distinct advantage since the rest of the world does not speak English as some would assume or expect. With China surpassing the U.S. as the world's largest economy, it's not surprising that some see the benefits of learning how to communicate in Mandarin. Beyond this, and perhaps more importantly, learning another language exposes you to different cultures, practices, and people. Finally, studying a second language often results in a better understanding of one's first language. This is all in addition to the university application requirements.

The school district seems to recognize the importance of this issue and is at least seeking alternatives that will allow students to study Spanish. It's very unfortunate that these may involve fees, but I will avoid criticizing the district until I can offer a better solution. As someone who was raised and educated in Payson, I think it is irresponsible, ignorant, and offensive to make the