

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STAFF NOTE REVIEW ITEM

Topic: BaseLang Spanish Language Immersion Partnership

Date: June 2023

Held In: Full Board

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Operations

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION:

In the fall of 2020, the Office of Continuous Improvement and Support (OCIS) began a multi-year exploration of the impact of Spanish language immersion training for educators. At the time, OCIS recognized a need to find new ways to support educators working with English learner populations. Based on an initial review of the research, staff determined that professional learning that is immersive and involves regular contact with individuals from another culture would promote greater multicultural competencies, increased empathy for English learners, and higher self-efficacy for teaching students from diverse backgrounds.

The BaseLang Grammarless program is an online immersive program initially designed to serve professionals and travelers seeking to expand their language skills. As BaseLang's Grammarless program has not been empirically studied or undergone an external evaluation, the OCIS received permission from the US Department of Education to re-route federal funds to study this professional learning opportunity. Despite the lack of prior validation, the conceptual underpinnings of BaseLang's Grammarless program, and its alignment to the professional learning literature, suggest that participation in the program is likely to provide a boost in the multicultural competencies of education leaders.

The program provides a highly immersive and intensive experience. Participants in the program are assigned a dedicated tutor who works with them in a one-on-one environment, allowing them to build relationships with their instructors. Each lesson is guided by a curriculum but allows time for conversations about cultural differences, discussions of how language shapes our understanding of our environment, and opportunities for the participant to ask specific questions, role play requested scenarios, or focus on industry specific vocabulary. Participants can apply their new learning immediately as the experience does not remove them from their home or job duties. Additionally, the daily commitment over an eight week period is aligned to the literature's assertion that professional learning experiences are more impactful when they exist over a longer period.

At this time, the OCIS is in the process of running its fourth cycle of participants through the BaseLang program. Cycle 1 included four principals who participated in qualitative interviews. This cycle helped us understand the flow of the program and its initial impact on the way these leaders approach their work with English learners.

Cycle two included fifty educators from across the state. During this cycle, the OCIS sought to better understand what it means to run this program at scale across the state. OCIS learned that we needed support in scaling this program. This led us to our first partnership with the Kentucky Education Association (KEA).

During cycle three, the KEA received a grant from the National Education Association (NEA) to allow the agency to provide the professional learning for fifty more educators. These educators took a series of multicultural teaching self-efficacy scales as well as journal entries about their experience. The self-efficacy scales showed a statistically significant and favorable change to the multicultural teaching self-efficacy of our participants and the qualitative analysis of their journal entries aligned with the findings of our cycle one procedure.

Having documented a change in educator beliefs, the OCIS now wants to understand if those changes lead to subsequent changes in educator behavior. Along with the KEA, the OCIS has partnered with Shelby County Public Schools to complete this analysis. At this time, fifty Shelby County educators are participating in the professional learning. The OCIS is collecting both qualitative and quantitative data during this cycle which will be reportable in the fall.

In addition to sharing this partnership, the OCIS has also determined that sufficient evidence exists to allow local school districts to self-fund their own language immersion cohorts using their federal funds.

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