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Teaching Foreign Language in Elementary School

Georgia Department of Education Elementary School Foreign Languages Model Program

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The Fulton County School System has one school that participates in the Georgia Department of Education Elementary Foreign Language Model Program and receives partial funding for the Japanese teachers at each grade level K-5. This model program has proven to be very successful over the past six years of implementation, and the students who began in kindergarten are now in middle school and doing quite well in Japanese. The Georgia Department of Education Elementary School Foreign Languages Model Program offers the following components:

- Students receive daily instruction exclusively in the foreign language.
- All instructors in the program are trained foreign language specialists.
- Activities in the foreign language class support the regular classroom instruction.
- School-wide and community involvement is encouraged.
- Students completing the elementary program will continue in well-articulated middle and high school foreign language programs.

A fully articulated K-8 foreign language curriculum has been developed by the Georgia Department of Education and can be viewed at the WEB site: http://www.doe.k12.ga.us. Assessment suggestions are provided and sample lesson plans are being developed that will also be placed on the WEB. For further information on this highly successful program and program evaluations conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), contact the Georgia Department of Education Foreign Language Program Consultants, Marcia Spielberger or Vicente Valverde at http://www.doe.k12.ga.us.

The Fulton County School System borrowed many of the successful features of the state model program in designing its own elementary foreign language program, such as teacher training, daily instruction, use of the target language, interactive teaching methods and assessing student performance. This school system encompasses metro Atlanta and serves a diverse and mobile population. Sustaining a long sequence elementary foreign language program for all students is made more difficult by the highly mobile population in the metro area. There are currently 45 elementary schools in the district with plans to open 3-4 more in the next 5 years. For these reasons, the system decided to initiate its own elementary foreign language program at the fourth grade. The Georgia Department of Education Elementary School Foreign Languages Model Program school in Fulton County serves as a demonstration site for the teachers who are teaching in the elementary

foreign language programs beginning at the fourth grade. At the conclusion of the fifth grade, students are evaluated for eligibility to continue into the middle school 6th grade program which continues building on the language skills acquired in elementary school. Since students receive daily instruction in the target language (30 minutes), they are able to access the language immediately for receptive listening skills and productive skills.

Instructional Activities based on the Georgia Elementary School Foreign Languages Model Program

Task-based: Students carry out tasks (e.g. making a kite) by following instructions given in the target language or by producing a product using the target language (e.g. big book/little book with illustrations) or by acting out a role play or simulation activity.

Instructional Games: Students interact with the teacher and each other through a variety of instructional games. They may be required to listen to the target language description and identify items on a poster chart by placing a marker in the appropriate place or they may be required to guess what is behind a flap or window on a chart based on what the teacher has said. Other types of instructional games include lotto (vocabulary /culture bingo) and authentic and appropriate children's games.

Songs, Rhymes, Verses: Students learn and retain language associated with singing and learning rhymes and verses. These are the schema which help children make connected use of language because they may be familiar with a word or expression from a song or rhyme.

Reading Materials: Commercially produced and student made read-along books are provided to assist in developing reading skills in the foreign language. Authentic materials such a labels, advertisements, cartoons, etc. are also used for building beginning reading skills.