

**EDUCATION REPORT - Foreign Language Learning in the United States***By Nancy Steinbach*

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This is Steve Ember with the VOA Special English Education Report.

It seems more and more Americans want schools to teach foreign languages to children younger than five years old. The most popular way to teach these young children another language is called immersion.

Children in immersion programs hear only the new language in the classroom. The children play games, sing songs and talk to one another in the new language. Some experts say immersion programs are the most effective way for young children to learn a language.

But there can be a problem when children in the United States begin to learn another language at such an early age. Not many elementary schools continue the effort as the children get older.

Only seven of the fifty states require schools to teach a foreign language to students between the ages of six and twelve. Language experts say it is easier for younger children to learn a language. Still, American schools generally do not begin to teach foreign languages until secondary school. By then, students are about thirteen years old.

American schools face difficult choices about the cost of educational programs. The federal government has increased support for foreign language study in its education law called No Child Left Behind.

At the college level, the Modern Language Association says more students than ever are studying foreign languages. The group recently announced its findings for the period from nineteen-ninety-eight until two-thousand-two. The number of students who studied foreign languages in American colleges and universities increased by seventeen percent.

Spanish is the most widely taught language in American colleges and universities. Other popular languages include French, German, Japanese, Chinese and Italian. The Modern Language Association says more languages are being studied now than in the past. It says the largest growth since nineteen-ninety-eight has been in the study of American Sign Language, Arabic and biblical Hebrew.

The association says about nine percent of college students in the United States study foreign languages. That is the highest level since nineteen-seventy-two.

This VOA Special English Education Report was written by Nancy Steinbach. This is Steve Ember.



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