

What are the first steps to starting an Arabic program?

Research existing programs

Seek out and communicate with leaders at existing K-12 Arabic programs. Ideally, you will be able to find other Arabic programs in your region who know about local circumstances, as well as leaders at schools further afield that have a similar profile to yours and that may serve as models.

This step is especially important for administrators interested in offering Arabic who lack a background in Arabic language or foreign language pedagogy. K-12 Arabic is a fast-developing field and, in practice, there is a wide variety of approaches to teaching the language and culture. Talking with multiple teachers and administrators working in different environments will leave you prepared to develop a vision for a program that follows best practices and suits your school's circumstances. In addition to researching programs independently, email QFI to learn about schools and leaders you may want to contact.

Talk with local stakeholders

Research and reach out to local stakeholders who may be able to support your efforts. These people could include school families who are interested in internationally oriented curricular offerings at the school, or Arab-Americans who are part of your school

community or living in the area. People from these groups can become allies in the building of an Arabic program and help find potential Arabic teachers. As they may also be potential beneficiaries of an Arabic program, it is important to hear from such people about what their goals and hopes for a program would be.

Identify an administrative leader and administrative support

Any successful K-12 Arabic program will need a building leader – usually the principal – who can take on the task of growing and building the school's Arabic program within a unified vision. This person should be the one who takes the initiative to start the program and who will serve as liaison between teacher(s), students, parents, school district and funding sources as the program continues. Especially in its initial years, starting an Arabic program will demand an entrepreneurial spirit.

In order to sustain an Arabic program, a network of administrative support is as important as any single leader. While a point-person is necessary, especially in the early stages, a program led by a charismatic individual runs the risk of falling apart if that person departs before it is well established.



Create a vision for Arabic at your school or district

An administration should be able to answer the question “why Arabic?” both in general and also specifically for their school: “How will teaching Arabic contribute to the wider vision and impact of our school?” The administration should articulate a long-term vision for how an Arabic program will be part of the school’s mission and how it will support students’ education. This vision-creation work will be the first step of the wider advocacy work that should accompany the introduction of a new and potentially unfamiliar language. Successful Arabic programs have found it useful to link the vision for an Arabic program with existing elements of the school’s mission or vision, including elements such as:

- 21st century education
- Global citizenship
- International or intercultural education

Arabic is a vastly under-taught language relative to the number of Arabic speakers globally, despite growth in college-level and K-12 language offerings since 2000. Offering Arabic at your school can help to meet a dire need for the teaching of a critical-need world language, while also setting your school apart from the norm.

Despite its uniqueness, however, Arabic as a course offering should be more than just a distinguishing “feather in the cap” for a school; it should fit integrally with the school’s purpose and serve the students’ education.

