

What are Real-World Advocacy Ideas?

Recruit Students and Families

Present about the Arabic program to potential students: "What is Arabic?"

Objective: Introduce potential students to the Arabic language in general and the Arabic program at our school in particular

Description: A group of current or former Arabic students visits a classroom made up of students who will have the opportunity to enroll in Arabic (or apply to attend a school that offers Arabic) in the following year. If a classroom visit is not possible, this kind of activity may work better as a lunch or after-school meeting. Students can present information about:

- The Arabic language in general and reasons for learning it
- Specific opportunities and special features of the program
- A short mini-lesson about something in Arabic to catch the interest of students and show them what Arabic class would be like.
- Here are some possible mini-lessons of different length and complexity:
- Teach the Arabic numbers and/or Hindi-Arabic numerals 1 through 10

- Teach a line or verse of a simple Arabic song, perhaps accompanied by a music video
- Teach enough Arabic letters for participants to write their names in Arabic

Materials: *It would be helpful to have PowerPoint or other visual aid that gives the key information, in addition to whatever materials are needed for a mini-lesson.*

Suggestions: It is important to ensure prior administrative support for a classroom visit and presentation of this variety, from both schools if applicable. Students leading this presentation will need to practice the presentation and lesson before they conduct it, depending on their age and abilities it may be helpful for them to "team-teach" with their teacher.

Sources: Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago, IL; Cholla High Magnet School in Tucson, AZ; Roland Park Country School in Baltimore, MD.

Put on an information session or an "Open House" event for potential families

Objective: Inform potential or incoming families about the Arabic program at your school



Description: For schools where students or families must apply to the school, an information session or open house is an essential advocacy event, which ideally is part of a wider all-school open house evening. In addition to being a forum for disseminating essential information about the Arabic program at the school, an open house event is a good opportunity for current students to demonstrate what they have learned.

Suggestions:

- Offering Arab food to participants is a great way to welcome guests as well as introduce an important aspect of Arab culture. One school with experience running these kinds of events had success soliciting donations of Arab food from a local restaurant.
- When presenting Arabic to potential families and students, it is important to counteract the narrative, often pre-formed in people's minds, that Arabic is impossibly difficult and demands a specific type of student.

Sources: Arabic Immersion Magnet School in Houston, TX; Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago, IL; Buckingham Browne & Nichols School in Cambridge, MA.

Use Social Media

Objective: distributing information and building interest for an Arabic program.

Description: Creating an Arabic Program account on Twitter or another social media service can be effective way to find supporters, keep interested parents and students updated with information, and build excitement for an Arabic class.

Anecdote: The principal of the newly founded Arabic Immersion Magnet School in Houston, TX, had the responsibility of attracting families of children to apply to her school within Houston's school choice system. She found that explaining and promoting her program via Twitter was an exceptionally effective tool for recruiting families, as well as for finding other supporters or potential teachers.

Inspire your Arabic students within and beyond the school

Planning enrichment events and activities for current Arabic students is an important part of advocacy. Such events can enrich the curriculum, motivate students to learn more, and build a positive vibe for the Arabic program in and around your school.

Create an Arab culture club

Objective: Allow students of multiple skill-levels to engage with Arabic culture in an in-depth way.

Description: An Arab culture club that meets weekly at a separate time from classes does not replace the cultural learning that happens in the classroom but rather deepens it in some distinct ways:



- A club can bring together students from different levels of Arabic, allowing for students to learn from each other and build a positive “program spirit”
- A club can include students not enrolled in Arabic classes but who are interested in or curious about Arab culture
- A club allows students more time than may be available in class to delve into a particular performative or productive cultural activity

Suggestions: A club could include activities such as:

- Cooking Arab food and/or creating a cookbook
- Performing arts activities (dance, singing, theater, drumming)
- Arts or handicraft projects such as calligraphy or traditional embroidery

Source: Cholla High Magnet School in Tucson AZ; Buckingham Browne & Nichols School in Cambridge, MA.

Engage with Local Arab-American Cultural Resources

Objective: empower students to connect with local Arabic-speaking communities in their own region and apply their language skills in the real world

Description: Field trips to Arab neighborhoods, restaurants, or cultural centers are an excellent way to show students that the language and cultural skills that they are learning in the classroom have a practical application in the real world. Out-of-classroom experiences stick in the memory of students and can help form a strong impetus to learn more.

Suggestions:

- If visiting an Arab neighborhood in which there are signs written in the Arabic script, create a scavenger hunt in which students must search for particular letters or words.
- If visiting a restaurant at which Arabs work, talk to the employees ahead of time and ask them to speak with your students only in Arabic. This kind of visit can be integrated into a unit about food and eating out.
- Invite an Arab performer or artist to come and present to your Arabic classes or the wider school community.

Preparation: Depending on the resources available in your region, the logistics of such a visit could vary significantly in terms of how complicated and expensive this kind of activity is. Even if there are no such cultural resources in your immediate area, it is worth investigating the possibility of finding funds to travel to such resources.

Sources: ideas drawn from all administrators and teachers interviewed.



Conduct cultural exchange projects with students from the Arab world

Objective: students connect via the internet with their peers from Arab countries to interact, learn from each other, and work on a joint cultural project.

Description: Connecting with students living in an Arab country is a very powerful way to motivate students and show the practical impact of learning a language. This could take the form of a pen-pal interaction, or an internet-based collaborative arts or performance project.

Anecdote: Administrators and teachers at Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago have coordinated with the Global Voices Initiative to connect students in their Arabic classes with high school students learning English in Morocco and Jordan. The students from Chicago wrote original plays in Arabic that were performed by the Arab students, while they performed the plays that the Arab students had written in English.

Bring back program graduates to talk to current students

Objective: inspire current students by letting them see how learning Arabic has influenced former students.

Description: Once an Arabic program has been around for a few years, bringing back former students to talk to younger students about their experience learning Arabic in retrospect

is a very powerful motivator. Students who have gone on to study Arabic in college or have been able to use Arabic in the “real world” are particularly effective. This lets students (especially those just starting their studies) see that learning Arabic is possible and that there are benefits to advancing in Arabic.

Suggestions:

- Even if the Arabic program has not been around a long enough time to have graduates, participants from a higher grade-level coming to talk to younger students may also be inspiring.
- Even if program graduates have not gone on to use their Arabic after graduation, it can be helpful to hear from graduates about their reflections on studying Arabic in retrospect.

Sources: Cholla High Magnet School in Tucson, AZ; Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago, IL.

Organize multi-school Arabic language events

Objective: motivate students and inspire a wider Arabic-learning community

Description: Seek out other schools that teach Arabic in your area, including public and private schools, and work with teachers and administrators there to organize joint events. The nature of these events would depend on the language levels of the classes at each school and the inclinations of each program, and would ideally allow students to display their language and cultural skills. Possible



event elements include:

- An Arabic food potluck feast, in which the different representatives bring different dishes.
- An Arabic poetry recitation forum or competition. Students who have learned a poem (or a section thereof) in class will perform a memorized recitation.

Source: Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago, IL.

Advocate for Arabic at school and in the wider community

Create an Arabic gallery

Objective: increase visibility of the Arabic program by creating a gallery of student work in a public place in the school

Description: Use bulletin boards or display cases to showcase student work, ideally with something visually captivating such as calligraphy or Islamic designs. Incorporating text in English with descriptions and context helps to demystify Arabic to the school community and pique the curiosity of other students.

Source: Cholla High Magnet School in Tucson, AZ; Charlestown High School in Boston, MA.

Set up a booth at a local festival

Objective: empower students to share their knowledge while informing the wider community about Arabic and Arab culture

Description: Students plan and create a

booth at a local international or multicultural festival. Students and teacher(s) can share their knowledge by offering some Arab food, displaying student work, explaining to festival attendees about the Arabic language and studying Arabic, and even teach visitors how to write their names in the Arabic script. This kind of engagement with the wider community is a great way to fight misinformation and negative stereotypes about Arabic while also empowering students.

Source: Cholla High Magnet School in Tucson, AZ

Plan an “Arabic Night”

Objective: welcome students’ families and the school community to celebrate Arabic language and culture with your students.

Description: Involve your students in the planning of a yearly “Arabic Night” in which there will be Arabic food, presentations by students, and perhaps a guest performer or speaker. This kind of event is a great opportunity to let students from different levels work together, to show off students’ achievements, and to welcome students’ families. By inviting the school community, these kinds of events are an excellent way to demystify learning Arabic and to conduct community outreach.

Suggestions:

- Involving students in the planning of this event will give them ownership and pride over the event itself and of their accomplishments in Arabic class.



- Consider inviting a guest speaker or performer who can add a cultural element and an element of excitement to the night. This option may require funds for an honorarium.

Sources: Buckingham, Browne & Nichols School in Cambridge, MA; Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago, IL.

Present to school officials about learning Arabic

Objective: advocate for Arabic programs at the district level by arranging for students to present to school officials.

Anecdote: Arabic students at Cholla High School in Tucson, AZ had the opportunity to present about what they are learning and teach a small lesson to school district officials. Students spoke from the dais about the impact of studying Arabic on their lives and taught the officials how to write their names in the Arabic script. Teacher Nour Jandali said that the experience was empowering and inspirational for the students themselves, at the same time as making a very strong impression on the district officials about the importance of world language education.

Respond to negative stereotypes

Some Arabic programs around the country have faced criticism based on misunderstandings or negative stereotypes about Arabic, Islam and Arabs. Here are some suggestions from experienced teachers and

administrators in the field about what to do when this kind of criticism becomes an issue:

Focus on the positive reality

A powerful way to minimize the likelihood of negative criticism based on falsehoods is to emphasize the positive reality of teaching Arabic in public statements and pronouncements. The Arabic Immersion Magnet School in Houston, TX, has faced criticism from Islamophobic protesters, including in the form of picketers outside the building on the opening day of school in 2015. Principal Kate Adams says that the best response to such criticism has been no direct response, but rather continuing to present publicly the positive reality of the school, detailing students' experiences and showing how learning Arabic language and culture can positively influence their futures.

Let administrators "run interference"

Principal Frank Armenta of Cholla High Magnet School in Tucson, AZ, in comments echoed by a number of other teachers and administrators, emphasized how important it is that principals take on the burden of responding directly to criticism if necessary, letting the teachers continue to do their work of educating. This kind of support could be as simple as holding conversations with parents who are curious, unsure, or even skeptical of what is going on in Arabic classes.

