

What should our school consider and plan for before starting an Arabic program?

With a vision in place, the next step is creating a long-term, concrete plan for implementation. Introducing any new language program into a school or district is a major undertaking that will take years to implement fully, and a plan is especially important with less commonly taught languages such as Arabic. Here are some of the questions and considerations for planning recommended by successful K-12 Arabic programs and leaders in the field.

Think long-term

Teachers and administrators at schools where Arabic is well-established report a start-up phase of at least five years, during which time the program will need extra support. What administrative and other resources will be necessary to see the project of establishing an Arabic program through to its completion?

Consider a district-wide plan for the future

Think about how an Arabic program at a single school could expand into other schools: is there a possibility for an Arabic learning “pipeline” from Kindergarten through 12th grade? What would such a development take in terms of policy and logistical support?

Make a plan that considers other language offerings

Consider how offering Arabic would have an impact on any existing language classes and student enrollment: draw up a detailed (if tentative) multi-year plan for language offerings, sections, target enrollments, and language faculty.

- At how many levels, and in which grades, does the school hope that Arabic will eventually be offered?
- If students have a choice of which language to study, how will this new offering potentially influence student enrollments in all of the school’s languages?
- Will the existence of Arabic, if an elective, be reliant on a minimum number of enrolled students? Some schools have found it necessary to support under-enrolled Arabic classes during the first few years of existence in order to let the program find its footing.
- Will other language offerings be removed or phased out in order to introduce Arabic? Some of the most successful K-12 Arabic programs exist at schools where Arabic is one of a small number of languages



offered. This situation allows Arabic to get the enrollment and administrative support necessary to grow. In contrast, schools with many language offerings have often struggled to have their Arabic programs gain traction.

Secure funding

An administration must be willing to marshal and allocate financial resources to support and establish their new Arabic program. There are a few potential sources of funding for jump-starting or supporting Arabic programs, yet these sources are by definition limited and cannot sustain an Arabic program by themselves. The school leader must seek out ways to find and allocate the resources for a teacher's salary, along with the necessary classroom space, administrative attention, and advocacy efforts that a new language program will need.

Teachers at successful Arabic programs have pointed to the importance of some discretionary funds for supporting special events such as field trips that allow students to gain real-world exposure to Arabic language and culture, arguing that this may be especially important because of Arabic's unfamiliarity.

Here are some ideas that other schools have used to overcome funding challenges and successfully start Arabic programs:

- Coordinate with more than one school and share an Arabic teacher's salary between the schools. In these cases, care must

be taken to ensure that the teacher is integrated into the school communities, despite not being a full time teacher.

- If you have a native Arabic speaker who teaches another subject at your school, recruit this teacher to teach Arabic in addition to their initial subject. Some of the most successful and long-lasting K12 Arabic programs in the country have been built on this model, with teachers of Math or French (for example) starting Arabic sections. These teachers, besides already being certified, are familiar with age-appropriate teaching methods and with the school community.
- Phase out another language offering at your school as you introduce Arabic. This option would involve difficult decisions but programs that have done this have a strong record of sustainability and success.
- Seek out partners from outside of the school. Some organizations or programs (such as QFI and TCLP) offer limited grants to help schools teaching Arabic. Other organizations, such as Arabic departments at local universities or civil cultural groups may be able to offer in-kind support to the program through teacher training or special event hosting.

Plan for integrating Arabic into the life of the school

An Arabic program has a much stronger chance of success when it is integrated into the life of the school in multiple ways. These



steps show the community that this new program is “for real,” rather than a fleeting experiment. Here are some best practices gathered from schools with Arabic programs:

- Dedicate a classroom for Arabic. This allows the Arabic teacher to decorate their space, creating an ideal environment for learning and showing students that the language belongs at the school.
- Make the teacher part of the school community. It is important to include the Arabic teacher (often the only Arabic teacher) in the language department and all-faculty meetings and events, even if he or she is starting out as a part-time or multi-school teacher. In addition to welcoming and encouraging the Arabic teacher, this inclusion also sends a signal to the community about the importance of Arabic.
- Create language credential options. A language diploma that students receive for completing a certain number of years of Arabic gives credibility and prestige to the program. This has been especially successful when integrated into other existing programs, such as International Baccalaureate.
- Create linked offerings for students. A number of schools have found success in sustaining their Arabic programs by offering related classes or student clubs. If the Arabic teacher can also offer a Middle East region subject class (such as a history or culture course), this provides a good

opportunity to familiarize students with the region and build interest in the language. An Arabic culture or arts club, held during a free period or after school, can also be an effective way to attract students to the language and expand the benefits of cultural understanding that come from having Arabic at your school.

- For more advocacy ideas that will help integrate Arabic into your school, please see this page.

