

START ITALIAN IN YOUR SCHOOL!

Do your children and grandchildren study Italian? Of course, you may want them to, but what can you do if your local school doesn't offer the language? This kit, prepared by The Council For The Promotion Of Italian Language In American Schools (COPILAS)¹ and adapted by IACE to the needs of the tri-state area school system, can help you introduce Italian in your neighborhood schools.

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¹ The Council for the Promotion of Italian Language in American Schools (COPILAS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting communities around the United States desiring to introduce or broaden the study of Italian language and culture in their public and private schools, colleges and universities. COPILAS is made up of representatives from Italian and U.S. education agencies, Italian American cultural and service organizations, educators and interested private individuals. All are experts in their respective fields, and are committed to promoting the study of Italian language and culture in the United States. The printing of this kit has been made possible under grants from the National Italian American Foundation and the Order Sons of Italy in America. For more information, contact: COPILAS, 4848 Battery Lane, 100, Bethesda, Maryland 20814. Tel: 301 215-7885, Fax: 301 215-5998.

Some Success Stories

According to the Modern Language Association in New York City, most students learning Italian in the United States today are not of Italian descent,. In Pueblo, Colorado, for example, barely 10,000 of the city's 109,000 residents are Italian American, yet all four of the city's public high schools have taught Italian for more than 20 years.

It all began in 1978 with adult education classes in Italian. The adults enjoyed the language so much that they lobbied and convinced local high schools to offer Italian. The high school Italian program was so popular that a few years later the parents persuaded the University of Southern Colorado to teach Italian. The university now has a student exchange program with the University of Turin.

Pueblo's story, while remarkable and inspiring, is not unique. Communities around the country are finding creative ways to introduce Italian into their local schools. Some Italian American clubs and organizations, for instance, have "adopted" a local school, and send their members into the classroom to teach Italian customs, card games and even bocce.

Often all you need is one determined person and it could be a teacher, a parent or a student.

Remember it is up to each of us to encourage our children, and our neighbors' children to study the language of a country that has given so much to the world in the past and has so much yet to offer in the future.

Getting Started

Before You Begin:

- Read the fact sheets carefully and make copies of the kit for distribution.
- Gather a group of interested parents, students, and volunteers. Meet them, form committees (fund-raising, school relations, media relations) to divide up the tasks. Give them copies of the kit materials.

Preparing Your Campaign:

- Circulate a questionnaire in your school to survey student interest in Italian (*See sample questionnaire and cover letter in this kit*);
- Create a typed fact sheet that lists in short, bullet form as much as you can of the following:
 1. The languages currently taught at your school
 2. Your survey results showing students' interest in Italian
 3. Why all students would benefit from learning Italian (*See our page "Why Study Italian?"*)
 4. Estimated cost to teach Italian at your school
 5. Where funding could come from (*See "How to Find Funding" in this kit*)
 6. Time frame for launching the program
 7. The number of Italian Americans in your city, if significant (*Call the NIAF at 202 387-0600 for Census data*)
 8. Your name, telephone number and e-mail
- After you have prepared your fact sheet, schedule meetings with your school district's foreign language coordinator, school principal and local school board, in that order;
- Come to these meetings with facts and figures to make a persuasive, but not belligerent argument. You must convince them that **all** students in the school will benefit from learning Italian, not just children of Italian descent;
- Be creative and flexible. It may take a year or more to start Italian at your school. If it can't be taught during school hours, suggest voluntary after school or pre-school classes and offer to fund the teacher's compensation (*See "How to Find Funding" in this kit*). Above all, be patient and don't give up! **Coraggio!**

Survey Questionnaire

Date _____ School _____

Student's name _____

Teacher's name _____

Grade _____

Are you aware that it is only in learning a new linguistic system that one acquires a better knowledge and an objective view of one's native language? Do you know that research studies indicate that high school foreign language students perform significantly better on the SAT verbal exam than non-foreign-language students, and SAT verbal score increase successively with each half year of foreign language study?¹

Yes _____ No _____

Would you be interested in taking Italian, as a world language, if it were offered in your school?

Extremely interested _____ moderately interested _____ not interested _____

If Italian were not offered during school hours, would you

Come to school early to learn it? Yes _____ No _____
Stay after school to learn it? Yes _____ No _____

Do you plan to go to college?

Yes _____ No _____

I would like to learn Italian because:
(Circle as many answers as you wish)

- A. I am of Italian descent
- B. I want to visit Italy someday
- C. Italian is necessary for my future studies
- D. I am interested in Italian culture

¹ Cfr.: Olsen and Brown 1992, Copper 1987.

Survey Cover Letter

To Accompany Language Questionnaire

After obtaining the permission of your principal, send this letter to your school's language and classroom teachers with copies of the questionnaire. Include a large, self-addressed envelope with the right postage or arrange with the teacher for you to pick up the questionnaires at the school.

Dear _____(Teacher's name):

We are doing a research project and would like to invite your classes to participate. The attached survey will provide us with important information about our school's foreign language program.

As you know, foreign languages are required in most high schools and colleges. Our survey is designed to see how many children at _____(Name of school) would like to learn Italian.

If this survey reveals a strong interest, we will discuss the results with the proper authorities to introduce Italian into our curriculum.

For your convenience, the surveys can be returned in the attached stamped, self-addressed envelope. Should you desire a copy of the summary results of this survey, please write "**Copy of the results requested**" on the back of the return envelope, and print your name and address below it.

If you have any question, please call _____ (your telephone number) or e-mail _____.

We would be deeply grateful for your help in this project. The survey is short and should not take up too much class time, but the results could be of great benefit to your students, who might want to discuss this with their parents. Thank you

Yours truly,

(Parents' name)

How to mobilize Your Parent/Teacher Association (PTA)

The PTA is a powerful volunteer organization that can play a major role in getting Italian taught at your local school. Usually, the PTA holds general meetings several times a year, but of even greater importance is the influential PTA Executive Board, which schedules monthly meetings to allocate money and discuss programs.

All parents are welcome to attend the PTA Executive Board meetings . If a parent has an item of business or expenditure that he or she wishes to have discussed, the usual procedure is to call one of the PTA officers – president, vice president or secretary- and ask to have the item placed on the next meetings' agenda. The Parent initiating the agenda item will be expected to attend that meeting and explain the item to the entire board.

Steps to Take:

- Call the school's main office or consult the school directory for the name, telephone number and e-mail of the PTA president, vice president or language program coordinator;
- Contact the person by phone or e-mail (if possible, meet in person) to place your item on the next PTA Executive Board meeting's agenda;
- Consider distributing copies of some relevant information, such as "Why Study Italian?", "How To Find Funding" at the meeting;
- Highlight the advantages to learning Italian, cite other schools in the area that are teaching Italian, suggest the possibility of getting a grant, provide contacts for more information and allow time for discussion and questions;
- Ask the PTA officers about the possibility of using the PTA's help to send out your questionnaire to students and parents to assess interest in learning Italian;
- Offer to write an article about the benefits of learning Italian for the school bulletin;
- Send the questionnaire's survey results to the school principal and the PTA officers;
- Request permission to publish the survey results in your school's bulletin or website;
- Have another meeting with the PTA Executive Board to discuss questionnaire results;
- Try to make friends and allies on the PTA Executive Board who will help you further with your plan to introduce Italian in the school.

How To Approach Your School Principal

Your goal when meeting with a principal is to present the advantages of introducing Italian into the curriculum. You must support each fact with data, and be prepared to answer the principal's questions about finances, student enrollment, finding a teacher and scheduling the classes either during school or before or after classes.

DO:

- Take the time to establish a relationship between your group and the principal you approach. It is also a good idea to seek the support of other key staff members at the school and in the educational committee of the PTA;
- Take a survey of students to assess interest in an Italian program (use the above questionnaire.) Offer their opinions and feedback as part of your presentation and in your report;
- Research your community's needs and interest in an Italian program. Ascertain how much community support is available from government agencies, the Consulate General of Italy in New York, Italian American Committee on Education (IACE), Italian American associations, local business, churches, PTA, universities, and other groups. Include this information in your report in bullet form;
- Present options for federal, state, IACE grants to support an Italian program;
- Prepare a concise, written report for the principal which outlines students interest, financial costs and possible funding for a pilot program in Italian. Make an appointment to discuss it with him or her in person. Always send a thank-you note to a principal who has met with you.

DO NOT:

- Position the argument so that it appears only Italian American students would want to learn Italian. Stress that it is useful to *all* students (See our page "Why Study Italian?");
- Come to a meeting with a school principal unprepared or with inaccurate information;
- Be pushy or rude to the principal, even if he or she is not in immediate agreement with your proposal. Eventually, you will succeed. It just takes time.

How To Approach The Foreign Language Supervisor

Public Schools. *Public school principals rely heavily on the school district's foreign language supervisor or coordinator for advice about which new languages should be added to their schools. Therefore it is a very good idea to let your district's foreign language supervisor or coordinator know that you want to have Italian added to the curriculum. Here's how:*

- Each school district has a district foreign language coordinator or supervisor or a foreign language chairperson. This person needs to know that there is a great interest on the part of the parents to have Italian in your school. It is important to invite him or her to parents' meetings, or to any meeting of Italian organizations to meet socially and also to discuss the issue.
- When the school district foreign language coordinators or supervisors attend the school district curriculum meetings, they report all requests they have received for other languages to be taught locally.
- Each state also has State Supervisor of Foreign Languages and ESL (English as a Second Language) in the state capital. You can find out the name, telephone number and e-mail of this person through your School Board of Education Office.
- Write or visit the State foreign language supervisor to let him/her know of your interest in having Italian offered in your school district. The more people hear of this interest, the better are the chances of it happening.

For private and parochial schools you must see the school's foreign language chairperson. If your school hasn't got one, go directly to the principal.

Private Schools. Talk to your school's Board of Trustees chairman and write to all members of the Board of Trustees, asking for support of your project.

Parochial Schools. If the principal, or director is not cooperative, go to your school's archdiocese and speak to the head of the Catholic schools in your area. You also can write to your Bishop, telling him you want Italian in your school. Send a copy of your letter to the school principal.

How to Find Funding

IACE Funds (for public and private schools in the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut).

IACE, in collaboration with the Consulate General of Italy in New York, provides incentive funding for the tri-state area schools interested in initiating an Italian program. The grants also include the opportunity of borrowing educational material (books, video, audio, CD-ROM) and participating in a summer program in Italy (*for further information see our page "Grant"*).

To know about Italian government grants in other states, contact the Italian Embassy or the nearest Consulate (*for websites see our page "Links"*)

State Funds. Write to your State Department of Education to get the list of state grants for language study. Most publish this list in July for the grants available the next year.

New York State Education Department, Education Building, Albany, NY 12234
Tel: 518 474-3852, Web: <http://www.nysed.gov>

New Jersey Department of Education, PO Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625
Tel: 609 292-4469, Web: www.state.nj.us/education/index.html

Connecticut Department of Education, PO Box 2219, Hartford, CT 06145 Tel: 860 713-6548, Web: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde>

Federal Funds. Available grants are listed weekly in the Federal Register, the newspaper, Business Daily and on the web:

<http://www.ed.gov/news.htm>

<http://ocfo.ed.gov/fedreg.htm>

Other sources of federal funding can be obtained from the following agencies:

- U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Ave SW, Washington, DC 20202. Tel: 202 219-2169
- National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)¹, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington, DC 20506. Tel: 202 606-8380. Web: www.neh.gov
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), 1100 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington, DC 20506. Web: www.arts.endow.gov

¹ The NEH funds Italian language classes. The NEA funds Italian culture classes.

- The Foundation Center. A non-profit group that offers free information about education and culture grants. New York office Tel: 212 807-3619. Web: www.fdncenter.org

Need help writing your proposal? For IACE funds, call 646 638-0384 or write an e-mail to : italian@iacelanguage.org. For state or federal funds, your school or county education department has a grant office with experts who can help you polish your proposal. Always show your proposal to one of these professionals before submitting it.