



## District 220 schools to offer Chinese classes in fall

By Eric Peterson | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 3/5/2009 1:15 PM

Only a year after the Beijing Olympics raised China's profile even higher on the international stage, its language will be heard more frequently in the corridors and classrooms of Barrington Unit District 220.

School board members this week voted to take advantage of an Illinois State Board of Education grant to add Mandarin Chinese to the middle school and high school curriculum in the fall.

After getting an exploratory grant this year, the district pursued another \$98,500 from the state to add Mandarin.

Todd Bowen, Barrington High School's world language department chairman, said the district wanted to add something new, challenging and relevant to its current language choices of Spanish, French, German and Latin.

The two finalists proved to be Arabic and Mandarin, with the latter ultimately selected for its greater feasibility in finding certified teachers.

In the U.S., Arabic is still taught primarily at the university level, Bowen said.

He added that learning Mandarin truly will be a substantively different experience than that of the other languages now offered.

Its addition won't cause an overall increase in staff but will trigger a reallocation of language teachers still in charge of approximately the same number of students.

"If I didn't firmly believe this was a great opportunity for our students, we wouldn't be taking these steps," he said.

The district will have the opportunity to renew the implementation grant for the second and third years of Mandarin instruction. The grant amount will gradually decrease each year while the amount the district itself will have to match will increase, Bowen said.

The grant basically pays for new technology and other materials to help establish the new subject at the schools.

This fall, students in sixth, seventh and ninth grade will have the chance to start Mandarin, with the sixth grade program intended to be an exploratory one for students.

The program will be expanded year by year for these initial students so that, by 2012, all students in grades six through 12 will have the opportunity to take Mandarin.

Superintendent Tom Leonard said that less than 50,000 students in the U.S. are studying Mandarin while more than 200 million Chinese students are learning English.

Bringing Mandarin to the district is seen as a way of preparing students for an economy and job market that will be even more global than today's.

Among Chicago area high schools already teaching Mandarin are New Trier, Stevenson and Glenbrook South, Bowen said. It's also taught in Chicago itself, and Naperville is home to one of the oldest programs in the region.