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Dist. 63 principals to study Spanish language in Spain

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Printer Friendly

With more and more Spanish-speaking families moving into East Maine School District 63, school administrators are looking to learn the language themselves in order to better communicate with parents.

This summer, two District 63 principals - Lynn Glickman of Apollo School and Scott Clay of Stevenson School - will travel to the University of Granada in Granada, Spain for a three-week course in Spanish language immersion.

The goal of the course is to teach the principals basic conversation skills they can use when meeting with parents who speak limited English or are more comfortable conversing in Spanish.

This year, there are more District 63 students in who speak Spanish as a first language than English, said Katherine Ruh, director of curriculum and instruction.

Ruh said that, of District 63's 3,350 students, 662 indicated they speak Spanish at home while 623 speak English. Polish is spoken at home by 335 students, followed by Gujarati which is spoken in the homes of 277 students.

Apollo and Stevenson, both located in unincorporated Maine Township, are homes to the highest percentages of Spanish-speaking students in the district, Ruh said.

"It's not unusual for parents to call the school and ask, 'Is there someone who can speak Spanish?'" she said.

Both Clay and Glickman said they want to learn conversational Spanish for meetings and conferences with parents so they do not have to rely on teachers or other staff members to translate, as translators are not always available.

"About a quarter of our students are Spanish-speaking, and probably

majority of their families speak very limited English, so it's very difficult for me to communicate with them," Clay said.

Spanish-speaking parents requesting translators is an almost daily occurrence at Stevenson, Clay added, and many times it is difficult to find a staff person who can accommodate them.

Clay plans to take a Spanish class before traveling to Spain so that he will be prepared with some basic skills.

Glickman, who took Spanish classes in high school, said she still relies on a Spanish-English dictionary when meeting with parents, and it can still be difficult to communicate.

Approximately 20 percent of Apollo School's students come from Spanish-speaking homes, said Glickman. Although a number of other languages are spoken by Apollo families, more Spanish-speaking parents tend to be limited in English than other parents, she added.

During their stay in Granada, Clay and Glickman will live in the university's dormitory with other educational professionals, be assigned Spanish course work, and spend time in the community conversing only in Spanish.

District 63 administrators learned of the University of Granada's Spanish immersion program during a state conference on English as a Second Language instruction. The district will cover the cost of the trip for the two principals, which is \$1,400 per person plus airfare, Ruh said.

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