



## VALPARAISO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

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Office of the Superintendent

Dear VCS Families:

I would like to update you on information shared with Parkview parents on February 18, 2020 regarding the reengagement process lead by Parkview Principal Dado concerning the Dual Language Immersion Pilot (DLI).

You will recall in December 2019 it was announced that DLI would be ending at the conclusion of the 2019-2020 school year. While that news was received with relief from some parents, many others were disappointed. A group of parents expressed their desire for the program to continue at the December board meeting during public comment. In January, the Administration took into consideration the feedback from parents and Parkview educators and agreed to take a step back and engage in further dialogue with the teachers and Principal Dado. On January 8, 2020 the move toward reengaging in the evaluation of the DLI pilot was announced to the Parkview parents in a letter that stated the outcome of the evaluation might result in the extension, modification, or discontinuation of the program.

Under the leadership of Principal Dado, the Parkview staff immediately engaged in important conversations to examine data, discussed programming options, and conducted a *Plus-Delta* exercise to identify challenges. Specialists from universities and the Indiana Department of Education were engaged to help bring professional perspectives of a variety of programming options. Since Parkview had experienced four iterations of the DLI pilot in four years, the assistance of these field experts was both needed and appreciated.

As part of the reengagement process, it was communicated to Parkview parents in the January 8, 2020 letter that the reinstatement of the Bilingual Advisory Committee (BAC) would be a part of the process of review. The BAC was established at the school level as part of the original grant requirement in 2015. This committee is comprised of K-12 teachers, parents, community members, and field experts. The school administration selected the members in 2015, and those same members, along with a few new members, have an opportunity to continue serving in this capacity moving forward. In keeping with the original intent of the BAC, Principal Dado will schedule and run all BAC meetings.

On February 6, 2020 Principal Dado, Director of Elementary Education Brandie Muha, myself, and the Parkview leadership team spent time discussing the teacher survey that was conducted with Parkview teachers to determine the direction in which they would like to evolve. It has been determined that keeping the status quo for the 2020-2021 school year will allow for a “reset” of the program for the 2021-2022 school year. This reset and new first year of a three year pilot will come after the team spends the remainder of this year and all of next year designing a 50/50 2-way program. The decision to move forward with this model is in large part to satisfy the original intent of the program and serve the needs of our English Learner population. With the shift to this model, the program will become a district intervention strategy

rather than just a special program for Parkview. Ultimately, we believe this strategy will bring with it more focus and input from many perspectives and resources within the Valparaiso Community School pool of professionals. The Parkview team has asked for the year to plan, engage in professional development, and fully examine all aspects of this 50/50 2-way program.

In addition, it is important to clear up some confusion about the purpose of the referendum as it pertains to STEM and the expansion of foreign language at the elementary schools. In 2015, former superintendent, Dr. Frataccia, communicated that it was his intention to use up to \$300,000 of the operating referendum dollars to bring foreign language into the elementary schools as a fourth special. Dr. Frataccia quickly realized the daunting task of finding four Spanish speaking teachers to begin the program, and then chose to add STEM as the fourth special for elementary students. This decision was helped in part due to the benefits of available training and staff through Project Lead the Way.

There have been some questions about the use of the money as it related to the intent presented at public meetings. A legal opinion dated February 5, 2020 was sought and rendered by Barnes and Thornburg that states:

*Based on the foregoing review and the applicable Indiana law, we believe that (a) the Resolution and the DLGF Order are the governing documents on this issue, and (b) the language in the question approved in the Resolution and the DLGF Order and contained on the ballot for the election held on May 5, 2015, contains the controlling language. The public question states that if the public question is approved by a majority of the voters who voted on such matter in 2015, then the property tax levies imposed by the School Corporation for deposit into the 2015 Referendum Tax Levy Fund will be “for the purpose of maintaining education services and restoring teaching positions.” Accordingly, we do not believe the language in the public question requires the School Corporation to spend money in the 2015 Referendum Tax Levy Fund in the specific amounts and for all of the specific purposes identified in the presentation contained in the Meeting Minutes. Instead, we believe that as long as the School Corporation is spending money in the 2015 Referendum Tax Levy Fund, either directly or indirectly, on the maintenance of educational services and/or the restoration of teaching positions, the School Corporation is spending such money in compliance with the requirements set forth in the public question and applicable Indiana law.*

This is not to say that an elementary program of some sort cannot or will not be designed and implemented as the Administration and the Board of Trustees believe that this is an important endeavor. The legal opinion is provided as clarification that the accusation of inappropriate spending of trusted referendum dollars has not occurred by past or present administrations.

In summary, I want to thank those who respectfully responded and shared their thoughts and concerns both for and against continuation of the DLI pilot. We are excited to be moving forward with the development of a new pilot program that will better serve the needs of the intended group of students with a team of Valparaiso Community School professionals working in unison to offer this unique experience for students attending Parkview Elementary School.

Sincerely,



Dr. Julie Lauck, Superintendent