

Why should I begin at the middle school?

Cognitive research on language learning informs us that the earlier the student begins learning a second language the better for developing functional ability in the language. Beginning the study of a world language in middle school provides the opportunity for students to begin a longer sequence of study that will allow them to graduate from high school proficient in a language other than English. This will be a necessary skill when these students enter the 21st century workforce regardless of the profession they choose to pursue in our global society. The maturity level of the student has no impact on their ability to learn a second language. Teachers are expected to assess student's language performance as they move up the proficiency spectrum.

According to 21st Century Skills, Education & Competitiveness: A Resource and Policy Guide, the 21st century will require a "workforce with the skills to translate American business models and offerings to international marketplaces, offer cross-border perspectives and solutions, and apply tangible skills such as language proficiency and skills that are less tangible, including greater sensitivity to cultural differences, openness to new and different ideas, and the ability to adapt to change."

Beginning in 7th grade also provides the student the time needed to develop an intermediate-mid level proficiency by senior year in high school. This makes the student eligible to earn the Virginia Seal of Biliteracy at graduation. This distinction informs colleges, universities and employers that the student is literate in English and a language other than English. Students may earn Seals of Biliteracy in all the languages they are literate.