

## Bilingual Benefits

The advantages of knowing a second language

*By Jordan Heinz*

Currently, over 7,000 languages are spoken in the world. Chinese, Spanish, and English are the top three languages with the most current speakers respectively. It's estimated that over half of the world's population can speak more than one language. Being multilingual is a valuable skill that benefits many people in the world.

At Sandy Creek, students have their first taste of learning a foreign language in the eighth grade in a required trimester-long class. Students can then continue their Spanish education in high school by taking Spanish as an elective class. Most public universities in Nebraska require two years of a foreign language for acceptance there. Therefore, many students take two years of Spanish in high school.

In recent years the number of students furthering their Spanish education by continuing into Spanish 3 or 4 has declined. This year, there are over 30 students in Spanish 2, 8 students in Spanish 3, and 2 students in Spanish 4.

Spanish 3 student Breanna Brennforder voiced her opinion as to why there are fewer students in the upper-level Spanish classes stating, "It gets more difficult every year and I think some people just don't have the motivation to continue their Spanish education." Many students choose to pursue other electives or take college courses in place of what was once their Spanish period.

Beginning to learn a foreign language in high school can be difficult, which is one reason that many students may be deterred from continuing their Spanish education. While on maternity leave, Mrs. Corman filled in for new Spanish teacher Mrs. Hartman. Mrs. Corman believed that schools should offer foreign language classes at a much younger age than high school. She explained that children should begin learning a foreign language in 3rd grade or younger. At this age, vocabulary will be stored in the language portion of the brain, whereas, after puberty, it's no longer stored there making it much difficult to remember words. She says, "I don't think schools realize that."

Knowing a foreign language strengthens the brain and characteristics of speakers. Students who are learning a foreign language often score higher on vocabulary, reading, or math tests. This is because problem-solving, concentration, decision-making, multitasking, and rationalizing skills are sharpened by the learning process. Using a foreign language opens up speakers to be more creative with the way they say things in their second language. This translates over to classes like art or band that encourage students' creativity.

Mrs. Corman mentioned that as someone who knows Spanish as a foreign language, it hasn't been difficult for her to find a job. Rather than seeking out a job herself, employers have

sought out her for her knowing another language. Multilingual people are more desirable in the workforce than those who only know one language. Knowing a second language allows for an easier experience between customers and employees because they can communicate in a language both understand. Bilinguals are often given a job over other candidates and sometimes receive higher pay for possessing the skill of knowing another language.

When asked why she believes learning a foreign language is important, Mrs. Corman responded with, "First I think it just opens you up to other cultures and the value of that culture and those people. It's also very exciting to be able to communicate with another group of people. It's only wise in our society now because we have so many groups of people moving to the U.S that it's beneficial to learn another language in order to communicate and interact with them. They have a lot of skills to offer us that you can only really know about when you speak their language."

Knowing a foreign language opens up learners to traveling to different countries that speak that language. People will often travel to countries where they can understand the people or put their knowledge of a foreign language to use. A foreign language can also be used somewhere closer to home such as a grocery store. Bilinguals can translate costs or directions to where an item is located to make the shopping experience for someone else smooth. Spanish 4 student Jordan Schutte commented, "In the future, knowing a foreign language won't only help you, but also others."

# Face-to-Face with Freshmen

## A glimpse into the life of high school freshmen

*Jordan Heinz*

In books and movies, the transition from middle school to high school is often depicted as intimidating. Sandy Creek freshmen were surveyed to get their thoughts on different aspects of high school life. Freshmen: Sean Heaton, McKenzie Petr, and Leiah Mueller were all interviewed to get more in-depth opinions on the first few weeks of school.

When surveyed, 23 out of the 25 freshmen polled determined that middle school and high school drastically differ. Sean Heaton explains, “There are a lot more options for classes and activities than in middle school.” Heaton continues, “Middle school was very scheduled and everyone was forced into doing the same things.”

In middle school, classes center around core school subjects like English or mathematics. In high school, students enjoy more options for electives in the arts, foreign language, agriculture, or industrial technology. Heaton and Petr favor their respective elective classes. Petr says, “I like learning Spanish because it’s a new language for me, and Mrs. Hartman is a fun teacher.”

Heaton prefers band because, “We get plenty of time to practice and Mr. Baxter’s style of teaching works well for us.” Freshmen in band will be exposed to many new band events this year. The freshmen will get to experience marching in parades, playing in the pep band at home sporting events, and competing at



McKenzie Petr smiles for a photo at the homecoming pep rally.

the district music contest.

Opinions on classes in the survey results were varied. When asked which was their favorite students choose classes of every subject. The most popular response being math with 24% of votes and physical education with 20%. Leiah Mueller felt indifferent on the subject stating, “I like all of my classes, I learn about something different in each one.”

On the other end of the spectrum, students felt Spanish and history were their more difficult classes. 32% of freshmen felt that Spanish is their most difficult subject and 24% for history. Many universities require two years of foreign language for students to be accepted. Therefore, students often choose to start their language-learning as a freshman to prepare for college.

While split on favorites and difficulties, one thing all interviewees agreed on was that there’s a lot more

space in the high school building. The open concept provides much more space than a crowded classroom but can lead to distraction. When asked about the negative aspects of high school Mueller expressed, “The worst part about high school is all the noise- everyone’s always talking.”

With different classes, teachers, activities, and the mentorship program there’s plenty for students to be enthusiastic about. Heaton is looking forward to competing in high school track and cross country. Petr is excited for her extracurricular activities: F.B.L.A, student council, and after hours. Mueller is eager to prepare herself for college through her academics. With 22 of the polled freshmen saying they are enjoying high school, there’s sure to be plenty of excitement for what awaits the class of 2023 during this new chapter of their lives.

## Education Enhancement

### A new educational program implemented at Sandy Creek

by Jordan Heinz

When first arriving last school year at the South Central USD5 district, Superintendent Julie Otero had many new ideas for Sandy Creek and Lawrence-Nelson. One of these ideas being implementing weekly assessment of students to track knowledge of learned material. Dr. Lee Jenkins created the L to J program which accomplishes that goal.

Dr. Jenkins describes the L to J program as, “A process to help kids remember instead of cramming, getting a grade, and forgetting the material.” L to J achieves this by quizzing students weekly over a random sampling of questions from a key concept list. Before the school year begins, every teacher creates a set of questions over key concepts that the students will learn from the class throughout the year.

Mrs. Shackelford, the business teacher at Sandy Creek, appreciates how teachers are able to sit down and decide what they really want students to learn from each class. Mrs. Shackelford also commented on how with L to J she is able to better plan her classes. Teachers can plan around the key concept list to incorporate the concepts into their lessons.

Every week students take short ungraded quizzes over these key concepts in every class. Students then grade their quizzes and track their results on various charts. These charts include an individual student run chart of questions correct, a class run chart of the class's total number of questions correct, a histogram, and a scatter plot showing how many students got each number of questions correct.

The name L to J stems from the progression of student results on the histogram chart. At the beginning of the year, the histogram forms an L shape. This means the majority of students get one or no problems correct while only a handful of students get two or three questions correct. The large number of students that only get one question right make up the vertical portion of the L. Those who branched out from the group and got a few more questions correct form the horizontal portion of the L.

To form the J, the histogram shows the opposite result. That being, the majority of students get all or



Ms. Shipley's class run charts and scatter diagrams are displayed on her wall

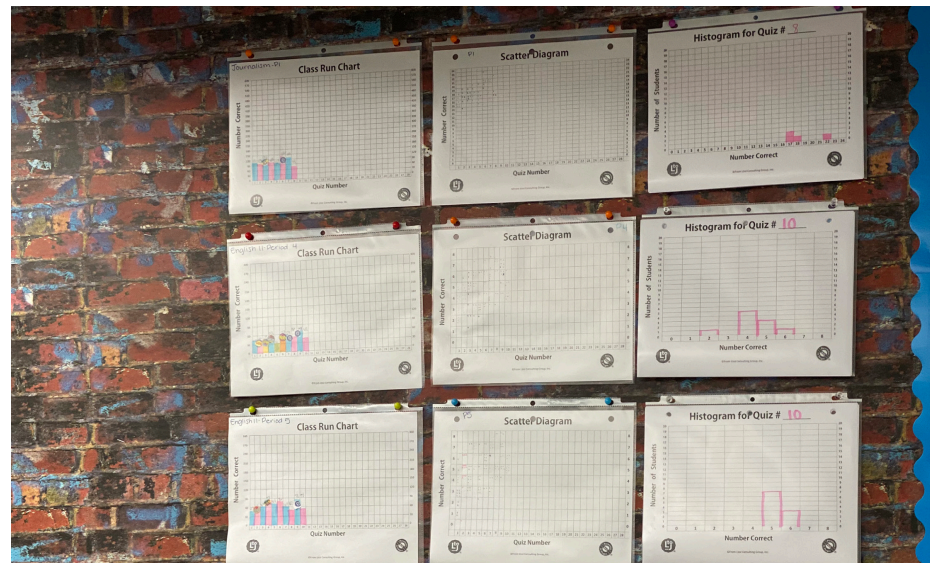
close to all of the questions correct while a few are only a couple of questions behind the majority. Those who didn't perform as well form the curve of the J and those who ace the quiz form the vertical portion of it. The progression from the majority not doing so well to later performing fantastically is how L to J got its name.

The week of September 16-20, Dr. Jenkins visited the school district to evaluate its L to J program. He spent time working with teachers at Sandy Creek and Lawrence-Nelson to improve how they conduct L to J. While at Sandy Creek, Jenkins shared that he's spoken about L to J in every state but the program is used the most in Nebraska.

When interviewed, Dr. Jenkins shared the results of a test that determined the effectiveness of L to J compared to that of conventional forms of teaching. Researcher John Hattie found that the average effect size, the rating of how well teaching strategies help

students remember, of over 250 forms of educating is 0.4. The L to J program has shown an effect size of 2.38, almost six times the average. With L to J introduced to the school district, Mrs. Otero states, “I am confident at South Central Unified #5 the effect size of learning will be at least 4 times the average effect size of 1.6.” This means with L to J at the end of the year students should remember much more from their classes than in previous years.

The introduction of the L to J program is the first step to accomplishing the goals Dr. Jenkins and Mrs. Otero have for schools—bringing back the excitement for learning and helping students remember what they've learned. The weekly quizzing over key concepts encourages students to keep their knowledge of material in use after homework and tests over it. Seeing improvement in L to J scores motivates students and increases their confidence. Mrs. Otero expressed, “Hopefully, L to J will motivate students to continue their learning and to bring back the love of learning that kindergarten students exhibit.”



Mrs. Schoof's graphs are hung on the wall to track class improvement.