OK dual language program for junior highs
Grant funds to pay for personnel costs, school board told

By Lyle R. Rolfe

Oswego School District Board members Monday night adopted the Dual Language Program for the district's four junior high schools.

Dr. Marsha Hollis-Golden, assistant superintendent of reaching and learning, recommended the board adopt the program.

The program was explained at a previous meeting by Rafael Segarra, former director of ELL and Dual Language, who has since left the district to accept a similar position in the Indian Prairie School District in Aurora-Naperville.

Board member Mike Scaramuzzi asked what the cost would be to the district.

Golden added the program will not require additional transportation costs.

In a memo to the board Golden said the program has been an advanced education model. She said its purpose is to address the needs of "at risk" native Spanish speakers and to allow native English speakers the opportunity to become bilingual, bi-literate and bicultural.

"Rather than downplaying the native Spanish speaker's native language and only introducing English (the ELL program), Dual Language aims to maintain the student's Spanish language while making him proficient in English as well," she said.

At the previous meeting, Segarra said the dual language program provides students with a better opportunity to acquire a third language in high school because of the strong foundation of their second language.

Students will reach high school with an opportunity to participate in more honors and Advanced Placement courses, he noted.

In addition, almost all students with the bilingual background who took the Spanish Advanced Placement test in their sophomore year, scored high enough to earn AP credit, he said.

Research shows there are benefits for students who have taken dual language classes through their secondary years, Segarra said.

Both Spanish and English speakers typically achieve native or near-native fluency in their new language.

On standardized academic tests, both groups outperformed their counterparts, who have been educated in monolingual classrooms by sixth grade, according to Segarra.

He said students perform better on tasks requiring divergent thinking, pattern recognition and problem solving.

Segarra said recent tests show that both Hispanic and non-Hispanic students in the dual programs nationwide, continue to become more proficient at reading and math as long as they are in the program.

This year Segarra said 228 elementary students were enrolled in the program for the 2009-10 school year, almost equally divided as native Spanish speakers and native English speakers.

The 280 students enrolled for this fall, 2010-11 also are evenly divided.

This fall the dual language program for kindergarten through fifth grade will be housed at Hunt Club Elementary School in Oswego.

Traughber Junior High will house the sixth grade dual language students, with the seventh grade being added in the fall of 2012 and the eighth grade being added in the fall of 2013.

The total number of dual language classes in junior high will start at two this fall, be increased to six in 2012 and to ten in 2013.

Less than one full-time teacher will have to be added to each of the junior high grades over the next three years he said, noting that the cost will be paid for teachers and materials from state and federal grants.