



## **EDUCATION FOUNDATION TO FUND LANGUAGE LAB UPGRADE, EXPANSION**

The Pelham Education Foundation has approved a \$67,320 grant to fund the purchase of technology equipment for a major upgrade and expansion to the language laboratory serving Pelham Memorial High School and Pelham Middle School.

“The decision to fund the equipment this year emerged naturally from responses to recent surveys by the Foundation of community members, school staff and secondary students,” said Foundation President Laura Sawyer. “The surveys demonstrated growing community interest in the teaching of world languages, as well as support for investments in technology. Student and staff comments suggested the need for more time in the language lab during and after school.”

The existing language lab, which was funded by the Foundation in 1998, consists of 25 individual stations where students enhance their learning experience by listening to native speakers on headphones and conversing with fellow students (with their teachers listening in) in the relevant modern language. The school district plans to expand the lab into an adjoining classroom, add 30 new stations, and replace the existing analog equipment with up-to-date multimedia equipment.

Listening and speaking skills are evaluated as part of several high-stakes tests in modern languages. Nearly all Pelham students pass state-mandated exams and challenging AP exams, and many place nationally each year in contests for students of world languages. Comfort with listening and speaking is critical to this success, according to World Languages Department Chair Anne Marie Duignan, and regular use of the language lab is a key to student proficiency. “Teachers can be so much more productive when we use the lab,” she explained. “Rather than spending valuable class time listening to students individually, we can record all of them simultaneously in the lab and listen to them individually at home. Students spend more time on task, actually speaking with each other in the target language.”

Because the increasing student population—the number of students from seventh grade, when language study begins, through twelfth grade has increased about 40% since the language lab was installed--and growing interest in world languages have led to a dramatic increase in demand for time in the lab, the more than 1000 foreign language students are limited to 20-minute shifts on the equipment and can often be found waiting in line to enter the lab.

The digital equipment in the expanded lab will offer superior file storage, permit easy download by students and teachers to an MP3 player, and enable students to complete assignments on any home or school computer. The upgrade to the existing lab will include a personal computer at

every station, have video as well as audio capability, and provide for additional possibilities in foreign language instruction. “Because students will be able to work on different projects at the same time, the lab will enable teachers to differentiate instruction for students of various abilities and learning styles,” said Mrs. Duignan. “The multimedia equipment will increase student engagement in learning about foreign languages and cultures by providing authentic materials in real time.”

“This gift is a wonderful example of the benefits of a local education foundation,” said Lisa Kiernan, Board of Education liaison to the Foundation. “Community members, teachers and students had the opportunity to share their priorities through surveys, and the Foundation was able to respond quickly to the clear need for an increase in language lab capacity. Because the new equipment will have additional capabilities, it will also expand the range of educational activities for students.”

The gift of language laboratory equipment supports the mission of the Pelham Education Foundation, which is to enhance the quality of public education in Pelham with the help of educators, citizens, parents, students, alumni, businesses and foundations. It funds educational programs that are outside of the annual school budget and awards grants for projects that strengthen and enrich the curriculum by helping to develop and promote innovative programs, support additional faculty training and resources, or provide funding for special school facilities and equipment.