

**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE  
ITALIAN LANGUAGE IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS**

**“START ITALIAN IN YOUR  
SCHOOL”**

**A “HOW TO” KIT ©**



**2008**

# **"START ITALIAN IN YOUR SCHOOL!"**

## **INFORMATION KIT**

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF



**COPILAS**

*THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE ITALIAN  
LANGUAGE IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS*

Dear Parents and Friends:

I am delighted that you are taking the opportunity to read the information contained in this "KIT". For those of us who are involved in the promotion of the Italian language and culture we welcome your assistance in our mission. We have had many excellent visits in schools, assemblies and cultural meetings while introducing ourselves and we have made lasting friendships along the process.

We strongly believe that our children should have the possibility in our schools to choose to study Italian. This heritage language with its outstanding culture represents a past, a present and a future that, in today's shrinking world, is very important.

We know from the most recent survey done by ACTFL in 2007 that the majority of our young people have signaled that given the opportunity, they would choose to study Italian as a foreign language over many others. The possibilities for many of our students to visit or to study in Italy are high.

You, our friends, can make it happen. Request from your local schools a meeting with the school officials. Let them know of your interest in having this language being introduced in the curriculum. Let them know that you have some good friends who will help with all the aspects of the implementation.

COPILAS will be happy to be your partner in this developmental process. Why should not your children have this opportunity? Today's education should not leave any voids. Our children should have the greatest and most advanced foreign language program in the world. They will need it to enhance their future!

Make that appointment with your school principal, superintendent, and board member and let the process begin.

Joseph Lupo, President

COPILAS

## WHAT IS COPILAS

COPILAS is a National non-profit organization dedicated to assisting individuals, associations and communities around the United States, desiring to introduce or broaden the study of Italian language and culture in their public and private schools, colleges and universities. It is made up of representatives from Italian and U.S. education agencies, Italian American cultural organizations, educators and interested private individuals. All are experts in their respective fields, and are committed to promoting the study of Italian language and culture in the United States.

COPILAS will be glad to help all types of elementary and secondary schools needing assistance, but also Colleges and Universities desiring to establish Italian Programs leading to the certification in Italian.

COPILAS offers this free KIT, "*Start Italian In Your School!*" designed to help parents and students approach school authorities, apply for funding and carry out other related activities necessary to achieving their objectives. The printing of this kit has been made possible under grants from the National Italian American Foundation and the Order Sons of Italy in America. For more information, contact:

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## SOME SUCCESS STORIES

How other communities launched Italian in their schools

The "**National Council for the Promotion of the Italian Language in American Schools**" (**COFILAS**) can help you introduce Italian at your neighborhood schools. Other people have tried and succeeded. So can you!

According to the Modern Language Association, the big surprise is that most students learning Italian in the United States today are not of Italian descent. In Pueblo, Colorado, for example, barely 10,000 of the city's 109,000 residents are Italian American, yet all four of the city's public high schools have taught Italian for more than 20 years.

It all began with adult education evening classes in Italian. The adults enjoyed the language so much that they lobbied and convinced local high schools to offer Italian. The high school Italian program was so popular that a few years later the parents persuaded the University of Southern Colorado to also teach Italian.

In the last five years, starting with a few "**Viva l'Italiano**" Clubs after school at the Elementary level and Italian courses, as part of the curriculum, at the Middle School level, COFILAS was instrumental in establishing Italian programs in more than 60 schools, in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties Public Schools in Maryland and in Arlington and Fairfax Counties in Virginia.

**Beginning Italian programs at the Middle School level is a very effective and practical way to have enough students taking Italian at the cluster High Schools, so that many more students will be able then to register for the Advanced Placement courses offered there. This is an important reality to accept and act upon, if our efforts are to be successful in having a good number of students registered for the Italian Advance Placement Examinations.**

The Pueblo's and COFILAS' stories, while remarkable and inspiring, are not unique. Communities around the country are finding creative ways to introduce Italian into their local schools. Some Italian American clubs and organizations, for instance, have "**adopted**" a local school, and send their members into the classroom to talk about Italian customs, about Italian great historical events and people, Italian current world achievements while also showing some Italian children games and, for high school students, even *how to play "bocce"*. Often all you need is one determined and interested person such as a teacher, a parent or a student.

In 2005 the College Board established for the first time an Italian Advanced Placement Program and Exam, thanks to the great efforts of Mrs. Matilda Raffa Cuomo, First Lady of New York, her daughter, Dr. Margaret I. Cuomo Maier, the Embassy of Italy and with funds provided by the Italian Government and three of the largest Italian American Organizations: the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF); the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA); and UNICO National (UNICO).

Remember it is up to each of us to encourage our children, *AND* our neighbors' children to study the language of a country that has given so much to the world in the past and on which our future will be built.

## WHY STUDY ITALIAN?

***Knowledge of Italian is important for people in business, the arts, technology and many other professions. It is also very useful for high schools and college students planning careers in art history, music, linguistics, education, medicine, law and international relations.***

It is important to begin Italian language programs at least at the High School level, and ideally, at the Middle School level to ensure that students will be prepared to enroll in the Advanced Placement Program in Italian.

Students preparing for the SATs who have studied Italian tend to score higher on vocabulary and grammar. The reason is simple: **Italian developed from Latin and an estimated 60% of the English vocabulary also comes from Latin. Also, now the students of Italian may take the Italian Advanced Placement Exam and receive college credits.**

According to the US Census Bureau, Italian is the fourth language most spoken in US homes; it is also spoken in Switzerland, parts of Africa, the Balkans, and Malta.

Italy is one of the top eight economies in the world and is a leading member of the G8 Group representing the wealthiest nations in the world.

An estimated 7,500 American companies do business with Italy and more than 1,000 firms have offices in Italy including IBM, General Electric, Motorola, Citibank, Price Waterhouse Cooper, etc.

Italy is a world leader in machine tool manufacturing, with advanced technologies in robotics, electromechanical machinery, shipbuilding, space engineering, construction machinery and transportation equipment. Many of these firms have offices in the United States.

Italy's economy has changed: state-owned companies are becoming privatized, opening up the Italian market to American companies and professionals in aerospace, transportation, insurance, finance, shipping, telecommunications and other commerce.

With the Italian market opening, American companies like AT&T and IBM have established ties with Italian companies in the areas of cable TV, international cellular telephone systems, the Internet and more, and need employees who speak Italian and English.

Italy is a world leader in the culinary arts, interior design, fashion, graphic design, furniture design etc. Those planning careers in these fields greatly benefit from knowing Italian.

**Italy has long been a magnet for the tourism industry: in 2007, according to ENIT, close to 4 million Americans visited Italy. According to the US Department of Commerce, Office of travel & Tourism June 30, 2008 report, Italy ranks fourth among the world's top tourism destinations.**

**According to the Institute on International Education - "Opendoors 2007" Fast Facts - U.S. Students & Study Abroad LEADING DESTINATIONS is Italy which ranks second after England.**

Art historians need to know Italian. According to UNESCO (the cultural and educational agency of the U.N.) over 60% of the world's art treasures are found in Italy.

## GETTING STARTED

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

- Read the fact sheets in this kit carefully and make copies for distribution.
- Gather a group of interested parents, students, and other volunteers. Meet with them, form committees (fund-raising; school relations; media relations) to divide up the tasks.
- Give them copies of the kit materials.

### PREPARING YOUR CAMPAIGN:

- Circulate a questionnaire in your school to survey student interest in Italian. (*See sample questionnaire and cover letter in this kit*)
- Create a typed "*fact sheet*" that lists in-short bullet form, as much as you can of the following:
  - ✓ The languages currently taught at your school;  
Your survey results showing students' interest in Italian;
  - ✓ Why all students would benefit from learning Italian;  
(See "Fact Sheet: Why Study Italian?")
  - ✓ Estimated cost to teach Italian at your school;
  - ✓ Where funding could come from and who would teach the class;
  - ✓ Time frame for launching the program;
  - ✓ The number of Italian Americans in your city, if significant;  
(Call the NIAF at 202/387-0600 for Census data)
  - ✓ Your name and telephone number.

After you have prepared your *fact sheet*, schedule meetings with your school district's foreign language coordinator, school principal and local school board, in that order.

- ✓ Go to these meetings with facts and figures to make a persuasive, but not argumentative case. You must convince them that *all* students in the school will benefit from learning Italian, not just children of Italian descent.
- ✓ Be creative and flexible. It may take a year or more to start Italian at your school. If it can't be taught during school hours, suggest voluntary after school or pre-school classes and offer to fund the initial teacher's compensation.
- ✓ Above all, be patient and don't give up! **CORAGGIO!**

# SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TEACHER'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you aware that you must study a foreign language in high school and college?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If your school taught Italian, would you take it?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If Italian were not offered during school hours, would you

Come to school early to learn it? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Stay after school to learn it? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to visit Italy one day?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you plan to go to college?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to learn Italian because:

- A. I am of Italian descent
- B. I want to visit Italy someday
- C. Italian is necessary for my future studies
- D. I am interested in Italian culture (Circle as many answers as you wish.)
- E. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## SAMPLE COVER LETTER

TO ACCOMPANY THE LANGUAGE QUESTIONNAIRE USE A LETTER

After obtaining the permission of your principal, send this letter to your school's language and classroom teachers with copies of the questionnaire. Include a large, self-addressed envelope with the right postage or arrange with the teacher for you to pick up the questionnaires at the school.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_(Teacher's name):

I am doing a research project and would like to invite your classes to participate. The attached survey will provide me with important information about our school's foreign language program.

As you know, foreign languages are required in most high schools and colleges. Our survey is designed to see how many children at \_\_\_\_\_(name of school) would like to learn Italian.

If this survey reveals a strong interest, I will discuss the results with the proper school authorities to possibly have Italian added into our curriculum.

For your convenience, the surveys can be returned to me in the attached stamped, self-addressed envelope. Should you desire a copy of the summary results of this survey, please write "*copy of results requested*" on the back of the return envelope, and print your name and address below it.

If you have any questions please write or call me. My telephone number is: \_\_\_\_\_ and my e-mail address is \_\_\_\_\_.

I would be deeply grateful for your timely help in this project. The survey is short and should not take up too much class time, but the results could be of great benefit to your students, who might want to discuss this with their parents. Thank you.

Yours truly,

(Your Name, Address and Telephone Number)

## **HOW TO INVOLVE YOUR PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION (PTA)**

The PTA is a powerful volunteer organization that can play a major role in getting Italian taught at your local school. Usually, the PTA holds general meetings several times a year, but of even greater importance is the influential PTA Executive Board, which schedules monthly meetings to allocate money and discuss programs.

All parents are welcome to attend the PTA Executive Board meetings. If a parent has an item of business or expenditure that he or she wishes to have discussed, the usual procedure is to call one of the PTA officers -- president, vice-president or secretary and ask to have the item placed on the next meeting's agenda. The parent initiating the agenda item will be expected to attend that meeting and explain the item to the entire board.

### STEPS TO TAKE:

Call the school's main office or consult the school directory for the name and telephone number of the PTA president, vice president or language program coordinator.

Contact the person by phone (if possible, meet him or her in person) to place your item on the next *PTA executive board* meeting's agenda.

Consider distributing copies of some relevant information in the kit, such as "*Why Study Italian?*" at the meeting.

Highlight the advantages of learning Italian, cite other schools in the area that are teaching Italian; suggest the possibility of getting a grant; provide contacts for more information and allow time for discussion and questions.

Ask the PTA officers about the possibility of using the PTA's help to send out your questionnaire to students and parents to assess interest in learning Italian.

- Offer to write an article about the benefits of learning Italian for the school bulletin.
- Send the questionnaire's survey results to the school principal and the PTA officers.
- Request permission to publish the survey results in your school's bulletin or website.
- Have another meeting with the PTA executive board to discuss questionnaire results.
- Try to make friends and allies on the PTA executive board who will help you further with your plan to introduce Italian in the school.

# HOW TO APPROACH YOUR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

*Your goal when meeting with a principal is to present the advantages of introducing Italian into the curriculum. You must support each fact with data, and be prepared to answer the principal's questions about finances, student enrollment, finding a teacher, and scheduling the classes either during school or before or after classes.*

## THINGS TO DO:

- Take the time to establish a relationship between your group and the principal you approach. It is also a good idea to seek the support of other key staff members at the school and in the educational committee of the PTA
- Take a survey of students to assess interest in an Italian program (use the kit's questionnaire.) Offer their opinions and feedback as part of your presentation and in your report.
- Determine what kind of recruitment and/or training of new teaching staff is needed.
- Research your community's needs and interest in an Italian program. How much community support is available from government agencies, the Italian Embassy or the nearest Italian Consulate, Italian American organizations, local businesses, churches, PTA, universities, and other groups? Include this information in your report in bullet form. Be concise.
- Present options for state, federal and/or private grants to support an Italian program.
- Point out advantages of offering Italian to the school. For example, an Italian program might attract students, who otherwise would go to magnet or private schools. It may also provide excellent professional opportunities and contacts for staff and school leaders.
- Prepare for the principal a concise, written report which outlines student interest, financial costs and possible funding, faculty training, etc. for a pilot program in Italian. Make an appointment to discuss it with him or her in person.
- Always send a thank-you note to a principal who has met with you.

## THINGS NOT TO DO:

- Do not position the argument so that it appears that only Italian American students would want to learn Italian. Stress instead that it is useful to *all* students. (See "*Why Study Italian?*" in KIT)
- Do not come to the meeting with a school principal unprepared or with inaccurate information.
- Do not be argumentative with the principal, even if he or she is not in immediate agreement with your proposal. Eventually, you will succeed. It just takes time.

## HOW TO APPROACH THE SCHOOL SYSTEM FOREIGN LANGUAGE SUPERVISOR

PUBLIC SCHOOLS Principals rely heavily on the school district Foreign Language Supervisor or Coordinator for advice about which new languages should be added to their school. Therefore, it is a very good idea to let your district's foreign language supervisor or coordinator know that you want to have Italian added to the curriculum. Here's how.

Each school district has a *District Foreign Language Coordinator or Supervisor* and a *Foreign Language Chairperson*. These persons need to know that there is a great interest on the part of the parents to have Italian in your school. It is important to invite them to parents' meetings, or to any social meeting of Italian organizations to meet the members and also to discuss the issue.

When the school district foreign language coordinator or supervisor attend the school district curriculum meetings, they report all requests they have received for other languages to be taught locally.

Each state also has a *State Supervisor of Foreign Languages and ESL* (English as a Second Language) in the state capital. You can find out the name and telephone number of this person by going to the Web Site of the "National Council for State Supervisors of Languages" (NCSSL) [www.ncssf.org/](http://www.ncssf.org/)

Write or visit the State Foreign Language Supervisor to let him/her know of your interest in having Italian offered in your school district. The more people hear of this interest, the better are the chances of it happening.

**PRIVATE AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS:** for private and parochial schools you must see the school's Foreign Language Chairperson. If your school does not have one, go directly to the principal.

**Parochial Schools:** If the principal or the director are not cooperative, go to your school's archdiocese and speak to the head of the Catholic schools in your area. You also can write to your Bishop, telling him why you want Italian in your school. Send a copy of your letter to the school principal.

**Private Schools:** Talk to your school's Board of Trustees chairman and write to all members of the Board of Trustees, asking for support of your project.

# HOW TO SEEK FUNDING

**FEDERAL FUNDS:** Available grants are listed weekly in the Federal Register, the newspaper *Business Daily* and on the web: <http://www.ed.gov/news.html>

Other sources of federal funding can be obtained from the following agencies:

**1. Department of Education:**

400 Maryland Ave. SW - Washington, DC 20202 - WEB: [www.ed.gov/](http://www.ed.gov/)

**2. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)\***

1100 Pennsylvania Ave. NW - Washington, DC 20506 - WEB: [www.neh.gov/](http://www.neh.gov/)

**3. National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) \*\***

1100 Pennsylvania Ave NW - Washington, DC 20506 - WEB: [www.nea.gov/](http://www.nea.gov/)

\*The NEH funds Italian **Language Summer Seminars and Institutes.**

\*\*The NEA funds Italian **Art Summer Seminars and Institutes.**

**STATE FUNDS:** Write to your State Department of Education to get the list of state grants for language study. Most publish this list in July for the grants available the next year. Contact the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in Washington, DC for a list of *other grants available in your state.* Web Site: [www.nasaa-arts.org/](http://www.nasaa-arts.org/)

**PRIVATE FUNDS:** Explore getting grants or scholarships from your local Italian American cultural organizations and large local companies and corporations. Other sources: The Foundation Center is a non-profit group that offers free information about education and culture grants. Its field offices in five cities have libraries you can visit. They also give information over the telephone and on their website: [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)

- **ATLANTA Web Site:** <http://foundationcenter.org/atlanta/>
- **CLEVELAND Web Site:** <http://foundationcenter.org/cleveland/>
- **NEW YORK Web Site:** <http://foundationcenter.org/newyork/>
- **SAN FRANCISCO Web Site:** <http://foundationcenter.org/sanfrancisco/>
- **WASHINGTON, DC. Web Site:** <http://foundationcenter.org/washington/>

**ITALIAN GOVERNMENT FUNDS:** Contact the Italian Embassy or your nearest Consulate for Italian government grants.

Need help writing your grant proposal? Your school or county education department has a grant office with experts who can help you refine your proposal. Always show your proposal to one of these professionals before submitting it. Also, the Adult Education Programs, run by the School Systems, offer courses on how to write grants. COPILAS will offer workshops on grant writing. Let them know that you are interested in attending a workshop. Contact the Italian Embassy or nearest Consulate for Italian government grants.

## HOW TO APPROACH YOUR LOCAL MEDIA

Getting your message into the local newspaper or evening T. V. news is one of the best ways to get the attention of your school board and principal, who might not initially seem willing to offer Italian. However, use good judgment or it may hurt your cause. Remember, you have to convince people with many compelling reasons why they should offer Italian to their students.

### THINGS TO DO:

Make a list of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all local daily, weekly, city, and suburban newspapers as well as your local radio and television news stations.

The public library might have Bacon's Media Directory with this information.

Do your homework. Create a typed "fact sheet" that lists in short, bullet form:

- The languages currently taught at your school
- The results of your student survey showing interest in Italian
- How much it would cost to teach Italian at your school
- Why all students would benefit from learning Italian
- The number of Italian Americans in your city, if significant.
- Your name and telephone number.
- 

After you have all your facts ready, request an Editorial Board meeting with the editors of your local newspaper to encourage them to write an editorial on the issue.

Send a "*Letter to the Editor*" urging that your school introduce Italian, stating facts as per above and including a name and a number where readers could get more information. The "Letters to the Editor" column is one of the most popular columns in any newspaper. Many people read it and you might gain supporters.

Always send "Thank You" notes to all editors, reporters, etc. who meet with you or run any article about your cause, telling them how useful the meeting or the article was.

### THINGS NOT TO DO:

- Do not imply that Italian Americans are being discriminated against.
- Do not complain by phone or in a letter if an editor does not run your story immediately. Editors may still use the story at a later time, especially if you give them specific information and offer solid facts.
- Do not be impolite. Remember, they are always looking for legitimate stories that are newsworthy.
- Do not twist the facts to strengthen your argument.

## **HOW TO ENSURE THAT AN ITALIAN AP COURSE IS OFFERED AT YOUR SCHOOL OR ANY OTHER SCHOOL**

The Advanced Placement courses are generally offered in the junior or senior year of high school. Therefore, it is important that there are enough students enrolled in an Italian Level III or Level IV course at the high school level.

Many students in the upper levels are seniors and will leave the school. Thus, the AP courses have generally, a fewer number of students registered. Some principals, however, may allow an AP course to run with a smaller number of students.

To help with this situation it is important, wherever possible, to try to have the regular study of Italian begin at the Middle School Level.

Efforts should then be made to go to all those Middle Schools whose students will attend the High Schools where an Italian Program is already being offered. This way in the Italian Level III or IV courses, there will be many sophomore and junior students who will be able to register in sufficient number in the Level IV AP Course.

Naturally, it will be a good thing to also start programs in Italian in those Middle Schools and High Schools where an Italian program is not offered, as it may be a way to have these schools initiate a program in Italian.

To make certain that an Italian AP course is offered and the students do very well, you must ensure also that the school library, where the program is offered, has a collection of Italian materials such as magazines, newspapers, literary, history and cultural books, videos and audiotapes that the students can use and take home. Also, there should be Italian materials such as Italian maps, posters and dictionaries in each classroom where the course is taught.

Incentives can be offered to eligible high school students to motivate them to continue their study of Italian for 4 years, and enroll in the AP Italian course in their senior year. For example, scholarships are available from the COLUMBUS CITIZENS FOUNDATION, and other organizations. Local Italian-American chapters of OSIA, UNICO NATIONAL, NIAF, and NOIAW, and others, may provide scholarships to reward excellent high school students enrolled in Italian language classes, including the AP Italian Program.

It would also be useful if you could give to the principals of the high schools, where the Italian AP courses are offered, and to the teachers of Italian, a list of possible speakers, experts in Italian and Italian-American historical events, important figures, artists and artisans who have contributed to making the United States the nation it is today.

A list of Italian-American Organizations in the area where the high school is situated should be provided to the teachers of Italian so that they can assist the schools with the purchase of textbooks, help with students' field trips and how to obtain scholarships. Whenever possible, students should be invited to make presentations to meetings held by these organizations.

**CONTACT US IF YOU NEED HELP!**  
[mariawilmeth@verizon.net](mailto:mariawilmeth@verizon.net)

**GOOD LUCK!**