SFUSD Awarded $1.5 million Grant to Support Russian and Japanese Heritage Learners

August 5, 2010 (San Francisco) – San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) has been awarded a Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) grant by the U.S. Department of Education to support Russian and Japanese heritage learners who are enrolled in SF public schools. Heritage learners are those whose home language is different from English. The district currently has approximately 500 Russian and 500 Japanese heritage learners.

The grant, which will provide the district $300,000 per year over a five year period, will be used for curriculum development, assessment development and professional development for teachers of heritage learners. SFUSD will partner with Stanford University, San Francisco State University, the University of California (Los Angeles) and the University of Oregon to develop the programs and student learning assessments.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for SFUSD to celebrate and honor the rich linguistic backgrounds our Russian and Japanese students bring with them from their homes,” says Margaret Peterson, Program Administrator of World Language/Multilingual Education. “This federal grant allows us to continue our journey toward multilingualism for all students in SFUSD, and we hope this groundbreaking project will set the stage for additional programs for other heritage languages to be developed in the future.”

The 2010-2011 school year will be a planning year, and heritage programs will begin at sites with existing Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) programs in Russian and Japanese in subsequent years.

SFUSD currently has 20 immersion programs, 30 biliteracy programs, 12 newcomer programs, 5 FLES programs, and 21 secondary World Language programs. SFUSD offers programs in 12 languages: Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Filipino, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Russian, and Spanish.

In 2006, the San Francisco Board of Education passed a resolution that called for taking full advantage of the rich “linguistic and cultural diversity and assets” of San Francisco to provide the opportunity for every student, pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, to become multilingual and multicultural as well as to graduate with proficiency in English and at least one other language.

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