District faculty cuts move Pioneer toward two-section classes

Arthur Lopatin • Editor



Anna Craigmile teaches AP German and German IV in the same room during the same hour, a situation she says is "less than ideal." Photo by Arthur Lopatin

The first day of school in the 2025-26 academic year was filled with confusion as Pioneer students walked into some classrooms to find students taking a completely different course sitting at their table. Some of these instances were common scheduling issues, but most came with a new district emphasis: combined sections.

As a result, classes such as German IV and AP German, as well as all sections of Latin, have been combined into one hour to accommodate for a smaller faculty body and fewer hours in the schedule for elective courses. This has put a strain on some teacher's ability to focus properly on their students and their curriculum.

Pioneer Principal Desmond Smith says that the new class style comes from changes to budgeting on the district level, including a new minimum 18-student requirement for all classes — at Pioneer anyeway. "We had staffing meetings all spring and summer with our bosses at central office," says Smith, "and they kept looking at our numbers for enrollment and how many students were scheduled in each section, and if it didn't hit that 18 mark, then they told us to either cut it or combine it with something. So we're trying to save some classes by combining and some got cut."

Despite this, Smith wants to keep as many elective options as possible for the students to choose from, including the AP German class. "We had to do two different combined classes," he says. "That way we are able to run the AP class, because all the students wouldn't be able to take the class if it was in only one hour."

Combining sections is "less than ideal" For German teacher Anna Craigmile. "It limits my flexibility as to what I can do," she says, "and it adds a lot of prep time in order to make sure that everyone has the space that they need to do what they need."

This has also made focusing on course material difficult for students. Pioneer Senior Avery Samford says of AP German, "I think that the class would be a lot more productive if we had more time to work with and get to know the teacher which is lost when we have to split her with another class."

Craigmile says the cause of combined sections and oversized classes is the district's unwillingness to hire new faculty. "They should figure out how to shake loose some dollars to make sure that we can have class sizes that are conducive to learning," she says. "We pride ourselves on being a good school district, a school district that people want to come to, but we don't put our money where our mouth is."

Smith adds that this has been a particularly extreme year in teachers leaving Pioneer, contributing to the strain on those that stayed. "We have seven or eight teachers that retired last year. Some people we knew about, some we did not."

Additionally, he says, teachers were poached by other schools with higher salaries. "In Ann Arbor, there's only a certain amount of money you can make, and when people dangle an additional $30,000 to $50,000, why wouldn't you go?" Smith says. "They didn't want to leave. But when you get pursued the way they were pursued, it's hard to say no, especially when you work less and you make more money."

Smith hopes all the teachers that left have a good time at their future jobs but worries about replacing them because experience can only com with time. "Sometimes all you can say is, 'Thank you for the time that you gave us' and hope for the best. With Sarah Roldán, Amy Van Appledorn, and folks like that, people expect the same or better to be filled following that person, which is practically impossible. So we just have to give the new person time and a little grace to make their own footprint."

Budget cuts lead to near elimination of Latin courses

Autumn Morast • Guest Writer

As the Ann Arbor Public Schools Board of Education sorts out the $25 million deficit the district discoverd last year, Latin classes are being targeted to help solve the issue, and now suffer after selective removal in the 2025-26 school year.

Budget cuts throughout the district became clearer in Ann Arbor when the AAPS board meeting last July revealed that, despite a large protest from teachers, the World Language program is being shrunk within the district in an attempt to ease the deficit.

In one of the only two remaining Latin programs in Ann Arbor, Pioneer's once-thriving program suffered a drought in students prior to the budget crisis for a variety of reasons. As middle school Latin was phased out, Latin I was removed from high school course selection, and ended in a drop in enrollment due to incoming freshmen being unaware of the opportunity.

Pioneer Latin Teacher William Finch said the Latin classes were bouncing back. "I was brought back and the numbers started climbing again, but then we had the budget crisis, and they were really serious about downsizing the number of programs they offered," Finch said.

The board justified their decision on only a handful of students signing up for the class.

Pioneer sophomore Madison Mahan said she benefits from the Pioneer Latin course due to the specific and unique help that comes with it. "When PSAT and SAT testing comes up, Mr. Finch helps us prepare by testing and teaching based on things that will be on the PSAT and SAT, which I don't get anything like in any of my other classes," Mahan said.

A letter was sent to the school board preceding the meeting where World Language was debated, protesting against its removal. Teachers wrote and expressed their concerns over the district's role in making sure to provide an extensive World Language program, and not agreeing with the selective removal of courses like Latin.

Finch said the course is more vital in other districts than it proves to be in Ann Arbor. "There's a charter school in Canton, where the kids start learning Latin in the third grade, and they do Latin from the third grade all the way up through high school. And all of the kids have to take it," he said. "So there's still Latin out there. I'm just sorry that it won't be available to our kids here."

Pioneer French teacher Tyler Vess told The Pioneer Optimist in May that the elimination of world languages for younger age groups is disappointing. "As a culture we are taking a step back from the rest of the world. Most students in other countries are bilingual, trilingual even," Vess said.

The budget cuts became necessary, say distrct leaders, after enrollent numbers were looked at along with the unforeen deficit. The district is still on the state's "watch list" until its fund balance, a sort of saving program, grows to a stable point, and even after cutting World Language education the $25 million will shrink to only around $5 million to end this upcoming school year, leaving an unsure view on the courses' chances of returning.

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