

UPDATE ON FLES COMMITTEE WORK – December 11, 2007

The FLES committee has met October through December to discuss foreign language programs for elementary school. They agree that early foreign language learning is an important part of a quality educational program for all children and are moving toward a preliminary recommendation as follows:

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATION

The option the Committee found to be most pedagogically sound and applicable to the needs of Palo Alto is a third through fifth grade FLES program.

If a program is implemented in Palo Alto, it should be for all students, proficiency-based, and taught by specialists during the school day. The school day should, therefore, be lengthened. Also, the program should be articulated with the secondary world language programs.

FLES DESCRIPTION

Both research and educational practice indicate that foreign language instruction can begin at third grade after students have attained literacy in a first language because literacy skills are transferable to the second language. The minimum time required to build proficiency is 60-75 minutes per week; typical arrangements are 30 minutes twice a week or 25 minutes three times a week in grades 3, 4, and 5. Instruction is typically provided by credentialed foreign language teachers, is communicatively-based, and is tied to existing curriculum wherever possible.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Over three years, students may attain varying levels of communicative proficiency and preparation for further language study. Students may wish to continue study of the same language at the secondary level, or they may choose to study a different language. Early second language learning enhances individual ability to learn languages at a later time.

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

In order to provide adequate instructional time for a FLES program which would offer foreign language instruction 30 minutes twice a week to third grade students and 40 minutes twice a week for 4th and 5th grade students, the Committee explored the following options:

The District has a number of elementary programs valued by the community as essential for student development including art, music, and PE. If a foreign language program were to be added, it would be necessary to lengthen the instructional day. Currently, teachers are concerned about the fragmentation of the day that results from interruptions to class time for music, PE, and library—the subjects taught by specialists who provide preparation time for teachers. One sample arrangement which could provide for foreign language instruction while creating a block of teacher prep time and reducing fragmentation would be as follows:

In third grade, prep time is provided for the regular classroom teacher when specialists teach PE, music, and library skills; however, this is not in a single block. One possibility for adding a program would be to offer 30 minutes each of PE, music, and foreign language, taught by specialists in a 90 minute block once a week and providing a 90 minute block of common prep time to a school's third grade teachers. The second language time would add 30 minutes prep time for classroom teachers. Library would cease to be used to provide prep time for teachers. Instead, teachers would accompany their classes to the library and would work with the librarian on instructional projects.

In fourth and fifth grades, a modified version of the specialist instructional block could be developed using PE and foreign language (instead of PE and library) twice a week for 30 or 40 minutes for each subject. Since in Palo Alto, music becomes diversified in grades 4 and 5, the District could not include music in the block without a major change to the music program.

Instructional time would have to be added to the school day. In the scenario above for third grade, the District would need to add a minimum of 30 minutes per week instructional time (thus lengthening the school day by an average of six minutes per day). The additional 30 minutes would be prep time for the teacher. In the scenario for 4th and 5th grades, the District would need to add a minimum of 50 minutes per week, thus lengthening the school day by an average of 10 minutes per day.

FISCAL IMPACT

A preliminary estimate of the cost of implementation of a grade 3-5 FLES program using the instructional time scenarios provided above is as follows:

Traveling team of specialist foreign language teachers (8 FTE)	\$800,000
Foreign language program supervisor/coordinator	150,000
Curriculum materials, staff training, program assessment	150,000

The cost is estimated at approximately \$1 million per year at present enrollment without accounting for enrollment growth or future negotiations of salary and benefits.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. A grade 3-12 world language articulation planning process should be conducted to examine sequential course offerings with pathways for students who participate in elementary foreign language programs.
2. Measurable student outcomes for each level of study 3-12 should be developed.
3. The elementary school day should be examined regarding start and ending times, teacher prep time, and how to schedule foreign language study.
4. Middle school schedules should be examined to see how articulation of foreign language study could be managed from grades 5-8.
5. If FLES cannot be implemented, then the District could look at ways to strengthen after school foreign language programs.
6. A process would be required to select the language(s) to be taught.

NEXT STEPS

- The Board will discuss an information item on FLES at the regular meeting scheduled for January 15, 2007.
- No decision will be made until after the Strategic Planning process has determined priorities for programs and budget over the next few years.
- Input to the committee can be provided through FLES@pausd.org.
- Becki Cohn-Vargas and/or Marilyn Cook are available to discuss FLES at site staff meetings upon request.