Foreign Language in the Elementary School Program

Year Three
Final Executive Report
SY 2012-13

January 2014

This Year Three Executive Summary Report is based on the Foreign Language in the Elementary School Program Evaluation Report (SY 2012-13).
Please contact the Office of Program Evaluation (571-423-1430) to request the comprehensive report.
Introduction

To what extent do Fairfax County Public Schools’ (FCPS) students benefit academically from world language instruction provided by the Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) program? Is the program associated with equal student performance in the core content areas to that of students at schools that do not direct one hour of instructional time toward learning a world language? Do some student groups benefit academically while others do not? This Year Three Final Evaluation Report examines these questions for students participating in the FLES program, which began its current approach six years ago.¹ This evaluation report, which represents the last of three reports, examines a variety of outcomes from SY 2012-13 and makes recommendations that have funding and policy implications. Earlier reports (Year One, SY 2008-09, and Year Two, SY 2009-10) examined interim data primarily to support improvements in the program. [For a summary of the Year One and Year Two evaluation findings, see the Year Three Final Evaluation Report.]

The FLES program is one of several FCPS offerings at the elementary level that support the School Board’s Student Achievement Goal (SAG) 1.2 (“communicate in at least two languages”). FLES offers all students at participating schools instruction in world language content and thus, has the potential to support the progress of all students towards the School Board’s goal.² Consequently, the School Board’s goal has generated increased interest in potentially expanding the FLES program to all FCPS elementary schools. During SY 2013-14, 46 FCPS elementary schools are offering FLES to approximately 22,000 students in one of six languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish). (For a list of all FLES schools and the languages offered, see the Appendices of the Year Three Final Evaluation Report. Fourteen of these schools began participating in FLES within the last two years.

The FLES program’s curriculum was developed by FCPS staff, with the aim of not only exposing students to a world language and culture but also reinforcing core content instruction within the twice-weekly 30-minute FLES lessons. The curriculum is based on an approach to world language instruction known as content-based instruction. In keeping with the content-based approach, students acquire world language skills while receiving lessons that reinforce core content drawn from FCPS’ Program of Studies (POS). Consequently, the program has as its goals, not only world language achievement and cultural knowledge but, also, reinforcement of core content for participating students.

Evaluation Purpose and Design

The FLES program was recommended for evaluation through a collaborative process among departments, clusters, school-based administrators/teachers and FCPS’ Leadership Team. These

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¹ FLES has existed as an FCPS instructional program for over a decade. For SY 2007-08, the program was revised and made uniform across the division following the model in current use.
² Other elementary world language programs offered in FCPS are the Two-Way Immersion and World Language Immersion programs, which serve a subset of students in kindergarten through grade 6 at participating schools. Two-Way Immersion:  Half of the students in the program come from families whose native language is English, and the other half from families whose native language is Spanish (for Spanish TWI) or Korean (for Korean TWI); students are taught half of the school day in English (English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Health) and the other half-day in the target language (Mathematics, Science, and Literacy skills).  World Language Immersion (formerly Partial Immersion): Students receive math, science, and health instruction in the target language and English language arts and social studies instruction in English; participating students are typically native English speakers.
stakeholders considered three factors in determining that the division could benefit from an internal evaluation of the FLES program:

a) the potential of the program as a means for reaching the School Board’s goal of “each student speaking two languages before graduation” (SAG 1.2);

b) the cost of the program; and

c) the absence of systematic evidence of the program’s effectiveness in FCPS.

The overall goal of the evaluation is to provide the FCPS School Board and Leadership Team with evidence-based judgments about the effectiveness (impact) of the program’s model in the context of its design, implementation, outcomes, and costs.

This final report is designed to provide the most comprehensive picture of the academic achievement of FLES students. Fall 2013 was the first year that performance in the world language was consistently assessed. Thus, this was also the first year that both a world language measure and the SOL measure were used to assess the benefits of the program, including those on sixth grade students who participate in the FLES program for a full six years. That is, this report provides language performance assessment that was not available in previous reports to address evaluation questions 3a and 3b:

**Evaluation question 3a:** To what extent do students participating in FLES meet the selected standards described by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (i.e., Communication, Culture, and Connections)?

**Evaluation question 3b:** Do some subgroups of students demonstrate stronger achievement benefits from FLES than others (i.e., ELLs and Special Education)?

(The FLES evaluation design with all additional questions addressed in previous evaluation reports is available as an appendix to the Year Three Final Evaluation Report)

The evaluation questions identify three outcome areas of interest: Communication, Culture and Connections. While the Jr. PALS measures the Communication (speaking and writing) skills, the SOLs are intended to measure students’ ability to make Connections (use world language to support learning and performance in the core content areas as measured by the SOLs). Culture was not measured as part of the evaluation.

**Conclusions**

This section of the report highlights major program strengths and challenges based on the findings from the evaluation. [For details on the findings that support these conclusions, see the Year Three Final Evaluation Report.]

**Program Strengths**

- With less instructional time than is recommended by research reviewed for this evaluation, FLES’ students are still able to reach the expected language benchmarks. The majority of FLES students assessed in Grades 3 and 6 achieved expected speaking and writing levels in the world language.

- English Language Learners (ELLs) performed at least as well or better than FLES students overall on the language assessment. This finding provides evidence that the FLES program is a viable world language instructional option for students who are concurrently learning English.
• The FLES program does not appear to hinder overall SOL performance pass rates. This is established in both the Year Two and the current report.

• FLES students who were also SWD demonstrated significantly higher pass rates than their matched counterparts on the reading, science, and history SOL tests. Results from the Year Two evaluation also found a small positive effect of FLES participation on the reading and mathematics pass rates for SWD, confirming the additional benefit of FLES participation for SWD.

Program Challenges

• A smaller percentage of FLES students (34 percent) are choosing to continue their language learning in the seventh grade than the rest of the division (41 percent) or Immersion students (84 percent). Although the reasons for this pattern were not explored by the evaluation, a possible explanation for the drop in FLES students taking a language course in the seventh grade is that they simply prefer to continue their language education in the eighth grade, especially since they can earn only one high school world language credit regardless of whether they take a course in both seventh and eighth grade or just eighth grade.

• FLES students do not perform as well as Immersion students in the world language they study, even though they have the same expectations for achievement by grade 6. A significantly larger percentage of Immersion than FLES students reached the desired benchmarked levels of performance. With the same expectations, it may be difficult to manage expectations of FLES student performance even though the program offers fewer hours of instruction than the immersion programs.

• FLES was based on the assumption that six years (first through sixth grade) of instruction would be necessary for students to reach expected levels of world language performance at the end of elementary school. While it is a strength that the majority of students with at least three years (fourth through sixth grade) of FLES instruction are meeting expected benchmarks when leaving elementary school, it is also a concern that students with a full six years of FLES instruction are not outperforming students with fewer years of instruction. This may have implications for whether FCPS should offer FLES throughout elementary school or only during the final three to five elementary grades.

• The Year Two Evaluation report indicated that FLES is a more costly program than similar language programs in other school districts. What appears to drive this cost higher in FCPS is the lower student-to-teacher ratio. However, the academic impact of decreasing the per pupil costs by raising the student to teacher ratio was not investigated by the evaluation.

Recommendations to Decision Makers

Information in the Conclusion section guided the development of recommendations presented in this final section. A summary judgment (Box Score) about the extent to which the program meets the program standards for definition, fidelity of implementation, outcomes and program costs can be found in Appendix A. (See Appendix B for justifications of the evaluation judgments about the FLES program quality in relation to standard benchmarks).

The FLES program has reached benchmarks necessary to receive an overall recommendation to continue the program with modifications. Common benchmarks for determining quality of a program have been
established to guide all evaluations in FCPS. To assist in the program’s continuous improvement efforts, the evaluation offers the following recommendations:

Summative Recommendation for Leadership Team:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continue program as is</th>
<th>Continue program with modifications</th>
<th>Discontinue program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Action Recommendations for Staff (Modifications)

Leadership Team

- To improve the cost-benefit ratio, consider scaling FLES back to the final three or four years of elementary school.
- Consider supporting a follow-up study of former FLES students’ enrollment and language performance in eighth grade world language courses.

Program Staff

- Identify or develop a valid and reliable divisionwide assessment of the program’s cultural goal.
- Investigate through school counselors, students and parents why former FLES students are less likely to enroll in a language course in the seventh grade.
- Consider modifying middle school world language options available to former FLES students who met or exceeded both speaking and writing benchmarks at the end of elementary school to allow for more advanced language learning during seventh and eighth grades.

Note: The OPE invites program managers to respond to recommendations presented in evaluation reports in order to gauge the level of understanding of, agreement with, and commitment to proposed next steps. Program management responses are written by and represent the perspective of the program management office and/or the parent department. ISD’s program management response to the final evaluation findings and recommendations from the OPE is available as Appendix H to the *FLES Year Three Evaluation Report*.
APPENDIX A

BOX SCORE
THE BOX SCORE REPORT: PROGRAM PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE
Foreign Language in the Elementary School Program
Year Three Final Evaluation

This Box Score Report summarizes the ratings of the program at the end of this evaluation period. See Appendix B for detailed justifications for these ratings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENTS</th>
<th>BELOW BENCHMARK</th>
<th>BENCHMARK</th>
<th>ABOVE BENCHMARK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Definition</td>
<td>Year 3 Not rated</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity of Implementation</td>
<td>Year 3 Not rated</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Year 2 Not rated due to insufficient data at that time</td>
<td>Year 1 Not rated due to insufficient data at that time</td>
<td>Year 3 Not rated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Costs</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Year 1 Not rated due to insufficient data at that time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**PROGRAM QUALITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PROGRAM DEFINITION</th>
<th>FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION</th>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
<th>PROGRAM COSTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not rated</td>
<td>Not rated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not rated</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3 (Final)</td>
<td>Not rated</td>
<td>Not rated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not rated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PROGRAM COSTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL COST</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>COST PER PARTICIPANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 2009</td>
<td>$2,916,301</td>
<td>7,623</td>
<td>$383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2010</td>
<td>$2,991,542</td>
<td>9,428</td>
<td>$317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2013</td>
<td>$5,519,972*</td>
<td>21,579</td>
<td>$256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*At the request of FCPS’ Leadership Team, the final FLES report focused solely on Outcomes; consequently, the rating of Program Costs was not considered final. See the Program Costs section of the Foreign Language in the Elementary School Program Year Two Evaluation for a detailed discussion of FY 2010 program expenditures.

**The cost increase from FY 2010 to FY 2013 is explained primarily by the expansion of FLES into upper grades at the 32 studied schools and the participation of 14 additional schools.

**Decision Rules for Making Overall Recommendation in Program Evaluation Reports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Interim Year</th>
<th>Final Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue As Is</td>
<td>Rating of 4 on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation, Outcomes, and Program Cost.</td>
<td>Rating of 4 on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation, Outcomes, and Program Cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue with Modifications</td>
<td>Rating below 4 on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation, Outcomes, or Program Cost.</td>
<td>One rating of less than 4, but at least 3 on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation and Outcomes, and at least 2 on Program Cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinue</td>
<td>Irreparable adverse effects observed at any point during the evaluation year.</td>
<td>Irreparable adverse effects observed at any point during the evaluation year. Or, rating of 2 or below on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation, or Outcomes. Or, rating of 1 on Program Cost.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Report Recommendation: ___ Continue As Is   ✔ Continue With Modifications³   ___ Discontinue

³ Modifications described as recommendations.
APPENDIX B

BOX SCORE RATINGS AND JUSTIFICATION
CORE PROGRAM QUALITY COMPONENTS:
RATINGS AND JUSTIFICATION

This section of the report provides a formal rating for each of the core program components considered in this evaluation, along with the evidence that justifies it. The ratings use a four-point scale where “3” is considered the minimum level (Benchmark) that a program should achieve over time if it is to continue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Below Basic</td>
<td>Program does not meet some Prerequisites of the component.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Basic</td>
<td>Program meets Prerequisites of the component.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Benchmark</td>
<td>Program meets Prerequisites and at least one Standard Element of the component.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Above Benchmark</td>
<td>Program meets Prerequisites and Standard Elements of the component.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcomes
Outcomes describe the extent to which the program has achieved the critical outcomes identified for the evaluation.

Rating: 3

Rating Justification:
The FLES program describes three types of outcomes for students: Communications, Culture, and Connections. During the evaluation period, the FLES program demonstrated strengths but also some areas for improvement. The program met the benchmark for Communications and Connections. No measure of Culture was available.

Communications: The FLES program is able to get a majority of students to achieve proficiency on the Jr. PALs assessment in both grades 3 and 6. This is significant given the limited time for language instruction; however, approximately one-third of students are not able to reach proficiency. This is an issue as FCPS typically sets the benchmark at 90 percent proficiency. With only one hour a week of instruction, the FLES program is able to get the majority of students to achieve proficiency, so with a slight increase in instructional time, it is conceivable that 90 percent of students could reach proficiency. Important to note is that sixth grade students who participated in the FLES program for three to five years were as likely to reach proficiency on the sixth grade language assessment as those who participated for the full six years. This would suggest that the full six years might not be necessary to benefit from the program.

A second Communication goal of the FLES program is increase student interest in studying world languages in middle school. This goal is suggested by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) as a means of reaching the goal that students graduate with communicative competence in a world language. However, FLES students were found to be less likely to enroll in a world language course in the seventh grade than students who had never participated in a language program. This is concerning; however, it may not be a threat to the ultimate goal of communicative competence, as FLES students may take a language course in the 8th grade and be at the same place at the end of middle school (one high school world language credit) as students choosing to take a world language elective in seventh grade. Data analysis of SY 2014-15 course enrollment selections should be done to determine if this is the case, as well as of performance, to see if FLES provides the expected language foundation for students.
Connections: Participating in the FLES program was not associated with SOL performance, even though participating schools hand over one hour of instructional time from core content to world language instruction. For students overall and for most subgroups at both grades 3 and 6, no differences were found on SOL performance when compared to matched samples of non-FLES students. Students with disabilities (SWD) who participated in FLES demonstrated some small performance advantages over matched SWD students at non-FLES schools.

Overall, the FLES program is able to teach students a world language, and students are able to demonstrate proficient performance on the language assessment. The program must continue to make adjustments to get more students to reach proficiency. If continuing language instruction in seventh grade is essential, then adjustments need to be made to increase the likeliness that FLES students will enroll in the seventh grade.