

**WLAC Response to the ACI Members**  
**Replies to Questions, Comments and Suggestions from February 6**

Introduction. The membership of the World Language Advisory Committee (WLAC) appreciates the thoughtfulness that ACI members put into their spoken and written questions, comments and suggestions when we met with you on February 6. As you know, we only had time to respond to a few of the remarks that were made, so we would like to use this opportunity to respond more fully. We have taken the liberty of grouping some of the questions together, and we hope that nothing important is lost by our doing that. If anyone would like to discuss anything in more detail, please send an email to one or both of us and we will get back to you right away.

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<b>Regarding Recommendation 1:</b>
<i>Q1: What should members vote on—the whole plan or just Phase One?</i>
A: We have presented a plan with three long-term objectives to improve WL education for Arlington. However, there are several options for achieving each objective, each with its own resource implications. For that reason, and due to the tight budget situation our school system currently faces, we have proposed building towards achieving the full objectives in phases. We have recommended implementing Phase One in the fall of 2013 and have provided a bare-bones budget to do that. Our analysis indicates APS can implement Phase 1 for the fall of 2013 at little to no cost to the APS budget. We ask the ACI to vote on Phase One, seeing it as the first critical step toward eventually achieving the three objectives.
<i>Q2: Reported test results for Elementary School achievement on STAMP 4Se show results lower than the national comparison group results in two skills [although higher in the other skills](pp. 6-7); if FLES does not show consistently top results in every skill, why should it be expanded?</i>
A: In general, APS FLES programs are functioning as they are supposed to. As national assessments of proficiency for elementary school students that were administered in the last two years show, FLES students are achieving or surpassing the established ACTFL (and APS) proficiency benchmarks for all 4 skills. Also, in informal comparisons with a national peer group for the 2012 assessments, APS results present score distributions for all four skills that are better than the comparison group, with the difference especially large for Listening and Reading. It is not yet known whether these differences, all of which favor APS, are statistically significant, because we lack information about the size and make-up of the national sample. (It is known that the APS group had about 15% heritage learners; the percentage of heritage learners in the national group is not known.) See the endnote on page 8 of this document for further detail and discussion. There is always room for improvement, but the data show that the APS FLES program is producing strong results. In addition, research has clearly demonstrated the benefits of early language study, including positive effects for the study of other subjects such as social studies, mathematics, and English language arts (see Appendix 12 of the WLAC report).
It is also worth noting that a preliminary study of the results of the SOL tests for third and fifth grade students in 2009-10 and 2011-12 in English Reading, Mathematics, and Science indicate <u>no significant differences</u> in the percentage of passes between students enrolled in the seven FLES programs that began before 2010 and students enrolled in the nine schools that do not

provide language instruction. That is, these test results indicate that FLES students who have been enrolled in language for at least three years do just as well in their core subjects as do students who are not taking language. But the FLES students are also developing proficiency in a foreign language.

*Q3: What is the meaning of “to be bilingual” in the text of Recommendation 1? Elsewhere, the report refers to “proficiency;” those aren’t the same thing, are they?*

A: The questioner is correct. It is our mistake in editing. The School Board’s 2010 value statement sets a goal for graduates to “be proficient in English and one other language.” Our recommendation is identical, with the shared understanding that “proficient” in this context refers to the ability to use the language effectively to carry out desired social, school-related and work-related tasks and functions.

*Q4: The report only talks about Spanish. What about other languages? Parents should have more choice, shouldn’t they?*

A: The intent of this year’s report was to seek practical inexpensive ways to remove the three major obstacles to articulated proficiency-based language instruction for children in Arlington’s present world language program. We hope to help fix the current programs, not suggest new programs that the School Board told the ACI in September cannot be funded. The current Arlington program begins with Spanish and introduces other languages beginning in Grade 7. A total of 7 languages are available to Arlington students, through Grade 12. Our recommendation would introduce some languages in addition to Spanish one year earlier, in Grade 6, but otherwise seeks ways to improve learning for all students in the existing programs. If funding becomes available later, the WLAC will certainly be supportive of another language being taught in elementary school, provided that APS can articulate its instruction through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Q5: Is it common for elementary schools to teach a language?*

A: Yes, increasingly so in the United States and universally so in other developed (and developing) countries. For example, England now requires all primary school children to learn at least one language in addition to English. Other European Union countries as well as Japan require two languages in primary school beyond the native tongue. China requires at least one. Proven advantages of starting early include cognitive development, widened perspectives, innovative thinking, a better “ear” for learning the sounds of a new language, and skill developed for learning other languages and cultures. Among Arlington’s neighbors, the District of Columbia and Fairfax, Loudoun, Fauquier, Montgomery, and Prince George’s counties as well as other nearby school districts have elementary school language. Fairfax and Loudoun counties are, moreover, expanding their elementary WL programs for the 2013-14 school year.

*Q6: What do we mean by “reasonable access”? What is “reasonable”?*

A: For the longer term, we envision all Arlington elementary children to have access to a world language program that is at a nearby school, and preferably their own neighborhood school. For the shorter time horizon, especially for Fall 2013, we feel “reasonable access” means that a child who wants to learn a language in elementary school, and whose neighborhood school does not teach language, is given the opportunity to transfer to a school in Arlington that provides proficiency-based instruction, either a FLES or an immersion school. In our opinion, transfers like this should also include APS transportation if practical.

*Q7: When should we expect full implementation of the objective to provide reasonable access to language? For students who don’t have language available now, how long should they expect to wait until this is provided?*

A: The objective of the WLAC is for every child whose parents request proficiency-based language instruction to be able to attend a school with such a program beginning next fall. Because the present budget almost certainly precludes implementing a new language program in a school next fall, we suggest that the least costly means of providing such access will be to make greater use of the school transfer mechanism that already exists in APS, including the existing APS bus routes. That is, a student at a school without language instruction would be able to transfer to a FLES or immersion school that has space available. Currently, transfer to a FLES or Immersion school is already available to all APS families except those who live in the Tuckahoe, Nottingham and Long Branch school districts. We believe that this situation is neither fair nor equitable for the students at those schools, and we strongly urge APS to address it by improving access and giving some priority to requests from families in those districts to transfer into a school with a WL program, depending on availability of space. Clearly, this would be a short-term solution, not a permanent one, but it would at least provide students at those schools with possible options until a longer-term solution can be put in place.

*Q8: I strongly oppose the idea that some students would have “priority access” to the immersion schools over other students!*

A: Existing APS policy already provides that students living in certain school zones have priority access to either Key or Claremont immersion schools, and students attending a “Team” school have access to an Immersion or FLES school within the Team.

One approach to improving access to elementary world language programs for children that currently do not have any way to study a language would be to temporarily extend this existing policy. Specifically, a student with no access to a neighborhood FLES school would be able to elect to enroll at another school with a FLES or immersion program starting this September. In practice, this would only apply to students zoned within the Tuckahoe, Nottingham and Long Branch school districts, where students have no other access.

The WLAC proposes several options for APS to consider in order to provide all elementary students with the opportunity to begin proficiency-based study of language. Of those options, transfers using existing bus routes are the only approach we could discover with minimal impact on the current system and budget. However, as we write on page 20 of the report, “It is possible that there are additional workable solutions that we have not been able to consider to the challenge of providing all of our children with reasonable access to proficiency-based language instruction. Any good solution will be more than welcome. What is not acceptable is to continue the current structure indefinitely.”

*Q9: Language is not “just language;” learning a language affects total learning positively! It needs support. It does not matter which language is learned first, so long as one is learned.*

A: Thank you. We could not have said it better.

*Q10: How does implementing 6<sup>th</sup> grade language not increase the budget? The amount of instruction may not increase, but wouldn’t increased language instruction require a teacher specific to that language?*

A: Increasing language instruction would require a teacher specific to that language. This Phase 1 recommendation, however, does not involve increasing the school day or increasing teacher contract hours, so there would not be increased staffing costs associated with it. The explanation is that there is only a finite number of students available to take courses, so, while the type or content of the courses they take may change, the number of courses will not. For example, if presently there are 3.0 Reading and Art teachers and then a portion of those

students move to Spanish classes, there will still be 3.0 teachers, they will just be divided among Reading, Art, and Spanish. The committee's Phase 1 recommendation would not lengthen the overall sixth grade day. The amount of instruction provided to each student would remain the same.

*Q11: I would like more reference to the importance of differentiation, esp. what teachers can do to manage it in a mixed classroom. The report only refers to differentiation between heritage and non-native learners and between experienced learners and absolute beginners. Differentiation is also important for learners who are closer together. It is important for all learners.*

A: We completely agree! Differentiation by individual needs is essential! Our priority at this time, though, is to seek practical ways to create somewhat more homogeneous classes than those that exist at present, where the great differences lead to frustration for everyone involved.

*Q12: The report seems to assume that children spend six years or no years in FLES, but also needs to keep in mind the mobility of students, both within APS and the DC area. That makes the case for much more personalized or differentiated instruction at ALL grade levels K-12.*

A: This is an important point that APS schools will always need to address. In much the same vein, we also note in the Report (footnotes pp. 17 and 22) that children from the newer FLES schools will be rising into 6<sup>th</sup> grade with fewer years of FLES for the next few years, in addition to those with no FLES and others with full FLES. We very much agree on the critical importance of differentiation in education. Our report, however, is primarily focused on the present lack of continuity at the middle school level for all students, which is exacerbated by the fact that children rising from elementary school have not had the same learning experiences. Research findings on language education point out repeatedly that a coherent curriculum that is articulated continuously across levels and grades is critical to building proficiency. As with any subject area that includes the development of skill (Math, Music, Science, ESOL, World Language), a child who joins a program after it has begun needs to be helped to catch up, through a variety of individualized and small-group interventions.

*Q13: Re: differentiation: the problem exists across all subject areas—in Science, English, Math, Social Studies. Why should it be addressed only in language class?*

A: Differentiation is needed in all subject areas. But the range of difference in the language classes is much greater than in other subject areas. A 7<sup>th</sup> grade language class can include the equivalent in Mathematics of some pupils who are just learning to count with others who have mastered long division and still others who are ready for Algebra. Where the need for differentiation exists in Math and Science, we agree that efforts should be made to provide it. But we are the World Language committee....

*Q14: Are there online language classes that are appropriate for ES and MS students that APS could use to provide more language options? Or other technologically enhanced options, in all grades K-12, to allow for additional personalization?*

A: This revolution is coming, but it is not fully here yet, especially not for elementary or middle school students, for whom, research appears to demonstrate, guidance from and frequent spontaneous interaction with a fluent teacher or mentor is essential. Class drop-out rates as well as limits to acquired proficiency point to that. (For adults, as well, recent research into motivated adults tasked with learning a language to a useful level using only a well-known program has shown success rates of only around 1%.) Motivated kids in grades 9 and higher who already have developed significant ability in a language can definitely use digital resources to increase their proficiency, although improvement in speaking, even then, requires frequent

real-time interactions with another fluent speaker. However, that can be done using Skype or other face-to-face software. At beginning levels and for younger learners, technology can provide wonderful opportunities for practice, exploration and use, but current research indicates that a live human teacher is also essential.

*Q15: Why can't FLES/TS 7<sup>th</sup> graders test into Spanish 2?*

A: They can test into Spanish for Fluent Speakers, which offers a fast-track up the proficiency curve. Enabling them to test into Spanish 2 would create more mixed classes of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders and would then entail being required to offer Spanish 3 in middle school, most likely for very small enrollments that wouldn't meet criteria for a teacher-led class. Spanish 3 is administratively a high school class, and changing that would not be easy at present. Our proposal for new "Advanced Spanish" I and II classes, developed in consultation with APS staff, will enable schools to provide instruction that meets the learning needs of all groups of students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

*Q16: I would like to disaggregate Recommendation #1. While I agree that middle school language must be revised to make sure any elementary school gains are not wiped out in 6<sup>th</sup> grade as well as 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, I cannot agree with the recommendations re. elementary school, because (1) the FLES program doesn't seem to be getting particularly good results and (2) without a stronger MS program, FLES appears to be time and money not well utilized, and therefore expanding the program is not the best use of scarce resources.*

A: Thank you for expressing the case so clearly. We all would agree that solving the middle school conundrum is the linchpin to providing true developmental growth in proficiency across the grades. We believe that FLES results are actually very good. (See also the response to Question 2 and the discussion in the attached endnote.) Almost 90% of APS FLES students have demonstrated results on nationally standardized examinations in the last three years that match or exceed the national and state proficiency benchmarks, with results that compare extremely well with those of other 5<sup>th</sup> grade FLES students from across the nation. Considering that there continue to be some problems with inadequate instructional time for FLES in some schools, where some classes meet only twice a week, instead of the ACTFL-recommended minimum of three times, frequently resulting in students receiving less than the bare minimum ACTFL-recommended learning time of 90 minutes per week, these results are outstanding. However, if nothing is to be done to fix the current 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade lack of articulation, we will agree that would be absolutely wasteful of the time, effort and resources invested by APS teachers, principals, administrators and, especially, the students to build (successfully) strong FLES programs.

It is in this context that we ask the ACI to consider the three objectives and components of this recommendation as a single integrated whole. We know from much recent research that early language learning is beneficial in many ways beyond the already-important fact of beginning to learn another language and culture; we know that learning a language does not take away from other learning but is additive to the development of the child, and we know that language learning, like that of any cognitive skill-set, needs to be continuous in a well-articulated curriculum. The implementation of this recommendation will provide essential remedies toward creating a well-articulated sequencing of language learning for Arlington's children, and does so at little or no cost.

For those who may continue to doubt the effectiveness of the APS FLES programs, let's continue to improve them—for example, by insuring that the minimum standards for implementing a proficiency-oriented FLES program are followed, as we urge in

<p>Recommendation #2. But let's, at the same time, eliminate the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade obstacles to articulation so that we can enable our FLES graduates to demonstrate in middle school and high school how much they have really learned about their language(s) and about language learning.</p>
<p><i>Q17: Why is there no mention of the valuable after-school and before-school language programs that are organized by the PTA? Such as at Taylor, Tuckahoe or Science Focus?</i></p>
<p>A: Three reasons: first, they are not programs designed and taught by Arlington Public Schools. The ACI committees advise APS. Second, the programs are not proficiency-based; they typically meet too infrequently and for too short a period for most learners to develop real functional ability. Third, and in some ways most important, families have to pay for them. Not every Arlington family can afford to do this, which causes inequity. They can certainly serve useful purposes, but they are not within the purview of this committee.</p>
<p><i>Q18: How about community involvement to set up a new WL school with perhaps a different language, e.g. immersion?</i></p>
<p>A: We strongly support the proposition that any new APS school should include a world language program. We would welcome new immersion and/or new FLES schools. We believe that all APS students should have access to proficiency-based language instruction through either FLES or immersion. Note, however, that a new Immersion program would need to be built from the bottom up, so that initially only children in grades K-1 would benefit. We also very much welcome introducing a different language from Spanish in elementary school, so long as APS has the resources and curriculum plans to be able to articulate it up continuously through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.</p>
<p><i>Q19: Objective 2 needs to be clarified: are we just talking about the "wheel"? Is this just for Spanish?</i></p>
<p>A: Objective 2 deals with the 6<sup>th</sup> grade obstacle; solving it involves 3 actions, only one of which explicitly involves Spanish instruction, and only the 3<sup>rd</sup> would involve the Wheel: (1) Change the current one-semester Transition Spanish (TS) course into a proficiency-based Spanish Continuation course at all APS middle schools —taught every other day over the entire year, in alternation with English Reading--for students who have already studied significant Spanish; (2) For students who have not studied Spanish before or who wish to learn a new language instead, use the same TS time slot (alternating with Reading) to teach <u>beginning</u> proficiency-based courses in, e.g., French, Chinese and Spanish; (3) For students who must take a full year of Reading (and for others who are interested) offer an elective Wheel course that includes 8-12 weeks (out of 36) of performance-based learning of one or two languages. In this way, every 6<sup>th</sup> grader will have the opportunity to study proficiency-oriented language. Although the "Wheel" experience will be short, those students will at least have a chance to experience a WL, helping them to make a good choice of a language to learn in grade 7.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b></p>
<p><i>Q20: Why is this recommendation necessary?</i></p>
<p>A: Some APS parents have voiced frustration with the implementation of FLES in their school: some students have received less than the bare minimum ACTFL-recommended learning time of 90 minutes per week, and some classes meet only twice a week, instead of the minimum recommended 3 times. In some instances, the two days of class in a week have been scheduled back-to-back, leaving five days without language instruction. The ACTL minimum standards are exactly that: instruction that provides less than the minimum does not lead to the development of proficiency.</p>

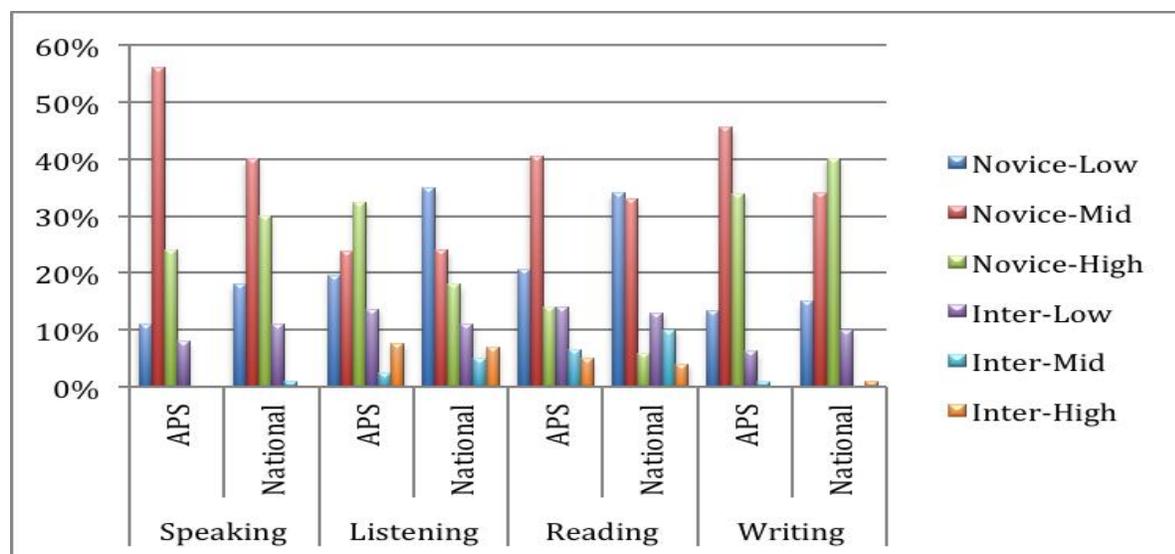
<b>Recommendation 3:</b>
<i>Q21: The Seal of Excellence is a good idea, but it should be based solely on proficiency and demonstrated mastery, not course attendance or credits. More and more states are moving away from Carnegie Unit based measures in favor of demonstrated proficiency.</i>
A: We somewhat agree. Demonstrated excellence must be a component in earning the seal. That is why one of the ways of earning up to two out of the required six credits would be to pass the new Credits By Examination test that APS introduced last November. But we also want very much to “incentivize” continued language study in at least one world language in the high school years. There are other ways to certify developed proficiency—including the ACTFL Language Proficiency Test, the IB certification and a high score on a language AP test. Our primary purpose for recommending the seal is to motivate students to stop dropping out of language after, e.g., French 3, but to continue to work to increase their skills throughout high school.
<i>Q22: What is the difference between the Seal of Excellence and AP credit? Are they the same?</i>
A: No. AP credit comes from taking an Advanced Placement course and passing the national AP examination in that subject. Many students who successfully take an AP language or literature course might well meet the requirements for the seal, as well. But some would not, and others would meet the seal requirements without ever taking an AP course.
<b>General</b>
<i>Q23: Excellent step to add Chinese and Arabic for the IB program! (It never made sense to include Latin but exclude Chinese and Arabic.)</i>
A: Thank you. That was a WLAC suggestion from a couple of years ago, and we were delighted when we learned from our APS Liaison Marleny Perdomo that it was actually happening!
<i>Q24: Strong complaint about the length of the Report.</i>
A: We are sorry that the report needed to be so long. The issues are complex and very difficult to solve, but it is absolutely clear that they <b>must</b> be solved. We made the decision to explain those issues with facts and detail, so that the reader could judge whether or not our recommendations are justified. We also made the decision to openly explore several different alternative ways to carry out the recommendations, indicating the pros and cons of each, to help the reader understand our phase-based approach to addressing the problems. And finally, the new template for the report that was posted online in early December included the need for two new sections that we had not expected to write. That all resulted in a long and somewhat dense report, but we hope that you have the information needed to evaluate the recommendations in it.

**ENDNOTE:**

**Assessment of FLES students:** This report updates, expands upon and replaces the last two sentences of the paragraph on “Elementary School Achievement” on page 6 of the report. FLES fifth graders at Glebe and Henry were tested in spring 2012 on the national Stamp 4Se Spanish proficiency test and their results were compared to national averages of tests taken in the same period. The benchmark proficiency range for FLES students who have studied K-5 is between Novice-Mid to Novice-High on the ACTFL proficiency scale. For the FLES fifth graders at Glebe and Henry, all of the Hispanic heritage students met or exceeded the goal of Novice-Mid—in some cases by a large margin—in Speaking, Listening and Reading, but 7% missed the goal in Writing. Of the APS non-Hispanic heritage students, from 11% to 20% fell short of the Novice-Mid goal in each of the skills, but in each case, a larger percentage of the APS group received the target score or better than with the national comparison group.

In the chart below, the two APS FLES groups have been merged into a single group, with Hispanic students making up approximately 15% of the total. The proportion of Hispanic heritage students in the national comparison group is not known. As can be seen, speaking and listening are the strongest skills for APS, with 89% and 81%, respectively, of students scoring at or above the target of Novice-Mid (the red bar), compared to 82% and 65%, respectively, of the national comparison group. The percentages of students achieving Novice-Mid or better in the other literacy-based skills are as follows: Writing-APS 87%, Nat 85%; Reading-APS 79%, Nat 66%. It has not yet been determined for certain whether any of these differences in distribution are statistically significant, but the differences are wide enough for Listening and Reading that one would expect them to be significant. The following chart displays these comparisons.

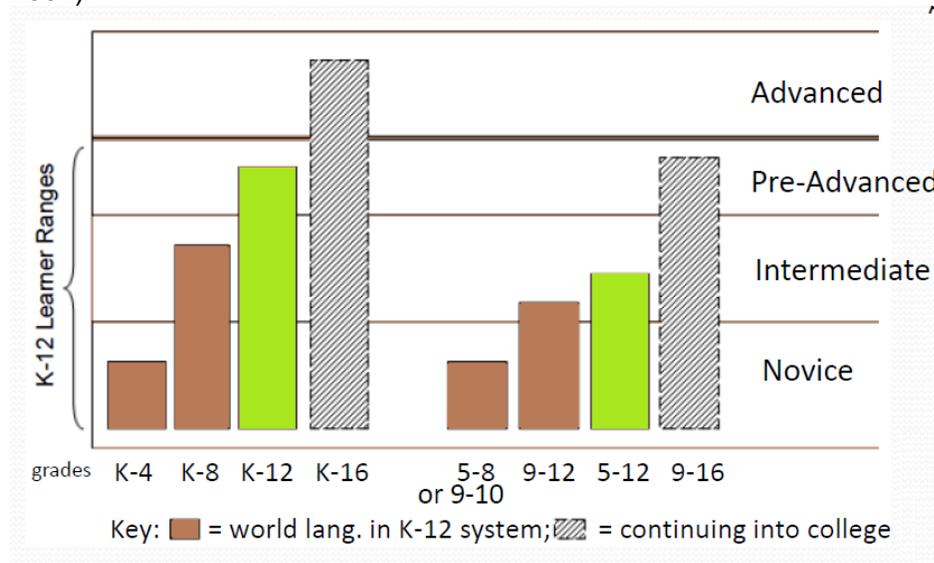
Chart 1. Results on the STAMP 4Se Tests by APS and National 5<sup>th</sup> Grade FLES Students.



ACTFL has published the learning expectations shown in Chart 2 below for students enrolled in a proficiency-based language course, such as FLES. As the chart indicates, students who have proficiency-based language instruction for a minimum of 90 minutes per week in at least three class sessions per week can expect to achieve Novice-Mid in study from K-4, and Intermediate-High in study from K-8. Arlington FLES students study Spanish K-5, with learning expectations of Novice-Mid to Novice-High. (Expectations for Immersion students are, of course, higher,

because they work with the target language for 8-10 times as much class time in the week as FLES students.)

Chart 2: Proficiency expectations based on years of language learning in grades K-16 (ACTFL 2001)



(See "FLES Program Evaluation Report" to the Arlington School Board on January 20, 2011. )