

World Language Advisory Committee Report with Recommendations

Executive Summary:

This Executive Summary replaces and clarifies the original executive summary in the 2013 Report with Recommendations of the World Language Advisory Committee.

During the 2012-13 school year, Arlington Public Schools (APS) had a number of very positive achievements in world language (WL) education that have improved the educational opportunities for Arlington children. However, the goal of a fully articulated WL education that begins in elementary school for all children has still not been reached. This is due primarily to three systemic obstacles: (1) 43.6 % of Arlington's children in grades K-5 are attending elementary schools that do not provide the opportunity to learn a second language at an age when research shows it would benefit them best; (2) almost all sixth graders have no access to proficiency-based language instruction and fewer than 20% are enrolled in any language study; and (3) middle school policies and schedules have created a situation in the seventh grade where absolute beginners in language study are grouped together in classes with other students who have already experienced up to seven years in the Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) program and 6th grade Transition Spanish. The result is not good for both groups of students, nor for the teachers instructing them. It is the urgent recommendation of this committee that these obstacles be corrected now.

In the light of those issues, we advance the following three recommendations:

Recommendation # 1. *Implement the long-standing APS commitment to a fully articulated sequence of World Language Education with the goal of enabling each graduate from Arlington schools to be proficient in English and at least one other language, by eliminating the three obstacles to that implementation.*

- Objective 1: Enable every Arlington elementary school child (K-5) to have reasonable access to regular proficiency-based WL instruction by (a) implementing FLES or Immersion programs in every APS school; (b) permitting students at non-WL schools to transfer into a nearby WL-school; or (c) by a combination of those strategies
- Objective 2: In grade 6 offer a well-articulated continuation of Spanish for those students rising from FLES programs and offer beginning language instruction for those who have never studied another language
- Objective 3: Ensure that every student in the seventh grade is placed into a language class that corresponds to his/her proficiency level and that challenges him/her to excel.

These three objectives, which together constitute our first recommendation, once achieved, would make it possible for APS schools to articulate language instruction continuously from elementary school through middle and high school and would make into a reality the School Board's 2010 public value statement that "all APS students should be proficient in at least two languages upon graduation and should have access to WL proficiency programs regardless of school of attendance."

Our committee is very aware of the current tight budgetary conditions as well as the existing middle school schedule. Realistically, Objectives 1 and 2 must be seen as long term goals. The budget constraints faced by our school system do not allow APS to

solve the problem of elementary school access in the short run, since we cannot afford to add any new programs now and our existing WL programs are already very crowded. Over the longer term, however, and as enrollments and the demand for WL education increases, it will surely be necessary to increase the number of elementary WL programs. However, in order to at least partially meet the needs of the students whose families desperately want them to begin language study early, we are recommending a Phase 1 in which students currently assigned to a school without WL may request to transfer to a school that offers language instruction. Similarly, we propose a significant, but incomplete step toward solving the problems of the “6th grade gap” within the existing schedules of our middle schools. Thus, we propose building towards the objectives in phases, with the initial Phase 1 being neutral on the APS budget by using already existing resources and structures.

We are, thus, recommending that APS implement Phase 1 this fall 2013, and we have asked the ACI to vote on this first phase, seeing it as a critical initial step towards achieving the three objectives fully over the longer term, which will require a later Phase 2 or Phase 3. We have designed this first step to entail almost no additional cost to APS. Phase 1 of this Recommendation would involve implementing the following specific components in Fall 2013 and then in Fall 2014:

- *Grades K-5: Improve access to proficiency-based language instruction, especially for children residing in the Nottingham, Tuckahoe and Long Branch neighborhoods, who currently have no direct access at all to WL. Space permitting, this could be done by allowing transfer into a WL school, utilizing existing APS bus routes and county/area programs.*
- *Grade 6: Provide the large majority of children with access to proficiency-based world language instruction in grade 6: a Spanish Continuation course that builds on what students have already learnt and Beginning courses in a variety of languages for children who have never studied another language or wish to learn a new one. If not all children are able to participate in proficiency-based language classes, also offer 8-12 weeks of a performance-oriented WL experience within the 6th grade exploratory wheel at all middle schools.*
- *Grade 7: Offer an Advanced Spanish I course for students with significant prior proficiency as demonstrated by results on the STAMP assessment, an APS placement test, or teacher recommendation. By Fall 2014, when 6th graders will be rising with experiences in other languages in addition to Spanish, offer continuations that correspond to proficiency levels already acquired and that complete the Level 1 curriculum.*
Grade 8: Offer an Advanced Spanish 2 course in Fall 2014.

Recommendation # 2. *Ensure that every elementary school with an APS language program provides the ACTFL-designated minimum of three classes per week of instruction for a total of no fewer than 90 minutes per week.*

Recommendation # 3. *Establish a “World Language Seal of Excellence” for the High School Diploma.*

The recommendations are presented and justified in detail in our report.