



# Lexington Public Schools

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**To:** Dr. Paul B. Ash

**From:** Carol A. Pilarski

**Re:** Elementary World Language Committee:  
Report on Options and Suggested Next Steps

**Date:** June 10, 2014

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As you know, based on the status report presented to you at the May 13, 2014 School Committee meeting, the World Language Committee (WLC) has been hard at work since its first meeting in October of 2013, addressing and grappling with the many essential aspects required to complete our charge: ***to discuss the process and steps that would need to be put in place in order to investigate and study the possible re-instatement of an Elementary World Language Program in the Lexington Public Schools.***

Needless to say, our journey has been rigorous . . . characterized by research, surveys, and investigations of elementary World Language programs in other communities, coupled with many challenging discussions. Our team came to this charge with a broad spectrum of perspectives and opinions. Over the course of our meetings and our reflections on information acquired and group thinking, we have arrived at several common agreements. We believe that our committee clearly represents an accurate microcosm of our community and our schools. Given the varied thinking with which members came to this task, it has been most interesting and affirming to see how the committee's journey has brought us closer to narrowing our collective understandings and diverse polarities, as we present our options for World Language instruction in Lexington's elementary schools. For me, both personally and professionally, the experience has, once again, proven that hard work and earnest collaboration can yield consensus in even most complex of tasks. I would venture to say, without a doubt, that each member of the committee would agree that our efforts have proven to be productive, fulfilling, and fruitful.

To reiterate from the previous report delivered on May 13, 2014, the research on the early study of World Languages tells us the following and convinces us that World Language instruction should be a necessary component of the overall elementary program:

- Early study of a second language results in cognitive benefits, gains in academic achievement, and positive attitudes toward diversity (Rosenbusch, 1995)
- Providing students knowledge of other cultures augments necessary skills to be citizens of a global society
- Students more seamlessly are able to make inter-disciplinary connections

For ease of reading and clarity of message, this report is broken down into the following categories:

1. The World Language Standards
2. Mission and Vision Statement
3. Core Beliefs
4. Definition of terms
5. Options to be considered
6. Other Alternatives Investigated and Reviewed
7. Unanswered Questions
8. Implementation Plan/Next Steps

## **1. The World Language Standards**

***“Language and Communication are at the heart of human experience.”***

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language – ACTFL

The goals and objectives of an elementary World Language Program in the Lexington Public Schools are very much in keeping with the foundational standards and expectations of any high quality World Language program, as nationally endorsed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and fully supported by the World Language Committee. These standards apply to a person/student of any age or grade level and are cited below:

- **Communication**: Students communicate in the target language as they engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, understand, present, and interpret spoken language on a variety of themes and topics. Proficiency levels describe what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, in real world situations with native speakers.
- **Culture**: Students acquire cultural proficiency by developing and demonstrating an understanding of the geography, life style, practices, products, and perspectives of the culture studied.

- Connections: Students connect with other programs/disciplines and “link” relevant information.
- Comparisons: Students develop insight into the nature of language and culture as they compare these to their native tongue and personal experience.
- Communities: Students develop and apply insight into the nature of language and culture beyond the confines of the school walls.

## **2. The Mission and Vision Statement**

The above stated standards are reflected in the following Mission and Vision Statement developed and collectively supported by the World Language Committee.

*A Lexington Elementary World Language Program will underscore and emphasize the need and importance in today’s global community for our students to become lifelong learners of another language and other cultures, for their personal enjoyment, enrichment, and potential career paths. The program shall provide an articulated proficiency-based plan of study that develops students’ language ability while inciting a passion to develop and nurture a curiosity for, and an understanding of, other people’s traditions, perspectives, and way of life.*

## **3. Committee’s Core Beliefs in the Development of an Elementary World Language Program**

The following tenets represent unanimous consensus among the group:

- There is resounding consensus that the Lexington Public Schools should offer an Elementary World Language Program that enriches the overall academic program for students.
- Equity for all students has emerged as a common theme. The program should be equally accessible to all students with limited exceptions.
- Current curricular programming and instructional time should not be compromised.
- The program should draw upon the skills, talents, and resources available within the community.

#### 4. Definition of Terms

In investigating the range of models that are currently being implemented in schools across the country and around the world, the committee researched a variety of possibilities and realized very quickly that it was necessary to come to a common understanding of the terminology used to describe certain programs. These definitions helped provide clarity and consistency in our own understanding and on-going discussions. I have selected to include them in this report, so as to provide the same understandings for tonight’s discussion and further conversations.

- Exposure/Enhancement  
Students are exposed for a limited amount of time to one OR a number of languages and cultures to increase and enhance their awareness of other countries, their languages, and traditions.
- Content-Based  
A Foreign Language certified teacher gives direct/language instruction to students for a determined time period in accordance with identified and agreed to World Language curriculum standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening and understanding. This type of program is generally a stand-alone program.
- Integrated  
A Foreign Language certified teacher gives direct language instruction to students for a determined time period in accordance with identified and agreed to Foreign Language curriculum standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening and understanding where language instruction reflects, to the greatest extent possible, the content of other core courses. These sessions may also be co-taught in conjunction with core subject matter teachers and requires a significant amount of pre-planning.
- Full/Partial Immersion  
An immersion classroom provides children with a learning environment in which the target language is the primary language of instruction throughout the day OR in partial immersion, in some identified portion of the day. Students participate in all regular learning activities in the target language.

#### 5. Options To Be Considered

As you will notice in each of the three options presented below, there are both “benefits” and “challenges” to each option, as well as considerations that will be required to support each program.

Following the three options, we have included information about other programs that were extensively reviewed and discussed by the committee, but not

considered to be viable alternatives for our district for the reasons described on the subsequent pages of this report.

**OPTION I**

**Content-Based World Language Program**

This “stand alone” elementary school World Language model essentially organizes instruction around a scope and sequence taught by a qualified World Language teacher. Its goals include developing language proficiency with an emphasis on oral skills, as well as providing a gradual introduction to literacy, building cultural knowledge, and tying language learning to the content of the prior grades' World Language curriculum. Elementary World Language programs vary, especially in the number of meetings per week or minutes per session, but research indicates that the most successful programs vary in duration from one and a half hours per week to two hours in multiple sessions.

It should be noted that this program type, while similar to the one that once existed for more than fifty years in the Lexington Public Schools up until the time of the failed override in 2006, would differ significantly from that program in that it would reflect current instructional methodologies and take advantage of 21<sup>st</sup> century innovations in technology and available resources.

<b>BENEFITS</b>	<b>CHALLENGES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplest to design and implement</li> <li>• Allows for opportunities for innovation, creativity, and constructivist pedagogy</li> <li>• Does not require additional classroom space</li> <li>• Does not add to current classroom-teacher workload/responsibility</li> <li>• Consistency of curriculum with regard to transition to middle school</li> <li>• Would be the easiest model for hiring quality teachers</li> <li>• Opportunities for natural connections between the WL teacher and the general classroom setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World Language (WL) teacher may have demanding schedule in moving across classrooms during school day</li> <li>• Challenge of integrating new students coming into the district at upper grades</li> <li>• Would require revision of middle school program as students move through the K-5 program</li> <li>• Need to ensure that the WL teachers feel a part of the school and teacher community – especially when teachers are moving from school to school</li> </ul>

**CONSIDERATIONS**

- Strong consideration would have to be given to extending the school day to avoid negatively impacting current curricular and instructional programs.
- In the process of phasing in the Elementary World Language program, the Middle School World Language program (in the selected language/s) would need to be revised and rearticulated for anywhere between four to six years to reflect the increasing proficiency levels of elementary school students.

## OPTION II

### Content-Based World Language Program with Subject Matter Integration

Option II is similar to the program described in Option I, and provides the added value of bridging the study of the target language so as to reinforce designated curricular units of study in such programmatic areas as Art, Music, Science, and Social Studies. Its multi-dimensional, multi-modal approach would rely heavily on advancing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, utilizing current technology and media to correspond with and learn from students of other countries in order to actively and realistically engage students in our world's expanding global community.

<b>BENEFITS</b>	<b>CHALLENGES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrates an even more serious commitment to World Language learning from early age, which enriches overall academic program</li><li>• Language learning is both separate and integrated, creating greater depth of understanding</li><li>• Local community members may be available for cultural elements in the integration elements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More challenging to design and implement compared to a “stand alone” content-based program</li><li>• More logistical challenges and planning time required</li><li>• Requires professional learning time for the World Language teacher to plan for the concurrent implementation of the identified units of study designed to reinforce student learning in both the target language and the specified discipline/s</li></ul>

#### **CONSIDERATIONS**

- Strong consideration would have to be given to extending the school day to avoid negatively impacting current curricular and instructional programs.
- In the process of phasing in the Elementary World Language program, the Middle School World Language program (in the selected language/s) would need to be revised and rearticulated for anywhere between four to six years to reflect the increasing proficiency levels of elementary school students.
- This model would require substantial summer curriculum development work for World Language teachers and curriculum specialists and/or teachers.

**OPTION III**

**Optional After-School World Language Program**

**N.B.** this option does not meet the standards or tenets of the committee’s core beliefs

This model would also be taught by a qualified World Language teacher, but would take place after regular school hours and would be based on parent and student choice.

<b>BENEFITS</b>	<b>CHALLENGES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No loss of instructional time and no need to extend school day</li> <li>• Attracts students who are already interested in learning another language</li> <li>• Increases possibility of offering multiple languages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would compete with other after-school programs i.e. sports, Lextended Day, etc.</li> <li>• Equity issues: Not all students would be able to participate based on limitations related to payment of tuition, transportation needs, etc.</li> <li>• Staffing of the program: member of LPS staff, sub-contracted individuals, volunteers?</li> <li>• Substantial articulation issues with middle school program</li> <li>• Difficulties in monitoring the quality of the program</li> <li>• Difficulties with supervision of students</li> </ul>
<b>CONSIDERATIONS</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determination of how program would be funded i.e., operating budget, individual family?</li> </ul>	

**6. Other Alternatives Investigated and Reviewed**

Besides the options presented above, other possibilities were explored, but ultimately not considered for various reasons.

- **Full/Partial Immersion Program**

As explained in our definitions included on page 4, an immersion classroom provides children with a learning environment in which the target language is the primary language of instruction throughout the day OR in partial immersion, in some identified portion of the day. Students participate in all regular learning activities in the target language.

While immersion may offer students the most “experience” in the target language, it would be very difficult to implement for many reasons e.g. equity across schools, impact on curriculum revision, recruitment of highly qualified staffing with multiple certifications. This program would require a substantive and comprehensive overhaul of both current practice and curriculum.

- Exposure/Enhancement Program  
In an exposure/enhancement program, students are exposed for a limited amount of time to one OR more languages and cultures to increase and enhance their awareness of other countries, their languages, and their traditions. The committee overwhelmingly agreed that this type of program would not support the integral elements of the mission and goals of an LPS elementary World Language program that aims at growing proficiency levels in the target language.

## **7. Unanswered Questions**

- Which language(s) will be taught? Spanish, French, Mandarin?
- If multiple languages were to be offered, how would the possible unbalanced demand for one language over another, impact scheduling?
- At which grade level/s will we begin instruction in the first year of implementation?
- Which additional grade level/s will be added incrementally into the progression?
- Would additional classroom space be required?
- In what ways might the choice of the World Language impact the availability of qualified teaching staff?
- In light of current research, what would be the number of minutes per week and/or number of days per week required to implement a high quality WL program?

## **8. Implementation Plan and Suggested Next Steps**

As you will easily conclude from this report, the committee wholeheartedly endorses the reinstatement of an Elementary World Language Program in the Lexington Public Schools. Please also note that the World Language Committee feels equally strongly about retaining the highly effective curricular and instructional programs currently in place in our elementary schools.

It is evident that both Options I and II, presented in this report, would require a lengthening of the school day and subsequent extensive discussions centered on a re-design of the current schedule for our elementary schools. This task clearly represents a highly complex and multi-faceted challenge that would need to include the voices of many stakeholders. In order to ensure high quality, success, and continued sustainability for this program, a thoughtful design and implementation plan must be established. We strongly believe that such a process would require at a minimum three years of planning with an implementation target year of FY18.

For your consideration, please review the following suggested timetable:



- **December 2014:** Superintendent and School Committee decide which option to support
- **January 2015 – December 2015:**
  1. Superintendent and School Committee establish an *Elementary World Language Program Design Team* involving discussions with the community and stakeholders to study and develop the program requirements, determine associated expenses, including staffing, materials, supplies, and professional learning. This committee would address the unanswered questions posed in item #7 on the previous page.
  2. The World Language Committee also foresees the establishment of an *Implementation Task Force* comprised of district administrators, LEA leadership, and classroom teachers working concurrently with the Design Team to collaboratively ensure a high quality World Language Program and to examine the impact of providing additional time in the daily elementary schedule for this program. Considerations would include topics such as changes to the elementary day, contract negotiation, adjustment of transportation schedules, and more.
- **Fall 2015:**
  - Public Discussion and Hearings
  - Regular Update Reports to School Committee from both the *World Language Design Team* and the *Implementation Task Force*
- **December 2015 – May 2016:** School Committee reviews the required budget to support the collaborative recommendation of the *Elementary World Language Design Team* and the *Implementation Task Force*.
- **May 2016:** School Committee endorsement of the proposed plan
- **August/September 2017:** Launch the first year of the Elementary World Language Program

I look forward to our meeting on Tuesday to answer any questions you might have.

## *ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS*

Elementary World Language Committee  
2013-2014

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