

## Update on the FLES Committee's Examination of an Elementary Foreign Language Program for PAUSD (Send responses to [FLES@pausd.org](mailto:FLES@pausd.org))

District staff were directed to develop by February 2008 an implementation plan for a program that would offer foreign language instruction to students in the elementary schools. A FLES committee comprised of parents, teachers, principals, and district administrators was convened to accomplish this task. It is important to note that the Board has not approved implementation of a FLES program in Palo Alto. Information provided by the FLES committee will be used during strategic planning in the spring when a FLES program may be weighed by the Board along with other district priorities. To date, the following questions have been researched and discussed:

### Benefits of Learning a Second Language at a Young Age

The research is consistent and clear that there are many benefits to learning a second language at a young age. Learning a second language provides for the development of many additional pathways in the brain that otherwise do not develop. Children who, at an early age, practice tonal qualities and sounds that occur in other languages are more likely to be able to speak multiple languages without first language accents. Study of more than one language and culture provides greater understanding and affinity for people from other cultures who speak other languages resulting in a more global perspective. Studying a second language early provides a basis for students to learn other languages more quickly and easily as they get older. Learning a second language provides insights into the grammar, structure, and linguistic nuances of the first language. Study of a language in the elementary grades can provide a higher proficiency level in language in middle school and high school grades and in adult life.

### Two Basic Forms of Second Language Programs are FLEX (Foreign Language Exploratory) and FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School).

FLEX programs are designed to allow for a broad exposure to another language or languages. Students will

- Develop interest in new languages for future language study
- Develop careful listening skills
- Develop cultural and linguistic awareness

The time requirement is 1-5% of class time; 15-30 minutes a week. The program can be thematic and incorporate materials from art, writing, technology, history, etc.. Language competency is not a requirement; and the program does not require an articulated curriculum. FLEX programs are not tied to one language; volunteers can be used; and the program takes little time from the instructional day. A disadvantage is that students will have words and phrases from various languages but no accumulation of proficiency in any one language.

FLES is a proficiency standards-based model of foreign language instruction at the elementary level.

Students will

- Develop understanding of and appreciation for other cultures;
- Develop proficiency in listening/speaking and some in reading/writing;
- Follow an articulated curriculum which is at a progressively higher level each year;
- Be more advanced in foreign language proficiency at the middle school and high school levels than students who have not participated in a FLES program.

The time requirement is 5-15% of class time for content-related programs; a minimum of 30-40 minutes/class 3-5 times/week; however, many districts offer FLES 60-75 minutes per week (such as 30 minutes twice a week or 25 minutes three times a week) for communicative-based programs. FLES is more effectively begun at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade after students have attained literacy in a first language because literacy skills are transferable to the second language; FLES is taught by certificated specialist teachers and so may provide classroom teacher release time. A disadvantage is that by use of specialist teachers and requirement of an articulated and cumulative curriculum which builds proficiency, cost may be high; and time out of the school day may require a longer day or may replace or reduce some other subject.

### Options That Could be Considered for Palo Alto

The FLES Committee will detail the advantages, disadvantages, challenges, and costs of the following potential programs and a report will be submitted to the Board in January 2008. An update on the progress of the committee work will be provided to the Board at a meeting to be scheduled in December or January.

1. **FLES K-5** (with fewer than 60 min./week K-2, increasing to 60-75 min./week in grades 3-5; articulated with 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> grades)
2. **FLEX K-2** (15-30 min./week) and **FLES grades 3-5** (60-75 min/week)
3. **FLEX K-5** (15-30 min/week all levels; informal, creative, and independent curriculum)
4. **FLES in grades 3-5 only** with no program K-2; requires articulation at 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> with secondary programs

Parent and staff comments are welcome. Please respond to [FLES@pausd.org](mailto:FLES@pausd.org) or to any members on the FLES committee. The membership list and minutes of meetings are available at [www.pausd.org/community/committees/](http://www.pausd.org/community/committees/)