



**Weston Public Schools  
K-12 World Languages Department  
Self-Study Report**

**May 2014**

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Self-Study Report**

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## **Introduction:**

Weston’s K-12 World Languages Department Comprehensive Program Review was grounded in conducting an extended self-study process. This is the first step in a multi-step process, and it frames the External Review with an in-depth assessment. The self-study then guides the “Charge” for the external review committee’s visit. The final phase of the Review cycle is completed when the department presents their response to the external review and develops an implementation plan.

Recommendations and reflections made through the process of the review are informed by our search for best practices through research and national guidelines, as well as learning from site visits, conferences and consultants. The self-study committee, which was comprised of a representative team from the K-12 Department, is recognized for its contribution to this essential first step of the review process.

### Committee Members:

Co-chairs: Cort Mathers and Amber Bock  
Members: Elementary: Cindy Crimmin  
Kristen Sheridan  
Mike Sullivan (survey)  
Middle: John Gibbons  
John Bracey  
Ma Ya Tao  
High: Kim Uyen Dang  
Sophie Kulas  
Nick Pezzote  
Alejandro Yegros

## **Purpose:**

The self-study is a combination research report and analytical assessment. Its purpose is to provide current information to the department on exemplary World Language program practices as a benchmark of comparison for assessing Weston’s current program and to set goals for future departmental improvements. The purpose of defining ‘exemplary’ programming is not to set the expectation that all components of such a program should be incorporated into Weston’s practice, but that we can then thoughtfully and purposefully select those that most benefit our program in the context of our school size and need within our school population. The overarching goal is always to provide the best possible experience for all Weston foreign language students.

## **Process:**

The committee approached the study through a set of varied lenses each of which explored the department from different vantage points and help to cross reference ideas, practices, and assumptions guiding the department:

- **Review of Weston Standards, Learning Goals & Benchmarks**  
Reflects on curriculum framework, core goals, and learning experience  
Assesses rigor, relevance, and alignment
- **Research**  
Grounds all practice and vision  
Develops knowledge and builds cohesive voice of department
- **Site Visits**  
Extends ideas and provides new thinking
- **Survey of Parents and Students**  
Explores assumptions and perceptions  
Assesses current program by constituents

The committee took preliminary program input from the whole department regarding what it felt it did well and less well and sorted information into areas of strength and need (See Appendix A). The committee prioritized this department data and established questions to be explored. These questions guided committee work, as well as the questions and ideas that emerged from committee research and assessment. The report provides background and information on each of the areas of focus, followed by a section of self-assessments and committee questions.

**Site visits:**

Internal reviews would not be complete without purposeful research into how other schools operate their programs. Some of this research can be obtained simply from visiting school websites and/or contacting department heads or teachers; however, a fuller picture is revealed when teachers can visit the school, discuss teaching, learning, and other issues more specific to the department's needs. After several months of meetings and discussions on our own program, Weston's World Language faculty developed a checklist of questions relevant to our own program needs, contacted nearby schools to arrange the visits, and carried them through. There was consensus within the department that the site visits were a valuable component not only to this self-study but to each teacher's continued professional development. While teachers felt reinvigorated by seeing and learning new techniques, they came away validated regarding the work they do as professionals given that many of those best practices observed off site are ones that are already employed in WPS. Practices in the use of authentic sources such as target language newspapers, as well as an emphasis on developing conversational fluency were shared areas of focus. Upon their return, teachers deposited completed checklists on our server with an accompanying write-up (see appendix C for checklist and site visit assignments). The department made a concerted effort to visit those schools that are in our regional area and are similar to ours in rigor and demographics. Both public and private institutions were included.

**Surveys of parents and students:**

During the World Languages review the Assistant Superintendent shifted practice toward an internal survey process. Having learned a great deal from past program reviews, the intent was to shift toward an in-house model of survey after having done three reviews with an external contract. The survey is completed in the spring of the self-study and then shared as part of program information during the external review. Data is then used to guide the development of the Departmental Response to the complete review process which is presented to School Committee.

### **Review of Weston Standards and Research:**

Grounding the review process is the opportunity to assess Weston's Standards and to conduct research on current best practices in the field of World Languages. Since the completion of NEASC in 2011, the department has been working toward a completion of improved curriculum articulation and an update to the Standards. This work was assessed during the review process. Additionally, the committee spent time exploring current research in second language development as it pertained to the department's work. It was an intriguing observation that we found limited current research on curricular and instructional practices. There was however a great deal on current explorations by other language departments - but less currently updated research beyond what had grounded the Glastonbury model.

### **Self-Study Assessments**

The report shares what we learned from our study using the lenses to explore exemplary programs and to examine our own program. This immersion of the self-study committee in research and analysis is reported as a series of Exemplary Program Targets that present highlights of what are exemplary practices within different aspects of an excellent World Language program. Self-Assessments and Emerging Committee Ideas regarding Weston's program are then compared to these exemplary practices.

Sections are organized by five important program components:

- **Instruction**
  - Pedagogy
  - Feedback and Assessment
- **Curriculum**
  - Standards Learning goals and Benchmarks
  - Scope and Sequence
  - Projects and activity experiences
- **Program Design**
  - Time
  - Schedule
- **Facilities and Equipment**
- **Departmental Practices**

## **Instruction:**

### **Exemplary Program Targets:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The classroom is an immersive cultural-linguistic experience for students.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students develop a high level of proficiency in each of the four language skills (listening/speaking/reading/writing).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers use a wide range of teaching strategies and media to provide students multiple routes of access to the curriculum and develop a love of world languages.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students have the opportunity to travel and reside abroad to put into use language and cultural concepts that they have learned to become more rounded 21st century citizens.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong use of technology for engagement, target language opportunities, multiple accents, authentic experiences.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers provide authentic opportunities for students to develop their skills.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A strongly scaffolded environment of visual cues, language prompts, and gestures to guide language work in multiple modalities across all instructional levels.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• World Language faculty know the full scope and sequence of language development and are themselves ongoing learners that actively collaborate and innovate.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Authentically grounded assessment of language skills mirrors and enhances the goals of language development beyond skills oriented testing.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students demonstrate thinking and speaking that does not process from a framework of translation. They work in the language without translation.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A classroom environment that is safe and well-grounded in the use of instructional strategies that support students in feeling safe to fail, take risks and then learn.</li></ul>

### **Self-Assessment:**

The Department of World Languages and the Program Review sub-committee discussed teaching and learning at length, reviewed and revised our standards and learning goals, engaged in research of best instructional practices, and took part in site visits to inform ourselves and to compare our program to similar neighboring districts. Both the K-12 department and the program review sub-committee found this review of our instructional practices useful, informative, and invigorating. The following were some of the instructional practices the department felt it did well: use of target language in class, travel opportunities/field trips, technology and lab use, effective use of on-line resources and other technology to provide hybrid and blended learning models.

Sustaining one of our Professional Learning Community (PLC) goals of the past three years, the department espouses a philosophy of immersion in our foreign language classrooms that increases with each level, a widely accepted standard found among those schools we visited. One question that did emerge with respect to the immersion classroom however was the option of

using English for short periods of time to explain complex grammar points. The choice boils down simply to this: spend X amount of time explaining the concept in the target language, vs. X/3 amount of time with English as the language of currency. Using the latter model does free up extra minutes for crucial reinforcement and the practice of these concepts clearing the way for quicker mastery. On the other hand, some students will be less likely to adhere to the use of the target language in class if they see that the teacher is not completely wedded to the idea.

Another central theme that emerged from our work entails foreign language assessment. Since foreign language study is about foreign language skill acquisition, looking at our current assessment practices to ensure that they monitor and assess the development of the four language skills (listening speaking/reading/writing) is a departmental reflection process that can impact instruction. The department recognized that teachers can over-rely on paper and pencil assessments which are easy to grade, forsaking the performance-based experiences that give a better picture of skill development. Although our common assessments, benchmark assessment tasks, and other level-specific projects, such as our District Determined Measures (DDM) pilot this year, are indeed performance-based, integrating more regular performance-based assessments into our assessment repertoire could help us more effectively monitor student development and would better align our instructional practices to match our goal of developing skill proficiency. This discussion of needing to diversify assessment increased as students' progress through the grades.

The department has been creative in developing solutions to issues such as under-enrolled classes, mixed level classes, and gaps in a curricular sequence (e.g. Mandarin I at the high school). Hybrid courses, blended courses, and full on-line courses have developed within the World Languages department over the last several years which have assisted us in meeting the foreign language needs of a diverse student body. Several departmental faculty have joined the edX effort to provide on-ramp and full level courses in foreign languages, the first of their kind. Purchase of the well-established on-line product Rosetta Stone has allowed us to enhance our classroom teaching, provide Independent Studies in German, Italian, and other languages that we do not offer, and offer an on-line Mandarin I as mentioned above. All of these practices are in an emergent phase and need much further departmental focus and discussion to formalize and extend their use. Having developed ideas to respond to the organizational needs detailed above, the department is now beginning to extend these approaches into classrooms uses of instructional innovation. Seeing the use of on-line technologies for the goal of enhanced language learning for students is an area where the department wants to play a leadership role at the High School.

#### Emerging departmental ideas

1. Continue the departmental exploration and assessment of purposeful use of targeted English as it relates to making strong in the moment teaching decisions.
2. Continue to develop instructional methodology that promotes risk-taking in speaking by maximizing verbal opportunities through varied grouping practices.
3. Develop instructional approaches to facilitate dynamic group learning that allows for increased speaking in the target language within a small group setting.
  - Use of technology to facilitate blended learning that rotates students into small group learning while others prepare for small group meetings, review content, or extend

learning through projects or directed work. This allows the teacher to focus on the small group and the intensive speaking work.

- Sustain and increase use of language lab.
4. Extend the repertoire of course based assessments to ensure that all 4 language skills are assessed through a range of approaches and with balanced emphasis in types of assessment tools. Increase the use of rubrics, projects, observational check sheets and other classroom observation tools to diversify grading and feedback.
  5. Assess the learning environment of classrooms to promote enhancing the use of strong visual cues and diverse modalities of language exploration and development. Clearly articulate the kinds of language supports that benefit learners at all levels. Share best practices.

## **Curriculum**

### **Exemplary Program Targets**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Curriculum that develops a robust, engaged and positive global perspective.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Curriculum materials that are dynamic and current to the cultural proficiency goals of a contemporary global society.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● K-12 scope and sequence that provides for learning progressions of content and skills across grade levels.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Relevant, rigorous and authentic content knowledge and high level proficiency in language ability.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A variety of instructional practices grounded in using authentic language opportunity designed to support the K-12 articulated curriculum.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A variety of assessment modalities designed to target and measure students' progress both formally and informally (i.e., formative/summative, common assessments, elementary science notebooks, projects, etc.).</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Purposeful curricular connections that are interdisciplinary in approach.</li></ul>

### **Self-Assessment:**

The Department of World Languages offers an array of 36 courses in its four languages across all grades. Teachers engage in differentiated instruction that seeks to develop proficiency in the four language skills while building a high level of content. They collaborate on grade level curriculum, research best practices, and attend workshops to add to their repertoires. An in depth re-examination of the curriculum, standards, and benchmarks was also recently completed.

At the elementary level, our Foreign Language at Elementary Schools (FLES) program enriches the general curriculum by adhering to a content-based curriculum approach. For example, units on insect life or the solar system are taught in Spanish as the students are learning the same concepts in their homeroom. The elementary program would benefit from strengthening these classroom connections to develop a deeper interdisciplinary approach. Spanish at the elementary level then could play a more embedded role in some core units, becoming a co-leader in the delivery of curriculum.

Current research in language acquisition indicates that authentic language use connected to speaking enhances language development. Weston's FLES program is grounded in a focus on receptive language skills and decisions about program improvements need to center on a discussion of program goals in order to direct changes. The committee discussed the perception by many parents in the community that the elementary program is not robust because students do not exit the elementary program able to "speak the language." The curricular focus of the program is on developing the receptive skills and less centered on spontaneous speaking confidence, which mirrors the more natural approach in language development. Discussions within the committee touched upon fostering a higher comfort level with spontaneous articulation in the target language, perhaps even at the expense of letting some errors go

uncorrected in order not to stifle productive creation of language. The department sees this as important curricular discussion, and believes that a more clearly delineated progressive development of the oral skill would be of benefit to WPS students.

The World Language Department is unique as it does not offer leveled courses. This gives rise to issues of meeting all student needs and “readiness levels” within the heterogeneous class. At the High School, there are three starting points for students: *Fundamentals*, *Novice*, and *Intermediate*. The majority of students enter at the Intermediate level. Some students need a second year in their language course which is offered as a “B Option”. This option acknowledges that students learn at different paces, sometimes requiring a longer period of exposure to the concepts in order to attain appropriate mastery. This construct of course curriculum merits a discussion of how to best meet the needs of high level learners. Differentiation is essential and exploring the addition of an Honors lift within the Intermediate level needs to be discussed.

Over the last several years our middle school program has benefited from the school-wide introduction of iPads as a powerful teaching, learning, and curriculum development tool. Middle School foreign language teachers are effectively transitioning their pedagogy to this platform by taking part in internal and external professional development and their own research. The devices have reduced dependency on our Middle School lab. The formal lab remains an important resource for recording student speaking, specifically. Matching newer and older technologies to learning purpose is important.

Our middle school World Language curriculum is complemented by travel abroad opportunities for this age group. Spanish students can tour Costa Rica or go to Ecuador for a trip with a service-learning component; French students can travel to Quebec (or perhaps France/Belgium in the near future), and Latin students can visit Italy. The Chinese teachers are interested in adding a trip to Shanghai or Beijing. The department would benefit from identifying a vision of how middle school and high school travel/residence abroad, both virtual and real, can enhance the language development experience.

The World Language department teaches the language of a country along with its culture: history, literature, customs, and norms. Through research and collaboration, faculty has developed these integrated units. Pre-Colombian history and culture are adequately covered in our intermediate Spanish sequence, and African Francophone culture is a focus at the Middle School and lower intermediate levels. It would serve the department well to re-examine the sequence of these cultural complements to ensure there is no unnecessary redundancy and that other areas of importance have adequate coverage.

The World Language curriculum is designed to build increasingly sophisticated sets of skills that allow students to effectively interact in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They need to be able to create language using these acquired skills. From our common assessments to our daily routine activities (e.g. paired conversations followed by reporting to the class), the curriculum is designed with such skill-building in mind. The courses themselves follow vertical linear alignment, with success in one course contingent upon earlier success in the previous year. The addition of more “elective” style courses, like *Hispanic Literature*, would benefit our department by allowing students more opportunities for enrichment. Such course offerings would also allow us to retain some very capable students who simply do not wish to take a foreign language AP course.

The department has developed an elective, *Ancient Roots of Modern Words and Ideas*, that it hopes to offer at some point in the future. This course is a departure from the norm of foreign language offerings as it would be conducted in English. By exploring the influences of ancient civilizations on modern language and literature and other disciplines, one of its goals is to meet the needs of students who could benefit from a focus on underlying language concepts, deferring their entry into the standard foreign language curriculum for a year. Of course, it could extend as well to those students who seek enrichment after their two year requirement has been fulfilled. The course may appeal to a variety of student profiles: students who struggle in foreign language at lower grades and seek an on-ramp experience to one of our languages; students who have an eye on improved standardized test performance; or students who are simply intrigued by how western language has developed. This is an example of reflection and contemplation on the part of the department to where and how it can meet myriad student needs.

Weston is fortunate to have the vested interest of a parent community that recognizes and values the importance of global experience and second language mastery. With parent support for second language experiences as well as a growing diverse cultural community, the department has been reflecting on the need to deepen parent connections in meaningful new ways. This is clearly a district wide goal shared by all faculty and leadership, but the World Languages department is uniquely positioned to support the work of global perspective and cultural proficiency. In the past there were parent organizations that supported aspects of this work. Moving forward reactivating this shared community energy will enhance Weston's global engagement.

#### Emerging departmental ideas

1. Continue the departmental exploration of non-sequential/non-linguistic courses such *Hispanic Lit* or *Ancient Roots of Modern Words and Ideas* that can add enrichment to our course offerings while still contributing to achieving our goal of foreign language and culture proficiency.
2. Develop a more formal catalogue of cultural complements to linguistic units to ensure more complete coverage of the essential history, literature, customs, and so forth.
3. Continue to explore hybrid, blended, and on-line opportunities for students, especially when they provide chances to learn outside of course offerings (e.g. independent projects or high school intro to Mandarin)
4. Global connections and authentic immersion experiences need to be expanded throughout all grades, with a planned expansion that moves toward global travel as a core experience for all learners at some time between 6-12<sup>th</sup> grade. Virtual travel and cross cultural exchanges should be part of the continuum of experiences. A clearly articulated vision needs to be written and communicated.
  - Explore further developing the parent role in hosting, organizing and promoting the global connections of Weston. Additionally, fund raising to anchor hosting expenses should be explored.
  - Develop GEC as instructional tool for 6-12 grades and connecting to sister schools and other global opportunities.
5. Interdisciplinary connections between languages and other subjects areas at all levels should be further developed with leadership from the World Languages department. Specifically at

the elementary level continue to foster interdisciplinary work that brings language and culture into the regular classroom with opportunities for co-teaching and collaboration on unit themes.

6. Form a diverse sub-committee of foreign language faculty from a wide range of languages and levels, with other important stakeholders to articulate ways to enhance and sustain the cultural experiences provided through the department as well as communication of global work within the Weston community.
  - enhance website
  - increase communication of cultural events to Weston community
  - maintain best practices for events and experiences to build institutional knowledge in the community and thus increase participation and information sharing
7. Through the Program of Studies process, fully articulate the “B” option of course level attainment and explore the embedded Honor lift within the Intermediate Level course strand.
8. Develop a plan to increase the emphasis on speaking with confidence, beginning at the early FLES level of language exposure. As a department, develop an articulated oral language continuum with target learning goals for speaking with confidence. Delineate expectations for the gradual correction of speaking errors to slowly improve speaking skills while maintaining engaged speaking.

## **Program Design:**

### **Exemplary Program Targets**

● Language offerings that reflect the diverse world in which we live
● A language selection process that engages students in understanding how to select a language that best meets their academic needs and language interests
● High school graduation requirement that sets high language standards for all students and prepares them to access high performing colleges and universities. Anticipated as three years minimum
● A program design by grade level that reflects core language acquisition goals and values regarding meaningful contact time and purposeful learning
● Travel and residence abroad opportunities are considered an integral part of the program design
● Program targets that emphasize developing the four core language components
● Sustained work with receptive and expressive language development

### **Self-Assessment:**

Weston Public Schools is fortunate to have a Foreign Language at Elementary Schools (FLES) program in Spanish in Grades 1-6. Although there are other districts with FLES programs, few begin as early as first grade. Numerous studies indicate that early second language learning not only benefits student linguistic abilities but cognitive and creative abilities as well. A program's structure influences learning, and our FLES program structure speaks to its priorities. Currently, expressive oral language is less of an emphasis in the elementary program because weekly contact is limited. A program that fosters strong oral proficiency as an anchor goal is characterized, according to research, by multiple weekly meetings, even if these meetings are short in length. In assessing the FLES program, questions emerged that our structural model should reflect our FLES priorities, and that the current contact time on task and frequency (outlined below) may not be aligned with our goals should we move toward a greater emphasis on expressive oral language.

As many of its regional counterparts, WHS has a foreign language requirement of two consecutive years of the same language (see appendix C). A clear majority of students continue into a third and many further into a fourth year of study, due in no small part to the fact that competitive colleges like Harvard and Stanford expect at least three years of foreign language study. The department would like to consider increasing the requirement to three years to ensure that a higher percentage of WHS graduates finish their secondary career able to, as Harvard University's admissions web page articulates, "... enter another culture and to understand its ideas and its values."

Regarding program design, four other major areas of discussion emerged within the committee:

- the language selection process at middle school
- contact time on task and frequency
- when students should select their foreign language
- meeting the needs of all learners

### **Language selection process at middle school**

Currently students emerge from the FLES program at the end of sixth grade, electing to either remain in the Spanish program through middle school and beyond or move to one of the other offerings: French, Latin, or Mandarin. Traditionally, the director and the 7th grade teachers attend a 6th grade meeting and outline the language options several days prior to the selection. More recently, the department has focused on educating 6th grade students and their families on their choices (i.e., memos and brochures home and multiple presentations to the 6th grade). Students have a predisposition toward the selection of Spanish. Because they have had a long exposure to the language and are aware of travel opportunities, many students choose to continue to study Spanish. To mitigate this issue, the department seeks a model of language selection that promotes the opportunity to learn about other languages and cultures including the following events:

- Formal presentation at a sixth grade meeting
- Brochure outlining the virtues of each language
- Memo to parents requesting they sit and discuss their child's selection
- Foreign language fair for students
- Foreign language selection evening for parents and students

It is worthy of mention that the department did implement several of these steps in the spring of 2013 with some success; each language received enrollments for class sections:

- French - 2 sections
- Latin - 3 sections
- Mandarin - 1 section
- Spanish - 4 sections

Another potential solution to a language selection process is an effective Foreign Language Exploratory (FLEX) program, which exposes students to each of the language offerings for a period of time. Some schools dedicate a quarter to each of four language offerings during the Grade 6 year. Although research indicates that such programs are somewhat ineffective for foreign language acquisition, a shorter program of a month per offering would serve promotional ends and allow students to survey the options as a means to make more informed decisions.

### **Contact time on task and frequency**

Another area of in-depth discussion on the committee centered around the most effective design of program to develop strong language confidence and receptive language skill. Length of time and contact with language were explored. Both research and the past program review recommended increased contact in both duration and frequency as core to success with language. Currently, time on task in Weston's foreign language classrooms varies from school to school, level to level, and is built roughly upon a premise that class contact time should be increased as students' progress through the sequence. Here is a summary of weekly time on task and contact points:

Grades 1 - 3: 2 X 30 minute periods per week.  
Grades 4 - 5: 1 X 60 minute periods per week.  
Grade 6: 2 X 50 minute periods per week.  
Grades 7 - 8: 4 X 50 minute periods per week.  
Grades 9 - 12: 5 X 76 minute periods per 8-day cycle (*approximately 220 minutes per week*)

With the exception of Field School, each segment represents an increase in contact time, although not necessarily an increase in contact frequency. Students at the Field School, like those at Country and Woodland, are exposed to 60 minutes of Spanish per week; however, the two 30 minute contact points at the lower schools are reduced to one 60 minute meeting at Field School, a model which runs counter to research that supports the more frequent contact the better. Grade 6 enjoys an almost 85% increase over the previous year in the amount of time, split over two meetings, and 7th and 8th grade double that output over 4 weekly classes.

The Weston 2005 Foreign Language Review outlined eight core recommendations, most of which have been fulfilled over the last 9 years. The two unfulfilled recommendation center on time:

- Language classes in the Middle School should meet five times per week for a full class period.
- Language classes in grades four and five should meet five days per week for thirty minutes.

While there remain questions on what is an appropriate number of class meetings per week for the elementary and middle school grades, there is consensus within the World Languages department that more time on task would be a welcome development both as a means to increase language proficiency and as a message to our community of the importance and relevance of the discipline, particularly in this the 21st century.

### **When students should select their foreign language**

As discussed above, WPS students currently begin study of Spanish in first through sixth grades as part of our FLES program. The decision to either remain in Spanish or switch to another language takes place in the spring of 6th grade. Issues such as those outlined above in *Language selection process at middle school* may create an uneven playing field for the French, Latin, and Mandarin programs which has compelled us to rethink our FLES program as a Grades 1-6 model. This model is a vestige of the old Junior High School prototype that had 6th grade as the terminal year of elementary education. If 6th grade is indeed as much a middle school year as 7th and 8th, then looking at 5th grade as the final FLES year would make some sense, with a foreign language selection decision in the spring of student's grade 5 year. Making this a "Field School" decision in effect diminishes the power of certain influences like the Costa Rica and Ecuador trips and allows rising 6th graders a new foreign language beginning as part of their new school experience.

### **Meeting the need of all learners**

In the program design of foreign language at the High School, there are some unique course structures. As part of the review process the committee explored the strengths and needs of this design. Discussion focused on the fact that, unlike other departments, World Languages has no leveled courses, so meeting the needs of all students in a class of diverse readiness levels and learning styles can be particularly challenging. This has resulted in the need to invent ways to

allow students to successfully develop their language skills (as in the A/B option discussed in the self-assessment portion of the curriculum section).

In a high achieving district such as Weston, both community expectations as well as graduation requirements guide the expectations for a minimum of two years of a foreign language in high school, and in most cases the guideline of three years required for the range of colleges to which Weston students apply. This presents some unique challenges for the department when a range of students who have complex learning needs, and who may not be able to manage a full work load in middle school opt not to take a language. There is concern among the World Languages faculty that some middle school students are removed from foreign language classes for remedial purposes, when indeed they could successfully access a second language. This further delays the progress of language development and impacts language choices at the high school level. A second area of impact for these students is during the selection process for high school language where, unlike math where the department head guides the best appropriate placement of students into their course selection, the decision is often reached without input from the World Languages department.

#### Emerging departmental ideas:

1. Develop a range of program responses that support a strong well developed process for the selection of language at the Middle School. Discuss these in department and work within the MS leadership team and parent forums to ensure a well framed response to concerns regarding selection being underdeveloped given the importance of the decision's impact through the high school experience. Current ideas of possible enhancements to process:
  - Develop a “FLEX program” experience to be implemented in the spring of either 5th or 6th grade to work in conjunction with a parent/student presentation on MS/HS language experiences, followed by an informed decision making process. Students would then begin studying their selected language in 6th grade.
  - Develop the World Languages webpage to scaffold the language selection process. Create an information platform for each language that supports parents and students exploring the aspects of each language. Include samples of student video and highlights of language strengths for each of the 4 languages.
  - Provide a parent/student evening presentation that outlines the importance of second language acquisition and the commitment of the selected language. Have a parent sign-in to track attendance and ensure that all parents are aware of the importance of the meeting.
  - Consider varied uses of a language fair to develop language awareness and interest. Perhaps at Field School, at the Middle School, or as part of the parent/student evening presentation on the language selection process.
  - Extend the window of information and learning on languages and enlist a parent signature process that ensures parents have had the opportunities to gain information.
2. Convene a subcommittee facilitated by the Director of World Languages, MS Principal and the Special Education Department Head to explore and develop a criteria and process for IEP and other waivers at the MS supported with process and documents.
3. More clearly articulate the language transition process from MS to HS for a percentage of students who may need more support. Clarify the range of options for accessing languages at

varied paces. Additionally, develop a clear course selection process inclusive of data use and input from the department.

- Have a separate parent/student evening presentation for rising 9th graders who have been pulled out of foreign language study at the Middle School.
4. Explore the development of an embedded Honors option starting in the Intermediate level of language. Discuss within department the possible criteria of such an option as well as the process of pro and con impacts on the language experience for both students and for teachers.

## **Facilities and Equipment:**

### **Exemplary Program Targets**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State-of-the-art digital labs with rapid internet access and high performing audio components for use in the development of the four language skills</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A robust network that allows for quick access to authentic materials</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An adequate number of classrooms, sufficient classroom space and supplies to maximize student learning</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Office space that promotes collegial relationship and structures to facilitate working with students one to one and in small groups.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An effective BYOT program that allows increased classroom technology work across all grades.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A classroom set up as a learning tool through its environmental print and cultural emphasis.</li></ul>

### **Self-Assessment:**

Weston Public Schools' facilities and equipment are excellent in providing our students with the appropriate support to access our curriculum. At the lower levels, teachers have their own well-equipped classrooms which allow them to create a space and atmosphere that has an immersion feel: posters and other visuals such as language prompts decorate the wall, student workbook binders and other resources are easily stored, and in the case of Woodland and Country Schools, there is desk space and floor space which permits teachers flexible seating arrangements. The Field School space is less desirable since there are no windows and hence no natural light, but this will no longer be an issue when the school moves into its new building. Access to computers can be harder at times at the lower schools since the computer labs are booked. The Middle and High School classroom spaces are generally large enough to service even maximum class sizes.

Both the Middle and High Schools are fortunate to have digital language labs that serve a multitude of needs; however, with the recent retirement of the lab aide who worked in both schools, maintenance of these labs has fallen on the regular technology staff who are burdened with maintaining all technology in both schools. Furthermore, language lab tech support needs often emerge when classes and the teacher are in the lab logging on, trying to record, or struggling with faulty headsets - issues that frequently need immediate attention. As such, there is rarely if ever a tech staff member available when needed, which has resulted in some hesitancy to use the lab for its more sophisticated features. This is mitigated somewhat at the Middle School where iPads can be manipulated to handle a good measure of the work once done in labs, but at the High School, where a higher level of sophisticated lab use is expected as students' progress through the sequence, teachers are often inclined to forgo their lab visit lest time be wasted troubleshooting lab issues.

Emerging departmental ideas:

1. The World Languages Department Head should meet with the Director of Libraries and Technology to revisit support of the language lab. The goal is sustained viable use of this resource. A more defined plan of support is needed.
2. Consider ways to reconfigure the World Language office space (room 207) to accommodate all teachers.
3. Schedule World Language classes into room 200 to preclude teachers from having to teach in the Mathematics wings.
4. Provide each CS/WS/FS classroom with a laptop station of five computers.

## **Departmental Practices:**

### **Exemplary Program Targets**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A teaching faculty that know the full scope and sequence of language development.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A department that promotes teachers as ongoing learners by promoting professional development and by asking participants to share the knowledge with the rest of the department.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A department that actively collaborates across varied languages is composed of demonstrated risk takers and innovators in their teaching.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A faculty that has established collaborative practices and routines that support sustained collaboration and problem solving around important issues.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A department that has developed shared and cohesive departmental practices and goals; all targeted toward developing successful multi-language learners.</li></ul>

### **Self-Assessment:**

The World Languages department works to be current through implementing new, emerging strategies (such as flipping the classroom or online components to classes) that are effective in foreign language instruction. Several faculty regularly present as experts in our field to groups of foreign language teachers. Professional development and summer workshops often focus on developing the latest proven techniques and approaches to effective foreign language pedagogy. The K-12 department meets three to six times per year to work on district, state, or departmental initiatives. There is sentiment that this time and other collaboration and communication across the K-12 vertical team could be improved. Some teachers use common planning time to develop curriculum and look at student work.

Building a cohesive department that can promote its discipline of world languages is a goal requiring further work. The faculty feels that promoting itself more effectively as a unified team is crucial for the attainment of some goals. It is a fact that the foreign language staff competes for the same students during the language selection process. Working on improved communication and collaboration can counteract some of these indirect stressful influences on collaboration.

### **Emerging departmental ideas:**

1. Take steps to ensure the full K-12 department continues to meet during the pre-scheduled times to collaborate on departmental objectives.
2. Adhere to an articulated plan to properly promote the four language choices at the end of FLES.
3. Continue to develop the Global Education component of the district's five year plan by putting in place additional long-term exchange programs.

## **Conclusion:**

The World Languages Department looks forward to welcoming the External Review committee in October 2014. The Self-study committee, working collaboratively with principals and the broader department, feels that it has completed a comprehensive look at Weston's current world languages program. We now await the assessment and recommendations that will emerge from the external review process. Work is already underway on many of the emerging areas of need that have been self-identified in our work; these will be further explored by the visiting committee. It has been the goal of this committee to vision the best possible language experience that can be provided to all Weston students. We see Weston through the lens of a community invested in developing students who have a strong global perspective and a rich knowledge in languages that give them access to a global economy and a life of broad experiences.

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## **Strengths, Challenges, Questions, Goals** Departmental Entry Discussion

### **Prompts for brainstorming issues pertaining to K-12 Self-study:**

- Curriculum
- Program Design
- Instruction
- Technology

#### **I. Strengths**

- Technology and lab use
- Available resources
- Travel opportunities/field trips
- Use of target language in class
- Collaboration w/SPED
- Students taking multiple languages
- Caring/generous teachers
- Diverse staff
- Culture as a part of the curriculum
- School-wide meetings
- Four languages

#### **II. Challenges**

- Promoting the department and its languages
- Short and long-term plan
- Pedagogical discussions (best practices)
- More external PD
- Communication between the schools/levels/teachers
- Constriction of dept (blended learning, classes over cap)
- Collegiality
- Tech support (lab, etc.)
- SPED students taken out of FL
- Alignment of curriculum

## Weston Data on Enrollment Practices and Trends

## Percentage of Weston Middle School Language Enrollment

School Year	Spanish 7	Latin 7	French 7	Mandarin 7
2013-14	45%	31%	17%	7%
2012-13	82%	8%	10%	0%
2011-12	48%	24%	17%	11%
2010-11	48%	22%	19%	11%
2009-10	52%	20%	21%	7%
2008-09	54%	22%	13%	11%
2007-08	55%	22%	10%	13%
2006-07	49%	15%	20%	16%

## Percentage of Student Enrollment (Including students not taking a language)

School Year	Spanish 7	Latin 7	French 7	Mandarin 7	No Language
2013-14	41%	29%	15%	7%	8%
2012-13	72%	7%	9%	0%	12%
2011-12	42%	21%	15%	10%	12%
2010-11	43%	20%	17%	10%	10%
2009-10	47%	18%	19%	6%	10%
2008-09	48%	20%	11%	10%	11%
2007-08	49%	19%	9%	12%	11%
2006-07	43%	13%	17%	14%	13%

## Student Enrollment Numbers (Including students not taking a language)

School Year	Spanish 7	Latin 7	French 7	Mandarin 7	No Language	Total Gr 7
2013-14	87	60	32	14	17	210
2012-13	102	10	17	0	19	148
2011-12	81	41	29	19	22	192
2010-11	90	43	35	21	21	210
2009-10	87	33	35	12	18	185
2008-09	104	43	25	21	25	218
2007-08	91	35	17	22	22	187
2006-07	77	24	31	26	23	181

## **Data Compilation of Site Visits**

### **Site Visits**

The Bancroft School  
Bedford Public Schools - Lane Elementary School  
Belmont Public Schools - Belmont High School and Chenery Middle School  
Brookline Public Schools - Edward Devotion Elementary School  
Concord Academy  
Concord Carlisle Regional High School  
Medfield Middle School  
Newton North High School  
Sharon High School and Middle School  
Wellesley High School

### **Guiding Questions for Site Visits**

- Languages offered?
- Language graduation requirement (years)?
- How long class times are and how many times per week/cycle/school?
- Class size
- What is a full-time teaching load?
- What is an approximate percent of students with IEPs who are pulled out for remedial purposes?
- What is an approximate percent of students continuing beyond requirement?
- What does a breakdown of class time on grammar vs. culture?
- How/when do students choose their language?
- Does the school track? What are their thoughts on tracking?
- What is the percent of students who “double up?”
- Is there a FLES program?
- Any online, hybrid, or blended learning opportunities for students?
- Are there travel opportunities and what is their impact?
- What are the departmental dynamics?

## Neighboring District Overview

	Languages					Grades and Frequency			
	French	Spanish	Latin	German	Mandarin	5	6	7	8
Belmont						FLEX	½ year	Every day	Every day
Wellesley									
Wayland									
Lexington									
Dover							Every day	Every day	Every day
Carlisle							Every day	Every day	Every day
Westford							FLEX		
Sharon						FLEX			

## Neighboring Districts - Graduation Requirements

	Year Requirements					
	Foreign Language	English	Math	Science	Social Studies	Notes:
<b>PUBLIC SCHOOLS:</b>						
Belmont	2	4	4	4	3	
Wellesley	0	4	2	2	2	
Wayland	0	4	4	4	3	
Lexington	2	4	4	4	4	
Dover	3	4	4	3	3	
Natick	2	4	4	3	3	
Concord/ Carlisle	0	4	2	2	*	2 years of Social Studies, Art, Music, Drama or Language
Westford	0	4	3	3	3	
Sharon	2	4	4	3	3	
Newton South	0	4	2	3	3	
Newton North	0	4	2	2	2	
Needham	2	4	3	3	3	
Brookline	2	4	3	3	3	
Lincoln/Sudbury	2	4	2	2	3	
Boston Latin	4 Modern & 4 Latin	4	4	3	U.S. History	4 years of Latin if admitted in Class VI 3 years of Latin if admitted in Class IV (Freshman)
<b>PRIVATE SCHOOLS:</b>						
Concord Academy	3	-	-	-	-	Data only on FL
Rivers School	2	-	-	-	-	Data only on FL

## Neighboring Districts - Minutes per week at high school level

Bancroft School	→	200 minutes
Bedford High School	→	230 minutes
Belmont High School	→	237 minutes
Brookline High School	→	220 minutes
Concord Academy	→	200 minutes
Dover-Sherborn Regional High School	→	216 minutes
Lexington High School	→	205 minutes
Natick High School	→	200 minutes
Needham High School	→	236 minutes
Newton North High School	→	240 minutes
Sharon High School	→	207 minutes
Wayland High School	→	205 minutes
Wellesley High School	→	215 minutes
Weston High School	→	220 minutes

**Other Site Visit Data:**

School	FLES?	Max Class Size?	Tracking?
<b>Belmont HS</b>		29-30	All languages: Level I; Level II CP or Honors; Level III CP or Honors; Level IV CP or Honors; AP
<b>Belmont MS</b>		25	
<b>Medfield MS</b>	Mandarin or Spanish starting in grade 2		
<b>Concord Academy</b>	NA	14	
<b>Brookline (Edward Devotion School)</b>	French or Spanish (K-2: 3x20; 3-5 3x30) NOTE: One of the Brookline K-8 schools teaches Mandarin as its primary language.	25	Yes, at the HS
<b>Bedford (Lane School)</b>	French or Spanish starting in grade 3 (3x25)		
<b>Sharon MS</b>		100/teacher; minimum 15	Level I classes not tracked; Levels II and up offer "standard" and "advanced"
<b>Wellesley HS</b>	Beginning 2015	27; minimum 10	MS unleveled; HS years 1 and 2 unleveled; year 3 and above: CP and Honors
<b>Bancroft School (Worcester - Private)</b>	French (Gr. 1-3; 1/week) French and Spanish (Gr. 4-5 alternate quarters 2/week)	17	Third year Spanish and above; not in French (numbers too low)
<b>Concord Carlisle</b>	Carlisle: Yes - one year of "each language" Concord: No	25 (but some have been larger); minimum 15	CP and Honors tracks
<b>Newton North HS</b>		Average 15	Yes. Honors, ACP (Advanced College Prep); AP