

Report of External Review Committee

World Languages Program

Weston Public Schools

Weston, MA

October 2014

External Review Committee:

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Presented to School Committee: December 2014

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Executive Summary
Weston World Languages External Review Report
October 2014

The purpose of the report is to update the Weston School Committee regarding Weston's External Program Review of the World Languages Department. The report summarizes the findings of the External Review Committee and provides recommendations and commendations to guide future departmental planning. It is the External Review Committee's hope that this report will be helpful to the School Committee as well as to all the other stakeholders participating in the department's review process and members of the Weston community.

The report is organized into sections that correspond with the School Committee Charge:

- Program Design
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Communication and Community

Important Recommendations

- Embark upon a process of vertical and horizontal alignment in the curriculum
- Increase frequency of instruction in the elementary program
- Create entry point of Mandarin at Weston High School
- Develop departmental goals
- Outline departmental policies
- Improve collegiality amongst WL faculty
- Improve communication with parents and other members of the Weston community

Composition of External Review Committee

- Arlene Guerrero-Watanabe, Associate Professor of Spanish / Chair of Modern and Classical Languages, Assumption College
- Karen Fairbrother, Field Supervisor in Education, Brandeis University
- Cristina Gonzalez, Spanish Teacher, Lincoln Sudbury Regional High School
- Kelly Harrington, Spanish Teacher, Sudbury Public Schools
- Elizabeth Kelley, Latin Teacher / Department Head of Foreign Languages, Littleton High School
- Diane Mammone, Chinese Teacher, Quabbin Regional Middle / High School

Campus Visit

October 7-9, 2014

Methodology

The review team read the department's self-study; reviewed the curriculum, course materials and standards; observed classroom instruction; interviewed faculty, students and program directors; met with the Assistant Superintendent, and Principals; and toured classrooms and other facilities. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with the Charge, the learning standards for foreign languages, the department's self-study and belief statements, and additional materials. The external review committee then discussed all pertinent materials along with individual observations from the three-day site visit. This report includes detailed feedback and recommendations from all members of the review team.

Program Design

To what extent does Weston’s program design support World Language acquisition and cultural proficiency?

- **Elementary: Does the delivery (time and frequency) of the elementary Spanish program support a high level of language acquisition?**

Weston’s program design in the elementary Spanish program is divided in its approach to the language acquisition process and the development of cultural proficiency. In 1st through 3rd grade, children at the Woodland and Country Schools participate in a FLES program which promotes language acquisition and oral output of language. The K-3 program offers an educationally sound delivery of elementary Spanish that begins in 1st grade, with teachers using immersion in the lower levels and meeting twice a week. While these biweekly meetings are not frequent enough to support a “high level” of language acquisition, they do support a reasonable amount of language acquisition.

Class observations of the K-3 Program showed satisfactory progress in the process of language acquisition. Students in grades 1-3 had clear expectations that the class would be conducted in Spanish and they were eager to produce and communicate in the target language. They were asked questions, were able to answer set responses as well as open-ended responses, participated in partner activities, played games and learned about Spanish-speaking countries and continents—all in Spanish. The students enjoyed class time and were clearly engaged in the lessons.

In 4th and 5th grade at the Field School, students were also engaged in class and had excellent participation, but the amount of Spanish used by the teacher and students was much less than in the lower elementary schools. In addition, grades 4-5 suffer from a reduction in

the number of class meetings per week. By nature of only meeting one time per week for a 60 minute class, the instruction shifted from class taught almost entirely in Spanish in grades 1-3 to English-based instruction with much less Spanish spoken by the teacher and students. Students did ask and answer a few questions in Spanish but the fundamental nature of the class was entirely different from the proficiency level demonstrated in the lower elementary classes.

The committee recommends that the frequency of class meetings in grades 4-5 be changed so that the students continue with the same amount of class time as they are used to in the lower levels. Grades 4-5 should meet with at least the same frequency, twice per week, as the K-3 program to continue adequate improvements in proficiency. The Field School's 60 minutes once per week, while promoting cultural knowledge of the Spanish-speaking world, does not advance nor maintain language proficiency gained from the K-3 program.

Overall, the FLES program provides a good introduction but alone does not support a high level of language acquisition. Parents and other stakeholders in the community need to be aware of this. Only total immersion at this age would produce a high level of language acquisition, at least orally. Students need to continue their study to develop language acquisition and cultural proficiency.

- **Secondary: Are we offering the “appropriate” languages at the “appropriate” time and in the “appropriate” manner?**

In order to address this question, we need to begin with a few, key observations about the sixth grade, since students presently continue with Spanish until grade 7. In grade 6, the culminating year of the FLES program, it appears that the content picks up where the third

graders left off. The 6th grade course meets twice per week. Class observations reveal that sixth grade students opened class with similar warm-up questions in a similar teaching style. It appears that if there were a fluid 1-5 FLES program in place where teachers have equal contact time (2x week for 30 minutes in grades 1-5) along with ample time to collaborate, explore best practices, create a sequential curriculum, conduct peer observations and share strategies, the program would then be able to support a high level of language acquisition. It also appears that teachers need to be made aware of the curriculum at the various levels 1-6 to create a circular but not repetitive curriculum. Finally, the committee unanimously agrees that grades 4-6 should have a minimum of three World Language classes per week.

Furthermore, there is significant concern that sixth grade Spanish, although currently a part of the FLES sequence, due to its location at the middle school is functionally not in strong alignment with the earlier elementary school programs. Students are, in effect, starting over instruction. Some middle-school students reported “they lost Spanish during the 4th and 5th grades.” Students stated that, for this reason, there is a lot of recap in 6th grade Spanish. Parents, teachers, and students expressed frustration at not seeing a logical progression in skill sets or proficiency based on this structure. Language acquisition gains were lost as students changed teachers or schools as there is little or no curricular alignment or even communication among teachers in the department.

Across most of the languages there is a problem in both the vertical and horizontal sequencing at all levels of instruction, as elementary teachers who teach at the same level have almost no time for collaboration, some using a shortened lunch period one day per week, and there has not been time or focus set aside for those teachers who teach one level above or below the other. Teachers at other levels are not in the habit of collaborating, even

when in the same office, and this is especially troubling for teachers of the same course at the same level. The teaching styles and philosophies of Weston language teachers seem to differ widely as well, even within a language cohort, and this may lead to some disjointed experiences for students as they progress through the various levels.

On a more positive note, all Weston Public Schools students benefit from language exposure in grades 1-6, and the students who choose to continue Spanish at the 7th grade level achieve a very high level of proficiency, with the option of skipping a level at high school, and enrolling in AP Spanish junior year. Weston is committed to offering a variety of pathways for students with various learning goals, and we commend the WL department for its efforts in this area.

With respect to the World Languages offerings at the High School, the committee suggests that students should be given the opportunity to continue with their middle-school language or change to another language in 9th grade. Mandarin should be given an entry-point at the high school level, the same as the three other languages in the Weston school district. There is an online course, Rosetta Stone, which can currently be accessed. Nevertheless, a language is best taught and retained when there is a live person at the front of the room who interacts with students, responds to their needs and questions, and with whom a student can converse in the target language. The high school entry point for Mandarin should increase enrollment for that language as there should be a "wash back" effect on younger students. (Older students, or students seeking a third language may be "braver" about trying Mandarin.) There seems to be interest among parents and students in a Mandarin program. The school district should be prepared, if necessary, to carry under-enrolled Mandarin classes

for a few years to give the program the opportunity to develop and become more extensively accepted.

- **Does the language selection process support informed student/family decision-making?**

In terms of language options in the Middle School, the Weston community is extremely fortunate to have 4 languages to choose from, given the small number of students in the school. Most schools that are comparable in size offer two or perhaps three language choices. However, the selection process and its timing are less than optimal. Students are not exposed to what they may select for future study in the Middle School and High School until the end of 6th grade.

The Review Committee strongly recommends that the language selection process begin a year earlier, having students and parents make a choice in 5th grade, and begin studying the language of their choice in 6th grade. This is standard practice at many other highly-respected schools, and teachers, parents, and students in Weston seem to support the rationale of beginning language instruction earlier. For all language instruction, the younger mind is more adept at hearing and producing sounds and grammar sequencing.

Furthermore, at the end of 5th grade, students are less susceptible to peer pressure and high-pressure salesmanship of particular languages by middle school World Language staff. Our interview with middle school students indicated that students felt ready to select their middle school language at the end of fifth grade. For those who wanted a different language, sixth grade Spanish was to some extent "a lost year." For some of the students who wanted to continue with Spanish, the sixth grade level was not focused or "serious" enough. The reasons for choosing a language do vary widely, including interest in the language and

culture, level of perceived difficulty, teaching style and goals of the language, teaching style and goals of the teacher, possibility of international travel, and others. None of these are inherently bad reasons, but not everyone agrees. (Acknowledgement is the first step here.) In any case, using methods to dissuade students from one language are unacceptable, and strong oversight and management are recommended throughout the process. Selection of a WL in middle school should not be based on popularity of a teacher, perceived work load or classroom perks, but rather objective information of the experience of learning a particular language and its uses in the professional world.

The committee understands that the selection process in the 6th grade has undergone some changes in the past few years in order to attempt to make it equitable and informative. However, many concerns were raised both in the internal review documents, and by teachers, parents, and students from all levels. The Middle School noted that the parental notification process will be tightened up this year, now that they are more comfortable with the technology for course enrollments. A formal permission slip signed by parents might be warranted for such an important decision. Parents indicated that they would like more information to help them select a language for the middle school and high school years. Parents requested information about the classroom experience of learning a particular language, a language's application and usefulness in the professional world, as well as Weston school district's timetable and logistics of the language selection process.

The committee recommends having a multi-modal information blitz including: presentations in the Spanish class by High School teachers in a mini-Exploratory model for a week or more; an all-grade information session (so that students who aren't currently in a language can hear the information as well) via video format and hosted by the World

Language Director. Our committee felt that perhaps middle school WL teachers may be too vested in recruitment to provide the objective information that parents and students want at this stage. Teachers who are passionate about their own language need to have a voice in the process, but not one that disparages the other language choices. High School students could be part of the information session, as well. The third piece might include hosting a World Heritage or International Night in the spirit of supporting World Languages. The pamphlet currently in use should be reviewed and approved by a committee of teachers of all languages. Parents can derive most of their information from the pamphlet and WL Night, and then be a significant part of the process, and all involved parties can ask questions at the evening event. The message to students and parents should be that it doesn't so much matter what language one studies but that studying any language exposes and trains one's mind to new ideas and linguistic structures. Skills can be easily transferred to other language learning in the future.

- **Given the reality of limited resources and declining enrollment, how can the department best support and sustain a broad range of language options within the class size guidelines?**

Given the reality of limited resources and declining enrollments, the offering of 4 languages at the middle school level creates some unavoidable insecurity and competition among middle school World Language teachers. The school district's policy is to accommodate parents and students' first choice of a WL, so staffing is determined by these yearly selection fluctuations. Weston is a small school system. Four languages from grades 7-12 is currently a challenge, but one to which most constituents seem committed. The use of blended classrooms, flipped learning models, and online learning serves as a temporary band aid for some courses with small enrollment, especially as some students seem to have found

success there, but the Mandarin program especially is suffering due to the multitude of levels in the same classroom. Students who are heritage speakers or have been more fluent due to study abroad are probably not being challenged in the way they could be by being in a more homogeneous classroom.

Although Weston should be commended for trying to meet the needs of so many students via a diversity of languages and levels, one result is a high number of part-time staff. The number of part-time teachers or teachers who teach across schools, grade levels, etc. might be contributing to a loss of team and shared purpose. Loss of collaboration and team-building time needs to be further examined, as well as a requirement that part-time staff attend district meetings. In addition an increase in vertical alignment meetings from 3x year is strongly encouraged.

Surveys of the community could help to mitigate the consequences of the sometimes large fluctuations in language selections. To stabilize the staffing, the district may eventually have to consider offering three languages at the middle school level, based on community demand. With a more stable, less competitive staff, both horizontal and vertical articulation among the various schools' programs would be more easily planned and achieved. The committee members also applaud the WL department for offering a 10 week after-school Mandarin course at the Field School. The after-school Mandarin program for younger students is an example of how Weston is meeting the needs of many students, even as a small district. This is a creative solution that enables students to begin the language acquisition process in Mandarin at a younger age, and it addresses the aforementioned staffing and enrollment issues within the context of the elementary program.

The committee recommends that beginning Mandarin be included as an entryway at the high school, both to offer more language choice for students who have completed their study of other languages, or who would like to experience a different language after middle school. This would also help bolster the Mandarin program at the high school. The creation of a new entry point for Mandarin should have a positive effect on class size and enrollment figures. The external committee understands the need for budgetary constraints; however, these need to be weighed against the possible benefits students gain from a Mandarin program. Once the new entry point in this language is in place, the district should allow the program to run for a few years before making any final decisions. Keeping this entry level class in place for several years as a trial period is recommended in order to allow it a chance to flourish. If enrollments do not stabilize after a few years have elapsed, the WL department will have to look to other options to maintain its overall health, and it may have to confront the question as to whether it can continue to support all 4 languages. It is important to have balanced sections with teachers who feel their language is also being supported. The committee believes that the answers to these questions will be found if the department embarks upon a path of systematic, long-term planning. Finally, it should be noted that the World Languages Director really cares and wants to support his staff but has been impeded by budgetary and personnel reasons. There are reports of some discussion of how to offer all four languages and at various levels, but there is a need for long-term goal setting with administration (perhaps including the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent) and teachers.

- **To what extent have we provided an opportunity to be inclusive of students with diverse learning profiles?**

Weston Public Schools does an effective job at creating an inclusive atmosphere that encourages students with diverse learning profiles to become better language learners. Class sizes are not big in general, which allows students to receive more individualized attention. The committee also witnessed the contributions of teaching assistants in the elementary program. The High School offers a “Fundamentals” course that allows incoming 9th graders who haven’t taken a language to be enrolled in a course offered by the language department. Additionally, the High School allows for online learning and uses the Rosetta Stone system with students who do not have an ideal course for their level. Furthermore, the Department Head has initiated talks with Regis College to offer a class that may accommodate Weston’s students.

The committee identified a related area of concern. Middle School teachers report that many students are pulled out of their language classes to receive services. Pulling students out of their language class seems to be one of the first alternatives. Language instructors report that there isn’t a clear channel of communication regarding when/why a student is going to be pulled out of a class, and they do not feel included or consulted in the process. Teachers felt at times that the student who was pulled out was achieving a level of success in their class that was very beneficial to him/her. Further, teachers reported that parents were not aware about other available options, since these alternatives were never articulated to them. There was also mention that there weren’t any tutors in the Middle School who could help students with WL study. Some of these issues may resolve now that the Middle and High School have appointed a department coordinator for Special Education. However, the

committee suggests that the WL faculty follow up on this matter to ensure that the necessary changes in protocol are put into effect.

The High School's communication with and inclusion of Special Education students in the WL program is to be commended. Very few students are waived out of FL instruction and most are encouraged to try a language for a grade or P/F before a waiver is granted by the principal. The new Special Education department head expressed concern that students are not allowed same access to foreign language instruction at various levels. He is looking into the current practice and de facto policies at the middle school in order to assure that each student has as much opportunity as suits his/her learning profile. As noted earlier, middle school teachers expressed concern that a WL class was the first place to pull a student for extra services, and that these students are then further behind the academic path of their peers in regards to foreign language achievement. Since students have to complete two years at the high school as a graduation requirement, many choose to begin in the Spanish Fundamentals course, but another option would be to institute the *Ancient Roots of Modern Words* course as another path to success. Another consideration discussed is the different learning styles that benefit from the structure and teaching practice of the various languages. This will also be part of the new practice in helping students on IEPs access a foreign language. Overall, the special education department and principals are very confident in the WL program's ability to meet needs of students with diverse learning needs. This is supported by the success students have meeting the high school FL requirement.

Curriculum

- **To what extent do our standards, learning goals, and assessments support a rigorous experience for students?**

The Weston World Language Program presents its standards and learning goals in a generally clear and accessible format. The documents – the Program of Studies, the Curriculum and Instruction Goals, and the Curriculum Guide – designate what students study from the Novice Level through to AP. Novice and Intermediate also include Honors levels in some languages. The Curriculum Guide is excellent and very comprehensive. It includes benchmark statements, performance standards, cultural themes, materials, instructional strategies, assessment and projects for each level. The WL Program models instruction on the published standards of ACTFL, and faculty have articulated these in detail on the Weston Public Schools website.

The Weston World Languages Department has an online Curriculum and Instruction explanation for each of the four languages: French (7-12), Latin (7-12), Mandarin (7-12), and Spanish (1-12). These are further divided into five Standards: Communication, Connections, Communities, Culture, and Comparison. Under each standard, the Learning Goals, Instructional Snapshots and Assessment are listed. The Department also has a Program of Studies online (6-8) (9-12). The setup of the two documents is different. The Program of Studies is more difficult to understand as to what the sequence of courses is in each language. The descriptors are there as well as the requirements necessary to enter the course, but a user-friendly flow chart for the sequence of courses would be beneficial for parents and students to see what is offered in the Middle School and High School, and they could more easily program their course of study. For example, parents and students would better understand that students from Intermediate II could move into Intermediate Honors the following year.

This would help them and their children when choosing their course(s) for the next academic year.

The committee, however, notes that there appear to be few commonalities in the understanding and implementation of the aforementioned standards and learning goals on the part of the World Language faculty. At a meeting of WL staff, when asked about departmental goals or those of any particular language program, there was dead silence. One teacher finally said, "We don't have department goals. I wish we did." This example illustrates some of the underlying tensions that have taken root within the WL department. These discontinuities and tensions are hindering the program and its ability to foster educational excellence. While teachers praise the support of the administration and its willingness to allow instructors to show their "individuality," some faculty members report feeling like "islands adrift." An extreme individuality may be the silver lining in a department that appears to have no articulated goals and little collegiality.

The teachers in the WL Department are dedicated professionals with tremendous talent. There is no doubt there. However, this major lack of camaraderie among the members of the department was further brought to our attention through emails and in the course of many interviews. Naturally, each department member is looking out for his or her language and position, but there is minimal articulation (both vertical and horizontal) between teachers of the same language and levels in preparation of materials, exams (with the exception of the final exams), and in actual goals. Some of the teachers do not speak with each other, cliques exist, and there is minimal sharing. There is minimal common planning time. The Department needs to confront this issue of collegiality head on. Otherwise the condition will ferment and cause greater damage. A committee member notes that some schools have

addressed this issue by hiring an online consultant (a psychologist) to meet with teaching staff to help resolve the problem. It should also be noted that the office space for the WL department is too small, and its current configuration does not promote collegiality or working with students one on one or in small groups. A larger area or better configuration needs to be provided.

The issues with department morale have additional forms of impact on the curriculum and its implementation. While teachers from another culture add much richness to a school community, if they hail from a very different educational culture they should receive mentoring and closer, continuous contact with other teachers who can provide this guidance. For example, native Chinese teachers come from a highly collaborative educational culture. The particularly non-collaborative, non-collegial culture of the Weston WL Department is stressful for teachers who have grown up and practiced in a U.S educational culture, and is exponentially stressful and confusing for teachers from other educational cultures. They are deprived of collegial contact to help them survive and flourish in a U.S. high school suffer even more “drift.” This seems wasteful of their potential contributions to the school community. While the school does not exist for the comfort of its adult staff, the school should have enough awareness of its staff’s needs so that these dedicated teachers can most effectively teach their students and serve as good role models.

The committee also recommends that the WL Department begin to brainstorm ways to “confront” the issue of camaraderie. One possibility would be to schedule more frequent department meetings at least 6-12 per academic year. Attendance would be required of all department members. Part time teachers should not be excused even if that teacher has only morning classes. This should be stipulated when the teacher is hired. Strong leadership here is

required. The meetings should foster a cohesive “esprit de corps” when it comes to educating the students. It can only improve each person’s teaching. Meetings can have different focuses – one for “keeping the trains running” and one for interdepartmental presentations and discussion of ideas as well as planning of curricula and learning goals.

Despite the serious challenges faced by the WL department, the committee would like to highlight areas of strength in the curriculum that should be lauded. First, students throughout the language sequence are given the opportunity to travel to foreign countries, which allows them to use and develop their language skills outside the classroom. This shows commitment by the town, the school and the teachers to encourage students to immerse themselves in other cultures and practice their language of study. As individuals, the majority of the WL personnel demonstrate a high level of commitment to their work as educators. Among the ranks of the WL teachers there are a number of native speakers. Their oral production enables students to hear the target language spoken in a natural fashion, and these faculty members additionally provide a wealth of knowledge about their cultures. Almost all of non-native WL teachers exhibit near-native fluency in their target language, and many of these teachers have traveled extensively or even lived in areas related to their field. The AP curriculum, as well as that in other upper-level offerings, reflects the fostering of the four central language skills and cultural proficiency. All the students we interviewed, (AP students in particular) demonstrated a high level of proficiency in their language of study.

- **To what do our standards, learning goals, and assessments support a balanced experience for students?**

The idea of a balanced experience predicates largely upon alignment throughout a student’s language learning experience. The WL department curriculum is not aligned, either

within the same grades, or among different schools. Guidelines such as use of the target language in class, and benchmarks and goals regarding achievement in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and cultural knowledge should be articulated. Weston may preserve its tradition of respecting the autonomy of individual teachers; however, as mentioned in the last section, some shared goals and guidelines would ensure that students have a more balanced experience in their language education.

Based on the three-day observation, the K-3 curriculum appears to be the strongest in the elementary sequence. Course outlines and common assessments were available for grades 1, 2 and 3, and these were in line with the curriculum taught and FLEX guidelines. There are two common assessments for grades 1, 2 and 3. One centers on listening and/or reading while the other centers on speaking. Two of them also focus on culturally appropriate situations (making a new friend on the bus or moving to a Spanish-speaking country). The skill level needed to do well on each of these assessments is indicative of the high quality of instruction and expectations at the lower elementary level. Having a first grader visualize moving to a Spanish-speaking country (common assessment grade 1B) and pretending to interact with his/her new teacher is not only teaching cultural awareness but it is getting a six or seven year old to put themselves in a potentially unknown environment and succeeding. That is a significant achievement.

The upper elementary curriculum, however, is not articulated with the lower, and language proficiency gained in K-3 is not maintained. Unfortunately, neither the curriculum, course outline nor common assessments were provided for grades 4, 5 or 6. Some committee members did notice that the 6th graders were doing graded presentations/dialogues using many of the questions that appeared on the 1st grade common assessment.

Another area where balance needs to be assured is in the aforementioned presentation of information about language choices at the end of 6th grade. There has not been balance in recent history, as teachers have utilized various unfair methods to enroll students in their particular language, perhaps in order to ensure the teacher's own full-time employment status.

Additionally, Mandarin should be offered as an entry point in the high school with the notation that it be allowed a chance to get a foothold in the enrollment game. This will offer more balance in the choices allotted students in the high school. Furthermore, the Chinese curriculum should include more listening and speaking and emphasis on active language proficiency. The curriculum appears to cover too much material, instead of focusing on student language acquisition. By adapting the curriculum, the Mandarin offerings will be more balanced with those in the other languages.

Instruction

- **To what extent does classroom instruction reflect curricular goals and best teaching practices?**

The forum with Middle and High School students yielded valuable information about teaching practices and student experiences in the classroom. The committee was impressed by the level of fluency exhibited by students who attended the discussion. With the exception of Mandarin, they were well prepared to speak the language they study. In general, students reported that they feel well prepared for their actual language classes. During our forum conversations, some students reported that there is more immersion happening in their junior and senior classes, and they would like to have these types of immersive classroom experiences early on. Some of the students expressly stated that they would like their teachers to not translate back and forth in class and just use immersion. Students report that beyond the different teaching styles, some teachers seem to put more emphasis on some aspects versus others, and it is confusing to them and it takes them some time to adjust from year to year. For example, some students feel that there is still more focus on writing than on other skills, such as speaking. Other students cited that there are significant changes in expectations from class to class within the same language.

At the Weston elementary schools, the FLES program naturally provides a variety of instructional practices, materials, activities, strategies, etc. It is clear that the lower elementary teachers work collaboratively when possible to create class sessions rich in linguistic awareness and exposure while providing a variety of methods of delivery. Equally

diverse are the methods of assessment. One area where instruction might be improved is to incorporate more realia from Spanish-speaking countries.

At both the Middle and High School, the committee observed disparities regarding use of the target language in class. These varied considerably depending on the teacher. Individual teachers reported different practices even among classes in the same grade at the same level. Not all classes were focused on developing language proficiency among the students. This may be due, as noted earlier, to a lack of departmental and program goals. It was brought to our attention that there is no policy for the use of English in a WL classroom. Some teachers said if there were a department policy to use the target language in class as much as possible, they would/could more easily enforce target language use in class. As noted in the Department's internal report, the Professional Learning Community's (PLC) goals of the past three years state, "The department espouses a philosophy of immersion in our foreign language classrooms that increases with each level." While many of the WL teachers spoke exclusively in the target language, committee members observed classrooms in which the instructor relied upon what the committee considers to be excessive instruction in English. In many of the classes we observed especially at the higher levels of study (with the exception of Latin) the target language was spoken all of the time. In some lower level classes, English was frequently used. If a teacher uses English, it then prompts the students to use English also. The committee, therefore, reiterates its initial recommendation that a policy be written which requires or encourages the use of the target language most of the time.

A related topic brought to the attention of the committee was that students in the modern languages want to struggle more in class, knowing that this is how the highest level of learning takes place. Students feel safe in the classroom and the high level of student

engagement serves as proof of that, but higher ability students especially want to be challenged by conversing in the target language in class. They want an opportunity to make mistakes and grow from these mistakes. The committee, therefore, recommends that the department review its policy on class expectations as well as its policy on the use of the target language in the classroom in order to better serve the needs of Weston's language students.

There were additional curricular and pedagogical differences in so far as teacher expectations and policies differed. In the Latin Program, possibly due to appropriate strategies for developmental level of middle-schoolers, students exhibit less confidence in the material in ensuing Latin classes. Perhaps there is a way to increase rigor in the 8th grade as students prepare for high school Latin. Teachers in both schools are in communication about alignment and should be encouraged to continue this practice to make adjustments to curricula, instruction, and expectations. In all Latin classes, cultural projects and information were posted around the room, evidence that students both produce and are exposed to various aspects of Greco-Roman culture, in addition to the Latin language. It should be noted that best practice in Latin may or may not include the use of exclusive or mostly oral Latin. Students might be encouraged to use the language in other ways by reading aloud before translating or interpreting in English, and by producing written Latin as elements of authentic products, such as the benchmark assessments of which Weston is especially proud.

One component of language education that was conspicuously absent was students' demonstration of using the target language in culturally appropriate ways. Students should at least sometimes be asked to imagine themselves in different cultural settings and act accordingly. Examples include the use of formulaic expressions with persons of different ages and statuses, knowing when to be silent and when to speak, how to greet and take care

of guests, how to adapt body language and gestures, etc. Every classroom appeared to be solely a Weston School District setting—very student-centered, but missing the valuable opportunity to teach intercultural communication

Some committee recommendations include instituting a program of coaching by other experienced classroom managers, departmental discussions and formulations of goals on use of target language, communicative structure, and homework, as well collaboration by teachers teaching the same course. There should be frequent check-ins regarding curriculum and instructional methods, as there is a common final exam in these classes, as well the benchmark project. Students need to be afforded the same opportunities for growth and development within a range that encompasses different teaching and learning styles. Other options for improvement include a monitored system of teacher mentoring and peer observation both in the district (other departments), and out of district in the same subject. For teachers who do collaborate already, peer observation within the language could foster an even greater understanding of curriculum, instruction, and teaching style at each of the levels.

The WL Department definitely has a wide range of assessments. However, the committee saw few examples of performance-based assessments and rubrics. In fact, committee members saw little student “performance” in the classes they observed. The department should collaborate to come up with basic standards-based rubrics for performance tasks. A general list of targeted performance tasks (from ACTFL, for example) should be created as general guidelines for each level class. Performance-based assessment and oral assessment in general can be cumbersome due to the number of students that a teacher has. Assessment of the students’ oral proficiency has also been difficult because there is no lab technician. If there is a problem with the functioning of the lab, time is lost until the

knowledgeable personnel can correct or repair it. The previous lab technician retired, and no one has been hired to replace her. The high school does have free interactive language software such as Voice Thread that may be used for this type of assessment. One committee member suggested the possibility of using additional software like Dill. It was also suggested that teachers pick a certain number of their students (20 -25) each quarter and test their oral skills.

World Languages teachers would like to increase the amount of interdisciplinary collaboration. Teachers used to have more time to apply for professional development opportunities. State mandated issues have taken time away from this. Perhaps summer workshops would be a possibility to jump-start this type of work. Some of the high school teachers did cite examples of working with the art department, and having had more district focused time during PLCs before the inundation of initiatives from DESE. They are hopeful that this time and intent will return within the summer workshop program, along with other district professional development opportunities. Weston School District should create time for mandated professional development that allows teachers to collaborate.

Weston School District should examine its professional development activities and schedule dedicated time for WL teachers to meet, share goals, and align curriculum. The High School only recently has arranged common planning time for WL teachers. The middle school team system does not allow WL teachers common planning time. The Middle School has a team-based/grade-based organization which does not allow easy collaboration for the “specials” in the team. This limits flexible scheduling within the Middle School that may alleviate some of its instability of staffing. For example: teaching 3 grades in middle school deprives a teacher of team membership. Another recommendation is to include language

teachers on interview committees when hiring new staff in order to promote similar goals, philosophies and a more cohesive teaching style overall within the department. Teachers feel more invested in new staff when they are part of the hiring process, too. Part-time positions in WL should be consolidated and staff stabilized to build a strong, vertically and horizontally aligned program.

Finally, the committee observed examples of classroom management issues which hindered instruction in the various languages at various levels (K-12). Some might be attributed to the Weston culture of individuality, which, although might be responsible for bringing out excellent teaching, can also backfire by not having set, clear, and enforced expectations within the foreign language classroom. Examples include no set protocol for using the target language, homework expectations, class preparedness, student behavior and use of the target language in the classroom. Overall, the department needs firm direction on the development and enforcement of policies, and there should be a restructuring of the World Language program as it relates to these issues.

Communication and Community

- **To what extent does the community have a clear understanding of what is accomplished in the World Languages program?**

As expressed in the internal review, overall promotion of and communication about Weston's World Language Program needs to be improved to better represent the strengths and excellence that are evident to us and many of the students, teachers, administrators, and parents. There is some misperception of what goes on in the FLES classrooms, as well as the purpose of language study at the various levels.

It appears that the community does not have a clear understanding of the wonderful work being done on the elementary school level, in particular at the Woodland and Country Schools. The listening skills and oral output exhibited by second and third graders were indicative of excellence in the elementary curriculum. Students understood and communicated with their teachers completely in Spanish. More direct communication with the community would directly benefit and improve the community's possible misconceptions about what is happening in elementary school Spanish classes.

The following are some concrete suggestions to make Spanish more visible in the elementary schools: have students present a simple announcement at a school gathering to demonstrate their speaking skills to their peers and parents; create kid-friendly websites to promote practicing Spanish at home or outside of school; post "Major Student Learning Objectives" found in the course outlines for grades 1-3 on a website or brochure (or both) to let parents know what is being learned in the lower elementary level; videotape or record students speaking Spanish in class to share at evening events or school assemblies; invite community members who are native speakers into the classroom; invite exchange students to

visit the elementary classrooms; incorporate a Spanish word, phrase or question into the morning announcements at each school if possible; highlight/showcase the advanced learning demonstrated in the common assessments for the lower elementary students; and positively promote/highlight all of the wonderful learning that is happening in grades 1-3 in a principal's newsletter or some other communication from the school.

In the Middle and High School, most teachers in the Department (if not all) prepare sheets for the parents' back to school night. These sheets explain for the most part a description of the course, the grading procedure, and the curricular texts that will be used. Parents often do not know what the students can do at the end of each level. The committee suggests that the teachers add user-friendly goals about what the students can learn and what they can do, such as the ACTFL "Can Do" statements. These global performance-based benchmarks can be set for as long a period as one wishes and reevaluated once informed by assessment. This will help parents understand what "proficiency" in a language means.

Parents indicated that communication should be improved, especially regarding the language selection processes in middle and high school, a topic that was addressed in an earlier portion of this document. The language selection process in the Middle School has tried various methods to communicate with students and parents about the opportunities for study in each of the languages, and the past practice of an International Night was well received according to parents and students. Parents would also appreciate discussion of career opportunities available with the study of different languages. This communication should be focused on the positive (not whether a certain language is "hard" or "easy") and the factors that should be considered for each family to make the best choice. Parents would like more information on why learning a foreign language is important and how it can help their child.

Parents should also receive simple explanation on logistics and budgeting to offer a certain selection of languages. It is not practical to offer all four languages from kindergarten onward. Parents should understand that learning several years of a certain foreign language is not a waste of time and has cognitive benefits for the learner. The WL Parent Forum is a great venue for getting out this message of excellence. The construction of a flow chart for each language to demonstrate the path a student might follow in the sequence of study would be most clear and should be presented at various fora, as well as published in the Program of Studies, as the committee noted earlier.

The WL page on the high school website is vibrant and updated regularly, but perhaps a more proactive approach would reach more parents. Some parents specifically suggested a quarterly World Language newsletter via email that outlines general topics, or specific information as necessary; a student showcase section could be another component. As noted earlier, parents and the community would benefit from more specific and user-friendly documents on the WPS website, such as the list of can-do statements for each level. This also improves the cohesiveness of the department as they step back to consider the most basic goals of each level of the language acquisition process.