



**WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Foreign Language Curriculum Review  
June, 2012**

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## **Introduction**

The Foreign Language Curriculum Review Committee met monthly throughout the 2011-2012 school year. The 10 member committee was comprised of members from both the middle school and high school as well as parent representatives as listed below:

### **Administration:**

Emily Parks, Assistant Superintendent

Kathy Lee, Foreign Language Department Head and Spanish Teacher

### **Westwood High School:**

Nancy Aykanian, French and Latin Teacher

Eileen Flanagan, Spanish Teacher

Liam Kelly, Spanish and Latin Teacher

Edward Zarrow, Latin Teacher

### **Thurston Middle School**

Marie Barillion, French Teacher

Shawn Witt, Spanish Teacher

### **Parents**

Helen Gee

Alexandra Trudo

The goal of the foreign language review was to recommend curriculum and programs which ensure that Westwood students have an engaging, challenging, and relevant foreign language education. Throughout the process, the committee considered the questions:

- What is the purpose of foreign language education in today's world?
- How can we ensure that Westwood's foreign language program best prepares students for today's global society?

## **Review Process**

During the 2011-2012 school, the Foreign Language Review Committee examined Westwood's foreign language program and researched best practices in foreign language education. The work included:

- A review of the standards established by the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks as well as national standards.
- A review of the status of the recommendations in Westwood's last foreign language program review (completed in 2003)
- An on-going review of student assessment results, including classroom assessments, AP scores, National Latin Exam results, and Oral Proficiency Interview on Computer (OPIC) data.
- Research on trends and best practices in foreign language education as provided in journals and publications.
- Visits to programs in area schools which were identified as employing exemplary foreign language practices or innovative programs.
- A survey of program offerings of TEC schools, specifically focused on middle school programming
- Internal surveys, designed, distributed and analyzed by the committee, to understand student and community perceptions of the program and perceived needs.
- Extensive discussion about our current practices and curriculum implementation.

The review of Westwood's program was completed in May, 2012 with the development of a revised mission statement for the program and the articulation of recommendations to guide future work, both immediately and in the longer term. Findings and recommendations were reported to Superintendent Antonucci and to the School Committee in June, 2012.

Two important changes in the field of foreign language education since the last review in 2003 contributed significantly to the committee's recommendations. First, today's foreign language education takes place in a context of much discussion about the importance of "global education" and a focus on introducing students to world issues and preparing students to be competent world citizens who can communicate in more than one language. Changes such as the globalization of economies; the rise of global production teams in business and international research teams in science; the international dimension of a host of issues such as environmental degradation, pandemic diseases, energy shortages, and terrorism; and changing demographics in

the United States requires that we move beyond the “tourist-consumer” lens of many traditional foreign language classes and view foreign language education as a means to develop critical skills and understandings for 21st century citizenship. Today’s students will not be merely observers of foreign cultures, but participants in a global society. With this expanded emphasis on global education comes an increased need for a rigorous, long-sequence program with instruction that leads students to proficiency in a second language. And, within a global context, the need to expand language instruction beyond the traditional model of French and Spanish becomes more urgent.

Second, this call for increased rigor focused on proficiency coincides with increased access to technology, thereby expanding teachers’ instructional repertoire, students’ access to real-world foreign language materials (authentic texts and written materials, videos with native speakers, etc.), and students’ opportunities to engage with native speakers using technologies such as Skype. More than ever before, the foreign language classroom has expanded beyond the classroom walls, allowing students to develop their language proficiency in new ways. This change presents an exciting challenge for educators as we contemplate what foreign language curriculum and instruction looks like in the 21st century.

## **Mission Statement**

The Foreign Language Department of the Westwood Public Schools is committed to providing all students with the linguistic and cultural tools for meaningful communication in a second language. Through the study of foreign language, students become active and engaged participants in an increasingly diverse, global, and multi-lingual society.

- Our curriculum moves students toward proficiency -- the ability to communicate and comprehend increasingly complex ideas with increasing accuracy.
- We engage our students with authentic, real-world materials.
- We instruct modern languages in the target language.
- We focus our instruction on realistic situations, topics, and interactions, whether global or local.
- Through the study of history and culture, we cultivate in our students a more critical understanding of and readiness to participate in a modern global society.

## **Description of the Current Foreign Language Program**

The goal of studying a modern foreign language in the Westwood Public Schools is for students to develop the necessary skills to communicate proficiently in authentic linguistic and cultural contexts. The target language is the means of communication in the classroom; it is the language of instruction (teacher to student) and all classroom activities (student to student, student to teacher). Personally relevant, meaningful, and purposeful communication is always the goal. The foreign language classroom re-creates a linguistically rich environment, where students routinely engage with authentic materials in a variety of communicative contexts: interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive. In addition to studying the structure of the language, students also learn about the culture of the countries where the language is spoken. Art, music, film, literature, journalism and other cultural products and media are the vehicles through which students explore language and culture in our classes.

In Latin, students are challenged to cultivate the linguistic and syntactical knowledge required for the meaningful comprehension of authentic, ancient texts. In addition, students of Latin learn skills which foster greater competence in reading and writing in English. Through the examination of ancient materials, students develop a more critical understanding of the linguistic, cultural, and philosophical connections between the ancient and modern world.

The language teachers in the Westwood Public Schools use their professional development time to keep up with the latest research in foreign language acquisition, pedagogy, and use of instructional technology. Our teaching strategies are continually evolving as we incorporate innovations in the field so that our students become linguistically and culturally proficient communicators in the language they have chosen to study.

### **Thurston Middle School**

All students at Thurston Middle School are required to take either French or Spanish in seventh and eighth grade. A very small number of students are waived from this requirement based on their need for extra learning center work. The two-year sequence at the middle school prepares students to enter a second year course at the high school. Students who have not successfully fulfilled the requirements of their language classes at the middle school may enroll in a first-year language class at the high school in order to strengthen their base in the language. Unlike the high school, there are no levels in foreign language classes at the middle school.

There are currently four language teachers at Thurston Middle School. There are two Spanish teachers, one for grade 7 and one for grade 8, and two teachers who teach both French and Spanish, one in grade 7 and one in grade 8.

### **Westwood High School**

In order to graduate from Westwood High School, students must successfully complete two sequential years of study in the same language. This requirement is supported by the district and the state, as outlined in the Massachusetts Foreign Languages Curriculum Framework.

The foreign language department offers a five-year sequential program in French and Spanish and a four-year program in Latin. Students are encouraged to complete the entire sequence. Students who begin French or Spanish in grade 7 and enroll in French or Spanish 2 in grade 9 are able to complete a five-year sequence with the option to prepare for the AP Language Exam. If a student starts studying a language in the ninth grade, a four-year program can be completed. The courses in modern languages are leveled to meet the needs of all students. The various levels offer different degrees of support and independent learning. Latin is offered as a level 1 course. Students may take French and Spanish 2 and 3 as a level 1, 2 or 3 course, and French and Spanish 4 and 5 as a level 1 or 2 course.

There are ten foreign language teachers at the high school, who teach a total of 48 classes. There is one Latin teacher, two French teachers, and seven Spanish teachers. The Chair of Foreign Languages supervises both the middle school and the high school programs.

In addition, results from the community and student surveys indicate that Westwood students pursue the study of foreign language in a myriad of ways outside of the school often connected to their cultural heritage or personal interests. Many students speak a language other than English at home; in fact, 30 different languages were represented in the survey.



## **Strengths and Recommendations**

Through the curriculum review process the committee identified program strengths and articulated recommendations to guide the department's work in several areas:

- A. Program Opportunities and Participation
- B. Curriculum and Instruction
- C. Assessment
- D. Instructional Technology
- E. Professional Development

These findings are outlined below.

**A. Program Opportunities and Participation:**

*To what extent does the program provide Westwood students with the opportunity for proficiency development? To what extent has the foreign language program been supported by the school community?*

Our students have access to a full sequence of foreign language courses in Spanish, French and Latin. Students study for at least 2 years (a requirement for graduation) at the high school and most students continue into their junior year. Our students who study through their junior or senior year exit the program being able to function conducting daily tasks in a Spanish or French speaking country.

**Program Strengths:**

- The curriculum provides the opportunity for a full sequence of foreign language study in all languages offered.
- 99 % of high school freshman and sophomore students study a foreign language
- 85 % of juniors study a foreign language
- The program includes opportunities to study both modern languages and a classical language.
- There are many opportunities for WHS students to travel abroad and to participate in student exchanges (e.g. Spain, France, Costa Rica, Peru, Canada)
- Class sizes are generally within the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language (ACTFL) guidelines.

**Recommendations:**

- Begin foreign language in the Westwood Public Schools earlier in students' educational experience. As a first step, expand the foreign language program to grade 6, with a long-term goal of adding foreign language to the elementary program.
- Add a Mandarin program at the High School.
- Redesign current Latin IV curriculum to incorporate Greek language and culture.
- Invite teachers in other departments and community members to explore the creation of a school-wide Global Proficiency Program, and consider incorporating students' experiences outside of school (e.g. foreign language courses, international service, etc.) as part of the program.
- Continue to expand opportunities for travel, foreign exchange, and service programs.
- Increase collaboration between Foreign Language Department and Special Education.



## **B. Curriculum and Instruction**

*To what extent is an organized, up-to-date curriculum in place? To what extent are researched-based instructional practices being implemented?*

The department has begun curriculum maps for each course that align with the National Standards for Foreign Language Instruction. Classroom practices follow the best practice guidelines of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (see appendix). The curriculum addresses multiple objectives of the Westwood Public Schools Strategic Plan.

### **Program Strengths:**

- The target language is the language of the classroom, with both teachers and students using the target language.
- Daily instruction emphasizes multiple modes of communication -- speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
- The curriculum reflects the ACTFL Guidelines as well as national standards for integration of the study of culture into the language classroom.
- Learning experiences are designed around authentic materials and real-world situations.
- Curriculum maps reflect a continuum of learning experiences centered around communicative functions.
- Students are provided multiple opportunities for contact with native speakers, both in person and via technology.
- Literature instruction occurs in a cultural context.
- The foreign language curriculum includes a high-degree of interdisciplinary connections (e.g. history, art, ELA, environmental studies, etc.)
- Students report that teachers are available for extra help and are supportive of individual student's needs

### **Recommendations:**

- Develop dynamic curriculum maps aligned to the MA Foreign Language Curriculum Frameworks and national standards that articulate expected level of proficiency for each course in the sequence.
- Develop a 6-8 sequence for Spanish and French, and form a plan to address scheduling issues that may arise from multiple entry points..
- Develop a curriculum for Mandarin.
- Horizontally align curriculum between the modern languages to ensure consistency and rigor.
- Develop strategies for spiraling knowledge and skills across the sequence of

courses.

- Purchase updated instructional materials (i.e. textbooks, texts / e-texts, films etc.)
- Identify literacy connections between foreign language and ELA & Literacy, with particular attention to the CCSS anchor standards for reading and writing.
- Introduce more complex and varied linguistic structures at an earlier stage to increase opportunities for meaningful communication.
- Increase authentic readings / listening (length and complexity) at all levels of the curriculum (e.g. multi-paragraphs in introductory courses, a full text in Spanish V, French V, and Latin IV).
- Increase opportunities to practice speaking about real-world issues in a real-world context (e.g. expand international contacts through Skype, bring native speakers into the classroom, increase university partnerships).

### **C. Assessment**

*To what extent are assessments that reflect student learning goals in place, being implemented, and being used to inform instruction and improve student achievement?*

Teachers in the foreign language department appreciate the role of assessment as a valuable tool for measuring student progress. Students are assessed for their proficiency in interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational communication. Teachers collaborate to develop common assessments for each course and utilize instructional data to inform instruction.

#### **Program Strengths:**

- Teachers collaborate consistently in developing common horizontal assessments, making appropriate modifications for the different levels.
- Teachers produce a great quantity and variety of assessments, allowing students ample opportunity to demonstrate their strengths.
- Teachers gather assessment data from formal and informal assessments to inform their instruction.
- Teachers have begun to collect student work in assessment portfolios to better measure and track student progress. In developing assessment portfolios, teachers reflect upon the extent to which students are meeting state-wide standards for foreign language.
- Teachers have begun to use pre and post assessments more consistently to demonstrate growth over a course unit and acquisition of new skills.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop more common assessments (both horizontal and **vertical**)
- Establish time for common review and grading of assessments.
- Review strategies for assessing student speaking and writing.
- Increase recorded speaking assessments at Thurston to comply with state standards.
- Expand use of the Oral Proficiency Interview by Computer (OPIC) data to assess progress of program.
- Increase oral proficiency at each grade and in all levels, as measured by the Oral Proficiency Interview by Computer (OPIC) exam.

**D. Instructional Technology:**

*In what ways is instructional technology being used to facilitate powerful teaching and learning and to enhance students' understanding of and readiness to participate in a modern global society?*

The high school foreign language classrooms take advantage of the access to technology as a portal to authentic language materials and experiences. In our visits to other schools we discovered that our use of technology in foreign language classrooms is more extensive and more integrated than other schools in our area. Our middle school teachers are eager to incorporate more technology and authentic materials as they gain access to both equipment and professional development.

**Program Strengths:**

Technology is infused throughout instruction and assessment at the high school:

- Authentic media is used daily in classrooms, by accessing websites, videos, podcasts, newspapers, etc. via the Internet.
- Students have access to native speakers to practice listening and speaking skills through web-based resources and Skype opportunities
- Technology (e.g. online programs for recording, flip cameras, language lab technology) is frequently used as a tool for assessment -- both by the teacher and for student self-assessment.
- Students often collaborate via Google Docs as a strategy for improving writing skills.

**Recommendations:**

- Increase ubiquitous access to technology at the middle school (e.g. laptops, Chrome Books, etc.) to facilitate the seamless integration of technology in foreign language classrooms.
- Investigate the use of new technology for correction to improve feedback on writing assignments.
- Reconsider the utility of a standing language lab in the context of today's technological environment and mobile technology.

## **E. Professional Development**

*To what extent is there a focus on improving the skills and capacity of teachers to implement the curriculum? To what extent does the professional culture promote collaboration to support student learning and achievement?*

Teachers are provided with time during the school day to work with other teachers collaboratively on the curriculum. The collaboration has supported student learning by creating common expectations for student proficiency growth. Teachers are supported by the school district to develop their knowledge in their content area, of foreign language teaching methodology, and technology integration.

### **Strengths:**

- Early release days afford an opportunity for members of the department to work on department initiatives and collaboratively examine student assessment results.
- Early release days provide opportunities for teachers to meet across schools.
- Common planning time for teachers who teach courses in common and a collaborative professional culture promotes consistent implementation of instruction and shared instructional resources and strategies.
- The district provides resources for teachers to attend conferences and workshops related to their professional interests and needs.
- In recent years, high school teachers' use of instructional technology has been supported by training and time for exploration.

### **Recommendations:**

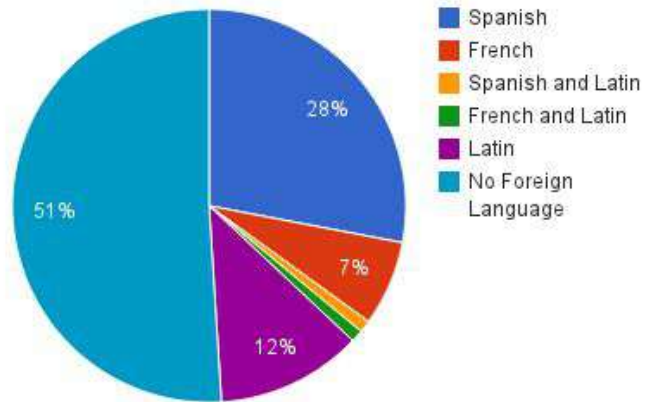
- Provide professional development for TMS teachers in order to increase integration of technology into the FL classroom.
- Review research on Special Education in language learning in order to develop additional differentiation strategies.



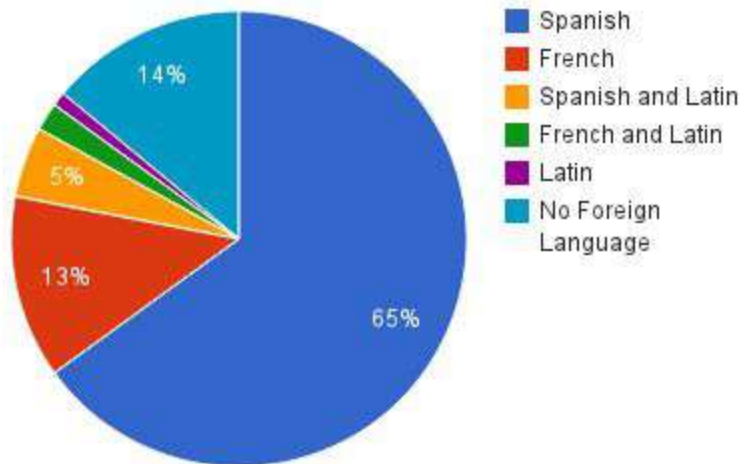
## APPENDIX A

### Foreign Language Enrollment at WHS

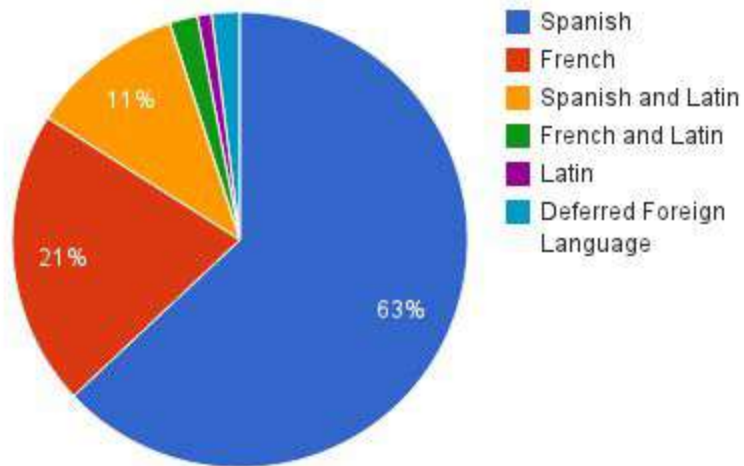
Senior Enrollment (Average last 3 years)



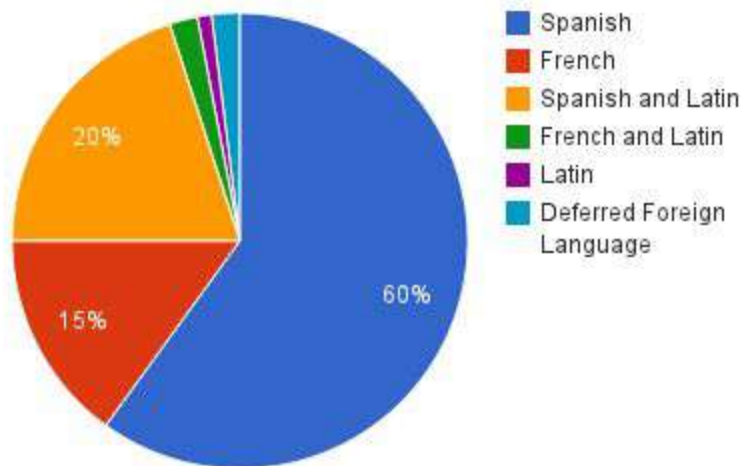
Junior Enrollment (3 Year Average)



**Sophomore Enrollment (3 Year Average)**

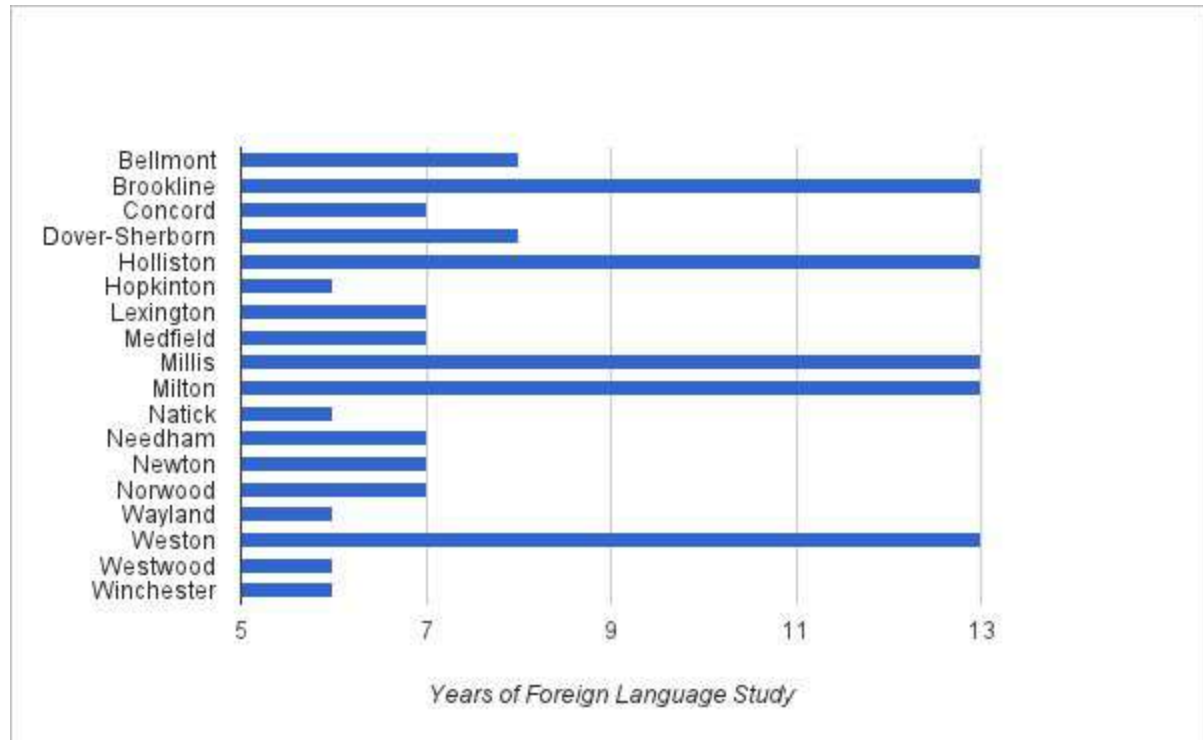


**Freshmen Enrollment (3 Year Average)**



## APPENDIX B

### Years of Foreign Language Instruction Offered - Comparison to Area Schools



## APPENDIX C

### Foreign Language Offerings at Area High Schools

	Spanish	French	Latin	Mandarin	Italian	German	Other
Belmont	X	X	X	X			
Brookline	X	X	X	X			X
Concord	X	X	X	X			
D-S	X	X	X	X			
Holliston	X	X	X	X			
Hopkinton	X	X	X	X			
Lexington	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Medfield	X	X	X	X			
Millis	X						
Milton	X	X	X				
Natick	X	X	X	X		X	
Needham	X	X	X	X			
Newton	X	X	X	X	X		X
Norwood	X	X	X		X		
Walpole	X	X	X	X		X	
Wayland	X	X	X	X			
Weston	X	X	X	X			
Westwood	X	X	X				
Winchester	X	X	X	X	X		

## Foreign Language Offerings at Area Middle Schools

	Spanish	French	Latin	Mandarin	Italian	German	Other
Belmont	X	X	X	X			
Brookline	X	X	X	X			
Concord	X	X	X	X			
D-S	X	X	X	X			
Holliston	X	X	X				
Hopkinton	X	X	X				
Lexington	X	X	X	X			
Medfield	X	X	X	X			
Millis	X	X					
Milton	X	X	X				
Natick	X	X	X	X			
Needham	X	X	X				
Newton	X	X	X	X	X		
Norwood	X	X	X				
Walpole	X	X					
Wayland	X	X	X	X			
Weston	X	X	X	X	X		
Westwood	X	X	X				
Winchester	X	X	X	X			

