



Public Schools of Brookline

K-8 World Language Program Review

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Professionals in Education Advancing Research and Language Learning
National Foreign Language Center
University of Maryland, College Park



**NATIONAL FOREIGN
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Introduction

The Public Schools of Brookline began implementing a district-wide K–6 world language program in 2009 to supplement an existing program in grades 7–8 as well as an existing Mandarin program at Driscoll School that had been developed in coordination with a private foundation.¹ Implementation of the K–6 program followed the recommendations of two task forces, convened in 1998 and 2005. With the rollout of this program now complete through 8th grade, and the district looking toward implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy, the district contracted with Professionals in Education Advancing Research and Language Learning (PEARLL) to provide program review and recommendations for growth. PEARLL is a Language Resource Center in the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland, and is a leader in language education, language teacher training and support, language program evaluation and management, and research.

PEARLL used several frameworks to guide our review. Principles of Effective World Language Programs, published by the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NADSFL) in 2015, “is intended to guide the development and administration of high quality and effective World Language Programs” across four facets: Program Design, Curriculum, Assessment, and Teacher Effectiveness.² The 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages, in addition to defining what students should be able to do with their language, also presents a series of ten Guiding Principles that “should guide the design and implementation of world language programs in schools.”³ Finally, the Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning (TELL) framework, updated in 2019, “establishes those characteristics and behaviors that model teachers exhibit,” across seven domains.⁴

The goal of the program review was to identify strengths of PSB’s K–8 world language program as aligned with these frameworks, and to identify opportunities for high-leverage changes that will help strengthen the program. Some areas of focus requested by PSB leadership included evaluating student proficiency at the end of 8th grade, especially with a view toward implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy;⁵ evaluating the materials used by the program; and making recommendations for improvement, especially in the structure of the program.

¹ Public Schools of Brookline, Driscoll’s Mandarin Program. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/domain/707>

² National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NADSFL). (2015). Principles of Effective World Language Programs. https://nadsfl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NADSFL_EffectiveProgramPrinciples-2-23-18-on-17-pages.pdf (p. 1).

³ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, World Languages: Massachusetts Curriculum Framework—2021. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/world-languages/2021.pdf> (p. 11). See Appendix A of this report for alignment of the findings in the report to the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages.

⁴ Professionals in Education Advancing Research and Language Learning (PEARLL). Teacher Effectiveness in Language Learning (TELL). <https://pearll.nflc.umd.edu/teacher-effectiveness/>

⁵ “The State Seal of Biliteracy is an award provided by state approved districts that recognizes high school graduates who attain high functional and academic levels of proficiency in English and a world language in recognition of having studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation.” Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy/>

Methodology

The review had a limited timeframe due to district constraints, and all data was collected between March 28 and May 2, 2023. During that time frame, PEARLL engaged with a variety of stakeholders and conducted classroom observation, as well as a document and data review, as described below.

Stakeholder engagement was conducted through three methods: 1-on-1 interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Methods were selected to elicit as much information as possible given time constraints. In interviews and focus groups we asked in general terms about the highlights and frustrations regarding the K–8 WL program, and invited participants to bring up anything they thought was relevant. Surveys included a mix of multiple-choice questions (to facilitate quantitative description) and open-ended questions (to dive deeper into respondents’ experiences and opinions) Surveys also included background questions such as the school and grade(s) the respondent was affiliated with, and students’ family language context. In total, we received input from nearly 1,000 parents/family members⁶ and over 100 other program stakeholders, through the following methods:

- Interviews with 8 district staff and principals
- Classroom observations in 21 K–8 world language classrooms
- 4 focus groups with different groups of K–8 world language teachers, representing all three of the K–8 languages (Chinese, French, and Spanish)
- 2 focus groups with high school world language teachers
- Survey of 18 K–8 world language teachers
- Survey of 52 K–5 classroom teachers
- Survey of 955 parents of 1,052 K–8 students (parents could take the survey separately for each of their children)⁷

PEARLL also reviewed and analyzed data and documentation provided by district staff, including:

- Publicly available information on Brookline’s websites
- World language teacher schedules
- Curricula
- Lesson plans submitted by teachers
- Student work submitted by teachers
- Aggregated AAPPL assessment data (8th grade, listening and speaking)
- 2023 report from New Solutions K12 on Brookline’s middle school schedules⁸

⁶ The survey was presented as a survey for K–8 families. In this report, we will use the term “parents” to refer to respondents to this survey, recognizing that in some cases another family member or legal guardian may have completed the survey.

⁷ Time restrictions prevented us from being able to interview students.

⁸ New Solutions K12. (2023). Brookline Middle School Schedules: Findings from Analysis of Current Use of Time, Course and Staffing Practices, and Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement.

https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/cms/lib/MA01907509/Centricity/Domain/62/PSB_%20Middle%20School%20Program%20Review%20Report_3.16.23.pdf

Finally, the PEARLL team also reviewed the recommendation from the committee that proposed the K–6 world language program in 1998. The initial recommendation for the K–6 program was for “a content-based FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary Schools), coordinated with Brookline’s learning expectations and grade-level teachers.” One recommendation by the committee was to extend the school day across the K–8 schools, to permit 80 minutes per week of language instruction in grades 1 and 2, 150 minutes per week of language instruction in grades 3-5, and 200 minutes per week of language instruction in grade 6.

Report Organization

The report is organized around 4 guiding questions:

1. How does district and school leadership establish and monitor implementation of policies, provide adequate resources, and facilitate space and instructional time to support highly effective world languages instruction for all students?
2. How does the program’s curriculum focus on communicative proficiency and alignment to the national World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages and the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages?
3. How does the program document students’ growth in their world language and intercultural competencies as defined by the national World Readiness Standards and the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages?
4. How does the program provide students with instruction that ensures the implementation of state and national standards for world languages using age and proficiency level-appropriate strategies?

Within each question, the report presents between one and four key findings, along with more detailed sub-findings. Both current strengths and opportunities for growth are included where relevant within each finding.

Question: How does district and school leadership establish and monitor implementation of policies, provide adequate resources, and facilitate space and instructional time to support highly effective world languages instruction for all students?

The tone for the world language program is set at the district level. In the “K–5 World Language Curriculum Overview,”⁹ the district describes the program as “a proficiency-based curriculum, grounded in culture, focused on what students can do with the language. This curriculum builds a solid foundation in oracy, our students will be well prepared to transition to our middle school program.” In the “6–8 World Language Curriculum Overview,”¹⁰ the district describes the middle school program as focused “on proficiency—the ability to accomplish real-world linguistic tasks on a wide variety of topics and for various purposes.” The middle school program “uses comprehensible input to help learners learn a world language the same way they learned their first language as a child—by using it, hearing it, imitating it, noticing, experimenting and negotiating meaning, which are key elements in acquisition.”

Several of the findings and recommendations in this section, while addressing the structure of the program at the district level, have direct impact on findings and recommendations found later in the report. Throughout this section, the report refers to later findings.

Finding 1

The world language program has a stated vision that enjoys the support of the school community.

The vision and mission for the K–12 world language program¹¹ lay the foundation for how language instruction is viewed in the district. The district’s vision emphasizes the contextual importance of learning a second language and learning about different cultures:

” *The Brookline K–12 World Language Program inspires all students to better understand themselves, each other, and the world by learning another language and its cultures in order to to [sic] become more engaged local and global citizens.*

⁹ Linked from Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2346>.

¹⁰ Linked from Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2346>.

¹¹ Linked from Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2346>.

The program's mission presents some of the details of how language and culture will be taught, both in academic structure and in social-emotional context:

” The mission of the Brookline K–12 World Language Program is to guide students in their language development and multicultural understanding. Students engage in purposeful communication in a safe, welcoming environment. They learn about themselves, their peers, their community, and the world through the use of thematic units that support comprehension.

Both the vision and the mission include global competency, and the vision emphasizes the intent to provide language instruction to all students, both key program design factors in NADSFL's Principles of Effective World Language Programs.

1.a

Many stakeholders support the vision for a K-8 world language program, including K-12 language teachers, K-5 classroom teachers, and parents.

K–8 world language teachers reported that the elementary program provides a “very good foundation” for students, giving them exposure to the language at a young age. Many middle school and high school world language teachers reported that K–5/K–8 world language instruction provides students with confidence and a level of comfort with language learning in general, and with hearing and speaking the language they've studied. Teachers who have taught in other districts, or who taught in Brookline before the K–8 program was fully rolled out, noted a marked difference from middle or high school language classes where students have no previous language learning experience.

Many parents mentioned the importance of learning multiple languages. For example, a parent of a 6th grade Spanish student wrote on the parent survey:

” Learning multiple languages is one of the most important things people can do, especially in today's global world. It can open understanding of different cultures and ways of life, help people develop friendships and help in careers.

A parent of a 2nd grade Spanish student wrote:

” I think not just normalizing but CELEBRATING learning a second language is so important to help kids buy-into the importance of gaining second language skills.

Several parents emphasized the importance of starting language instruction at a young age. For example, a parent of a 4th grade Spanish student wrote:

” This is crucially important as the younger brain is more adaptable and able to make quicker progress towards fluency with more exposure to a new language.

1.b

The purpose of the program as a part of the larger K–8 curriculum is clear to most, but not all, stakeholders.

Although most stakeholders we heard from support the vision of the program, not everyone understands exactly what they should expect students to be learning. Additionally, the district finds it challenging to identify how the world language program fits into the larger curriculum and aligns with the overall goals of the district.

In separate surveys, K–8 world language teachers, K–5 classroom teachers, and parents shared their understanding of the world language program. A majority of each group reported agreeing with the statement they were presented with. 72% of K–8 world language teachers reported that the goals of the K–8 world language program are clear. Some teachers who responded “disagree” or “neither agree nor disagree” elaborated on their responses. One elementary world language teacher wrote:

” The K-8 program goals are articulated clearly, but I would like to see department meeting time and in-house professional development function in a way that better aligns with the stated goals so that the goals are clear both in words and action. Teacher scheduling also needs to align with the goals - the vertical scheduling model introduced in some schools over the last few years is not working in support of the goals when teachers are stretched too thin.

90% of responding K–5 classroom teachers reported understanding the role of language instruction in their school, with some sharing thoughts such as “I think exposing students to languages and cultures is valuable and important” and “This program is essential and helps our students to become citizens of the world!” At the same time, some did not understand whether language should be understood as an academic subject or did not understand what proficiency outcomes should be expected. A 5th grade classroom teacher wrote:

” Being perfectly honest, I don't completely understand the role of language instruction in K–5....There is no connection between the Spanish content and other academic classes. Spanish feels like more of a special than an academic class in 5th grade.

Another teacher wrote, “Given that students have been taking Spanish for several years, I would expect a higher level of comfort conversing in Spanish.”

Just over 80% of K–8 parents reported that they agree with the statement “I understand the role of language instruction in our school.” Some parents added comments such as “I think it is very important to have students begin to learn a second language as early as possible. BPS provides this opportunity in kindergarten to grade 5. This foundation is a great starting point and should be continued.”

At the same time, several parents expressed concerns or confusion about the goals of instruction. A parent of a first-grade student wrote, "I do not completely understand the goal of world language in K-5. Is it purely for exposure, introduction to Spanish culture and fun? There is no homework, no report card. So, is Spanish more of a special than an academic class in K-5? My son enjoys Spanish because of the songs, games, puppets, and art projects. However, I can't say with certainty that he knows more Spanish as a 1st grader than he did as a Kindergartener." And a parent of a 5th grade student wrote, "I, personally, understand the importance of world language instruction. However, I have not heard the value of it articulated by the school - from the school's perspective, why is world language viewed as an important part of the curriculum and student learning?" A middle school world language teacher wrote, "I think families may need more clarity about what to expect students to be able to do at various stages. Sometimes I have observed that families' expectations are not aligned with minutes of instruction (especially for K-5)."

A K-8 principal we interviewed commented, "There is no evidence that this program is successful." The principal was not saying that the program is unsuccessful, but rather that the principal did not see clearly defined metrics for success and did not see anyone measuring the success of the program.

Many Brookline world language teachers also believe that classroom teachers, principals, parents, and students do not understand the purpose or importance of world language instruction. World language teachers repeatedly gave examples, in surveys and focus groups, of ways that they feel that their work is not widely respected. Many of these are listed under Finding 2 (where they relate to logistics) or Finding 4 (where they focus on missed opportunities in communication). The overall message from several world language teachers, however, is that the program is viewed by many stakeholders as unimportant, or less valuable than other subjects and district initiatives. This sentiment is summarized well in a survey response from a middle school world language teacher:

” Parents and teachers of other subjects have come to discount our world language program. We need to get back on track....As the program has been discounted, students have come to expect that they won't learn much. And, they often see it as an elective and not something to take seriously.

One middle school world language teacher had a clear recommendation to strengthen the program: "If upper admin models and promotes this respect and value for our WL department the message would spread. Our principals and colleagues of other subjects would be more likely to recognize us as equals and not leave us out of important conversations, planning, special ed or EL discussions etc., special ed services (push in, 1-1 support, consultation) would extend into the WL classroom and not be reserved for other classes, iep's would include WL in their language and accommodations. More parents would see us as essential and not extra or special. Finally, (and most importantly) students would have higher expectations for themselves as language learners if they received these messages from other adults in their lives."

Recommendation

The district should identify what the role and importance of the K–8 world language program are, and what its place is in the larger K–8 curriculum.

If the district wants to continue to consider its world language program a signature of the district, it needs to be included in the overall vision for teaching and learning, and messages about the standing and value of the program need to be clear to all stakeholders, from students to principals.

Finding 2

The program provides staff that allow for long sequences of articulated language courses, even when scheduled time or school space are limited.

Public Schools of Brookline has an extensive K–12 language program designed to allow for long sequences of articulated language courses, another principle of effective world language programs identified by NADSFL. Many school districts around the United States aspire to offer such a long sequence. The Massachusetts World Language Framework notes that “Students acquire proficiency over extended periods of time [...] well-articulated world language programs should begin in pre-kindergarten and continue beyond grade 12.”

2.a

The district has invested resources to provide staffing, but teacher schedules are a concern in some schools.

The district employs 31 world language teachers to teach Chinese, French, and Spanish in the eight K–8 schools. In most schools in Brookline, world language teachers teach three or four adjacent grade levels. In some schools, teachers teach as many as five grade levels, in some cases ranging from kindergarten to 8th grade. Teachers report challenges in moving around the school quickly between classes, and in abruptly adjusting their teaching persona between teaching very young students and teaching teenagers. Teachers also report that frequently changing the grades they teach from year to year makes it harder for them to refine their teaching of the curriculum. These types of schedule challenges are some of the reasons given by K–8 world language teachers for the high rates of teacher turnover in K–8, as reported by both K–8 and high school world language teachers. Other reasons include lack of input into the grade level plans, lack of respect, and insufficient teaching and learning spaces.

One elementary world language teacher wrote, “From my perspective, the best way to better serve students is to give teachers the opportunity to ‘specialize’ in their ‘preferred’ grade levels. I can tell from experience that year after year teaching the same grade levels has been the single most valuable way of serving my students better.” Another elementary teacher wrote, “individual teacher schedules that force them to teach many different grade levels in a single day can make it very challenging to deliver high quality instruction to all classes. This varies greatly building to building and year to year.”

A middle school world teacher wrote:

” *[It would strengthen the program] if class assignments year to year were more stable. In this way, teachers could focus on working together to improve and align curriculum, and improve pedagogy as they have continuity in the lessons and grade levels (ie every time we have new preps, the focus is on the curriculum you need to deliver and we miss the opportunity to refine curriculum after teaching it and also have less time to focus on pedagogy itself).*

2.b

Students have the opportunity to gain high levels of proficiency in one language for up to 13 years or gain proficiency in two languages over 13 years.

In Brookline’s model, students have the opportunity to take Spanish or Chinese for up to 13 years, depending on their elementary school, and French for up to 7 years. The opportunity to switch languages in 6th grade and in 9th grade provides flexibility and more opportunities for students to have agency in their choice of language.

Several middle school world language teachers mentioned the positive impact of elementary world language instruction on their middle school students’ comfort with language learning. A middle school Spanish teacher wrote:

” *Since the elementary program started, students now come to 6th grade with a higher comfort level both hearing and using Spanish. They have increased cultural knowledge and connection and they are excited about learning language and exploring culture....Students are coming to middle school with language learning skills that help them to interact with and navigate Spanish more.*

A middle school French teacher, whose students do not have access to French instruction through the school district before 6th grade, wrote,

” *Having been here for a long time, I can say that students come to 6th grade French with a level of comfort in being in a language classroom and not understanding every word. They come with a foundation as language learners, so it is a bit easier at the beginning of 6th grade.*

High school world language teachers also commented that students come to their classes with a degree of confidence gained from studying languages since elementary school.

Some parents are impressed with the skills their children have gained at various stages of study. One parent wrote that their 8th grader “can communicate her needs and feelings and describe and report on events” and can “read stories and expository text and write descriptions and opinions....I am so impressed with what she can do as an 8th grader in her Spanish-language literacy!”

Some parents report advantages of a long sequence of study, for example one parent of a 7th grade Spanish student who wrote that their student has a “high level of comprehension thanks to the K–8. Even with the interruptions caused by the pandemic, I can see the great benefit of the years and years of exposure and learning.”

2.c

The instructional time allocated to the language program varies from grade to grade.

The district has four different schedules for world language instruction, including different schedules for grades K–2, grades 3–5, grade 6, and grades 7–8. The current schedule includes fewer minutes of world language instruction in grades K–6 than originally proposed for the program in 1998, since the school day has not been extended as was recommended in that proposal. The following table shows the schedule proposed in 1998 alongside the current schedule.

Table 1. Weekly world language instruction schedule

	1998 proposal	Current implementation
Grades K–2 ¹²	4 x 20 minutes = 80 minutes	2 x 30 minutes = 60 minutes
Grades 3–5	5 x 30 minutes = 150 minutes	3 x 30 minutes = 90 minutes
Grade 6	5 x 40 minutes = 200 minutes	3 x 45 minutes = 135 minutes
Grades 7–8 ¹³	(existing program)	5 x 45 minutes = 225 minutes

“FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) is a term that has often been used to label all programs for languages other than English at the elementary school level.” While that term is no longer describing the wide variety of early language program models available to school districts, “current best practice for these programs call for 30 to 40 minutes a day, three to five days a week.”¹⁴ At 90 minutes per week, Brookline’s early language program in grades 3-5 meets those recommendations while falling short in frequency and total number of minutes in grade K-2.

According to the report from New Solutions K12 on Public Schools of Brookline’s middle school schedule,¹⁵ “gaps” are left in the schedules of 6th graders from “not taking health class and [taking] world language less frequently” than 7th and 8th graders. These gaps are filled by

¹² The original proposal started in first grade.

¹³ World language instruction was already established in grades 7 and 8 in Brookline when this proposal was made.

¹⁴ Curtain, H. A., & Dahlberg, C. A. (2016). Languages and Learners: Making the Match: World Language Instruction in K-8 Classrooms and Beyond. Pearson.

¹⁵ New Solutions K12. (2023). Brookline Middle School Schedules: Findings from Analysis of Current Use of Time, Course and Staffing Practices, and Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement.
https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/cms/lib/MA01907509/Centricity/Domain/62/PSB_%20Middle%20School%20Program%20Review%20Report_3.16.23.pdf.

various other classes and opportunities but could also be filled by increasing the frequency of world language classes.

2.d

K-5 world language teachers do not always have a dedicated classroom, and the K-5 classroom teachers do not always leave the classroom in a set-up to facilitate language teaching and learning.

Space is one challenge for the K-5 program, as most schools do not have a dedicated language classroom, unlike every other class in the school, including specials. Some K-5 world language teachers reported that “jumping around classrooms” is one of the most challenging parts of their job. They have no control over the physical environment in the classroom, and classroom teachers do not always leave the classroom in a state that facilitates navigation by a visiting teacher. Examples from world language teachers included having nowhere to put their computer, not having access to the white board, or having the classroom set up in such a way that they need to have the students sit on the carpet rather than in seats.

Recommendation

Prioritize scheduling practices to allow world language teachers to excel in their jobs.

Consider:

- Limiting, as much as possible, the number of grade levels a teacher is assigned during a given academic year. With a smaller number of distinct lessons to prepare, teachers will be able to devote more attention to each one; additionally, teachers teaching a smaller number of grades will be more likely to be able to join grade-level meetings. This will also address Finding 4a below.
- Avoiding, as much as possible, frequent changes in teachers’ grade level assignments from year to year so that teachers can refine their teaching of the curriculum, rather than learning a new grade level of the curriculum every year.
- Simplifying teacher assignments by adjusting class schedules, reducing the number of different schedules for different grades. Currently four different world language schedules for different grades.

Finding 3

The program does not provide equitable access to world language learning experiences for all students.

Equity of access “to all students regardless of academic standing, home language, or special needs” is a central principle of effective world language programs according to NADSFL¹⁶ which also stipulates that the particular needs of heritage and native speakers should be met. This principle is echoed in Massachusetts’ Guiding Principles for Effective World Language Education.¹⁷ Brookline’s vision for K–12 world language education does include mention of “all students,” which is an important first step. However, some stakeholders do not believe that the K–8 program is currently serving all students.

World language teachers (61%) and some central office staff expressed clear concerns about the program’s equity, as detailed below. This is a point without clear agreement among stakeholders. In informal interviews, most principals did not bring up equity as a source of concern (we did not explicitly ask them about it). While 51% of K–5 classroom teachers reported that access is equitable, some did mention concerns, including “I don’t think that it’s necessarily equal for EL or Special Education students,” “Students who have services on their IEPs are not able to participate in language classes to the extent of their non-disabled peers,” and “Our EL students are also expected to participate in Spanish classes 3x per week while they are trying to learn English. I don’t believe that is equitable to the students or teachers.” Over 54% of K–8 parents reported that access to the program is equitable, while 40% parents did not provide a response as to whether the program was equitable or not (replied “neither agree nor disagree” or “don’t know or not applicable”).

3.a

Students with IEPs or other special needs are frequently pulled out of world language classes to receive support services.

World language class periods are often chosen as a time slot for students to receive support services, as mentioned frequently by district staff, world language teachers, and K–5 classroom teachers, as well as several parents. However, since pull-outs are not documented in the portal used by parents and school staff, there is no direct data showing the scope of this practice.

¹⁶ National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NADSFL). (2015). Principles of Effective World Language Programs. https://nadsfl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NADSFL_EffectiveProgramPrinciples-2-23-18-on-17-pages.pdf

¹⁷ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, World Languages: Massachusetts Curriculum Framework—2021. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/world-languages/2021.pdf>.

Several world language teachers reported on the variety of reasons students are pulled out of world language classes. In the words of one elementary school world language teacher, “Many ELL students are pulled out of K–5 Spanish either once or both times a week.” A parent reported that their Spanish-speaking child who wanted to learn French in 6th grade (and who the parent felt did not benefit from the K–5 Spanish classes) did not have the opportunity to study a language in 6th grade because the child had ESL services during the 6th grade French class. A middle school world language teacher wrote:

” Students with IEPs are frequently pulled from World Language classes, sometimes entirely, sometimes 1, 2 or 3 days per week out of 5. Students who are considered to be in need of “interventions” in literacy or math, but not on IEPs are taken from language classes. Sometimes 1-2 days per week, sometimes entirely for 1-2 marking periods of the year, or potentially more.

From another world language teacher: “WL is often the targeted time for special ed service delivery - some students attend WL part time, some miss WL completely. Either way it is disruptive to learning, not in the best interest of most special ed students and these students do not have equal access to WL opportunities at the high school.”

High school world language teachers agreed that pull-outs from world language classes in the K–8 program are a problem, noting that the inequities created by these pull-outs persist until high school, with IEP students and Black and Brown students (who are overrepresented among Special Education students) disproportionately represented in 9th grade Beginning Spanish 1. This is confirmed by data on enrollment in 9th grade Beginning Spanish 1.

Some parents expressed regret that their children have missed world language classes due to receiving other services. Parents of 7th graders wrote:

” My child has an IEP and it was an easy decision to have him leave Spanish. There was constant teacher turnover, and he didn’t seem to be learning anything. It was so disappointing as I strongly support early language acquisition but very little seemed to be happening in class.

” The Mandarin program at Driscoll was a significant factor in our decision to buy our home. We are disappointed that one of our children was not able to continue receiving Mandarin instruction due to their IEP. We are native English speakers who regard Mandarin as one of the most important languages to learn, due to its economic and political significance.

Having a frequent practice of providing services for certain groups of students during their world language class period undermines the district’s stated vision to provide world language instruction to “all students.” In addition to the problem of some students missing some or all their language instruction for a given week, marking period, or even grade, the process of determining which class students should miss, and why they should miss that class, is not transparent, as described in more

detail under Finding 4. Some world language teachers would like to see students with special needs receive the same support in their classes that they receive in other classes. One middle school teacher wrote:

” Students on IEPs who remain in our classes (which ideally would be most, if not all students on IEPs) would benefit from a Special Ed Teacher or Paraprofessional supporting them in similar ways to how individuals receive support in other classes. This arrangement is almost never the case. Our differentiation would be considerably more effective with the additional support of an extra educator that is standard practice in other content areas.

3.b

There is no systematic approach to providing differentiated language learning experiences for heritage language learners.

Heritage language learners are students who are studying a language they hear regularly outside of school; these students have different needs than students who are only or primarily exposed to the language at school. The Frequently Asked Questions document on the Brookline World Language website¹⁸ addresses the parent question “What if my child already speaks the target language?” After emphasizing that the district welcomes the experiences of heritage and native language learners, the document explains that Brookline’s K–8 world language program is a second language acquisition program, in which most students “are learning the language for the first time.” The document explains that differentiated instruction is available to students of different proficiency levels, including “modifying class content, processes or products.” The document attempts to manage expectations by noting that “some students with superior language proficiency may require a greater extent of differentiation than we are able to provide in a second language acquisition setting.” Individual world language teachers explained their differentiation practices. One teacher wrote, “When I teach 5th grade Spanish, I focus a lot on the cultural and geographical aspects of Spain so that the heritage learners are also learning something new.” Another elementary teacher noted that “teachers do as much differentiating as possible and there are open ended assignments and projects in which students are able to shine.

One 2nd grade classroom teacher reported that the heritage learners in their class enjoy the Spanish class: “It is an amazing opportunity for ALL students to learn a new language and develop cultural intelligence. It is the favorite part of the day for my Spanish speaking students!” Another elementary classroom teacher reported, “The world language program at [my school] is accessible by a range of learners, but that is largely due to the teachers’ ability to modify and engage students. It has not been the case with other world language teachers in the past.”

These reports emphasize that much of the responsibility for differentiation is given to individual teachers. Some world language teachers emphasized the limits of what they are able to do for

¹⁸ Linked from Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language Family Page.
<https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2351>.

heritage language learners. One middle school world language teacher wrote, “I think we need to have materials for the heritage language learners or what the students truly need is a totally different option.” Another middle school world language teacher expressed frustration, “Heritage students need literacy instruction which is something done now with limited time since most of the population is not proficient in the language we teach. As teachers, it is painful not to have enough time to dedicate to these students who are placed at the same level as non-heritage.”

Parents of heritage language learners¹⁹ have mixed views of their students’ experience in world language classes. This group of parents overall agrees at higher rates than the general parent population with the survey item “My student usually enjoys their language classes.” Among parents of elementary students at Driscoll School (where Chinese is offered in K–5) who also regularly hear Chinese spoken outside of school, 89% agree or strongly agree with the statement “My student usually enjoys their language classes,” while that figure stands at 79% for parents of elementary students at other schools who regularly hear Spanish spoken outside of school. Both of these numbers exceed the 69% of parents overall who agreed or strongly agreed with that statement.

Parents of heritage language learners overall also agree at slightly higher rates than the general parent population with the survey item “I understand the role of language instruction in our school.”

However, some parents are dissatisfied with their heritage language learners’ learning experience. For example, one parent of a Spanish-speaking student wrote, “The fact that students can’t choose or even access another language other than Spanish is unfair to those students who already speak it. It’s a lost opportunity for learning a new language, having native speakers in the classroom is problematic. They aren’t being challenged nor are they developing their own skills in the language.” Another parent wrote, “When a student is already a native speaker of a language (in our case, Spanish), there are no options for actually learning a new language. She isn’t able to develop her Spanish as the class is so basic and she doesn’t have the option to learn something new for her.”

Recommendation

Develop systems that provide language learning experiences that meet the needs of students with heritage or native speaker capabilities, students developing proficiency at different rates, or other identified students.

Consider:

- Establishing and following a transparent process (involving input from the student and

¹⁹ In this section, “parents of heritage language learners” means (1) parents of Driscoll School students who report that their students regularly hear Chinese outside of school and (2) parents of students in other PSB schools who report that their students regularly hear Spanish outside of school.

parents) for determining the best timing for IEP and ESL pull-outs, so that world language class is not automatically the default time for pull-outs. Document the implementation of this process in a way that is accessible to parents and to all of the student's teachers, including their world language teacher.

- Identifying curricular extensions and teacher resources to address the needs of heritage language learners.

Finding 4

Some program structures impede communication among stakeholders to support world language learning.

Communication is key to any world language program. Effective language programs identify, involve, and leverage the support of all stakeholders in the learning process. This requires teachers to partner with other school staff to better understand and address the varied learning needs of their students. In addition, the NADSFL principles highlight two-way communication with all stakeholders, with the world language program sharing goals, accomplishments, and details of proficiency-based grading, while other stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on the world language program.

4.a

World language teachers are frequently excluded from grade level communication, limiting their ability to support students' complete academic experience.

World language teachers working in both elementary and middle grades reported frustration with being excluded from communication channels within their schools. A K–2 world language teacher wanted to participate in meetings of the K–2 faculty but couldn't because she was teaching another grade at the time of the meetings. A middle school world language teacher reported that recently a student was not completing projects, which turned out to be part of a larger issue that the teacher was not aware of because the teacher was not kept informed by the student's other teachers.

World language teachers reported being excluded from weekly guidance meetings to learn relevant information (which is shared with other teachers) about students' home life and whether students are using different pronouns. An elementary classroom teacher wrote, "Language teachers often have no idea which students are on IEPs." One world language teacher wrote, "We are no longer included in team meetings, despite many of us knowing our students for several years in a row. We can share no information and we receive no information."

4.b

World language teachers are not always notified when students will be pulled out of their class for IEP or English Learner Education services, or when the student will return.

Several world language teachers reported frustration with this lack of communication. One elementary world language teacher wrote, "there are individual students who are pulled out for some language classes, and it is not clear to me which stakeholders are involved in these decisions, why they are made, and whether family or student input is considered." Another teacher wrote, "world language teachers are not consulted about pull-outs; some students receive other services

during world language time one or more times during the week making it difficult for them to succeed on the days when they are present.” A middle school world language teacher wrote, “There is a practice of pulling (many, but not all) students on IEPs from world language to receive services. This often seems to be the default practice, and it often is made without discussion.”

4.c

The program has not shared expectations for K–5 classroom teachers to support world language instruction.

The “K–5 World Language Curriculum Overview”²⁰ notes that “[a]ll educators have a shared responsibility in the implementation of our K–5 program. In addition to the world language teacher, all K–5 classroom teachers are present in the classroom to help facilitate interdisciplinary connections and support world language instruction.” However, the specifics of what it means for a classroom teacher to support world language instruction are not widely understood.

In focus groups, K–5 world language teachers reported on large variation in practices by the classroom teachers, including staying in or leaving the classroom during world language lessons, modeling learner behavior, alerting the world language teacher to anything unusual about the class on a given day, using or not using target language vocabulary in their own classes, making or not making connections with earlier learning. One teacher mentioned that some classroom teachers do not even greet the world language teacher when they arrive, which misses an opportunity to model respect for the language teacher in front of the students.

In survey responses, K–5 classroom teachers themselves reported engaging in a variety of practices during world language lessons, including helping with classroom management (70%), remaining in the room but occupying themselves with things besides the language lesson (60%), modeling learner behavior (28%), and leaving the room entirely (26%). One classroom teacher reported that the role of the classroom teacher has changed from year to year, and wrote:

“ *It feels unclear why a second teacher needs to be present in this language classroom when they are not present in other specials/classroom teachers do not have another adult in their classroom. Management has also been tricky with two adults in the room, as the students do not see the language teacher as a teacher of authority if the classroom teacher is still managing.*

4.d

The district has shared performance targets for each grade level, however information about curricular learning outcomes is limited.

The world language program shares performance targets on its website²¹, with some details, for grades K–2, 3–5, 6, 7, and 8. This document also includes the number of contact hours per year,

²⁰ Linked from Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2346>.

²¹ Linked from Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2346>.

which impacts how much progress students can make in a year. The website for families²² includes visuals to help students and their families understand proficiency. Additionally, the Frequently Asked Questions document on the same website provides ways that families can stay informed about what their student can do with the target language, and, as described in Finding 3, explains how the program can support most, but not all, students who are native or heritage learners of the target language.

However, some parents expressed frustration on the family survey with the limited amount of progress their students have made over the course of the program, and some program staff reported that it is common for parents' expectations to be out of alignment with the program's performance targets.

” *It seems like a lot of time (2x week K– 5th grade) and my 5th grader still can't speak much Spanish. I'm sure there is a strategy to not teaching verbs, but I'm not aware of the strategy.*

” *I think learning Spanish is wonderful for cultural appreciation, but the amount they get is insufficient to gain deep language skills and my daughter says they learn the same content year after year.*

” *My child has been learning Spanish for eight years now, but my child's progress in Spanish has been so limited.*

A middle school world language teacher predicted such parent responses, writing:

” *Families may need more clarity about what to expect students to be able to do at various stages. Sometimes I have observed that families' expectations are not aligned with minutes of instruction (especially for K–5).*

Recommendation

Empower all stakeholders to support language learners success through collaboration and strategic communication.

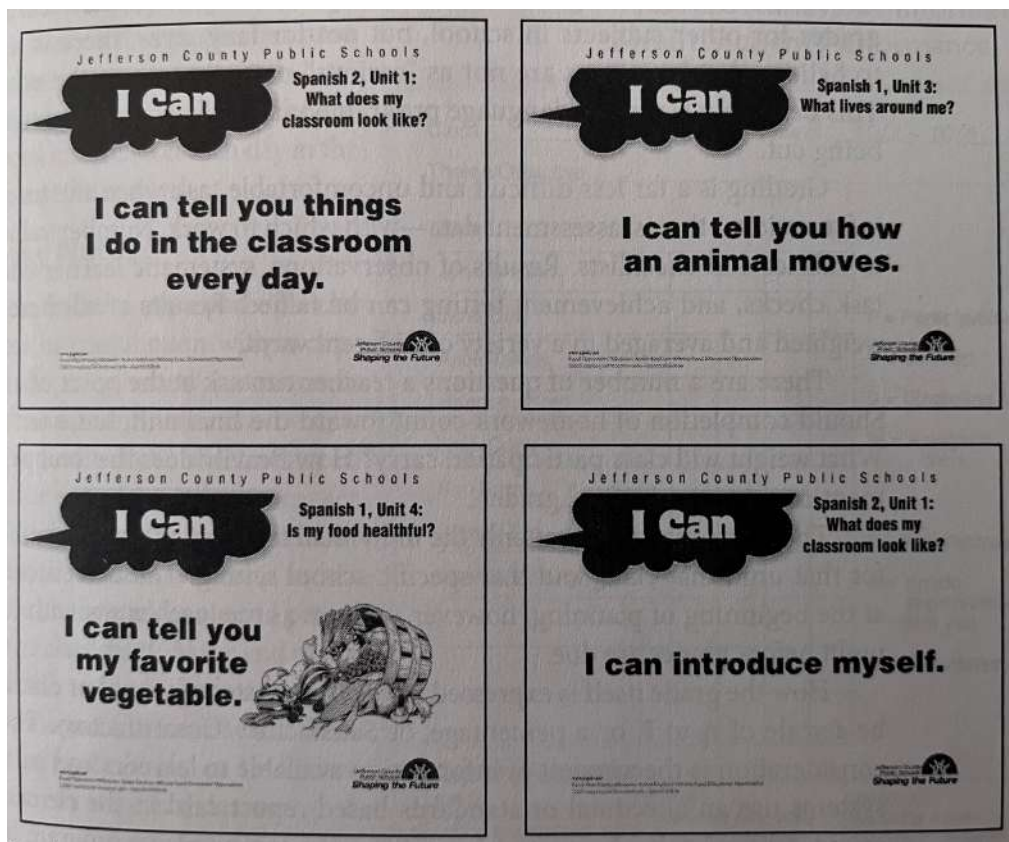
Consider:

- Provide world language teachers with opportunities to collaborate with grade level teachers and student support staff in order to promote students' academic, social, and emotional growth.

²² Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language Family Page. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2351>.

- Establish clear communication with K–5 classroom teachers about their role in supporting world language instruction.
- Develop a family communication plan for each grade level that includes learning outcomes from the curriculum. Such a communication plan would allow the program to frequently connect directly with stakeholders, celebrate individual student learning, and make parents and world language teachers partners in the learning process.

For example, the Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky have created “Can Do” cards that identify learning targets from the curriculum on one side, while giving an example response on the other side. Students bring the cards home with them and “perform” for their parents demonstrating they have met the targets for the unit.



In Pinellas County Public Schools in Florida, teachers share “performance activity cards, attached to an explanatory letter. Activities are at ten different language levels, with ten performance activities for each level. When a learner can accomplish one of the activities, the parent signs the card and sends it back to school with the child.” ²³

²³ Curtain, H. A., & Dahlberg, C. A. (2016). *Languages and Learners: Making the Match: World Language Instruction in K-8 Classrooms and Beyond*. Pearson.

Question: How does the program’s curriculum focus on communicative proficiency and alignment with the national World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages and the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages?

Effective world language programs have developed a standards-based curriculum focused on supporting students’ growth in language proficiency. Such curricula are made up of a series of thematic units with clearly defined performance targets, provide scaffolded student learning experiences, and opportunities for students to interact with authentic sources. A thematic curriculum will allow programs to create meaningful, real-world contexts for teaching and learning. Integrating culture, content and language around a meaningful center provides a focus for unit performance objectives, performance assessment tasks, and learning targets for individual lessons. This will allow programs to address learners’ interests and create a sense of purpose and community in the program.

In the Public Schools of Brookline, district staff and teachers have invested significant resources to develop a curriculum to guide the K-8 world language program. The program’s mission identifies “thematic units that support comprehension” as the main curricular goal. Nevertheless, principals, parents, K-5 classroom teachers, and the K-8 world language teachers themselves question the effectiveness of the current curriculum. As one middle school teacher wrote:

” *We have a nice vision and lots of good ideas but have yet to translate that into a cohesive curriculum from K-8. Some grades have more clear curriculum goals, others are in need of revisions but have been waiting for years to figure out what the revisions will be, so we essentially don't have a guide for some grades (beyond proficiency targets).*

Finding 5

The program’s curriculum varies in format, focus, and content and is not consistently aligned with national and state standards.

In effective programs, programs use the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements (2017) to identify unit performance objectives that will guide the development of each unit. Programs outline summative performance assessment tasks that learners will complete to provide evidence that they have met the unit performance objectives. Performance assessment tasks are assessments which require and

expect students to use the target language in real-life situations. Effective programs support teachers' lesson planning by identifying the learning targets (often written as can-do statements) that will indicate the language function and context learners will need to be successful on the performance assessment tasks. As a final step in the curriculum development process, programs need to identify language and culture specific resources they will use to provide comprehensible input for learners.

Since there is not a common curriculum development process in place for the Public Schools of Brookline world language program, it is challenging to make findings that are common for each available curriculum document. It is clear however, that curricular decisions have been influenced by backward design and principles of proficiency. However, several misconceptions of those approaches to world language curriculum development have led to inconsistent and sometime misaligned curricular decisions.

5.a

The curriculum identifies what students will know and be able to do at the end of each grade level.

The program has identified oral performance targets for each grade level which are published on the K–8 World Language homepage on the Brookline website.²⁴ Each curriculum document for the program has additionally identified a proficiency target for the units of study that teachers are following in their instruction. It doesn't appear that the program makes a distinction between performance and proficiency targets and uses the terms interchangeably. It's also not clear if the targets identified in the unit are focused on oral language production only. There is no indication if the curriculum has performance targets for the interpretive listening or reading, or the presentational writing mode, or if the targets apply to all modes of communication equally. For many of the grade levels, the curriculum also identifies what the program has labeled as "Can-Do Statements"; however it is not clear if those are overarching unit outcomes or teachers are to use these statements as learning targets for their lessons. The complexity of the statements varies widely within and across grade levels. The majority of identified unit outcomes target language competences identified in state and national standards. There are few instances where units attempt to address intercultural competences. While the elementary school units identify a cultural focus, there does not seem to be a connection to intercultural competences. Instead, the curriculum guidance states suggests that "teachers (and students) are encouraged to bring in other cultural connections that naturally arise."

5.b

The elementary school Spanish curriculum is a series of topics repeated across grade levels.

The curriculum has made a commendable attempt to spiral students' language learning experiences. Unit documents for grades 3 through 5 clearly identify knowledge students should have acquired previously. With ever-changing schedules and high rates of teacher turnover, this is particularly useful

²⁴ Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2346>

for teachers new to a particular grade level. Despite these intentional connections, the curriculum fails to advance students language proficiency since the focus of most units is on the expansion of vocabulary rather than expanding students' ability to use language functions in increasingly more difficult contexts. A source for that limitation can be found in the actual content focus of the units, which take a more topical approach rather than identifying overarching themes that would allow teachers to make multiple topic and content connections. Those connections are possible within some of the existing enduring understanding and essential questions of units, but much work remains to be done. The repetitive nature of the curriculum's topics of school, climate, leisure time, food, and their strong focus on vocabulary development is one of the causes for frustration of parents. As one parent wrote:

” *My child has been taking Spanish at [his school] since kindergarten. The curriculum is severely limited and repetitive. He has shown me that he has completed the same work sheets multiple years in a row.*

Classroom observations confirmed this parent's comments as identical activities and classroom resources were observed in multiple elementary grade levels. The vocabulary focus also impacts the effectiveness of teachers' instructional choices discussed in Finding 10.

5.c

The middle school Spanish curriculum is not aligned to the performance targets of the program and not connected to students' K-5 language learning experiences.

The middle school Spanish curriculum is composed of a mixture of units purchased from multiple commercial vendors (*Adios Textbook* and *Somos*). This combination of curricula is sending mixed messages to teachers as each set of curricula takes a different approach to language learning. *Adios Textbook* provides longer lasting backward designed thematic units built around a set of authentic resources and includes performance assessment tasks aligned to the performance objectives of the unit. The *Somos* curriculum provides shorter units that are organized around sets of prescribed lessons targeting common language learning objectives. Both of the curricula are designed for beginning language learners, and not for students who have been in the program for up to six years. The two different approaches together are not creating one cohesive curriculum that teachers can follow to support the oral performance targets of the program. For students and teachers in the program, it must feel like starting all over again with the first year of Spanish. As a middle school Spanish teacher wrote:

” *Teaching materials are not sufficient for all grades 6-8 and need to be reviewed, for example Somos lessons are not grade/proficiency level appropriate.*

5.d

The curriculum does not consistently identify how students will demonstrate what they can do with what they know through formative and summative assessments.

While the middle school French and elementary Chinese curricula consistently include a variety of performance assessment tasks in the three modes of communication, curricula in other languages fail to identify them consistently or any at all. It's important to note that while many of the curricular documents do not specify performance assessment tasks, a review of submitted student work samples indicate that teachers are using them to allow students to demonstrate learning. It is unclear, however, how frequently these assessments are taking place and what teachers, or the program are doing with the information collected from the assessment. This is further discussed in Finding 6.

Table 2: Performance assessment tasks

Elementary: Chinese	Elementary: Spanish	Middle School: Chinese	Middle School: French	Middle School: Spanish
Most units have performance assessment tasks for one or more modes.	Not identified	Most units have not identified performance tasks by mode. Some units have "activities" that could be used as assessments.	Most units have performance assessment tasks for one or more modes.	The unit overviews do not indicate performance assessment tasks. It's unclear how <i>Adios Textbook</i> tasks are used.

5.e

The curriculum identifies a variety of instructional strategies and resources.

The teacher-developed curriculum identifies instructional strategies along with a rich list of resources (including PowerPoint presentations, books and readers, worksheets, videos, etc.). This is helpful for teachers who are often charged with preparing multiple lessons each day. Nevertheless, teachers are overwhelmed and need additional support. The disconnect between the performance targets of the program, the unit outcomes and the resources, causes many teachers to "reinvent the wheel" for their own students on a daily basis. As one teacher wrote:

”

We haven't had a cohesive attempt to make a curriculum that would be a support to teachers. I have worked many long hours uncompensated to make lessons and share them with colleagues in our shared Google Drive. That sharing goes one way and I don't get materials back from others. And, as our teachers teach multiple preps, we need lessons to rely on. If indeed we are going to teach from authentic documents, we need a bank of documents to rely on in our teaching.

Recommendation

Develop all K-8 world language curricula around a series of backward designed thematic units that identify unit performance objectives, performance assessment tasks, and anchor lessons.

Consider:

- Identifying performance targets for all three modes of communication to guide the curriculum development process. When developing targets, consider the differences in receptive vs. productive skills.
- Developing a language independent curriculum that can be applied within cultural context of any language. Using a common curriculum development process and following the principles of backward design facilitates the sharing of units, instructional strategies, and quality materials across grade levels and languages.
- Developing K–5 thematic units of study that make direct connections to state and local content standards in order to meet the original intent of the world language program. This will provide learning extension and differentiation opportunities for learners across all content areas and increase the overall value of the program to the K-8 curriculum.
- Developing middle school thematic units that build on the existing language skills of incoming 6th graders.
- Identifying opportunities for differentiation to address the needs of heritage language learners in the program within each thematic unit.
- Standardizing all curriculum documents so that all program stakeholders have easy access and can support outcomes of the program.

Question: How does the program document students' growth in their world language and intercultural competencies as defined by the national World Readiness Standards and the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages?

Assessment is key to understanding student growth, according to both the NADSFL framework and the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages. This process includes the use of both internal and external data collection, addressing proficiency benchmarks and performance indicators, which serve different purposes throughout the academic year and throughout the program. Assessment data should be analyzed to drive decision-making throughout an effective world language program. Curtain and Dahlberg remind us that "every step in the decision-making process is linked to assessment, from theme selection to decisions about standards and content to be addressed."²⁵

Finding 6

The program has not developed a balanced assessment approach that offers multiple ongoing formative assessment opportunities and feedback, summative assessments, and benchmark assessments.

6.a

The program has established a process of collecting external benchmark assessment data that is limited to interpretive listening and interpersonal speaking.

The program has administered and collected data from the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) in interpretive listening and interpersonal speaking. These benchmark assessments were administered to students in 8th grade from 2014-2019 and are scheduled to resume again in 2023.

²⁵ Curtain, H. A., & Dahlberg, C. A. (2016). *Languages and Learners: Making the Match: World Language Instruction in K-8 Classrooms and Beyond*. Pearson.

According to Language Testing International, which administers it,²⁶ “The ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) is an assessment of standards-based language learning across the three modes of communication (Interpersonal, Presentational, and Interpretive) as defined by the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning.” AAPPL is a widely used assessment, available in 11 languages, that allows students to demonstrate how they engage with “linguistic tasks on topics of personal, social, and academic relevance across the three modes of communication.” The test is scored according to the ACTFL Performance Scale.²⁷ According to the Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center, “Benchmark assessments can inform policy, instructional planning, and decision-making at the classroom, school and/or district levels.” The authors continue, “Benchmark assessment operates best when it is seen as one component of a balanced assessment system explicitly designed to provide the ongoing data needed to serve district, school, and classroom improvement needs. The National Research Council (NRC) defines a quality assessment system as one that is (a) coherent, (b) comprehensive, and (c) continuous (NRC, 2001).”²⁸

6.b

The program does not consistently monitor and document student language development by implementing formative and summative performance assessments across the three modes of communication.

As discussed in Finding 5, the curriculum does not consistently include internal performance assessments across the three modes of communication. Some middle school units include formative and/or summative assessments in one or more modes, while elementary grade units typically do not include any formally identified assessments in any mode.

Recommendation

Expand collection of summative internal and external assessment data in order to document student growth in language learning.

Consider:

- Expanding the collection of external assessment data to include interpretive reading and presentational writing.
- Developing and administering internal performance assessment tasks in each mode of communication. These assessments should be used minimally at key transition points (grade 2, 5, and 8) but can also be developed as end of unit and/or end of course assessments.

²⁶ Language Testing International. ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL). <https://www.languagetesting.com/aappl>.

²⁷ ACTFL. (2015). Performance Descriptors for Language Learners. https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLPerformance_Descriptors.pdf.

²⁸ Herman, J. L., Osmundson, E., & Dietel, R. (2010). Benchmark assessments for improved learning (AACC Policy Brief). Los Angeles, CA: University of California. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED524108.pdf>.

Finding 7

The program documents and reports student growth based on performance in world language class and external assessments.

7.a

The program has established a process of analyzing external student growth data in listening and speaking.

Program staff has analyzed students' AAPPL data at least from 2014–2019. Brookline student data has been compared to AAPPL's national reports, and has been analyzed by school, by language (and whether the student had been learning the language since elementary school or started in middle school), and by race. These are important steps for understanding the areas of strength and potential for growth in language instruction.

The 2019 analysis of students meeting performance targets in 8th grade shows substantial variation between schools in proportion of students meeting the targets. There is also a substantial difference between students testing in French and Spanish and students testing in Chinese. The program has the opportunity to use this data to improve instruction in world language classes and to work to make instruction and outcomes more equitable across schools and across languages.

7.b

The program does not use external assessment data to drive programmatic decision-making.

The program's ability to use external assessment data to drive decision-making is limited by only testing listening and speaking skills, and by only testing in 8th grade. Literacy in a world language is a stated goal of the 6–8 language program, but the program does not use external data to measure students' progress in reading and writing, which limits program staff's ability to make decisions or changes in response to students' demonstrated growth. In listening and speaking, if analysis of assessment data shows limitations in 8th grade students' ability that are unexpected based on the curriculum, it will be hard for program staff to know where in the preceding nine years of instruction changes should be made.

7.c

The program uses standards-based grading practices to provide feedback on student proficiency to students and parents.

The program reportedly began using standards-based grading during the 2018–2019 school year with several goals:

- to align grading with proficiency-based learning.
- to ensure that grading reflects student progress toward the learning objectives, rather than incorporating external factors such as effort and behavior.
- to increase learners' awareness of where they fall on the proficiency continuum.

Teachers assign grades ranging from 0 ("not yet," not showing evidence of understanding), through 3 ("established," the student meets the end of year target), to 4 ("extending," exceeding the end of year target). The program has communicated with parents on multiple occasions about new grading procedures and surveyed parents to verify that they understand the grading practices and to ascertain the impact of the grading practices. An infographic explaining the rationale for standards-based grading and the grading system itself has been sent out with report cards.

Some teachers mentioned in surveys that they would find it useful to have professional learning opportunities relating to standards-based grading: in particular, how to accurately measure proficiency levels, and how to explain it to students and parents.

Recommendation

Expand external assessment opportunities in order to monitor student growth and make program adjustments.

Consider:

- Including assessments across all modes and skills in the external benchmark assessment plan.
- Administering external benchmark assessments at key transition points in the program (grades 2, 5, and 8).
- Establishing a review panel of teachers to correlate external benchmark assessment data with student work from internal performance assessments to identify strengths and opportunities for program growth.
- Using external benchmark assessment data to monitor and revise the program's performance targets.

Finding 8

The program has established the foundation for students to earn the Seal of Biliteracy during high school, however there is currently no process in place to award the Seal to students.

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award given to students who have achieved high levels of proficiency in two languages by the time they graduate from high school. In addition to recognizing and honoring bilingualism, the Seal “can be evidence of skills that are attractive to future employers and college admissions offices.”²⁹ The Seal of Biliteracy was first implemented in California and is now offered in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Massachusetts adopted the Seal of Biliteracy in 2017, and 176 districts in Massachusetts currently offer the Seal of Biliteracy to their graduates.³⁰ Public Schools of Brookline do not yet offer the Seal. To earn the Seal in Massachusetts, students must demonstrate English proficiency through the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or another approved assessment and must demonstrate a minimum of Intermediate High proficiency in an additional language on an approved assessment.

In 8th grade AAPPL data from 2014–2019, in most years a majority of students completing the three-year and nine-year Spanish sequences and students completing the three-year French sequence reached the Intermediate proficiency range in speaking and listening. For example, in 2019, 70% of students who had studied Spanish from K through 8th grade reached the Intermediate range, as did 67% of students who began Spanish in middle school and 64% of students who began French in middle school. Students who start high school in the Intermediate range for speaking and listening have a strong foundation for reaching the state standard of Intermediate High in all domains to earn the Seal of Biliteracy, assuming they meet the other requirements.

In the 8th grade AAPPL data from 2014–2019, in most years a minority of students studying Chinese reached the intermediate level, both among those who had continued studying Chinese from elementary school and among those who began studying it in middle school. For example, in 2019, fewer than 20% of 8th graders who had studied Chinese since elementary school tested at the intermediate level, and no 8th graders who had started studying Chinese in middle school tested at in the Intermediate range. Students finishing 8th grade below the Intermediate range will not have as much of a head start in reaching Intermediate High in all domains in high school, though it is certainly still possible for them to reach that level and earn the Seal of Biliteracy.

²⁹ The Seal of Biliteracy. <https://sealofbiliteracy.org/>

³⁰ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy/>

The absence of systematic data collection on reading and writing skills is currently a limitation to the district's ability to project how many students are likely to be eligible to earn the Seal of Biliteracy. Currently, estimates can only be made based on speaking and listening data, though the Seal of Biliteracy in Massachusetts requires reaching the level of intermediate high in all four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Recommendation

Establish policies and procedures to award the Seal of Biliteracy to Brookline students.

Consider:

- Administering external benchmark assessments at program transition points to determine whether students are on track to earn the Seal of Biliteracy. All benchmark assessments should include assessments across the modes of communication and skills areas.
- Aligning high school entrance expectations and course proficiency targets to K–8 program outcomes as measured on external benchmark assessments.

Question: How does the program provide students with instruction that ensures the implementation of state and national standards for world languages using age- and proficiency-level appropriate strategies?

There is a growing body of research that points to teacher effectiveness as the single most critical factor in student achievement. Research shows that it is not a particular school that students attend, or the size of the school or even the size of their classes that impacts learning nearly as much as the effectiveness of the teacher. And while a solid foundation in subject matter content is clearly important for any teacher, research suggests that it is not so much what the teacher knows but what the teacher does in the classroom that maximizes student achievement. What do effective world language teachers do to ensure that students achieve world language competence?

To support instruction in effective world language programs, a district must provide ongoing professional learning opportunities planned with the teachers' learning needs in mind in response to data available about current teacher practice and student learning.

Finding 9

Teachers use some core instructional strategies that are effective in facilitating language learning.

A guiding principle of the Massachusetts World Language Framework states that "Effective world language programs are communicative and support meaningful, authentic, and affirming interactions in the target language....Language instruction should be communicative - used to accomplish a purpose such as exchanging information and ideas, interpreting relevant authentic resources, meeting needs, expressing and supporting opinions, and building positive relationships with teachers, peers, and community members" (p. 12). The "Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning (TELL)" Framework identifies the behaviors that teachers must exhibit to facilitate such learning experiences. The framework consists of seven domains designed to address a teacher's need to prepare for student learning, advance student learning, and support student learning. During the classroom observations completed as part of this program review, the focus was on teachers' ability to facilitate effective language learning experiences using high-yield teaching and learning strategies

designed to move students toward the attainment of carefully planned course, unit, and lesson performance objectives.

9.a

The target language is frequently used as the language of instruction and to provide comprehensible input in many classrooms.

During classroom observations, many teachers used the target language for multiple aspects of a lesson: providing language input for new vocabulary, explaining or modeling instructions for an activity, facilitating student behavior, and celebrating student learning. Some teachers used English to provide unnecessary translation of key vocabulary. This often happened on PowerPoint slides designed to support the lesson. A couple of teachers encouraged translation by the students: “¿Cómo se dice March en Español?” or even used a mixture of English and Spanish throughout the lesson. In cases where teachers used English, teachers were undercutting their own comprehensible input strategies and not providing enough scaffolded support to allow their students to make meaning of the new language. The use of English as a language support is not supported as an effective practice and reflects a teacher’s limiting beliefs in their students’ abilities as discussed in Finding 10.

9.b

Authentic materials support language learning experiences in almost all classrooms.

In an effective language classroom, “interactive reading and listening comprehension tasks should be designed and carried out using authentic cultural texts of various kinds.”³¹ During classroom observations, many teachers used authentic resources such as videos, images, and other texts. As discussed in Finding F, the program’s curriculum provides access to those materials.

9.c

Middle school teachers facilitate communicative tasks for students in order to connect to the students’ interests as well as current and prior experiences.

During classroom observations, multiple middle school teachers facilitated learning experiences that asked students to interact with each other using the target language in order to express their reactions, opinions, or beliefs about various topics.

9.d

Teachers are ambassadors for the language and culture they teach and share their passions with the students.

During classroom observations, teachers demonstrated that they have built strong rapport and relationships with their students. Even though many of the program’s language teachers interact with

³¹ ACTFL Guiding Principles for Language Learning. <https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/guiding-principles-for-language-learning>

a large number of students every day because of the scheduling limitations, in most cases teachers were noticeably passionate about the language and culture they teach. In most classrooms, their students responded to that passion with excitement and a clearly visible eagerness to learn during their language class.

Recommendation

Use the Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning (TELL) Framework and tools to prioritize high-leverage teaching practices that can be implemented by all world language teachers.

Consider:

- Conducting a needs analysis to document what professional learning opportunities teachers need.
- Linking formal and informal professional growth goals setting to the criteria identified in the TELL Framework.
- Using the TELL Framework self-assessments to identify strengths of individual teachers.
- Using the TELL feedback tools for walkthroughs and observations by the K–8 world language coordinator and other district and school administrators.
- Using Catalyst (catalyst.uoregon.edu) to collect evidence of effective teacher practice within the program and share with other teachers. Catalyst is a social, online portfolio based on the Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning (TELL) framework. Developed out of a collaboration between PEARLL and the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon, Catalyst allows world language educators to:
 - Set professional goals
 - Identify their strengths
 - Upload work samples and reflections to document ongoing growth
 - Connect to professional learning resources, including small group peer-to-peer mentoring
 - Create and participate in professional groups
 - Form individual connections
 - Reflect on their growth over time

Finding 10

Teachers' practices are often reflective of limiting beliefs in students' abilities to learn languages.

10.a

The limitations of the schedule have created a culture in which teachers are reluctant to establish high expectations for their students.

While teachers hold much of the agency and responsibility for their instructional choices, there are external structural limitations. In the current K-8 world language program, the number of hours of instruction is limited and therefore limits are placed on the instructional options available to teachers. Indeed, several teachers shared that there is only so much students can be expected to do in the limited time they spend in the language classroom, especially in grades K–6, when they only have classes 2–3 times per week. This has resulted in established classroom routines that are unnecessarily repetitive given the short amount of contact time teachers have with students. During classroom observations, many teachers spent 10 minutes or more of a 30-minute class period on a calendar routine or review activities that were not connected to the learning target of the day. Findings 10.b and 10.c provide additional examples of limited instructional choices created by this culture of low expectations.

Some parents have noticed this lack of teacher confidence in students. A parent of a 5th grader wrote:

” He does not like Spanish because he feels that the teachers treat the students as if they were much younger than they are, and much less competent. He does not enjoy language class because it is so repetitive. It makes the children bored and frustrated.

A parent of a 7th grader wrote:

” ALL the kids are capable of so much more. The lack of rigor is a shame for all of the students and we felt it particularly keenly [as a Spanish-speaking family].

It is true that students in grades K–6 have limited time in the language, perhaps not as much as teachers or parents would prefer, and several teachers also reported that even the time allocated to language classes “on paper” is often further restricted due to external factors. However, teachers’

limiting beliefs about their students' abilities can become self-fulfilling prophecies when their teaching practices don't demonstrate confidence in students' abilities to work hard and to grow in proficiency.

One reason the program's culture has fostered limiting beliefs are misconceptions about the ACTFL proficiency levels that identify what students are able to do at various levels of language learning. The program has identified reasonable performance targets for each grade level. However, a review of public documents on the program's website, as well as the curriculum documents indicate there is a need to deepen teachers' and other stakeholders' understanding of the ACTFL proficiency guidelines as well as the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do statements as in discussed in Finding 5.

10.b

Students' learning experiences in grades K–5 are frequently teacher centered, thereby limiting student-to-student interactions in the target language.

During classroom observations, teachers in grades K–5 used instructional strategies that were limited to the teacher providing input for new vocabulary or reviewing previously taught vocabulary. During that time, students had little to no opportunity to process new language in guided learning experiences or for collaborative learning experiences. On the rare occasions that students were applying learning in independent learning experiences, these were often limited to interactions between a teacher and one student. While one teacher interacted with one student, all other students were left waiting and not engaged or given a task to complete. Few classes had activities where all students were either processing language input or producing language output at the same time. Especially with limited instructional time available, maximizing opportunities for student processing and collaboration can help students get the most out of their language classes. While these instructional decisions are made by teachers, it is important to reiterate the shortcomings of the existing curriculum that hasn't identified opportunities for learner centered activities as discussed in Finding 5.

10.c

Learning experiences for students in grades K–5 are limited to mostly word level production.

The program's oral proficiency targets document, linked from the K–8 World Language homepage on the Brookline website,³² sets the goal of K–5 language instruction as reaching the Novice High level by the end of 5th grade. The document's description of the Novice range includes a number of abilities of a Novice learner and closes with the summary: "is known as being at the WORD level." We observed this level of language production in most elementary classrooms, where students were generally asked to give one-word responses to teacher prompts. Particularly concerning were word level production from students in the upper elementary grades who have been in the program for four to five years already. If those students were to truly meet the program's identified performance

³² Public Schools of Brookline, K–8 World Language. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/2346>

target of Novice High, one would expect to see students “using a variety of practiced or memorized words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions.”³³

These instructional decisions made by the teachers are directly related to the word level focus in the curriculum. While there are some unit level can-do statements that suggest a functional language focus, many of them identify a vocabulary focus on the word level. The units identify “Suggested Vocabulary and Language Chunks”, however in most cases are limited to single word vocabulary and are missing key language chunks that would allow students to use the vocabulary for a communicative purpose.

- *I can name some of my favorite activities. (3rd grade. Leisure Time Unit)*
- *I can name 3-4 items of fall clothing. (3rd grade. Climate Unit)*
- *I can describe typical weather on the coasts of Mexico, at sea level, as hot and humid. (3rd grade. Climate Unit)*
- *I can name 3-5 community members. (3rd grade. School and Community Unit)*
- *I can name 3-4 items of fall clothing. (4th grade. Climate Unit)*

Recommendation

Provide professional learning that allows teachers to develop a deep understanding of the ACTFL proficiency guidelines in order to make instructional decisions aligned with the expectation of the program.

Consider:

- Providing proficiency training to K-8 world language that teachers in the district’s high school are currently completing.
- Providing training on the use of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements and the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages.
- Clarifying the differences in proficiency and performance and their impact on curriculum planning and instructional choices.
- Establishing an annual review of student work at program transition points to establish interrater reliability among the teachers when evaluating student work samples.

³³ NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements. https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/Resources-Publications/Can-Do_Benchmarks_Indicators.pdf

Finding 11

Teacher effectiveness is directly impacted by limitations of the existing curriculum, scheduling choices, grade-level coordination, and district expectations.

While teachers hold much of the agency and responsibility for their teaching and professional growth, there are external structural limitations that have a direct impact on their instructional effectiveness and thereby student growth in language learning. The number of hours of instruction is limited and therefore limits the instructional options available to teachers, especially in grades K–2, and also in grades 3–6 (Finding 2). Another limitation is the practice of pulling students out of world language classes for IEP or EL services, either entirely so that they don't have any world language instruction for a period of time, or partially so that they attend less than the full weekly schedule of WL classes (Finding 3). Scheduling conflicts that limit world language teachers' communication with other grade level teachers, and with student support staff, make it more difficult for world language teachers to integrate their teaching into the grade-level curriculum and to fully support their students academically and personally (Finding 4). The inconsistencies in the format, content, and focus of the curriculum (Finding 5) limit the abilities of teachers to implement effective lessons. The lack of a balanced approach to assessment impacts the opportunities for teachers to receive meaningful feedback on the impact of their lessons. (Finding 6 and Finding 7). Many of these findings combined with the public perception of the importance of the program has created a deficit culture within the K-8 world language program that is directly impacting students' learning experiences. While surveys and focus group confirm that teachers are committed to the program, they are also very concerned that without strong direction and increased district support the program will not be able to thrive and meet the mission outlined by the Public Schools of Brookline in 2005.

Recommendation

Develop embedded professional learning opportunities aligned to revised district expectations for lesson planning.

Consider:

- Identifying teachers in the district who can provide model lessons for other teachers.
- Establishing expectations for lesson planning that align instructional effectiveness across grade levels.

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Appendix A: Alignment of the review findings with the guiding principles of the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages³⁴

Guiding Principle 1:

Effective world language programs invite, include, support, and benefit all students.

- Finding 1: The K–12 world language program has a stated vision that enjoys the support of the school community.
- Finding 3: The program does not provide equitable access to world language learning experiences for all students.

Guiding Principle 2:

Effective world language programs lift up all students and empower them to act with cultural competence and critical consciousness.

- This was not a focus of the review.

Guiding Principle 3:

Effective world language programs produce high levels of linguistic and cultural proficiency in one or more world languages in their students.

- Finding 2: The program provides staff that allow for long sequences of articulated language courses, even when scheduled time or school space are limited.
- Finding 5: The program's curriculum varies in format, focus, and content and is not consistently aligned with national and state standards.
- Finding 10: Teachers' practices are often reflective of limiting beliefs in students' abilities to learn languages.

Guiding Principle 4:

Effective world language programs are communicative and support meaningful, authentic, and affirming interactions in the target language.

- Finding 10: Teachers' practices are often reflective of limiting beliefs in students' abilities to learn languages.
- Finding 11: Teacher effectiveness is directly impacted by limitations of the existing curriculum, scheduling choices, grade-level coordination, and district expectations.

³⁴ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *World Languages: Massachusetts Curriculum Framework—2021*. <https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/world-languages/2021.pdf>

Guiding Principle 5:

Effective world language programs measure linguistic proficiency.

- Finding 6: The program has not developed a balanced assessment approach that offers multiple ongoing formative assessment opportunities and feedback, summative assessments, and benchmark assessments.
- Finding 7: The program documents and reports student growth based on performance in world language class and external assessments.
- Finding 8: The program has established the foundation for students to earn the Seal of Biliteracy during high school, however there is currently no process in place to award the Seal to students.

Guiding Principle 6:

Effective world language programs foster risk-taking and mistake-making toward growth in linguistic and cultural proficiency.

- Finding 5: The program's curriculum varies in format, focus, and content and is not consistently aligned with national and state standards.
- Finding 10: Teachers' practices are often reflective of limiting beliefs in student's abilities to learn languages.

Guiding Principle 7:

Effective world language programs deliver meaningful, relevant, and cross-disciplinary content to motivate students to acquire the language and build proficiency.

- Finding 5: The program's curriculum varies in format, focus, and content and is not consistently aligned with national and state standards.
- Finding 9: Teachers use some core instructional strategies that are effective in facilitating language learning.

Guiding Principle 8:

Effective world language programs differentiate instruction and content, so that they are accessible, rigorous, and appropriate for all students.

- Finding 3: The program does not provide equitable access to world language learning experiences for all students.

Guiding Principle 9:

Effective world language programs connect students to their peers in the classroom, their community, and speakers/signers of the target language throughout the world.

- This was not a focus of the review.

Guiding Principle 10:

Effective world language programs promote social and emotional growth.

- This was not a focus of the review.

Appendix B: Glossary

Definition of a few key terms will help the reader better understand the report.

Authentic resources. Texts, visuals, audio, or video material, or any other material developed by and for native speakers of the target language.

Comprehensible Input. Comprehensible input refers to the language that students understand even when they do not understand all of what they hear or read. The language should be mostly understandable, and it is often presented as language that is one level beyond the level of the student.

Early language learning program. Previously referred to as foreign language in elementary schools (FLES), it describes a particular type of elementary school language program, one that calls for 30-40 minutes per day, three to five days per week. Effective early language learning programs are part of a K–12 sequence.

Heritage language learner. For purposes of this review, the most useful definition of a heritage language learner is someone who “is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken. The student may speak or merely understand the heritage language and be, to some degree, bilingual in English and the heritage language” (Valdés, 2000, 1).

Performance assessments. Performance assessments are tasks that students complete to provide evidence that they have met the performance objectives of a thematic unit. They are assessments which require and expect students to use language in real-life contexts.

Performance targets. A performance target sets an expectation of how well students are likely to perform given that they are working within a specific content or context during the program. The performance targets are taken directly from the performance indicators found in the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can Do Statements. (<https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>)

Proficiency. Proficiency is the ability to use language in real-world situations in a spontaneous interaction and non-rehearsed context and in a manner acceptable and appropriate to native speakers of the language. Proficiency demonstrates what a language user is able to do regardless of where, when, or how the language was acquired. Found in the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can Do Statements, the proficiency benchmarks identify the overarching features of language performance in each of the three modes of communication to describe learners’ progress along the ACTFL proficiency continuum from novice to distinguished.

Proficiency targets. Proficiency targets are used to set goals for how well students will use language at certain pre-decided points in time. The goals are based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. (<https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/actfl-proficiency-guidelines>)

Seal of Biliteracy. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, “The State Seal of Biliteracy is an award provided by state approved districts that recognizes high school graduates who attain high functional and academic levels of proficiency in English and a world language in recognition of having studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation.”³⁵ The Seal of Biliteracy was first implemented in California and is now offered in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Massachusetts adopted the Seal of Biliteracy in 2017, and 176 districts in Massachusetts currently offer the Seal of Biliteracy to their graduates.³⁶

Second language acquisition. Brookline’s K–8 language program is a second language acquisition program,³⁷ meaning that it is intended primarily for students who are not consistently exposed to the language outside of school, unlike heritage language learners.

Target language. Target language refers to the language other than one’s native language that is learned by students in the classroom.

Thematic unit. A thematic unit organizes curriculum around a specific theme which provides a meaningful and purposeful context that is cognitively engaging and relevant for learners. The theme allows for integration of topics and content areas and is often guided by an essential question. The unit includes a specific proficiency target, performance objectives and assessments to determine if students have met the objectives of the unit.

³⁵ <https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy>

³⁶ <https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy>

³⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/17Lti80v8KjxrmUSdem0iy-wTf8EgpoqR/view>