

**Feasibility Report     Mount Pleasant Central School District**  
**Elementary World Language Program K-5 at Hawthorne and Columbus Elementary**

**Introduction**

Mount Pleasant Central School District (MPCSD) requested a feasibility study for the development and implementation of a World Language Elementary program, thereby extending the existing 6-12 program down to Kindergarten. The scope of the study explored Hawthorne and Columbus faculty input, requests, and concerns with regard to curricular models, schedules, materials, and staffing. Group and individual interviews with students, teachers and administrators were conducted, as well as class observations and closing questions for teachers in STEAM subjects. One limitation of the study was the lack of survey data of all MPCSD parents and staff. Survey data from participating Hawthorne parents were presented with overall comments taken in consideration. No audio or video recordings were collected during site visits. Administration, instructional staff and students extended a happy, kind, and nurturing atmosphere in both buildings. Everyone appeared confident and safe to express themselves, learn out loud, help and respect others. Faculty enthusiasm for teaching was infectious; the children were thoroughly enjoying their learning experiences here and supported each other in doing so.

In addition to meetings with Drs. Bronstein and Giarrizzo, the study included with building administrators Michael Cunzio, Principal of Columbus Elementary, Anne Stern, Principal of Hawthorne Elementary, and Erica Denman, Assistant Principal of both schools. The study also included group and individual interviews with STEAM and/or Encore teachers, including Lauralee Chambers, Adam Yaeger, ConnieMarie Rao, Austin Alianiello, and Carolyn MacCullough. Also included were visits to classrooms, grade level as well as encore classes during a full day at each school and two combined days with faculty from both schools.

**SWOT analysis**

The goal of this feasibility study was to determine if design and implementation of a FLES program is viable. This report used a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis is a well-recognized strategic planning technique used to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats related to project planning. Four visits occurred consisting of classroom observations and interviews. Schedules and curricular materials were presented upon request.

***Strengths***

Faculty were very receptive and enthusiastic about the prospect of a FLES extension program. Common branch and Encore/Special teachers cited the value of early World Language learning and were eager to answer questions and give feedback. They cited the diversity of the MPCSD community and how much parents could offer the school with cultural activities year-

round. There are many unique spaces for academic, artistic and cultural events. Faculty are highly motivated and creative educators who have maintained a caring, supportive atmosphere to learn and work.

### **Weaknesses**

Faculty wanted more connection with the community and involvement in activities between schools. There could be more involvement with culture bearers in the community and visibility of cultures within the curriculum. They hoped there would be enough time for the FLES teacher to collaborate with them.

### **Opportunities**

The visual and performing arts programs are stellar. The World Language FLES teachers can be the umbrella for all STEAM and make the FLES program focused on culture and the arts unlike any other program in the county, a true stand-out. These faculty collaborations will create a unique program due to the talent you already have. Involve parents for arts integration of all cultures represented at MPCSD. Offer lectures, exhibitions and such by inviting authors, artists, engineers, from your parent and community base.

### **Threats**

Although there were none expressed by faculty, there are external considerations. It is important that each building has its own FLES teacher. There is a shortage of WL teachers, particularly for Spanish and Italian. Dual certified teachers are rare. However, creative thinking for your particular needs hire opens possibilities for optimal candidates. Suggestions are below.

### **Summary**

As a result of interviews with Mount Pleasant CSD teachers, administrators, and students, the following action plan is **positive** for recommending expansion of the world language curriculum- Kindergarten-5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Mount Pleasant CSD seeks consistent, high quality World Language instruction for all learners, in keeping with the nine goal areas in the **Portrait of a Mount Pleasant Learner**. In respect to this mission, Mount Pleasant Central School District can offer a comprehensive **content-enriched sequential FLES model** in two target languages in grades K through 12. ASL is currently offered only at the secondary level. Sequential FLES is learned within the themes and topics of the mainstream and encore curriculum content objectives.

In order to implement the curriculum that the Mount Pleasant CSD community desires, it is recommended that MPCSD offer a sequential, articulated WL model that:

- 1) Gives all students at Hawthorne and Columbus schools the opportunity to develop Italian and Spanish language with proficiency-based curriculum and assessments integrated with the 3 modes of communication with an intercultural competence focus.

- 2) Offers elementary students in grades K through 5 Italian and Spanish with a FLEX experience K-4 and to choose one in the 5th grade.
- 3) Designs a content-enriched language curriculum in collaboration with common branch and STEAM teachers.
- 4) Articulates into the 6-12 secondary Italian and Spanish program.
- 5) Engages learners in both Hawthorne and Columbus schools in visible projects, tasks, and activities reflecting not only the two languages and cultures offered by also those of the diverse families represented in the Mount Pleasant community.

MPCSD world language curriculum is in the design process of a **proficiency**-based model of language acquisition with the [five World-Readiness Standards](#): Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities. The revised NYS Standards still focus on the first two standards with Comparisons absorbed therein as they transition from a 30-year hiatus. Incorporating all five agrees with district goals on alignment to content areas and desired language and culture visibility within the community they serve.

MPCSD seeks to provide language learners with a seamless experience of language acquisition through vertical and horizontal **articulation** throughout the scope and sequence. Learners K-12 will use the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes of communication to develop proficiency in the chosen target language. Learners will acquire meaningful understanding of the products, practices, and perspectives found within the target culture. Via engagement in content-based thematic units, **Cultural Community Authentic Texts**, and performance assessment tasks, learners will demonstrate **transfer** via problem solving and critical thinking tasks, collaboration, resilience, and empathy. Learners at MPCSD will develop a **key performance catalogue** or artifacts of tasks that demonstrate the intercultural communicative competence required as twenty-first century global citizens.

### **Faculty hiring recommendations**

World Language 6-12 **faculty content leader becomes K-12** for MPCSD, in order to collaborate with K-12 music, visual arts, FCS, and ENL.

Encore/Special teachers requested to be on the hiring committee for the WL teachers. They seek a colleague who will overarch and be a common thread across encores: “creative, risk taker, understands childhood, designs lessons with us.’

**One WL teacher for each building**, the practice currently in place for other specials and recommended by MPCSD faculty. It is highly recommended that the district considers candidates with experience teaching young learners, who have language proficiency and will ensure content connections. These two teachers need to be open to collaboration with other content areas, understand language acquisition with vertical articulation to create a smooth K-

12 alignment. This means the best candidate may not have a BA in the language itself or is a traditional Spanish or Italian teacher, but is:

- 1) a K-12 music, art, theatre, ENL, or common branch teacher proficient in the languages however they acquired them, who can then add the world language(s) certification to their resume if they have not already done so. In order to do so, they need to score at least advanced low on the [OPI and WPT exams](#) in the given language(s), take the Content Specialty Tests, and preferably, a WL methods course or significant WL professional development. Nicole Ponte, 3rd grade teacher, heritage Italian, is an example. Someone like ConnieMarie Rao or Lauralee Chambers with language proficiency. Given the shortage of WL teachers, we seek these teachers to add WL certification.
- 2) a certified WL/ENL teacher but without a BA in the language. This teacher may be a career changer and now they are certified to teach languages. They have demonstrated advanced language proficiency and preferably a visual and/or performing arts background and have other childhood field experience, such as music for children or theatre. This candidate may have the FLES extension or needs it if certified 7-12 only. Given the WL teacher shortage, this is the largest group seeking certification.
- 3) a certified WL teacher with dual certification Italian/Spanish. A BA/MA in the language is fine, but they must demonstrate experience or willingness to collaborate with your STEAM/FCS/common branch faculty to push in and align with that curriculum as well as echo it during their encore sessions. As discussed, it is not advised that this program be isolated from the rest of the curriculum, with alphabets, colors, animals, etc., repeated for 5 years.

## Schedule

Given district input and interest to integrate with content areas, a **hybrid of both push-in and encore/special time** is recommended. These teachers will collaborate with grade level teachers to push in for content specific vocabulary and material, as well as have dedicated time during the week during the designated schedule for encore/special currently in place. If there is any flexibility in the given schedules or possibility of expanding that designated time to more than once a week, it is highly recommended and should be discussed further.

## Implementation

Currently, students choose a language in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. With the FLEX expansion, students choose for 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The three scenarios below each have benefits and the decision will depend on staffing and timing of impact on 6-12 program.

**Scenario 1:** FLES program starts first year with K-1<sup>st</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade the second year, and 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade the third year.

**Scenario 2:** FLES program starts with 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> the first year, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> the second year, and 1<sup>st</sup> and K in the third year.

**Scenario 3:** FLES program starts with 5<sup>th</sup> and K the first year, 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> the second year, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> the third year.

### **Proficiency targets for K-5**

After completing the K-5 sequence, students are expected to perform at the Novice-Mid level of proficiency, as established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. See [ACTFL Performance Descriptors](#). At the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the revised NYS WL graduation requirement is a proficiency range of Novice Mid-Novice High.

Learners at the Novice-Mid level can:

- Understand short, simple phrases, sentences and directions.
- Engage in simple conversations about familiar topics. Learners will be able to describe themselves, others and objects around them; discuss daily life; express basic opinions; talk about their community; communicate aspects of culture, and content-based material.
- Speak and write in short sentences.
- Read and understand brief texts on familiar material when supported by visual cues.

### **Making language accessible and products visible**

MPCSD faculty supported the importance of developing functional proficiency in Italian and Spanish at earlier stages of language acquisition. They also seek meaningful contexts for developing intercultural competence. To this end, they want to do this through the languages taught at MPCSD, but also create opportunities for reflection and inclusion of cultures represented in the school community on an ongoing basis. The Hawthorne survey revealed a diverse community that can be represented both inside and outside school. Faculty and students expressed interest in showcasing visible products made by and for developing language learners at all levels of engagement, that have value outside the classroom to be seen by the community at large. They also want culture bearers to visit the school for community engagement. By aligning with content areas and not presented in isolation, intercultural communicative competence builds understanding and appreciation for other cultures and a global perspective across content areas. It was suggested that Nick DiPaolo, parent, community and school leader is primed to promote WL visibility of student projects and products in the community. A survey developed in collaboration with PTA, admins, and Mr. DiPaolo could offer further suggestions on FLES implementation and community engagement within the schools.

## **Glossary**

**Articulation** is intentional, collaborative curriculum and assessment design between levels via intercultural concepts and transdisciplinary performance transfer tasks.

**Cultural Community Authentic Texts** are spoken, written, signed, created, or viewed media designed by cultural communities for the public to consume, use, or experience.

**Key Performance Catalogue** is a set of performance tasks that all learners in your program will do by the time they finish your school or program. These are designed across languages and levels by teaching faculty.

**Proficiency** refers to how well someone uses the language in an unplanned manner at any given time wherever they are, regardless of when, how, or where language is acquired.

**Transfer** evidence for world language education is when we can use our knowledge and skills repertoire independently to solve novel intercultural challenges or create a product of value with no cues or instructional help.

**World Readiness Standards** are the [5Cs](#): Communication, Culture, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet and work with the faculty and staff at Hawthorne and Columbus Schools. They shared with me so much of their expertise and creativity in their work. I welcomed the opportunity to get to know them, visit their classes, and understand their vision for their work and for your learners. Please let me know if you have any questions or wish to follow up on any next steps regarding the points in this report.

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