

West Hartford Public School District

Agenda Item: World Language Program Report

Meeting Date: October 1, 2013

From: Nancy DePalma, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Lucy Cartland, World Language Department Supervisor, Bert Neumaier, World Language Department Supervisor

Through: Karen L. List, Superintendent

What is the mission of the West Hartford World Language Program?

The mission of the West Hartford World Language (WL) Program is to enable our students to communicate effectively in the target language, to develop an understanding of the cultures of the speakers of that language, and to compare those cultures to their own. As a result, students will be able to use essential 21st century academic skills across other disciplines, demonstrating themselves to be lifelong learners and engaged members of the global community. The World Language Department believes that all students can and should learn another language other than English in order to be linguistically and culturally prepared to function as world citizens.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) National Content Standards are the cornerstone of world language instruction. They are built upon the philosophy that we must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. The standards are compacted into what are known as *The Five Cs*: **Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities**. As part of the Cultures Standard, the *Three Ps of Cultures* are universally accepted as a methodology for examining culture in the world language classroom at any level: **Practices, Products**, and most importantly, **Perspectives**. Students examine a tradition (**Practice**) or an artifact or item (**Product**) and with teacher guidance, discuss the **Perspective** on the home culture and the new culture they are learning about. This instruction is both standards and performance based.

The ACTFL National Performance Standards established the Proficiency Guidelines, which are research based levels of language performance in the four skills of: **speaking, listening, reading** and **writing**. The world language performance standards are benchmarked by proficiency levels rather than grade levels. These proficiency levels—identified by the terms **novice, intermediate, advanced**, and **superior**—are language performance descriptors designed to categorize students' language ability at various points along the language learning continuum. The skills of speaking and writing are nationally calibrated and are included as part of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) certification for different languages through the Oral Proficiency Interview and the (Writing Proficiency Test). Students in the West Hartford WL Program aim and often reach the intermediate/advanced level preparing them for continued language learning at the college or university level. This is the result of a well-developed sequence of language learning provided in the district.

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What are the World Language pathways?

The elementary world language program is provided by eight teachers who instruct students from grades 3 through 5 in all district elementary schools. At Charter Oak International Academy students are taught Spanish from Pre-K to grade 5. Norfeldt students receive instruction in French while all other students learn Spanish. Elementary students receive one hour of instruction per week divided into two thirty-minute classes. The elementary experience establishes the academic foundation of the language learning pathway in West Hartford.

The middle school world language program is provided by twenty-one teachers who teach French or Spanish in grades 6-8. Classes are approximately forty minutes five days per week. World language is a core academic subject with our teachers as fully participating members of the different teams. Several WL teachers at each middle school are in fact team leaders. Students continue throughout their middle school years in one language.

The high school world language program is provided by twenty-five teachers who teach Ancient Greek, Chinese, French, Latin or Spanish. Classes are approximately forty-five minutes five days per week. Students are able to continue learning French or Spanish at the high school through the sixth year of study with offerings that include French/Spanish VI, Advanced Placement (AP) French Language and Culture, AP Spanish Language and Culture, and AP Spanish Literature and Culture. While many middle school students choose to continue with their middle school WL choice, they are able to change languages. High School programming includes up to four years of: Ancient Greek, Chinese or Latin, in addition to French and Spanish as a second world language. Since students are able to change languages, some add a second world language to increase their WL profile, adding a single year of, for example, Latin or Chinese. Classes at the honors level provide a pathway with increased challenge and rigor. Native and/or fluent speakers are able to advance to higher levels upon successful performance on a departmentally established placement test.

What does the curriculum look like in the different language pathways?

The elementary curriculum provides students with instruction that is content based, with Spanish (or French at Norfeldt) theme-based or topical instruction aligned to classroom topics. Curriculum is written to reflect major themes (e.g., greetings, weather, clothing, numbers, colors, our school, our community, our world) of the elementary classroom. Activities and learning strategies are age and learner appropriate and include song, movement, rhythms, as well as providing a variety of interactive and differentiated activities at all levels. Most if not all of the instruction is in the target language. As a result, students are asked to respond verbally making them active world language speakers early in the program. As they progress through the program, they are called upon to perform increasingly complex and difficult language tasks. At key times during the program, students are assessed in meaningful and interactive ways to provide students with challenge and teachers with data about the level of rigor of the program. Reading and writing occur at all levels of the program and by the end of fifth grade, all students will read grade level appropriate short stories in the target language and write a personal description to include their likes and dislikes and other personal information. Students learn basic geography, a selection of holidays, cultural dress and traditions, as well as a foundational awareness and acceptance of different cultural products and practices.

The middle school curriculum continues to review, expand and enhance the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing learned at the elementary level. New themes, cultural topics, and additional challenges are included in the middle school WL program. Daily instructional time provides more opportunity for performance based activities that include oral and visual presentations, computer based speaking and listening activities. In class, students practice interpersonal speech with each other on a wide variety of “real life” topics and themes (e.g., going shopping, planning a trip, eating out with friends). Communication is a key focus used to support grammar instruction and vocabulary development delivered through examination of authentic

documents, video clips, technology based activities and other sources. Technology integration and cultural explorations serve to provide a high level of student interest, thereby enhancing student motivation and learning. By the end of the middle school experience, students speak comfortably in the target language (French or Spanish) with each other and the teacher, interact with small student groups, make presentations on a variety of topics, read three short high interest novels, understand video presentations and communicate verbally and in writing. Students are knowledgeable about several geographic regions (e.g., Mexico, Québec) and explore the cultural practices, products and perspectives of these regions.

The high school curriculum builds on the middle school program and continues to expand and enhance student learning in both communication and level of accuracy in all skill areas. An articulated sequence of learning builds students’ capacity to perform in the target language at high levels throughout their four high school years. Situational activities, authentic media, interviews, surveys, classroom discussions, and email activities with other language students provide opportunities for students to improve language ability.

All along the spectrum, students refine their understanding of grammatical structures, build their vocabulary, read material ranging from the contemporary press to the classics, from *El Mundo* to *Le Petit Prince*, and continue to develop to speak on topics of general interest with personal elaboration. The richness of the WL curriculum includes connections to 21st century skills, of communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, and information, media, and technology literacy. Students practice language skills in authentic settings (e.g. after researching, write a composition in the target language explaining where you would prefer to live listing advantages and disadvantages of each). The WL program provides multiple opportunities for students to build on prior knowledge through previous language experience whether continuing study in a language or starting a new language from among the broadened range of choices.

The West Hartford World Language faculty is composed of fifty-two educators, who bring excellence in their language abilities, cultural perspectives, and enthusiasm for and success in teaching the WL classrooms Pre-K to grade 12. Most of the faculty has achieved a master’s degree in language, curriculum development or education. Several have or are currently working on their PhDs. Twenty-eight (54%) of the WL faculty possess native or near native abilities in languages from the following countries: *Argentina, Belgium, China, Colombia, La Cote D’Ivoire, France, Panama, Puerto Rico, Spain, and Taiwan*. These teachers’ experiences living or working in a country for an extended period of time provide them invaluable perspective as well as a bilingual/bicultural understanding of the culture or cultures of the target country. Ten of the fifty-two educators are graduates of the Alternate Route to Certification (ARC), a program that trains highly qualified teachers of language building on their other career/work experiences (e.g., business, law, and international teaching).

How do we assess our students?

The WL program has a natural connection with authentic assessment since the primary purpose of learning a world language is to communicate ideas and negotiate meaning with others. With this fundamental and measurable connection to real life, the WL curriculum includes age appropriate opportunities at all levels for students to demonstrate what they know, understand and are able to do in the target language. Teachers use multiple methods and modalities for students demonstrate what they know in the target language. “Can the student understand or be understood in the target language, and how well?” This question frames WL teachers’ discussions in their collaborative inquiry team (CIT) meetings while reviewing student performance.

The ACTFL and CT State Frameworks for World Language Teaching and Learning continue to provide ongoing and updated resources for teachers. Speaking rubrics written by the WL teachers are aligned with the benchmarks below established by our national professional organization.

- **Comprehension** – How well does the student understand?
- **Comprehensibility** – How well is the student understood?
- **Vocabulary** – How extensive and applicable is the student’s vocabulary?
- **Language Control** – How accurate is the student’s language?
- **Cultural Awareness** – How is the student’s cultural knowledge reflected in language use?
- **Communication Strategies** – How does the student maintain communication?

ACTFL resources include researched-based writing rubrics. In addition, the school wide rubrics developed in conjunction with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) standards provide clear and coordinated direction for the high school WL teachers.

Assessment

Formative assessments at the elementary level occur as the students work individually or in small groups on activities such as identifying vocabulary by matching pictures with basic words, etc. At middle and high school, formative assessments include a wider range of activities given that the instructional time provides more opportunities to weave all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) into the learning. Assessments include: short, listening activities focused around key vocabulary or expressions and reading and writing within authentic contexts (e.g. read a train schedule and identify key information; study a picture and describe the scene with elaboration; create a shopping list of 8 items with quantities, etc.). At the high school, the learning lab is used to provide listening activities and record student responses which add a spoken language component. Teachers at all levels differentiate the content and format of assessments based on student need.

Summative elementary assessments include authentic experiences that measure students’ reading, speaking, listening and comprehension skills. For example, all students are asked to read a passage in the target language and answer both factual and critical thinking questions which could include deciding on the best title for the passage to demonstrate comprehension. All fourth and fifth grade students listen and view the digital production of a conversation and then answer a series of questions about what they heard and saw. Summative assessments at the middle level are under development and include common performance based assessments set within a wide variety of themes. Assessments are evaluated using common WL rubrics during CIT meetings where teachers review student work, compare results, and collaborate on instructional adjustments. High school summative assessments are also varied in length and complexity. Summative assessment may take the form of traditional assessment but more commonly are performance based. For example, students may conduct an oral presentation (in the target language) to complement a writing assignment using supporting visuals (e.g., PowerPoint). In addition to these examples, teachers administer common unit assessments, midterms and final exams.

How does the World Language Department mission and vision align to the WHPS mission and Common Core State Standards?

The WL mission and belief statement are well aligned with the WHPS mission. Consider the below statements:

WHPS Mission Statement:

To inspire and prepare all students to realize their potential and enhance our global community.

The World Language Department Statement of Belief:

The World Language Department believes that all students can learn another language other than English and follows the standards set forth by the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language, the national professional organization for all world language teachers elementary through college.

The World Language Department Mission Statement:

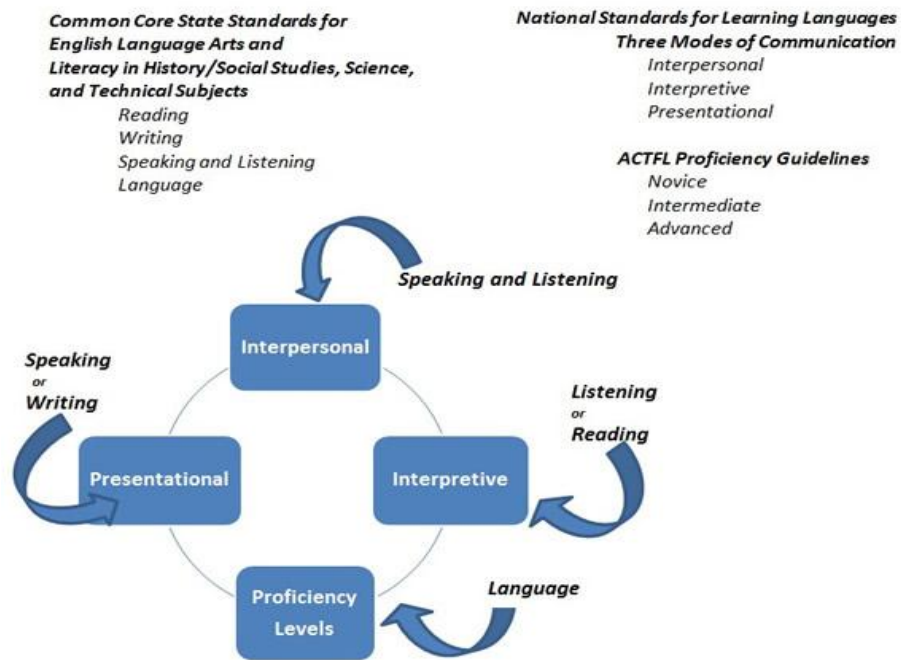
The mission of the West Hartford World Language Program is to enable our students to communicate effectively in the target language, to develop an understanding of the cultures of the speakers of that language, and to compare those cultures to their own. As a result, students will be able to use this essential 21st century academic skills across learning other disciplines, demonstrating themselves to be lifelong learners and engaged members of the global community.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy (CCSS-ELA) and ACTFL Content Standards

World Language instruction aligns directly to CCSS-ELA given our basic purpose is to teach literacy and develop language proficiency. ACTFL has provided a draft document for WL professionals that clearly demonstrate the connections to the learning strands of the CCSS-ELA. As previously described, the ACTFL National Standards for World Language Learners are known as The Five Cs: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. The CCSS ELA content strands of *Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening Strands* parallel the Communication standards within world language and represent the four fundamental world language skills. ACTFL National Performance standards (proficiency levels of Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced) are well aligned with the CCSS-ELA *Language Strand*. The example below provides a comparison of one indicator in the CCSS-ELA of the Reading Strand.

Common Core State Standards – ELA	ACTFL Standards for Learning Languages
Reading	Interpretive Reading, Listening, Viewing
Range of Reading & Level of text Complexity	Range of Reading & Level of text Complexity
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently	Interpretive Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students monitor comprehension and use other sources to enhance understanding.• Students apply critical reading skills to authentic written and aural sources. Cultural Comparisons <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students compare and reflect on products, practices, and /or perspectives of the target culture and the student’s culture. Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students interpret written and aural texts within the communities of the target language.

The CCSS-ELA / ACTFL cross-walk chart below shows the alignment and integration of the CCSS-ELA strands and the ACTFL Content Standards and Proficiency Guidelines as seen through the modes of communication.



What does the future hold?

The WL Department (PK-12) started the 2013-2014 school year with an overview of significant summer curriculum work that produced a **Rigorous Curriculum Design template** for world language units. A district vertical team worked to create a template aligned with the common templates in use in the other academic areas. Various components, including but not limited to **Common Vocabulary Lists (CVLs)**, **Assured Learning Experiences (ALEs)**, **Common Formative Assessments (CFAs)**, connections to the **21st Century Skills**, were already in place and transitioning to use of this new template will be a logical next step. Having a common template gives the department the ability to further refine and align units at all grade levels, and provides clear expectations when developing new units. Several new units were created at the end of the summer and are in draft/review status. These efforts will have a positive effect on our students by increasing coherence across the district. In addition, this work informs the World Language Five Year Curriculum Review and future planning for improvement.