



Washington State Language Study

**Senator Pam Roach**

31st Legislative District

# Foreign Language Education: Washington's Elementary Schools

April 26, 2007



**Sen. Pam Roach**

Washington's 296 school districts were asked to participate. There was a tremendous amount of interest among respondents. It is hoped that this report will inspire parents, educators and legislators to provide more foreign language instruction to our youngest students.

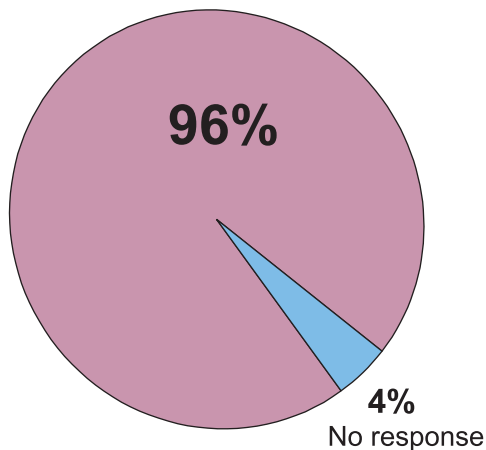
I'm a strong proponent of teaching foreign languages in our elementary schools.

During the 2007 legislative session my intern\* conducted a detailed survey to inventory foreign language instruction in the elementary schools (K-5) of Washington state. As chart 1 shows, there was a response rate of more than 95 percent.

Superintendents in each of

**Chart 1  
Survey Participation**

284 of 296 school districts



■ Response    ■ No response

## Summary

This report is an inventory of foreign language instruction at the elementary school level in Washington state.

**Total number of school districts in Washington state: 296**

**School districts with formal elementary language programs: 37**

**Number of K-5 students enrolled in elementary language programs:**

7,002 (about 1.55 percent of the 451,067 K-5 students statewide)

### Types of programs:

Immersion: 4  
Dual Language: 14  
FLES: 9  
Exploratory: 10

### Languages of instruction:

Spanish, Japanese, French, Salish, Klallum, Makah

## INSIDE THIS REPORT

- Immersion programs and dual language
- FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary Schools)
- FLEX (Foreign Language Exploratory Programs)
- Additional notes
- Districts by program type

\* This foreign language education report was compiled by Sen. Roach's 2007 legislative intern, Jonathan Stephenson. Jonathan, a recent graduate of the University of Washington, is interested in education policy and is fluent in Spanish.

## Findings

Of the respondents, 37 school districts reported having a form of foreign language program in their elementary schools.

The programs reported were categorized in three types:

- Immersion
- Foreign Language in Elementary Schools (FLES)
- Foreign Language Exploratory Programs (FLEX)

## Immersion

Immersion students are required to learn grade level material in another language. Many programs begin in kindergarten or first grade and progress through the years. Some districts start with just one or two classes while others involve a whole elementary school.

- In the Bellevue School District, an entire elementary school (Puesta del Sol) is immersed in Spanish.
- The Tacoma School District has an 80/20 split. This means that 20 percent of instruction takes place in the target language and 80 percent in English.
- The type of instruction in the Seattle School District is a 50/50 split. Half of instruction is in English and half of it is in the target language.

## Dual language

A dual language program is a form of immersion that strives to have equal numbers of native foreign language speakers and English speakers. This is the most common type of program in Washington state. Funding is provided through the English Language Learner (ELL) program. Instruction is divided by subject. Generally, science and social studies are taught in Spanish while math is taught in English. Some schools alternate the language of the day with Monday, Wednesday and Friday in Spanish and Tuesday and Thursday in English.

**FLES** (Foreign Language in Elementary Schools) (Pullout instruction)

FLES, the more traditional manner of language instruction, is language instruction as a subject of study. FLES instruction is a stand-alone class with little implementation outside of that specific class time. The most common form for this type of instruction comes from school districts with tribal language programs.

Chart 2  
Percentage of schools with language programs

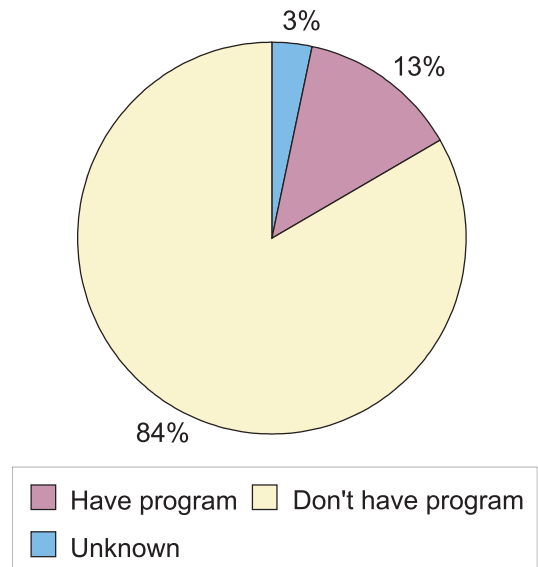


Chart 3  
Types of programs

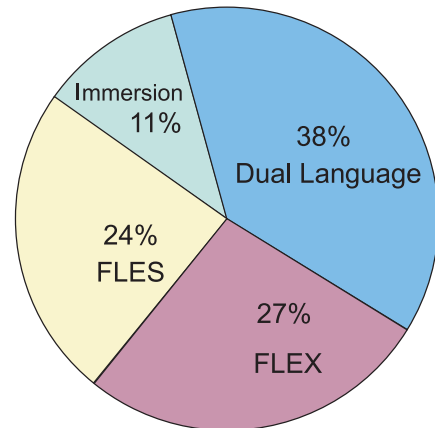
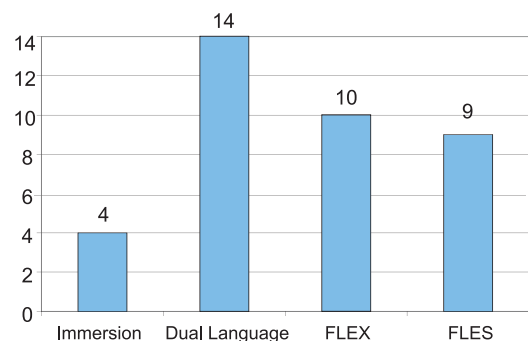


Chart 4  
Number of school districts by program type



## **FLEX** (Foreign Language Exploratory Programs)

FLEX is an exploratory instruction model used to introduce cultural awareness and create familiarity with foreign languages. This lays the groundwork for future academic instruction. Most teachers in these programs devote about 60 minutes a week to language instruction for several weeks during the school year.

## **Extended Day**

Several schools report having extended day programs. Fifteen schools report having extended day programs, but as they are not part of the curriculum for elementary schools, it was not included in the survey. Extended day refers to either before-or after-school programs that students can attend. These programs are generally funded by student fees. Sometimes, funding is provided through the PTA or community donations. The Anacortes School District responded with the most extensive extended day program with 96 students participating. They have language programs teaching Spanish, French, Japanese and American Sign Language.

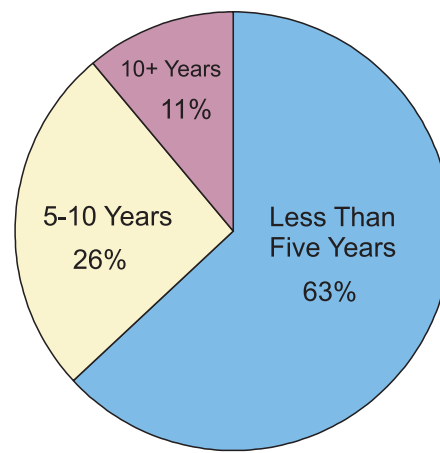
## **Program length**

Chart 5 shows almost two-thirds of the school districts have had language programs for less than five years. Those that have had a program for five or six years have students who are just now entering into middle school. Only three school districts reported having a program for more than 10 years.

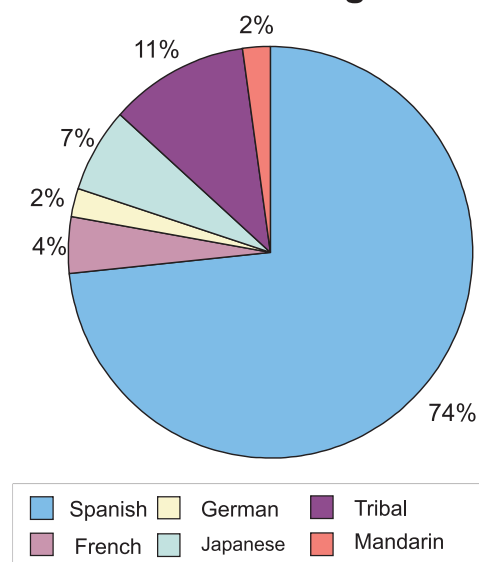
## **Languages**

Chart 6 shows that almost three-fourths of all language instruction programs at the elementary level teach Spanish. The Tacoma and Seattle school districts are the only school districts with multiple language immersion programs, while Cheney allows for exploratory instruction in multiple languages depending on the teacher and the class. Tacoma has one school divided into four groups, one in French, one in Spanish, one in Japanese and one in English. Seattle has its programs in various schools and is expanding to include Mandarin Chinese in 2008. There are also a number of programs teaching tribal languages including Salish, Klallum and Makah.

**Chart 5**  
**Program Length**



**Chart 6**  
**Languages Taught by Number of Programs**



## Additional notes:

Grandview is the only school district with more than one elementary school (they have three) to have all students in bilingual instruction beyond the exploratory level.

Also, Bellevue's immersion program extends from kindergarten through 12th grade, although students can opt out after elementary school. Wellpinit is the other K-12 program "teaching Salish," but it is a pullout (FLES) class.

### Number of K-5 students in school districts with immersion programs

Bellevue (460)	Seattle (546)
Marysville (35)	Tacoma (400)

### Number of K-5 students in school districts with dual language programs

Burlington-Edison (195)	Shelton (486)
College Place (142)	Sumner (50)
East Valley-Yakima (200)	Sunnyside (586)
Grandview (400)	Vancouver (100)
Kennewick (56)	Walla Walla (200)
Northshore (194)	Wenatchee (270)
Pasco (120)	West Valley-Spokane (200)

### Number of K-5 students in school districts with FLES programs

Cape Flattery (64)	Oakville (35)
Cusick (141)	Port Angeles (360)
Inchelium (89)	Summit Valley (20)
Kelso (70)	Wellpinit (176)
Manson (286)	

### Number of K-5 students in school districts with FLEX programs

Bainbridge Island (587)	Naselle-Grays River Valley (27)
Cheney (undetermined)	North Kitsap (100)
Longview (16)	Onalaska (160)
Methow Valley (135)	Puyallup (68)
Mill A-Skamania County (9)	Shaw Island (19)

### Number of K-5 students in school districts with tribal language programs

Cape Flattery	Port Angeles
Cusick	Wellpinit
Inchelium	

## Creating a foreign language pilot program for elementary schools

I introduced legislation this year aiming to make foreign language instruction a higher priority in our elementary schools. Substitute Senate Bill 5714 would create a two-year Spanish and Chinese language instruction pilot program in which two Washington school districts would participate. Each district would receive \$500,000 to take part in the program.

The bill passed unanimously in the Senate and later passed in the House Education Committee. Unfortunately, it did not clear the House Appropriations Committee, so in a year with a \$2.1 billion revenue surplus and a budget with more than \$13 billion in K-12 education spending, there was no funding to advance the teaching of foreign language to students at any level.

The issue has become popular among parents, and it is supported by the state Parent Teacher Student Association. All children should have the opportunity to compete in our state and world economy. Knowing a foreign language will help make that possible. Sadly, that opportunity is only given to children whose parents speak something other than English in the home.

Although the pilot program won't happen this year, I plan to try again in 2008. The program could be the starting point where our public schools finally make foreign language instruction a priority.



Sen. Roach meets with a first-grade dual language class at Daffodil Elementary School in Sumner.

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