

FLES* Advocacy and Promotion (1)

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Introduction

Recently, I had the opportunity to interview a group of parents whose children had been studying a foreign language in their elementary schools for approximately one year. I asked, “Are you pleased with your child’s progress in the foreign language?” Most of them responded, “No.” When pressed to expand on their response, they said:

“I expected them to be speaking the foreign language more...”

“We wanted the teacher to stress speaking...”

“She couldn’t even order food in a restaurant!”

“He never uses the language at home.”

“She likes it, but she can’t tell me what she learned each day.”

These comments seem to be typical of some parents’ reactions to FLES* programs across the country, not because FLES* programs are not working, but because of a number of different reasons, particularly the following:

- Parents’ expectations for FLES* are unrealistic in that they do not understand the process of language learning and acquisition. They fail to understand that FLES* is the introduction to a long language-learning sequence. If parents expect students to be “fluent” after one year of study of a foreign language, with very few contact hours, they will be greatly disappointed. Foreign language educators should be careful about specifying what kind of program can really be delivered, given the various constraints, often beyond their control, such as the schedule, and limited funding.
- The school or district has not clearly communicated to the parents the objectives and expected outcomes of the FLES* program, or the specific goals for each unit and each year’s course of study. Often, the goals are too general. They should be stated in specific descriptors of what students will be able to do in the foreign language, and the level of accuracy they can expect to achieve.
- The time and frequency of FLES* sessions do not realistically match the FLES* goals and outcomes. Furthermore, sessions may be canceled for such reasons as field trips, guest speakers, special assembly programs, and extra practice for No Child Left Behind tests.
- Sometimes FLES* teachers have an inordinately heavy teaching load, at times in more than one school. Teaching more than 400 students in

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multiple grade levels creates almost impossible teaching and learning situations.

- FLES* enthusiasts have sometimes exaggerated students' ease in learning a foreign language. Some of us have used phrases such as "children soak up the language like sponges." This often accounts for the "disconnect" between the unrealistic expectations of parents and what can realistically be achieved in FLES* programs.
- Parents get discouraged when vertical articulation plans (if any) are not implemented when students move on to the middle school and are required to start the foreign language all over again.
- There is no definition of what "fluency" means at the end of the FLES* level. It is difficult to provide this definition because there are so many different models being implemented across the nation. This diversity in contact hours swings from once-a-week to 5-day-a-week programs, from partial to total or dual immersion, with a wide array of different total class-time schedules. There are various types of program models, instructional models, lengths of FLES* program sequences and time allocated for class in the foreign language. The ACTFL model on Early Language Learning attempts to establish some kind of standard approach through which to view all these differences, when it outlines minimum recommendations for scheduling in its *Position Statement on Early Language learning*.(2)

The Research Basis for FLES* Programs

Many research studies, over the years, have justified the statement in the ACTFL Performance Guidelines that "Students who start earlier have a distinct advantage."(3) The following selected research studies offer concrete evidence for parents, school board members, decision-makers, and members of the school or school district community:

1. Research studies supporting FLES* programs

Brain researchers have strongly recommended that foreign language study begin before the age of ten, when the language area of the brain is most receptive. The following represent some of their findings:

- Penfield, a neurosurgeon, encouraged children's study of foreign languages before the language and speech patterns lose their plasticity. (4)
- Chugani and other brain researchers used P.E.T. (Positron Emission Tomography) to observe brain development and language function, and found that the language areas were most active before the age of ten. (5)
- Thompson, another brain researcher, stated that "...brain researchers and educators have known for years that a 'critical period' in which children are most efficient at learning new languages ends around puberty."(6)

- Thompson and his colleagues studied areas of the brain, and scanned children aged 3 to 15 to determine which areas had extraordinary growth. They found dramatic growth in the regions of the brain that support learning new languages in children aged 7–11.(7)

2. Children learn pronunciation more easily than adults

The following studies support children’s advantage with regard to pronunciation and their brain receptivity:

- Dulay and others found that “children under ten who experience enough natural communication in target language nearly always succeed in attaining native-like proficiency, while those over fifteen rarely do.”(8)
- Wolfe and Brandt maintained that “it is more difficult to learn a foreign language after age ten or so, and the language will probably be spoken with an accent.”(9)
- Fathman reported that “preteen children are more successful at learning the phonology of a new language.”(10)

3. FLES* students outperform others on AP language tests

The early study of a foreign language has a long-term effect on how well students can perm in that language by the end of high school studies.

- A College Board report showed that students taking the 2002 AP examination who had started their study of French in Grade 3 or earlier or in Grades 4–6, outperformed those students who started their study of French in Grades 7–9 or in Grade 10 or later. (11)In an earlier study, it was found that students taking the 1995 AP examination who started their study of French in Grade 3 or earlier or Grades 4–6, outperformed those students who started their study of French in Grades 7-9 or in Grades 10–12. (12)

4. FLES* students outperform others on tests of basic skills in English

FLES* studies even have a positive influence on how students handle their own language.

- In a Louisiana statewide study, Taylor found that foreign language students in elementary school “outperformed their non-foreign language peers on every test (English, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies)...these findings underscore the positive effect continued foreign language study has on academic achievement.”(13) Similar results were obtained in an earlier Louisiana statewide study conducted by Rafferty. (14)

5. FLES* improves children’s cognitive skills

FLES* studies do not merely affect the language skills of children; they also enhance their thought processes.

- Foster and Reeves found that FLES students showed improved cognitive skills. (15)
- Landry demonstrated that students studying a foreign language showed improved creativity. (16)
- Landry, in another study, showed that students studying a foreign language showed increased divergent thinking. (17)

6. FLES* affects children’s cultural attitudes

FLES* studies have been shown to have a positive effect on the ways children react to other cultures and peoples. By early study of a foreign language and culture, they develop insights into other cultures and develop a sense of cultural pluralism.

- Carpenter. and Torney reported positive attitudes of FLES students toward speakers of the foreign language being studied. (18)
- Hancock and Lipton, and others, found positive attitudes of FLES students toward the French and French culture. (19)
- Donato and Tucker, and others, found positive attitudes of students in their study of attitudes, achievements and instruction in the later years of FLES. (20)

A Definition of “FLES* Exit Fluency”

FLES* studies have been shown to have a positive effect on the ways children react to other cultures and peoples. By early study of a foreign language and culture, they develop insights into other cultures and develop a sense of cultural

pluralism. However, in order to create a definition of FLES* “fluency,” certain program essentials must be stated.

Let us assume that the FLES* program does the following:

- follows ACTFL’s recommendation that early language learning should be “continuous throughout the school year, connected grade to grade, and more frequent than twice per week, adding up to at least 90 minutes per week...”(2)
- continues for a minimum of at least three years.
- is planned as an *initial stage* in a K-12 foreign language sequence.
- states clearly defined, realistic goals (the 5 Cs) as outlined in the National Foreign Language Standards. (21) (Expected outcomes for each unit and each year of FLES* instruction should be included.)
- is scheduled for sufficient class time, quality, and intensity to achieve these goals for each year of instruction. It should be remembered that these factors are of major importance in student performance.
- includes a written curriculum with language performance specifics and expected outcomes in thematic units, and based on the ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners, with the six language performance descriptors. (3)
- hires teachers who use appropriate methods and materials that support the curriculum. (These teachers know that students’ comprehension skills will be much higher than their oral and written communication skills.)
- employs teachers who are fluent in the foreign language and have received training in FLES* methods courses.
- has an effective, continuous assessment plan for demonstrating students’ progress across the following three modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational.

The Basis for “FLES* Exit Fluency”

There are six basic documents that may be used to define the kind of fluency to be expected as students leave a FLES* program. They are the following:

1. Clifford’s factors for language learning consist of a three-stage “hierarchy of learning”: “limited transfer learning for use in rehearsed situations;” “near transfer learning for use in a variety of similar situations;” and “far transfer learning for use in new, unfamiliar situations.” (22)
2. The National Foreign Language Standards include progress indicators and benchmarks for grades 4, 8, and 12. (21)

3. The National Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners Performance is described through the following three modes: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. There are six language performance descriptors as follows:
Comprehensibility, Comprehension, Language Control, Vocabulary, Cultural Awareness, and Communication Strategies. (3)
4. The SOPA (Student Oral Proficiency Assessment) is an oral proficiency assessment of young students' performance in oral fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. (23)
5. Rubrics are used in the evaluation of student recordings in portfolio assessments.
6. The FLES* Scale for the Evaluation of FLES* Programs is a checklist of characteristics of successful FLES* programs. (Appendix A)

The “FLES* Exit Fluency” definition

This encompasses a range of proficiency from Novice Low to Intermediate Mid Learner Proficiency levels on the ACTFL Performance Guidelines K-12 and deals with communication tasks in the target language, adapting Clifford's three stages of fluency, across the three modes of communication, and student performance on at least the mid-point of the rubric for accuracy.

1. **“Limited transfer learning”** involves accurate use of the target language in **rehearsed** situations, on topics of every day, functional, real-life situations in the present and future, in home, school and community activities, food, health, sports, songs, holidays, time, the calendar, weather, etc., with some cross-cultural elements.
2. **“Near transfer learning”** involves the accurate use of the target language in **similar** situations, in functional, topical, or thematic units (scenarios) with additional cross-cultural elements in the present, past, and future, such as celebrating family events, buying and preparing healthy foods, buying appropriate clothing for weather conditions, leisure time activities, playing with pets and friends, going to the doctor or dentist, going to the zoo, ordering in a restaurant, etc.
3. **“Far transfer learning”** involves the accurate use of the target language in **unfamiliar** situations, in real-life themes, with many cultural elements, in content-based or interdisciplinary units in science, social studies, or other areas of the elementary school curriculum, such as celebrating cross-cultural events, famous people and their contributions, past and present, the effect of global warming in different geographical locations,

expressing opinions on candidates in an election, and health issues for children around the world.

Benefits for students exiting a FLES* elementary school sequence

As has been mentioned above, FLES* students will have

- improved cognitive skills
- increased creativity
- increased divergent thinking
- improved self-esteem
- greatly improved listening skills
- a higher level of understanding the foreign language than in speaking it, because of the need for a substantial amount of “comprehensible input” as a foundation, based on Krashen’s work (24)
- increased attention to the need for accuracy, both oral and written, in the foreign language
- acquired linguistic abilities in accordance with the national foreign language standards and national foreign language performance guidelines
- reviewed and reinforced key concepts and abilities across the elementary school curriculum through a content-based, interdisciplinary approach
- used the language in 3 different modes: interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive
- acquired cultural insights about the people(s) who speak the foreign language
- used the foreign language in real-life and simulated real-life, functional situations, within the constraints of the curriculum themes and topics that were age-appropriate
- acquired near-native pronunciation of the foreign language if they started the study of the target language before the age of ten
- shown an awareness of cultural similarities and differences
- developed a sensitivity to different cultures and to people who speak foreign languages
- recognized the importance of studying one or more foreign languages in today’s and tomorrow’s world
- developed good study habits for many aspects of foreign language situations
- benefited by having more time to experience the sounds and patterns of the foreign language at an optimum time to learn
- experienced a sense of the power of being able to express one’s thoughts and wishes

- enjoyed access to authentic sources of the foreign language through technology
- opened their minds to new vistas and experiences for lifelong learning and adventure.

FLES*Advocacy and Promotion

FLES* advocacy and promotion should begin in the classroom. An excellent program wins friends! What are the criteria for an outstanding FLES* program?

- It is a standards-based foreign language program with goals and student outcomes that are understood by parents, students, administrators, and decision-makers.
- The program design permits an optimum schedule of instruction that is in consonance with the goals.
- There is a written curriculum that reflects the goals and the student outcomes.
- All students are involved in some type of target language program.
- There is a FLES* Advisory Committee.
- More than one language is offered in some form, and often reflects the language choices of the high school.
- The assessment/evaluation design of student progress is based on a variety of standards-based measures, performance guidelines, and alternative assessments.
- There is an articulation design accepted by elementary and middle school teachers and administrators.
- There are qualified, trained, competent FLES* teachers who have opportunities for professional growth.
- The instructional materials are age-appropriate, culturally authentic, and standards-oriented. There is evidence of the use of the new technology, such as Smartboards and mobile student boards, I-pods, etc.
- If distance learning is utilized, it should be done in conjunction with qualified FLES* professionals.
- There is provision for appropriate coordination and supervision of the FLES* program.
- There is on-going involvement of parents, administrators, and decision-makers.
- There is on-going advocacy and promotion.
- The program capitalizes on the unique local features of the school and school community.
- There are onsite and offsite student performances in the target language.

Adapted from Lipton, G. (2004) 4th ed. *Practical Handbook to FLES* Programs*, 410. (27)

FLES* Promotion and Visibility

FLES* advocacy may begin in the classroom, but it can certainly continue beyond the classroom walls. Consider the following as ways to increase the visibility of your FLES* program.

- Invite members of the public to FLES* events:
 - Food competitions
 - International dinners
 - Mini-Olympics
 - Special events in the FL culture
- Develop an attractive FLES* brochure, showing:
 - Achievements by FLES* students
 - Achievements by FLES* teachers
 - Results on standardized tests
 - FL contest winners
 - Testimonials from former FLES* students
- Provide opportunities for FLES* students to participate in:
 - FL cheers at athletic events
 - FL booths at school fairs
 - FL lobby and hall displays
 - FL performances
 - Teaching the FL (with supervision) at malls, the library, etc.
- Provide services of all kinds in the FL:
 - Short translations
 - Help with non-English speakers
 - Cross-cultural information
- Show the AATF FLES* Video: *Forward With FLES** (25)
- Be sure to notify the press and media before and after events.
- Plan an Advocacy and Promotion Calendar for the school year.

For additional suggestions, see 2004 AATF National FLES* Commission Report on Promotion (26) and the *AATF French Advocacy Kit*, AATF web site: www.frenchteachers.org .

Appendix A

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The FLES* Scale for the Evaluation of FLES* Programs

1. All students have access to FLES* programs.
2. There is a foreign language advisory committee for K-12 programs.
3. The goals and student outcomes of the FLES* program are clearly stated.
4. There is provision for articulation with upper schools.
5. There is provision for ongoing informal feedback and formal evaluation every five to seven years.
6. There is assurance that there is a continuing supply of appropriate FLES* materials and appropriate technology.
7. There is assurance that there is a continuing supply of well-prepared and trained FLES* teachers.
8. There is documentation of the short-term and longitudinal results of studying FLES* and the effect on English language skills and achievement in other curriculum areas.
9. There is a written FLES* standards-based curriculum that indicates progress based on national standards, in linguistic, cultural, and interdisciplinary approaches. The five Cs (or goals of the Standards) include: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities.
10. Students demonstrate their progress in FLES* in a variety of ways, including progress indicators suggested by the National FL Standards and the National Performance Guidelines.
11. The FLES* instructional program in class reflects the goals and student outcomes of the program through the curriculum content and methods.
12. There is enthusiasm for the FLES* program on the part of students, parents, administrators, school board members, school counselors, and other members of the school/school district community.
13. There is more than one foreign language offered at the FLES* level, depending on the size of the school and the school community.
14. The teachers are qualified to teach in the FLES program and have sufficient fluency in the FL and English, and are knowledgeable about FLES* methodology and the elementary school curriculum.
15. For distance learning, it is in conjunction with a qualified FLES* teacher.
16. The FLES* Exit Fluency essentials should be available to parents and the public, the supervisors and administrators, and school board members.
17. There is a clear relationship between the goals and student outcomes of the FLES* program, the standards-based written curriculum, the assessment design, and the essentials included for “FLES* Exit Fluency.”

Adapted from Lipton, G. (2004) *Practical Handbook to FLES* Programs*. 4th ed. 407. (27)

Appendix B

Talking Points for FLES*

1. Children acquire language abilities easily.
2. Children develop cultural insights and openness to other people(s) through the study of a foreign language.
3. All children can be successful foreign language learners.
4. Children studying a foreign language have an improved self-image.
5. Children studying a foreign language show improved cognitive skills.
6. Children can acquire authentic pronunciation if they start before the age of 10.
7. FLES* students outperform non-FLES* students on standardized tests (in English) in reading, mathematics, social studies, and language arts.
8. FLES* students outperform non-FLES* students on AP examinations especially if they started their study of the language before grade 7.
9. FLES* students benefit from interdisciplinary units by reinforcing some of the content and concepts of different aspects of the elementary school curriculum.
10. FLES* students benefit from scenarios that are age-appropriate and that are of interest to them.
11. Support for FLES* has appeared in the following selected publications:
 - National PTA (28)
 - National Elem. School Principals (29)
 - National School Boards Association (30)
 - Education Week (31) and Education Week (32)
 - AATF Policy Statement (33)
 - Northeast Conference Newsletter (34)
 - NCSSFL/ACTFL Statement on the Study of FL in Elementary Schools (35)
 - Center for Applied Linguistics (36)
 - Boyer (37)
 - The 5-Minute Linguist* (38)
 - AATF National FLES* Commission Report (2007)* (39)

Appendix C

FLES* Marketing Strategies

BE CLEAR ON WHAT ARE YOU MARKETING

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- Is your FLES* program effective?
- Does it deliver its goals?
- What can students do in the FL and how well?
- Are there community-based events and field trips?
- What are your messages for your various publics?

CREATE A FLES* MARKETING DESIGN

- Who is the person responsible?
- Are there at least monthly press releases (with principal's approval)?
- Is there a FLES* newsletter to parents, administrators, and school board members?
- Is student work on display and changed frequently?
- Are student performances in the FL available to the public?
- Are there opportunities for feedback?

CREATE A FLES* ADVOCACY FOR YOUR SCHOOL/DISTRICT

- FLES* program portfolio with photographs?
- Student portfolios?
- FLES* program brochure?
- FLES* program video? DVD?
- FLES* program interactive web site?
- Testimonials from parents, students, and former students?
- Testimonials from celebrities?
- Results of competitions, tests, and contests?
- Varied other opportunities for visibility of the program?

CREATE A FLES* MARKETING TEAM

- Advisory Committee?
- Parents? Students? Former Students?
- Supervisors? Administrators? Foreign Language teachers on all levels?
- Native speakers of the target language in the community?
- Business contacts in the community?
- Media Contacts in the community? Publications? Radio and TV? Blogs? Listserves?
- National foreign language-specific organization?
- Civic organizations?
- Consult the *AATF French Advocacy Kit* web site
- Others?

Appendix D

Strategies to Consider When a FLES* Program is Threatened

1. Develop and maintain the most effective FLES* program possible. Remember- advocacy and promotion begin in the classroom.
2. Give students many opportunities to demonstrate their use of the foreign language- at meetings of the school board, at libraries, at athletic and musical events, and at events for National Foreign Language Week, National French Week, etc.
3. Prepare a Portfolio of student accomplishments.
4. Ask for feedback and suggestions from students, parents, and administrators.
5. Discuss the issues with the school or school district Foreign Language Advisory Committee.
6. Assemble a FLES* Advocacy and Promotion Committee.
7. Assemble a FLES* Response Team to work with your Advocacy and Promotion Committee.
8. Contact allies in the school community, the business community, the parents' associations, the media, the middle schools, and high schools and universities.
9. Alert supporters and allies in the school and school community.
10. Develop a list of assignments for volunteers who will be in contact with the various influential groups.
11. Enter "Full Survival Mode:" Contact volunteers, national and state advocates, allies in education and civic associations, legislators, native speakers, national and regional foreign language associations, etc. Request letters of support and public testimonials.
12. Prepare public service announcements for radio and TV and print media.

See Lipton, G. Chapter XIV and XV (27) and AATF web site www.frenchteachers.org and *AATF French Advocacy Resource Bank*.

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