

Foreign Language Instruction For All In Springfield, Massachusetts Public Schools

Many people think that elementary foreign language instruction takes place only in private school settings or in affluent suburban communities. But Springfield Public Schools prove that a large, diverse and urban school district can successfully deliver a consistent and sequential foreign language program to all students in the elementary grades.

Springfield, located in the western part of Massachusetts, is the second largest city in the state. Springfield Public Schools enroll approximately 26,000 students in Grades Pre-K–12. The district is dedicated to the

belief that all children can learn a new language, and the district has consequently earned a reputation as a leader in foreign language instruction.

The district operates 32 elementary schools, 8 middle schools and 4 high schools, as well as several alternative learning centers. All of the elementary schools in Springfield are designated as Title I buildings. This population is very diverse: 49% Hispanic, 28% African-American and 21% Caucasian. Approximately 80% of the students qualify for the federally funded free and reduced-price meal program.

Over the years, and with the assistance of a series of federally funded foreign language grants, Springfield Public Schools have established and promoted foreign language instruction for all students.

At the elementary level, content-enriched language instruction aligns with the regular classroom curriculum. Students revisit the same topics in math, reading, social studies and science in the target language. Springfield Public Schools rely on specialists to deliver language instruction.

“We are fortunate to have teachers with both elementary training and a high level of proficiency in the target language,” reports Nancy M. Mangari, foreign language resource teacher.

¡Viva el español! Pilot

With a pending application for a Foreign Language Incentive Program (FLIP) formula grant, Springfield Public Schools piloted the *¡Viva el español!* program during the 2002–2003 school year. Preceding the pilot, the district was using a home-grown curriculum which experienced foreign language specialists were successfully implementing. Many new teachers in Springfield Public Schools however, felt overwhelmed as they implemented the language curriculum.

2003–2004 Pre-Assessment/Post-Assessment Comparison Listening Comprehension

Grade 3 City-wide Totals

% of Students Scoring this Total Number of Correct Responses						
		0-3 Correct Responses	4-6 Correct Responses	7-9 Correct Responses	10-12 Correct Responses	13-15 Correct Responses
PRE	100 %	8 %	29 %	28 %	19 %	16 %
POST	100 %	<1 %	7 %	21 %	33 %	40 %

Grade 4 City-wide Totals

% of Students Scoring this Total Number of Correct Responses						
		0-10 Correct Responses	11-15 Correct Responses	16-20 Correct Responses	21-25 Correct Responses	26-30 Correct Responses
PRE	100 %	4 %	11 %	27 %	28 %	30 %
POST	100 %	1 %	4 %	15 %	27 %	53 %

Grade 5 City-wide Totals

% of Students Scoring this Total Number of Correct Responses						
		0-10 Correct Responses	11-15 Correct Responses	16-20 Correct Responses	21-25 Correct Responses	26-30 Correct Responses
PRE	100 %	5 %	9 %	22 %	29 %	34 %
POST	100 %	<1 %	4 %	12 %	29 %	55 %

Over the 2003-2004 school year, Springfield Public Schools students in Grades 3-5 greatly improved their listening comprehension skills.

The goal of the *¡Viva el español!* pilot was to allow the implementation of a foreign language curriculum at a consistent level, with continuous reentry and recycling of previously learned materials. This goal became the key to the successful introduction of *¡Viva el español!* in Springfield Public Schools.

¡Viva el español! Experience

Based on the successful pilot, and with full funding from the FLIP grant, Springfield Public Schools implemented *¡Viva el español!* in all elementary schools. The district's grade-level learning outcomes and curriculum map were slightly modified to incorporate the new vocabulary and topics found in *¡Viva el español!*

Many positive outcomes were realized in Springfield Public Schools with the full implementation of *¡Viva el español!*, according to Rita A. Oleksak, former director of foreign languages in the district. "The goal of more uniform and consistent delivery of foreign language instruction was met. In addition, we noticed greater use of the target language with the students, and the students were acquiring more language," states Oleksak.

The *¡Viva el español!* kits also helped address the concerns of new teachers as the kits contained a variety of materials, both to support the teacher and to assist classroom instruction.

Results

With the full implementation of *¡Viva el español!* in all elementary schools, Springfield Public Schools conducted a

pre-assessment/post-assessment during the 2003–2004 school year. All students in Grades 3–5 participated in the assessments.

Springfield Public Schools used the listening comprehension assessment included in the

31 correct responses in the post-test, while 27% had 21–25 correct responses. At Grade 5, 56% of students had the correct responses to 26–30 questions in the post-test and an additional 29% gave 21–25 correct responses.

"All elementary students in the Springfield Public Schools learn either Spanish or French, and middle school students can choose from Spanish, French and Chinese. High school students have the opportunity to study German, Greek, Latin, Italian, Chinese, French and Spanish."

¡Viva el español! kits as the pre-test and post-test. These assessments are structured so that students mark a sheet with pictures of vocabulary items as teachers read from a prepared script. The Grade 3 test contained 15 items, while the Grade 4 and Grade 5 assessments contained approximately 30 items each.

In fall 2003, the pre-assessment baseline was established. At the Grade 3 baseline, 16% of the students gave 13–15 correct responses. At Grade 4, with an expanded number of test items, 30% of the students had 26–31 correct responses. 34% of students in Grade 5 answered 26–30 items correctly.

The post-test, conducted the same way as the pre-test, was administered in April 2004. The results showed significant growth in students' oral comprehension skills over the course of the school year. In Grade 3, 40% of the students answered 13–15 questions correctly and an additional 33% gave 10–12 correct answers. Over one-half (53%) of the students in Grade 4 scored 26–

Professional Development

Each August, all 110 language teachers in Springfield Public Schools come together for a four-day professional development conference. The articulation of the foreign language curriculum is highlighted from elementary school, through middle school and to high school. "Children who learn another language in elementary school find it much easier to acquire more languages," explains Oleksak.

"We are so pleased with what these children are learning and accomplishing" states Carmen Felix-Fournier, the district's current director of foreign language. "Our students are provided a strong foundation for language learning that will allow them to move forward to higher levels of language learning through high school, including Advanced Placement."

For additional information on Wright Group/McGraw-Hill's *¡Viva el español!* program, please contact us toll-free at 1-800-648-2970 and visit our Web site at www.WrightGroup.com