

FLES FAQs

What is FLES?

Originally meaning **F**oreign **L**anguage in the **E**lementary **S**chool, it is a language philosophy that surrounds a child with language, much as s/he learns native language, and builds one level of learning on another from one year to the next.

Why Spanish?

Several reasons: overwhelming choice of parents, importance of Spanish as language in metro Chicago area, ease of curriculum development and consistency across district with one language, staffing considerations.

How/when did the program start in D97?

By the mid 1990s, there was new research about second language acquisition and its positive effects on child development. At the same time parents, teachers, and administrators in the district recognized the importance of second language as an important life skill. After a long and deliberate process, a pilot program of Sequential FLES began at Holmes and Irving in 1996. Between 1996 and 2000, five schools had adopted the program. In 2001, the district fully embraced the program district-wide and the final three elementary schools began instruction in grades K-2. Full implementation was reached in all schools in 2005.

How does it work?

Currently, students receive 2 -30 minute Spanish sessions a week with a beginning emphasis on listening and understanding basic words and phrases. The language teacher works with the regular classroom teacher to identify areas where learning can be connected to other subject areas such as listening to stories, working with numbers, vocabulary building through curricular themes (science, social studies, math, language arts, fine arts), cultural activities, and music and learning games.

Is FLES effective language learning?

Yes, research-based practice has shown the longer the sequence of learning, the stronger the benefits. Even at twice a week for 30 minutes each, starting students at age 5 or 6 gives them a good grounding in listening and understanding and begins a long sequence of learning, necessary for getting a good command of the language and exposes the brain to sounds not heard in English.

How will I know if my child is really learning, especially if I do not speak Spanish.

Watch for newsletters, progress reports, and report cards from your child's language teacher to let you know what they are studying and how your child is doing. Spend time in the classroom if possible. If at any time you have questions or concerns, please contact the teacher.

Understanding comes well before speaking, and being in a Spanish-speaking environment is important for seeing gains. For example, if you ask your child "How do you say 'sit down' in Spanish?" He or she may not know. But if you walk into his/her classroom and the teacher says, "Siéntense" and everyone sits down, you will know the child understands. At some point, the same student will tell his or her classmates to "siéntense."

What happens when my child gets to the middle and high school?

When students get to 6th grade in middle school, they continue with Spanish on the exploratory wheel, getting one rotation of nine weeks of daily Spanish instruction. When they go to seventh or eighth grade, they may choose either Spanish or French as a language elective. OPRF High School offers six languages: Spanish, French, Italian, Latin, Japanese, and German. Reports from the middle schools and high school show the positive results. Students are highly motivated, have strong basics with the ability to move faster and go in more depth, and good pronunciation. Statistics show that students continue with language study, many choosing to add another when given the chance.

Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns?

As with any other learning concern, you should first contact the appropriate teacher. If this has been done and there is still a concern, the building principal would be the next person to contact. Beyond this or if there is a program-wide concern, please contact the Teacher-Leader for FLES who reports to the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning.

How can I support my child's learning, especially if I do not know Spanish?

Let your child know that you value language learning as an important life skill and encourage him/her to really get involved in class activities. If you do not speak Spanish, you can support your child's language learning by exposing him/her to the wide array of cultural opportunities around the Oak Park & Chicago areas – museums, festivals, restaurants, neighborhoods, special events, and more. You and your child can also log into the Oak Park Public Library computer system using your library card and take advantage of the Rosetta Stone language program – in Spanish and many other languages. If you are a Spanish speaker, use Spanish with your child whenever you can and read together in the language. Work on your Spanish skills – there are conversation groups held at the library. Consider family vacations to Spanish-speaking destinations when possible. For more suggestions, contact your child's teacher.

How can I support the program?

Let your school, the district administration, and the board of education know that language learning and multiculturalism are important to you and for your child's learning. Get involved in your school's PTO World Language Committee (if it doesn't have one, help start it!). Join the World Language Advisory Committee as a representative of your school. Write letters to the local press to advocate for continued and expanded language learning opportunities. Report on language events at your school. Volunteer to assist the World Language staff, especially if you speak Spanish. Attend World Languages Day, Ethnic Festival, and other school and district language/culture events. Contact your child's teacher for other ideas. Bottom line – get involved!

For more information contact:

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