

# Threats and Strategies to Counter Threats:

## *Voices of Elementary School Foreign Language Educators*

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*It was clear to all FLES staff, which included French, German, Japanese, and Spanish specialists, that their 13-year-old programs could be on the "chopping block" at the next regularly scheduled school board meeting.<sup>1</sup>*

*"A survey was designed to gather the stories of teachers who had experienced threats to their own elementary school foreign language programs."*

The experience described by Kay Hoag, Advocacy Chair of the National Network for Early Language Learning (NNELL), exemplifies the threat of program elimination and/or cutbacks that elementary school foreign language programs across the nation experienced with increased frequency during the 2002-2003 academic year. Reports of these threats concerned the co-chairs of the Special Interest Group on Foreign Languages in the Elementary School (FLES SIG) sponsored by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).<sup>2</sup> In response, they proposed a panel discussion on the topic as a conference session for the 2003 ACTFL annual meeting.

To prepare for and enrich the panel discussion by providing a voice for those directly affected, a survey was designed to gather the stories of teachers who had experienced threats to their own elementary school foreign language programs.<sup>3</sup> The survey also asked respondents to describe strategies they had found to be effective in countering threats. Additionally, respondents were asked to consider whether national organizations could provide support helpful in meeting the challenges faced by local programs. The results of the survey are presented in this article and their implications for action are discussed.

### SURVEY DESCRIPTION

The survey was composed of four questions:

1. Provide a description of the most important threat/s your early language program has

encountered and include the source of the threat/s (administration, budget, etc.).

2. Describe the strategies you have used to counter threat/s to your program that have resulted in successfully maintaining your program.
3. Specify a list of strategies you would recommend to others for maintaining a strong and viable early language program.
4. Describe specific types of support from national organizations that would be helpful to you in meeting challenges to your local program.

Respondents were asked to provide information about the type of elementary school foreign language program that served as the basis for their responses: FLEX, FLES, intensive [content-based] FLES, immersion, other (see program definitions in Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 420). They were also asked to provide information about themselves: name, position, address, phone number, and e-mail address. Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate permission for citing their responses in the survey report: full permission, which approved the use of their name, location of their school, and state in citing examples; and partial permission, which included the use of only their state.

### METHODOLOGY

The survey was designed for electronic distribution and response through e-mail. The survey was distributed through the e-mail lists of the ACTFL FLES SIG and NNELL and was further distributed to e-mail contacts of these original recipients. Additionally, an announcement about the survey appeared in the SIG corner of *Foreign Language Annals* (Vol. 36 [1], p.151) and a paper copy of the survey with contact information for receiving the electronic version was published in *Learning Languages* (Vol. 8 [3], p. 31). Information about the survey and how to access it was also distributed through the Nandu listserv, which is an electronic listserv sponsored by the Center for Applied Linguistics and the Lab at

Brown University that provides a medium for discussion among elementary school foreign language classroom teachers and others interested in early language learning.

## RESULTS

### Demographics

Frequencies indicate that a total of 33 individuals responded to the survey of which the majority were foreign language teachers (19) (Table 1).

**Table 1. Survey Respondents by Role**

Teacher	Methods Professor/ Teacher Trainer	Principal/ Assistant Principal	Dept. Chair /For. Lang. Coordinator/Supervisor	Other	Total
19	2	3	5	4	33

Respondents represented 19 states from all regions of the nation; however, more states were from the Central States region (7) and the Northeast (6). Additionally, more respondents were from the states of Iowa (8), Connecticut (3), and Ohio (3) than from other states (Table 2).

**Table 2. Survey Respondents by State and Region**

State	Region	Respondents	State	Region	Respondents
CO	CSC/SWCOLT	1	NC	SCOLT	1
CT	NECTFL	3	NJ	NECTFL	1
DE	NECTFL	1	NY	NECTFL	2
IA	CSC	8	OH	CSC	3
IN	CSC	1	OR	PNCFL	1
LA	CSC/SCOLT	2	SC	SCOLT	1
MD	NECTFL/SCOLT	1	VA	SCOLT	1
MI	CSC	2	WI	CSC	1
MN	CSC	1	WY	PNCFL	1
MO	CSC	1			
Total		19	5	33	
		States	Regions	Respondents	

*“Respondents reported that the most important threat to elementary school foreign language programs was that of program elimination.”*

Respondents represented a variety of program models from FLEX to Immersion (Table 3).

**Table 3. Program Models Represented by Respondents**

<i>FLEX</i>	FLES	Intensive FLES	Immersion	Other	Total Represented*
6	16	2	7	4	35

*\*Note: More than one program model may be represented by a respondent.*

## THREATS

Respondents reported that the most important threat to elementary school foreign language programs was that of program elimination. Eleven of the 33 respondents indicated that they had been informed that their program faced elimination (Table 4). Additionally, the threat of scaling back the program was reported by 8 respondents. This scaling back was of four types: (a) reducing the instructional time for targeted grade levels, (b) downsizing the program by reducing the number of teachers in the program or failing to hire replacement teachers, (c) eliminating instruction at targeted grade

levels or failing to expand to additional grade levels as in the original plans for program expansion, and d) dropping or changing the languages taught. Additionally 3 respondents reported other types of threats to their programs, which included replacing the language taught with Spanish, large class size, and lack of paraprofessional help.

**Table 4. Most Important Threats Reported by Respondents**

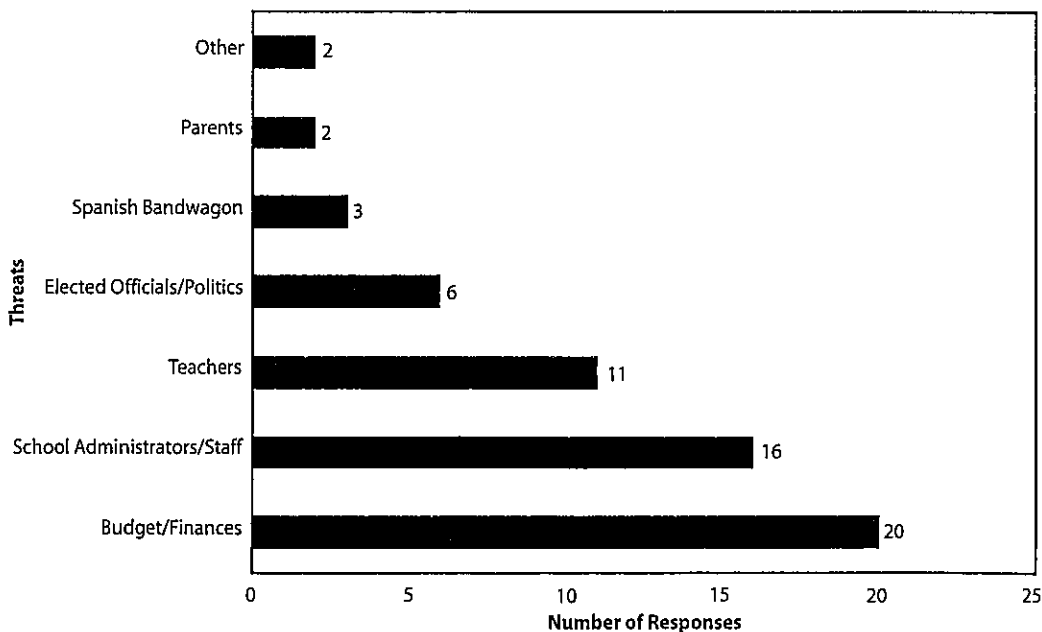
Most Important Threats	<i>Respondents</i>
Program Elimination	11
Scaling Back Program	8
Other	3
Total	22

*“The majority of respondents indicated that the source of the threat to their elementary school foreign language program was finances, followed by non-supportive school administrators and staff.”*

**SOURCES OF THREATS**

Figure 1 presents the sources of threats identified by respondents (who frequently identified more than one source). The majority of respondents indicated that the source of the threat to their elementary school foreign language program was finances (20), followed by non-supportive school administrators and staff (16). Each of these, as well as the other threats identified, is examined using excerpts from respondents’ comments to clarify the nature of the threats.

**Figure 1. Sources of Threats to Program**



**Finances.** The threat to eliminate a program was described by two respondents as an easy solution for school district budget problems.

*We have been in place for six years now, but we’re still the “new” program compared to music, art, PE. So, if something goes it will be “last in, first out” (Millie Mellgren, Ada, Michigan).*

*The school board was faced with instituting nearly \$2 million dollars in budget cuts for the 2003-04 school year. Well, the 23 FLES teachers’ salaries and benefits in our district cost approximately \$950,000 so it was easy to target this million dollars (Kay Hoag, Lexington, South Carolina).*

Sometimes the threat was the result of an escalation of past cuts.

*On Thursday, April 29, 2003 our City School administrators informed me, and the other three elementary Spanish teachers, that our Elementary Spanish program, in place at the third, fourth and fifth grade levels, was being cut, yet again, due to budgetary concerns (Pamela Cauble, Asheville, North Carolina).*

Other program elimination threats were predictable, as when grant funding that had supported the program came to an end and no new funds had been identified.

*Our dual language program was originally funded by state and federal money. When that funding was scheduled to sunset, we faced downsizing and potential elimination of the program (Melanie Pores, Albany, New York).*

Some threats of program elimination due to finances related to changes in state funding and affected numerous programs in the state.

*The NC General Assembly mandated K-5 foreign language instruction in NC back in 1980s, but they never fully funded the Basic Education Program (BEP) (the name of the program that included elementary FL). By the early 1990s with the influx of NC's diverse population, local districts had to divert BEP funds to be able to fund ESL programs, so they wrote waivers to use the funds for programs other than ESL. Also, with the arrival of NC's ABC's of Accountability in the 1990s and the state testing program, funds were needed for remediation, especially in math and reading. Thus, more waivers were written and more FL programs were cut at the elementary and middle school levels (Catherine T. Hodges, Troy, North Carolina).*

**School Administrators and Staff.** A lack of understanding and valuing of the elementary school foreign language program among administrators and staff is an important threat that can be exacerbated when there is turnover in administrators (Figure 1).

*The most important threats to our program have come from community and leaders in the school that do not fully understand nor appreciate the value of early language learning (Lynn Sessler Schmalling, Menasha, Wisconsin).*

*When a new principal came in, we experienced a year of complete lack of support for the program. This principal was not properly introduced to the program and the issue never even was brought up in her job interview (Margaret S. Rose, Stafford, Virginia).*

*In addition, due to the fact that the program design is K-12, the program was not considered the responsibility of either the primary or the secondary curriculum directors!!! (Indiana).*

*The most important threat that we have encountered and are encountering is the lack of consideration, understanding and caring on the part of the district administrators. That is to say, whenever they make decisions for the majority, they never even think about those of us in immersion. For example, they have initiated a system wide assessment program of primary reading skills. We scurried for two years to get a similar assessment created in French. The following year they changed the English assessment dramatically without any notice to us. We had to work to get ours aligned again. They changed it again. (Maryland).*

Lack of support from classroom teachers or other faculty can be an important part of the threat to programs.

*We have experienced jealousy and resentment from other faculty in the building because our program has been falsely perceived as being for the "special kids," the "bright kids" (Margaret S. Rose, Stafford, Virginia).*

*At one point, first grade teachers decided that they wanted to cut Japanese to two times per week. That would have had a snowball effect to all grades, we were sure. So, we requested that our Inter-district school board (for the magnet programs at the school) hear both sides. The state magnet consultants were also there. Luckily, they were convinced that losing 1/3 of our instruction time was not worth the mere 25 minutes per week that the first grade teachers would gain (Jessica Haxhi, Waterbury, Connecticut).*

**Teachers.** Eleven respondents identified a lack of qualified teachers to fill available positions as a threat to programs (Figure 1).

*My school has been unable to find an elementary Spanish teacher to replace me. . . . the source of this threat is the lack of qualified teachers coming into the field (as well as the fact that the position is part time and therefore not as attractive to qualified teachers) (Andrea Happel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa).*

*Lack of qualified teachers is one of the major areas where we are caused to panic every year if one of our teachers leaves. Our teachers must be elementary endorsed plus have proficiency in Spanish. This is not easy to find (Margaret S. Rose, Stafford, Virginia).*

*"A lack of understanding and valuing of the elementary school foreign language program among administrators and staff is an important threat that can be exacerbated when there is turnover in administrators."*

*“Local and even state board of education elections can result in changes in policies that impact foreign language programs for better or worse.”*

One respondent cited the No Child Left Behind Legislation that requires “highly qualified teachers” as a barrier to recruiting qualified teachers from abroad to fill open positions in this country.

*Most of our immersion teachers are foreign associate teachers hired from different countries across the world. Teacher degree programs are different from country to country. For example, our Belgian teachers are usually excellent, with a fantastic training in early childhood. However, their degree program in a three-year program (although more condensed and on a longer year scale), so the state hesitates to recognize them as Highly Qualified [No Child Left Behind]. This is the newest and the most important threat to our programs so far. Added to the new immigration laws and all the policies put in place through the Homeland Security, it makes us wonder if we will be able to recruit any foreign associate teachers next year and maintain a high quality program. Ironically, the new legislation on Highly Qualified teachers [No Child Left Behind] is preventing us from getting exactly that! (Nicole Boudreaux, Lafayette, Louisiana).*

**Elected Officials/Politics.** Local and even state board of education elections can result in changes in policies that impact foreign language programs for better or worse, as 6 respondents observed (Figure 1).

*The turnover in the school board membership has resulted in a loss of the original board members who instituted our FLES program in the first place. . . . One [new member] is the former PTA President of my elementary school and she is an avid advocate for K-12 Foreign Language instruction because both of her daughters are profiting from our program. . . . The other board member has his doctorate in Divinity, is a music advocate, and speaks other languages—and seems to be an ally. But [he] was more concerned about music programs being cut than the Foreign Language (Kay Hoag, Lexington, South Carolina).*

*Many board members have had less than glowing world language experiences themselves, and therefore are reluctant to spend precious dollars on the maintenance and implementation of state mandated programs. Furthermore, the present state board of education has considerable bias when it comes to the value of world language learning (Jean Modig, Lincoln Park, New Jersey).*

**Spanish Bandwagon.** Three respondents noted that sometimes the threat to a long-standing program is competition among languages.

*Another threat is the “Spanish” Bandwagon—where many in the community, including other teachers and administrators believe that Spanish is the most beneficial, easiest, etc. language and it should be offered to all students, forcing the stoppage of other world languages (Lynn Sessler Schmalling, Menasha, Wisconsin).*

**Parents.** Two respondents noted that negative parent attitudes toward learning a foreign language can also be a threat (Figure 1).

*There have . . . been a few [parent] nay-sayers who keep saying my child needs more science or math not Spanish (Bea Houston, Albert City, Iowa).*

## STRATEGIES RECOMMENDED FOR COUNTERING THREATS

Respondents identified a variety of strategies they have used to successfully counter threats to their programs and identified others they believe would help if put into place. Both types of strategies are summarized in four recommendations, which are clarified and illustrated with examples provided from survey responses. The fifth recommendation results from responses to the last survey question on what type of support national organizations could offer local programs to help in countering the challenges they face.

### EDUCATE TIRELESSLY

- **Publicize program benefits to classroom teachers, school administrators, elected officials, parents, and the public.**

Making the program visible through coverage in school newsletters and the press and increasing direct exposure to the program for classroom teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and the public through open houses and special events were all frequently cited.

*We have tried to inform parents and the administration about the benefits of our program through conferences, handouts, and through [information on] students' attitudes toward Spanish class (Lindsey Rice, West Des Moines, Iowa).*

*Holding an Open House for School Board members was a big eye-opener for many of them. Never having had foreign language themselves as young children, it was difficult for them to understand the program (Margaret S. Rose, , Virginia).*

*Try to get the kids to do Spanish things in as many music programs and other outlets as we can. The more they are exposed, the more parents will continue to demand it. It can't be a well-kept secret!* (Millie Mellgren, Ada, Michigan).

- **Share research findings on language learning.**

One important facet of educating the public is the dissemination of current research and examples of viable programs.

*I shared research data as to the benefits of early language study and examples of programs from other schools* (Fadia Hamid, Chagrin Falls, Ohio).

*We always had research, articles, and parent surveys to quote when we talked with boards of education* (Jessica Haxhi, Waterbury, Connecticut).

*We collected data on parent involvement, student achievement and professional development to prove how this program was helping students improve both personally and academically* (Michigan).

- **Lobby those with power and influence about the value of your program.**

Several respondents spoke to the effectiveness of mobilizing parents to support the program by encouraging them to voice needs and expectations for the program to the administration, or circulating petitions and writing letters.

*I myself went through my classroom rolls; this took time since I teach as many as 550 students. I made an index card for every student whose parent has been supportive or who has made comments about how much they like [the] program etc.—this was about 50 of 550. I began calling these parents at home to ask if they were aware of what the school board was considering. First, I asked these parents if they were planning to go to the next school board meeting. If so, I asked if they were thinking of making their feelings known to the school board. I encouraged them to both speak and write letters to school board members, and state legislators. I asked the parents what they might say at the board meeting, offering to give them copies of articles or research if they wanted. I made a list of which parents committed and what their “talking points” would be* (Kay Hoag, Lexington, South Carolina).

*The parents have been great advocates when the decision makers are willing to listen. Some*

*of them were involved in the formation of the immersion program and have done extensive research with regard to early language learning* (Indiana).

*The strategies the parents employed were to immediately send out a petition and collect supportive signatures* (Pamela Cauble, Asheville, North Carolina).

Older students, community members, and members of professional organizations were also asked to get involved and to contact those with power and influence.

*Marshalling the forces of language club and student council presidents, we sent petitions to the governor, senators and each member of the state board of education in support of a world language requirement. The effectiveness of this effort trickles down to maintaining world languages as a viable part of core content in New Jersey* (Jean Modig, Lincoln Park, New Jersey).

*[At the board meeting] middle and high school students spoke in their second language and praised the programs saying that their skills are such as they are due to the early language “beginning” that our district had offered them. Former students who were studying at the Sorbonne e-mailed special messages explaining how much they were able to do in the language due to our early language learning program. A former student spoke in person showing his passion for the program* (Kay Hoag, Lexington, South Carolina).

*I asked FL leaders at a JNCL (Joint National Committee for Languages)-NCLIS (National Council for Languages and International Studies) Delegate [meeting] to sign a petition letter to the School Board of Ed. Impressive!* (Colorado).

*[I] encouraged our “Cultural Arts” district committee to write to head administration encouraging support for the K-6 program* (Millie Mellgren, Ada, Michigan).

*“The strategies the parents employed were to immediately send out a petition and collect supportive signatures.”*

## DESIGN PROGRAMS SKILLFULLY

- **Integrate the foreign language curriculum with other content areas.**

Respondents noted that content integration helped to maintain a positive relationship with classroom teachers.

*Integration into the curriculum (math and social studies) was a key tool in being able to work with the elementary teacher's needs and not perceived as a threat to their time needs.*

*. . . I always strived to present the program as supportive of their pedagogical goals. Be part of the team. . . . I attended the weekly grade level meeting religiously—[it] was very important for them to see me as part of the team and also made content integration possible as then I KNEW what they were doing (Jane Hanson Smith, Iowa City, Iowa).*

- **Create an articulated curriculum.**

Establishing Pre-K–12 articulation for the program is a successful strategy that pays dividends for the time originally invested.

*We have also put in the time to make sure that our programs are well articulated K-12—I think this has been a major positive in our programs. The time we have spent on getting our K-12 articulation piece solid and in place was well worth it and is paying us back 3 fold as we continue to strengthen our curriculums and standard assessments/performances (Lynn Sessler Schmalling, Menasha, Wisconsin).*

*I have used what I learned during the two summers spent at NFLRC in Iowa to develop a well-articulated program for elementary and middle schools in my district. The success of these programs breeds further success as parents turn out in support of world language study (Jean Modig, Lincoln Park, New Jersey).*

- **Assess student progress.**

Assess student progress and report the results to educate the public; include the assessments as part of the regular program evaluation.

*Make assessments meaningful and report assessments in such a way that students and parents can clearly see progress and a direction to the program (Patty Ryerson Hans, Columbus, Ohio).*

*Do periodic program evaluations and include attitudinal surveys and assessments aligned with the standards (Colorado).*

*Evaluate your program regularly. . . . Set up an evaluation program in the target language. We test 3<sup>rd</sup> graders for oral production (Student Oral Proficiency Assessment from the Center for Applied Linguistics), 5<sup>th</sup> graders for written proficiency (a test created through another FLAP grant in the 1990s). We test 7<sup>th</sup> graders with the state approved French I credit exam, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders with the state approved French II credit exam (2 high school credits altogether). We use the results to adjust instruction and curriculum. Also, in these days of testing frenzy, it has given us some credibility (Nicole Boudreaux, Lafayette, Louisiana).*

## COLLABORATE

- **Work with teacher educators to prepare pre-service teachers of excellence.**
- **Seek ways of providing professional development for in-service teachers that meet local needs.**

Respondents addressed the lack of “qualified, certified, interested elementary language teachers” and the “inability to retain these teachers” (Iowa teacher), by proposing expanded pre-service training for elementary school foreign language teachers and opportunities for in-service continuing education.

*More university programs need to be formed to educate future teachers (Iowa).*

*Reality demands. . . alternative routes to growing more FLES teachers (Ann Tollefson, Casper, Wyoming).*

*More high quality institutes such as the one held at NFLRC [www.educ.iastate.edu], for teachers to learn methods and thematic planning are desperately needed. Most of our teachers come to us qualified to teach elementary and with no experience or knowledge of appropriate foreign language methodology. I search for good training programs whenever we hire a new teacher and they are hard to find (Margaret S. Rose, Stafford, Virginia).*

*I recently attended a summer institute sponsored by CARLA in Minneapolis[ that gave me great insight on the teaching of students with special needs in immersion. This kind of professional development is extremely important and very much needed. However, it needs to be more local for teachers in my building to be able to access it (Maryland).*

## MAINTAIN THE VISION

- **Define the vision for your program and keep it alive.**

Several respondents spoke to the importance of defining a vision for what the program will be like when it is fully in place and maintaining that vision in spite of setbacks.

*. . . have a clear vision on the desired end result and communicate that vision to all concerned/involved (Fadia Hamid, Chagrin Falls, Ohio).*

*Develop goals and curriculum direction that outline the vision for the continuation of the program (Andrea Heppel, Cedar Rapids, Iowa).*

*“Assess student progress and report the results to educate the public; include the assessments as part of the regular program evaluation.”*

- **Establish and maintain lines of communication.**

A number of respondents emphasize the importance of establishing lines of communication with those who influence decisions on programs and making their voices heard in a professional way.

*Keeping communication strong among all interested parties* (Oregon).

*We tried to be problem solvers, not too defensive. We actually told the board that we would "certainly support" a reduction in our instruction time if that is what these teachers felt was necessary. We just felt it was our duty to share the research and our qualitative observations about the possible effects it would have on the Japanese program* (Jessica Haxhi, Waterbury, Connecticut).

*I voiced my concerns, politely but sometimes forcefully, to administrators at all levels as well as to the Board* (Fadia Hamid, Chagrin Falls, Ohio).

- **Prepare for threats.**

The importance of being prepared for anything, no matter how strong your program appears also was advised, and, with that in mind, gathering the important evidence that you will need.

*NEVER rest on your laurels. The minute you stop advocating, that's when a surprise attack hits!* (Jessica Haxhi, Waterbury, Connecticut).

*Good record keeping: [be ready to answer the question] What have you done?* (Andrea Hapel, Cedar Rapids, IA).

*I also used the results of a survey given to parents who responded 90% favorably, and who wrote in comments clearly in support of keeping World Language available for students in grades 1-5. . .* (Connecticut).

- **Seek funding sources that are long-term for program longevity; use soft money for program enhancement.**

Accessing additional funding through alternative means such as grants or petitioning the state legislature can help address financial needs for the short-term and provide the means to enhance the program, but, as one respondent noted, for program longevity funds should be based within the district.

*Avoid grants for the nuts and bolts of a FLES program. One of the best things was for us to get local buy-in and the FLES program was a part of the annual district and building budget from the beginning. Soft money often does not allow*

*for programs to have longevity. Grant money is wonderful for one-time items, such as materials* (Colorado).

*We have had foreign language supervisors who do understand our needs and who have written and obtained federal grants that enable us to have the financial means to spend time adapting and translating new curriculum and to get materials in the target language to support new curriculum. These grants also provide an immersion specialist in the central office building who can advocate for us* (Maryland).

*We are finishing a three-year FLAP (Foreign Language Assistance Program from the US State Department of Education) grant. Through this grant, we were able to pay teachers to attend developing material sessions or to pay substitutes to allow teachers to attend workshops during the regular school day, to buy materials and equipment, and to reimburse the coordinator for travel* (Nicole Boudreaux, Lafayette, Louisiana).

*FLIP (Foreign Language Incentive Program) and FLAP funds were used to bring in a national consultant to educate the district administrators and board members who cared to attend the orientation* (Indiana).

## INVOLVE NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- **Disseminate research.**

Research findings are critical for the development of strong, convincing program rationale. National organizations and the federal government could provide an important service to programs nationwide by defining and even supporting the type of research most needed in the field and disseminating current research findings to the profession.

*Support new research on benefits of FLES (specifically relating to enhanced scores on assessments in other subject areas). While we know the goals of a FLES program are language skills and cultural awareness, these additional benefits often help support the existence of FLES programs* (New York).

*Support continued research on Immersion education and share information learned* (John Giese, St. Paul, Minnesota).

*[Provide support by] distributing research that supports early language learning* (Kay Hoag, Lexington, South Carolina).

- **Prepare advocacy materials.**

Advocacy is an important part of every foreign language educators' job description, therefore,

*"National organizations and the federal government could provide an important service to programs nationwide by defining and even supporting the type of research most needed in the field and disseminating current research findings to the profession."*



national organizations could provide training and materials to help them advocate effectively for their programs.

*Easy to use advocacy materials, such as videos and brochures, examples of activities/presentations that have been successful for advocating for early FL programs [are needed] (Lynn Sessler Schmalling, Menasha, Wisconsin).*

*I would like to consider making a short presentation to our local school board this year, but frankly, it still feels intimidating (Pamela Cauble, Asheville, North Carolina).*

*“Teacher training in the form of workshops, in-services, and institutes is an important service national organizations could provide.”*

- **Provide assistance with grants.**

With budget cuts, more programs are in desperate need of short-term funding and are looking for help in applying for grants and in understanding the role of grant monies in program longevity. National organizations could examine how to best provide that help.

*Assistance with writing grants—feedback, info about grant writing opps [opportunities], etc. (Jane Hanson Smith, Iowa City, Iowa).*

*I have wanted to apply for grants, although our program does not meet certain criteria (specifically, student contact time does not meet the minimum required by some grants, roughly 75 minutes per week). If we could get grant money, it might bridge the financial gap that exists and allow us (ironically) to expand staff and allow students to have more time per week in World language (Connecticut).*

*Money! Grants earmarked for early language education—to pay salaries, provide materials, technology, etc. Incentives: Scholarships, grants, loans to get certified in FL elementary education (Iowa).*

- **Provide workshops and institutes.**

Teacher training in the form of workshops, in-services, and institutes is an important service national organizations could provide.

*More high quality institutes. . . for teachers to learn methods and thematic planning are desperately needed. . . (Margaret S. Rose, Stafford, Virginia).*

*An immersion conference would be a plus. Perhaps an addendum to the ACTFL conference. Where new immersion research, strategies, and established schools could offer suggestions and help (Louisiana).*

- **Identify models of articulated K-5 curriculum.**

Respondents also mentioned the lack of elementary foreign language curriculum that is

articulated K-12 and the need for models that demonstrate what such a curriculum would be like and how to establish articulation. National organizations could take the initiative to identify model programs.

*(We need] an articulated K-5 curriculum that could be used in developing new programs (Ann Tollefson, Casper, Wyoming).*

*[We need models to show how to] maintain vertical articulation to ensure [a] smooth transition for students (Fadia Hamid, Chagrin Falls, Ohio).*

- **Provide letters of support for programs.**

Another important source of help that national organizations could provide is letters of support for programs at the time of crisis.

*Have available position statements that when programs are in trouble, the heads of the organizations can get off immediate support to the program in trouble. The most appropriate organizations would be ACTFL (American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages), NNELL (National Network of Early Language Learners), and the language-specific organizations. The signed petition paper from the JNCL (Joint National Committee for Languages)—NCLIS (National Council for Languages and International Studies) was powerful! (Colorado).*

## CONCLUSION

The results of this survey provide a view of challenges elementary school foreign language programs face. Over half of the respondents report the threat of program elimination or reduction as their reality. The most frequently cited factor leading to this situation is finances. Some respondents hoped that grant funding would help solve their funding problems, but as one respondent noted, program longevity cannot be resolved with short-term funding from grants. The lack of support among school administrators and/or staff for the program was the second factor cited as threatening programs.

Respondents shared many ways they have addressed the challenges faced by their programs, providing a rich source of ideas for the profession. The innovative examples of how respondents educated the school, parents, and community about the value of their program, even to the point of involving students and parents in lobbying those who hold the power, are invaluable. Another important strategy illustrated in respondents' comments is using assessments of student progress across program levels and data from parent surveys to convince those who make decisions

about the value of the program. In fact, the wealth of information respondents shared suggests that more conference sessions in which teachers, program coordinators/supervisors, and/or principals share these types of strategies with their colleagues would be helpful to the profession.

Several respondents mentioned the need for well-prepared, committed teachers, and indeed, when we realize the skills effective teachers need to maintain their program, the question arises, are our pre-service teacher preparation programs resulting in teachers who have the advocacy skills, data collection skills, curriculum writing skills, and assessment skills needed? Respondents also express the need for more in-service professional development opportunities and provide a number of suggestions for how national organizations might help them in preserving and strengthening their programs.

Some current national efforts clearly were not known to all respondents. Those asking for national organizations to provide advocacy support may not be aware of the advocacy packet offered to members on-line by NNELL (nnell.org); those asking for grant information may not know of the FLAP information provided on-line by JNCL-NCLIS (www.languagepolicy.org); those requesting professional development institutes

and workshops should explore those provided by ACTFL (www.actfl.org), the 14 Language Resource Centers (http://nlrc.msu.edu), and the language specific organizations.

Yet the call for support from national organizations is appropriate. Information that is available can be publicized more broadly. Collaborative efforts can establish new initiatives to help define solutions for the difficult questions of how to establish the vision for a program and successfully advocate for it, and how to establish funding for a program so that it endures through budget crises.

NNELL President, Martie Semmer (2003) described an important first step in collaboration in January 2003 when representatives from ACTFL and NNELL began a dialogue about how to work together in support of early language programs. The collaborative business meeting held at ACTFL 2003 between the ACTFL FLES SIG and NNELL was another important step in this direction. Broadening the dialogue to establish collaborative efforts that include other organizations makes good sense. Through combined forces we can better weather this current storm of threats to elementary school foreign language programs and define a future of strength.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

### Educate Tirelessly

- o Publicize program benefits to classroom teachers, school administrators, elected officials, parents, and the public.
- o Share research findings on language learning.
- o Lobby those with power and influence about the value of your program.

### Design Programs Skillfully

- o Integrate the foreign language curriculum with other content areas.
- o Create an articulated curriculum.
- o Assess student progress.

### Collaborate

- o Work with teacher educators to prepare pre-service teachers of excellence.
- o Seek ways of providing professional development for in-service teachers that meet local needs.
- o Maintain the Vision
- o Define the vision for your program and keep it alive.
- o Establish and maintain lines of communication.
- o Prepare for threats.
- o Seek funding sources that are long-term for program longevity; use soft money for program enhancement.

### Involve National Organizations

- o Disseminate research.
- o Prepare advocacy materials.
- o Provide assistance with grants.
- o Provide workshops and institutes.
- o Identify models of articulated K-5 curriculum.
- o Provide letters of support for programs.

## FOOTNOTES:

From "A Response to a Crisis in 2003: A Personal Experience in Lexington School District One, Lexington, SC" by Kay Hoag, French FLES teacher. FLES SIG Panel on Advocacy, ACTFL conference session handout, November 21, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The FLES SIG Co-chairs are Christi Moraga, Kathy Olsen-Studler, and Marcia Harmon Rosenbusch.

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