

# World Language Teaching in U.S. Schools



## Preliminary Results from the National K–12 Foreign Language Survey

NATIONAL K-12  
FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE  
SURVEY

**CAL**

CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

[www.cal.org/flsurvey](http://www.cal.org/flsurvey)

# Are our students learning to communicate



## About the Survey

U.S. educators, parents, and major education organizations are calling for an education system that prepares children to be competent world citizens for the 21st century. Are our schools doing their job?

One way to measure whether we are progressing on our way to educating global citizens is to examine the teaching of world languages in our schools.

Every decade, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) conducts a national survey of foreign language instruction in public and private elementary and secondary schools to provide an updated national and regional portrait of foreign language instruction in the United States.

In June 2008, CAL completed data collection for its third national survey. These new data allow us to show trends in foreign language education at three points in time: 1987, 1997, and 2008. Survey questionnaires were mailed to a stratified random sample of more than 5,000 elementary and secondary schools across the country. The response rate was 76%.

# with the rest of the world?



The survey was designed to help us understand, among other issues, current patterns and shifts over time in these areas:

- Foreign language enrollments
- Number of schools offering language programs and types of programs offered
- Foreign language curricula and methodologies in use
- Teacher qualifications and training
- Effects of No Child Left Behind legislation on foreign language instruction

The survey results will present national data according to the following factors:

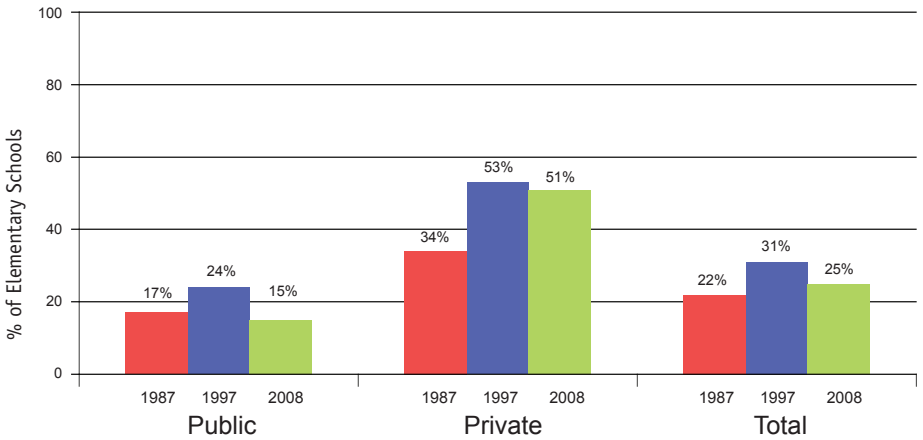
- Type of school (public or private)
- Location of school (urban, rural, or suburban)
- Socioeconomic status of students
- Percentage of minority students enrolled in the school
- Geographical region (e.g., Northeast, Pacific Northwest)

## Survey Snapshot

This brochure provides a snapshot of preliminary elementary school results. A final report and executive summary outlining both the elementary and secondary school results will be available in 2009.

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## Elementary Schools Teaching Foreign Languages



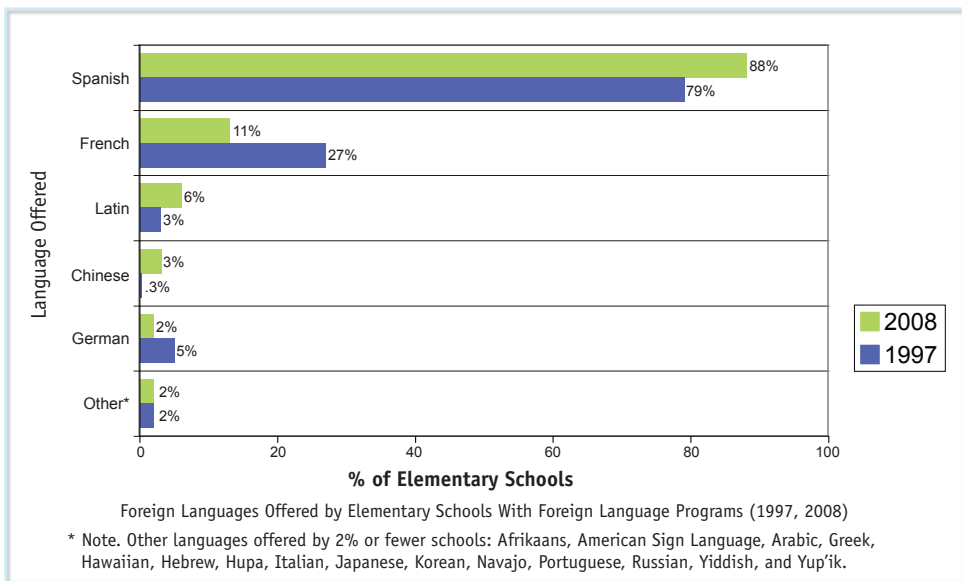
U.S. Elementary Schools Teaching Foreign Languages (Public, Private, Total) (1987, 1997, 2008)

In the past decade, the overall number of elementary schools offering foreign languages has decreased to a statistically significant degree. Six percent (6%) fewer elementary schools are teaching foreign languages now than in 1997 (25% vs. 31%). This follows an increase of 9% a decade earlier (from 1987 to 1997).

The most significant decrease is found among public elementary schools; private elementary schools have better maintained language instruction over the past decade.

- The percentage of private schools offering languages decreased only slightly from 1997 to 2008: from 53% to 51%. This followed a substantial increase—from 34% to 53%—between 1987 and 1997.
- The percentage of public elementary schools offering language instruction decreased by a statistically significant degree—from 24% to 15%—from 1997 to 2008, following a 7% increase from 1987 to 1997 (17% to 24%).

# Foreign Languages Offered by Elementary Schools

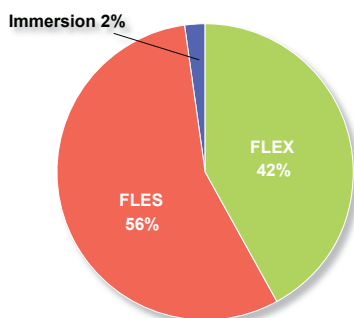


Spanish and French continue to be the most common languages offered in elementary schools. Spanish has become increasingly popular over the last decade. In 2008, 88% of the elementary schools teaching a language reported teaching Spanish, compared to 79% in 1997. In contrast, French instruction has become less common. The percentage of elementary schools with foreign language programs that offer French decreased from 27% in 1997 to 11% in 2008.

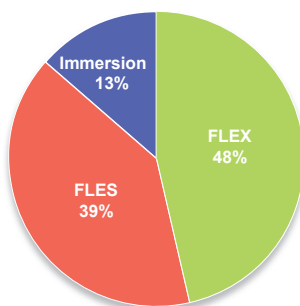
Other survey data reveal the following:

- Latin, Chinese, and Arabic are on the rise. Among elementary schools that teach languages, Latin instruction has increased from 3% to 6%, Chinese from 0.3% to 3%, and Arabic from 0% to 1%.
- German, like French, is offered at fewer schools than a decade ago: 2% of elementary schools with language programs in 2008 offer German versus 5% in 1997.
- Additional data tell us that schools offer native language instruction for native speakers of the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Haitian Creole, Hupa, Navajo, Salish, Spanish, and Yup'ik.

## Types of Programs Offered by Elementary Schools



**Private:** Program Types Offered by Private Elementary Schools With Foreign Language Programs, 2008



**Public:** Program Types Offered by Public Elementary Schools With Foreign Language Programs, 2008

Note. These data are from schools offering French and Spanish, the two languages most commonly taught in the elementary school.

The majority of elementary school programs fall into one of two categories:

- FLEX (foreign language experience or exploratory) programs aim at providing students with general exposure to language and culture.
- FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) programs aim to help students acquire listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in addition to an understanding of culture.

A smaller percentage of schools offer immersion programs, in which the target language is used for instruction at least 50% of the day and the goal is for students to achieve a high level of proficiency in the target language.

There was a difference between public and private school program offerings. The majority (56%) of private elementary school programs were FLES programs while the majority of public elementary school programs were FLEX. Only 2% of private school programs provided language immersion, while immersion programs accounted for 13% of public school programs.

## Spotlight on Innovation



There are pockets of innovation around the country where elementary schools offer language instruction resulting in high levels of proficiency. Language proficiency assessments show students achieving a wide range of levels of proficiency and reaching high levels in the more intensive language programs.

These intensive programs, located in over 600 urban, suburban, and rural schools around the country, include those where academic content is taught in the second language. These programs are known as partial, total, or two-way language immersion programs. The following are characteristics of immersion programs:

- Teachers speak only the target language to teach 50% or more of the academic subjects, using a wide range of instructional strategies.
- The ultimate goal is for students to become proficient in the target language in addition to English, and to develop increased cultural awareness while reaching a high level of academic achievement.

While it is not feasible for all schools to implement such intensive language programs, immersion methodologies used in these programs can be successfully adapted for use in all language instruction.

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**Visit us online** for updates and information about the National K-12 Foreign Language Survey or to join our list to receive email notification about the 2009 report of the survey results.

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