

Happy New Year from Fairfax FLAGS!

We are lining up speakers for the January 25-26 School Board Public Hearings. [Online registration](#) for speaking timeslots begins at 6 a.m. this Friday, Jan. 8.

Dr. Dale and the School Board have indicated they want to avoid program cuts and recommend we talk to the County Board of Supervisors (BOS) about increased funding. While we should continue to lobby the BOS, it is the School Board and Dr. Dale who will ultimately decide how the money is spent within FCPS. Public hearings present the opportunity to speak to them directly and to educate other community members about the value of early foreign language programs.

Groups will speak in support of many at-risk programs (full-day kindergarten, band/strings, class size, etc) and, as done at past hearings, may suggest foreign language programs be cut. As Fairfax FLAGS, we want to serve as a unified voice for early foreign language programs - immersion and FLES - without suggesting cuts to other at-risk programs (many of which we support).

At our December FLAGS meeting (with 100+ people) the group agreed on the need for organized testimony with a strategy of QUALITY versus QUANTITY. We would like to present a limited number of quality speakers from various backgrounds/experiences versus a large number of speakers repeating the same things over and over. We want to show large "numbers" of supporters in the audience.

Please let us know if you can help in any of the following ways (read below for more details if you want to help):

1. If you were already planning to speak and were not aware of our plans, please contact us so that our bigger group can support your effort and our common cause.
2. Research/write testimony or provide outline (you will have our help, if needed, and don't have to speak if you prefer not.)
3. Identify students at elementary, middle, and high school levels who would be willing to speak about their personal experiences.
4. Identify professional, political, or embassy contacts (they do not have to have kids in FCPS) that may be able to provide credible and influential testimony as suggested below.
5. Make time to "show up" at the public hearing to support our speakers and our numbers.

SPEAKING NOTES:

Testimony is strictly limited to three minutes. Ideally, we will have a mix of parents and students from immersion and FLES schools and a mix of personal and professional testimonies. We would like to share compelling personal stories, discuss specific research showing educational benefits of early language learning and real-life experiences.

Three minutes is not long enough for one person to fully capture ALL of the benefits of early language learning, however, if we organize and divide up the testimony, we can make a stronger argument without being repetitive.

Speakers should be able to use research (and personal experiences) to explain various benefits. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Cognitive benefits
- Academic benefits
- Increased test scores
- Cultural and social benefits
- Narrowing the achievement gap
- Research reinforcing the need for early learning to develop proficiency
- Particular benefits of FLES model (why both programs are needed)
- Particular benefits of Immersion model (why both programs are needed)

Speakers may also address the benefits and importance of foreign language and/or cultural knowledge in their field, organization, life experiences, etc. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Struggles in their field with multilingual candidate pools
- Need for better cultural understanding in field/life
- Personal struggles/limitations in career from not knowing a language or having cultural understanding
- Personal benefits in career from knowing language or having cultural understanding (especially if this person benefited from EARLY foreign language)
- Current and future of global competition/marketplace
- Managing and marketing within our own increasingly diverse region/country

It would be ideal if speakers could reinforce the need for EARLY foreign language programs, which are proven to increase chances of attaining advanced-proficiency in language and cultural fluency.

NOTE: The public hearings are at 6 p.m. at Luther Jackson Middle School in Falls Church. Students are allowed to speak first before all other speakers. It is important to sign up early in order to receive an earlier evening timeslot (hearings can go on until midnight or later). You are not allowed to select a particular date since the second date will be added once the first night fills up. If you sign up and then decide not to speak, please let us know and someone else may be able to take your speaking slot.

If you would like to help or have any questions or suggestions about our overall plan, please contact us as soon as possible so that we can coordinate the online registration and provide more details before Friday's registration begins.

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Fairfax FLAGS is a unified group of community members working to preserve the world-class quality of Fairfax County Public Schools and its early foreign language programs. For more information, visit us at www.fairfaxflags.org. Be sure to also join our Fairfax FLAGS Group on Facebook. Search for us under "groups" and write your thoughts on our wall!

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