

THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11 AND YEAR OF LANGUAGES: FROM SPUTNIK MOMENT TO REAL MOMENTUM IN LANGUAGE POLICY

Among the many effects of 9/11 on this country are a renewed sense of community in our willingness to help each other and our determination to disable those who would destroy us. Americans recognized that we were dangerously hampered by our inability to understand and communicate with the rest of the world. Fortunately for us the Joint National Committee for Languages and the National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS) [www.languagepolicy.org] has been constantly at work in the halls of Congress, supporting progressive moves in national policy. On a national level, our adaptive energy and in reaction to a pronounced lack of linguistic and cultural skills has resulted in support for the Foreign Language Assistance Act, the Lincoln Study Abroad Act, the new Department of Defense roadmap and increases in foreign language pay for the military, along with the National Security Language Initiative, a Teachers of Critical Languages Program, and many more. The Year of Languages in 2005, effectively promoted by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, brought our national shortcomings and the general virtues of foreign language instruction to the attention of a wider public, though television ads, tee-shirts, language ambushes, and government proclamations.

While these are impressive signs, it would be wrong to assume a direct and speedy transfer of national concerns into local and state venues, because of the relative autonomy of both school districts and the states which set policy for them. These are moved by community, state, and regional economic, cultural, and political forces. As for students, a recent study by Joseph Price and Carolyn Gascoigne found that national security needs played practically no role at all in their attitudes about language requirements.¹ It is then important to assess what is happening at the state level. I have been able to do this with information drawn largely from the following Web sites:

National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages [www.ncssfl.org]

State Scholars Initiative [www.wiche.edu/statescholars]

Education Commission of the States (report 745) [<http://mb2.ecs.org>]

Movement toward more specific high-school expectations for the study of languages other than English is evident in Indiana's "Core 40 Diploma Requirements;" still more in the support of Secretary of Education, Virginia Fox and of Gover-

nor Ernie Fletcher for all Kentucky students to study a foreign language.

In Delaware, on August 17, 2006, the State School Board unanimously approved the new high school graduation requirements proposed by its curriculum reform task force. The changes make Delaware's standards among the most rigorous in the country, raising the required credits from 22 to 24 and requiring students graduating in 2013 to take two years of a foreign language.

A recent 18-hour option for high school graduation which the Florida Legislature passed in 2002 requires the completion of two credits in the same language or documentation of proficiency at a level equivalent to two years of instruction. All school districts submitted a K-12 Foreign Language Plan to the Florida Department of Education by June 30, 2004.

In Hawaii, starting in 2006-2007, students will have to choose World Languages, Fine Arts, or Career and Life skills to meet requirements for a regular diploma. Although the state's elementary schools are not "required" to offer foreign language at this time, World Languages is presently listed as one of the subjects on the report card and is included in the nine Content and Performance Standards for all students.

One year of foreign language study fulfills Idaho's requirement of two credits in Humanities for graduation from high school.

Beginning 2011-2012, Maine's "Learning Results Endorsement" will guarantee that a high percentage of the state's students graduate with study in a foreign language assessed according to the Maine's standards in modern and classical languages.

In Michigan, a new core curriculum, with high standards for high school graduation, including two credits in Languages other than English, was approved in HB 5606 by both Michigan House of Representatives and Senate and then signed by the Governor. The languages component will be in effect in 2016.

New Jersey extended its expectations through requirements stated as options: (1) students complete an additional year of language study at the high school level or (2) they successfully complete a competency-based exit test.

In Oklahoma, beginning in the 2006-2007 school year, the "Achieving Classroom Excellence Act" will require that all students not signed out by their parents complete the following college preparatory curricular requirements relating to foreign languages:

two units of the same foreign or non-English language or two units of computer technology approved for college admission requirements. However, foreign language instruction is required for all students in grades K-8. This program will soon effect high-school requirements.

In Texas, beginning with the freshmen of 2004-2005, all students have been required to graduate with what was the recommended plan, requiring two years of a foreign language.

In West Virginia beginning the fall of 2008, Foreign Language Level IA will be the state sequence for 7th graders and Foreign Language Level IB will be the sequence for 8th graders. High school students in the Professional Pathway must earn two credits of the same foreign language to graduate.

In Wyoming high schools, for the 2006 graduating class, any student wishing to earn an advanced or a regular diploma must demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language. Districts may define "proficiency," although there is a state-provided language experience that may be used by districts to offer special language exploration courses leading to a relatively low level of proficiency. Students who do not demonstrate language proficiency will receive the lowest diploma.

There is also momentum evident in the increased accessibility of foreign language study. A proposal under discussion in Indiana would change in the "Middle School Curriculum Rule" to include a provision that the World Language curriculum be accessible to all middle school students. In Iowa, every high school has to offer four years of one foreign language. In New Hampshire all high schools, regardless of size, must offer three years of each of two languages. American Sign Language is included among the possibilities. In Ohio, high schools are required to offer three years of one foreign language or two years of two foreign languages so that students can earn an honors diploma. Nearly one half of school districts offer foreign language courses before high school. In Pennsylvania, public high schools are required to offer four consecutive years of a modern language and two consecutive years of another language (Latin, Greek, less commonly taught, or American Sign Language). Of 501 public school districts, Pennsylvania has about 130 K-12 foreign language programs all of which are very different models. In Texas, many districts are offering the middle school language program to afford students the opportunity to complete some of the high school graduation requirements in middle school. In Virginia, schools must

offer a foreign language from 8th grade through 12th grade. Progress in FLES opportunities is outlined in "State Requirements for Foreign/World Languages in Elementary Schools" (June 2004) at [www.ncssfl.org/reports/index.php?state_reqs].

Still on the secondary level and operating in twenty states is a national program, "The Scholars Initiative," involving an alliance between business community and educational leaders. The result is a rigorous state high school diploma, not aimed primarily at college-bound students, a state scholars diploma. Among the requirements are two years of foreign language study. In most of the twenty participating states, the diploma is in early growing stages, not available in every district. These states are Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. Colorado and North Carolina have been chosen to join, but are not yet participating members.

Finally, on the college level, we might well expect that the top ten colleges and universities named in *US News & World Report* special issues of recent years have admissions practices and policies highly favoring candidates with extensive foreign language study and shutting out those with none. Since many of us are discovering the enormous value of an education at a good state public college, it should be of considerable interest that the following states have decided freshman candidates must have foreign language learning experience for regular admission to all of their four-year colleges and universities: Arizona, California, Colorado (for 2010), Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia (for 2008). These states represent 53% of the nation's current population. In Wisconsin, Delaware, Missouri, Nebraska, Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Ohio, Connecticut, New Mexico and a number of other states, the flagship public institutions all require foreign language study as an undergraduate admission criteria. So the old question of whether you need a foreign language to get into college should be answered "only if you are interested in choice, quality and value."

The progress made in foreign language requirements reflects indirectly the character of Americans. We help our neighbors, and are willing to own a responsibility toward the needs of the nation. For the most part, however, we are interested in what goes on in our own states, and what will

affect regional and local fulfillment of the American dream. In general, just about all of the states need residents with foreign-language and culture skills, but many of them have no way to see the overall impact of the various international knowledge needs. In Tennessee, part of the TFLTA Web site is a hypertext essay called "Why Study a Foreign Language in Tennessee?" [www.utm.edu/departments/french/why.html].

It is a place where Tennesseans have gone over 31,000 times to discover how this knowledge works to their advantage economically and culturally. I suggest that this practice be extended nationally.

Advocates for all foreign languages should understand that the progress we see in increased requirements will translate into the spread and longevity of the language teacher shortage we are now experiencing in certain parts of the country. Advocates for French need to remember that what is happening with language requirements may produce sudden staffing needs with expected program results. Fortunately, French is a level-one commonly taught language, and there are more and more Americans attaining proficiency in the Intermediate-High to Advanced-High range through college programs enhanced by study abroad and home stays. It is also easy to demonstrate the importance of French, along with that of other commonly taught languages, in the national origins of a large proportion of export and foreign-direct investment dollars. Opportunities are lost if there is not a group of French teachers alert to all calls for assistance. This is why all chapters of the AATF must have advocacy coordinators and all states must have state-specific Web sites. Tune in to our advocacy web site to find out where your state stands: "Ideas for French Language & Culture Advocacy in the U.S." [www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advofr.shtml].

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Notes

- 1 "Current Perceptions and Beliefs Among Incoming College Students Towards Towards Foreign Study and Language Requirements," *Foreign Language Annals* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2006), 388, 389.