



## Looking for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for our students? Don't forget world languages!

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We're hearing a lot in education about "21<sup>st</sup> century skills." Just what are these skills? The definition depends upon whom you ask. The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills provides one framework that includes core content areas, such as English, world languages (Note that "world language" is listed as a *core* content area by the Partnership as well as by NCLB), social sciences and math, among others. In addition to their list of core content areas, the Partnership goes on to add other skills to the list of those that the 21<sup>st</sup> century citizen will need—skills that are not taught through textbooks, but rather through rigorous and authentic learning experiences within and beyond the classroom. These include cross-curricular skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and media literacy, and additional traits such as leadership and collaboration.

There is one specific content area that has received the attention of the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, as well as numerous educational authors and researchers: world language education. Beyond all of the data from decades of research showing a correlation between world language study and increased academic achievement, higher standardized test scores, and improved critical thinking and problem solving skills, world language proficiency is desperately needed in business and industry, including all of the careers considered part of "career and technical education" programs. According to the Partnership, as well as authors such as Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacobs, Tony Wagner, and Yong Zhao, today's students—regardless of career or college aspirations—need to be able to communicate in more than one language in order to help the businesses for whom they work be poised to take advantage of inter-

national opportunities and do business in their own communities. World language programs also provide one of the only avenues for students to explore the diverse perspectives that shape how others in the world respond to situations within and beyond their communities. In other words, world language proficiency (not just seat time) must be a key component in any program claiming to prepare 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens for their future roles in society.

As part of their arguments for upgrading the amount and quality of world language education offered to our students, each of the authors cites, among other data, information from a report prepared by the Committee for Economic Development, which is a non-profit, non-partisan, business-led public policy organization. Membership is made up of approximately 200 senior corporate executives and university leaders who lead CED's research and outreach efforts. These excerpts from their 2006 report highlight the imperative to augment our world language offerings for all students:

- "[...] our education system must be strengthened to increase the foreign language skills and cultural awareness of our students. America's continued role as a global leader will depend on our students' abilities to interact with the world community both inside and outside our borders."
- "Many American students lack sufficient knowledge about other world regions, languages and cultures and as a result are likely to be unprepared to compete and lead in a

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global work environment.”

- “Seventy-seven percent of the public believes that high school programs in the United States are not adequately preparing students to understand current international affairs.”
- “Compared to their counterparts from universities in other parts of the world, U.S. students are ‘strong technically’ but ‘shortchanged’ in cross-cultural experience and linguistically deprived.”

World languages *are* a 21st century skill, and CED is not the only group to have noticed. Here is more evidence that our society and economy are dependent on increasing the number of citizens who are proficient in world languages and culture:

- A survey of American businesses operating overseas conducted by the Modern Language Association found that many companies give preference to candidates with foreign language skills when hiring new management personnel, provided other business experience and abilities are equal.
- Four out of five new jobs in the United States are created as a result of foreign trade, according to the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Language.
- Each year, 200,000 Americans lose out on jobs with business because they don’t know another language, according to Edward Trimnell, author of *Why you need a foreign language and how to learn one*.
- In their 2008 report called, “Putting the World into World-Class Education,” The Council of Chief State School Officers specifically recommends that high school graduation requirements be redefined

“to include global knowledge and skills. [...] Requirements should include world languages and assessment of international knowledge and skills across the curriculum.”

- In his book, *Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization*, Yong Zhao says that “American companies lose an estimated 2 billion dollars a year due to inadequate cross-cultural guidance for their employees in multicultural situations.” and “...nearly 30 percent of the companies believed they had failed to exploit fully their international business opportunities due to insufficient personnel with international skills.” As a result, Zhao states that “ An essential ingredient of global competence is foreign language proficiency and a deep understanding of other cultures.”

Language proficiency gives our students an open door to the world. If we aren’t providing language and cultural education to our students, are we really preparing them to assume roles in the global society they are inheriting? Can we claim to graduate students with a full complement of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills if they can’t communicate in the languages their future employers need? What about the languages needed by our community organizations? Or those needed during these times of increased concern for national security? How are we preparing our students to interact in positive and productive ways with those from cultures different from their own? Clearly, continuing the status quo of “language education for some...and not until high school” is not an option. Speak up for language education in your communities. Share the information in this article with your PTA/PTO, your school board, and your site administration and counselors.

## What is Advocacy?

From the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages  
[www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org)

Language advocacy is a comprehensive effort to serve as a national voice for language-related issues and raise public awareness of the benefits of learning languages in order to influence the direction of present and future education.

When it comes to applying this definition to real, grassroots advocacy activities, think of it as the promotion of the academic, intellectual, career, societal and personal benefits of language learning and cultural awareness at all levels. It must deliver compelling messages to the student, parent, school administration and teachers, corporate, government and community decision-makers who will benefit from strong language programs.

# Teachers of Japanese in Southern California Hone Their Advocacy Skills

By Eiko Ushida, Ph.D. (President TJSC), 2008-2010)

Teachers of Japanese in Southern California (TJSC) held an annual spring workshop on Sunday, April 18 at Notre Dame High School. The theme for this year's workshop was advocacy. About fifty people (current teachers and graduate students) who engage in Japanese language education in Southern California attended this workshop.

We invited a keynote speaker to participate in our workshop, Ms. Lynn Sessler, from Clovis Grove Elementary, who has been actively involved in foreign language education in Wisconsin (2009/2010 WAFLT President Elect/Awards Committee, NNELL Central State East Regional Representative).

During the morning session, Ms. Maki Watanabe Isoyama, from the Japan Foundation in Los Angeles, talked about the importance of advocacy and networking to protect a "forest" of foreign language education in the U.S. Next, Ms. Sessler discussed the new face of advocacy, and introduced useful tools, strategies and ideas to advocate for Japanese language programs in the 21st century with a number of practical examples.

During the afternoon session, four presenters shared their experiences in advocacy. Topics included parents' initiatives to start a new Japanese immersion program, strategies to write a grant proposal and fund-raising, a booth at the Anime Expo, and activities beyond the classroom to advocate Japanese programs.

Following that, we conducted a letter writing campaign to collect our voices to oppose AB2446. After providing information about this bill's author, Assembly member Furutani, its history and current status, attendees discussed how this

legislation would affect us and what we could do to prevent this bill, which led us to a consensus on the importance of sending our voices to the decision makers. Then attendees were divided into groups and engaged in writing letters to oppose AB2446, discussing effective arguments.

At the end of the workshop, we uploaded all of the letters that attendees wrote as templates in TJSC's website so that our members can access for download. Since the hearing was scheduled right after this workshop, we urged the attendees to visit our web site, download the letter, sign it and send or fax it to all of the key decision makers by Tuesday, April 20. We also requested the attendees to spread this information to other stakeholders who may be affected by this bill including administrators, teachers, parents and their family members.

We heard comments from our members such as "very timely," "I learned a lot," "I realized the importance of advocacy effort," and "It was a great idea to lead the teachers through the letter writing process." We believe that this workshop empowered and benefited all of us.

We are very glad to hear that AB2446 was sent to the Appropriation suspense calendar for the time being. We keep our advocacy efforts via letters and discussion on strategies in our forum.

*CLTA would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the individuals involved in this workshop. Your actions helped further the CLTA Advocacy agenda and helped us send a clear message about our opposition to AB 2446 to Assemblyman Furutani and to the Assembly.*

## Of Special Interest to the Educational Community

The Legislative Analyst's Office has just issued the following report:

### Year-One Survey: Update on School District Finance and Flexibility

This survey sought information about how public school districts in California were responding to various state and federal developments. In particular, the survey asked districts to report how they were responding to the newly granted flexibility to shift funds among, as well as away from, approximately 40 state-funded categorical programs. The survey also asked districts to report how they were using federal stimulus funding.

We found that categorical flexibility is having a positive impact on local decision making and that the majority of districts generally appear to be using freed-up categorical

funds to support core classroom instruction. Also, roughly two-thirds of the federal stimulus funds were used to minimize teacher layoffs and the remainder used to backfill reductions to categorical programs and make various one-time purchases.

Finally, we lay out several recommendations for providing school districts with more flexibility. In this report we highlight the major findings of this survey. We also lay out a package of recommendations that the Legislature could adopt in 2010-11 to provide school districts with additional flexibility.

This report is available using the following link:

<http://www.lao.ca.gov/laoapp/PubDetails.aspx?id=2266>

# CLTA News

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## The Changing Scene of World Language Education

*By Lorraine D'Ambruoso, CLTA Executive Director*

The title of an article by Sam Dillon, published in the January 21 edition of the New York Times, "Schools ...halt teaching of foreign languages," gives us cause for concern. His article begins by stating that the USA needs more individuals with linguistic and cultural competency to conduct its global business and diplomacy. But despite this obvious need, documented by numerous studies, a government survey recently revealed that, over the past ten years, language programs have been eliminated in thousands of schools across the nation. Much of this is due to tight budgets. This is truly disheartening to our profession.

But Dillon also pointed to another trend that dissipates some of the concern: the rapid, almost dizzying growth of Chinese language programs in every part of the country. Despite the belt-tightening affecting the traditional language programs, districts are finding it difficult to refuse the help offered by the Chinese government to schools interested in offering instruction in Chinese. The Chinese government is sending guest teachers to schools all over the world, providing instructional materials, and often paying part of both of these costs. Ten years ago, there were Chinese programs in approximately 300 schools. Today, there are such programs in over 1600 public and private American schools. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), the percentage of schools offering Chinese increased from 1% in 1997 to 4% in 2008.

Trevor Packer, a College Board Vice-President, was surprised to find AP Chinese, offered for the first time in 2007, surpassing AP German and "becoming the third most tested AP language after Spanish and French." To quote Nancy Rhodes, author of the CAL survey, the growth in Chinese programs is "really changing the language education landscape in this country."

For the complete article, go to: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/21/education/21chinese.html?scp=1&sq=Foreign%20Language%20decline&st=cse>