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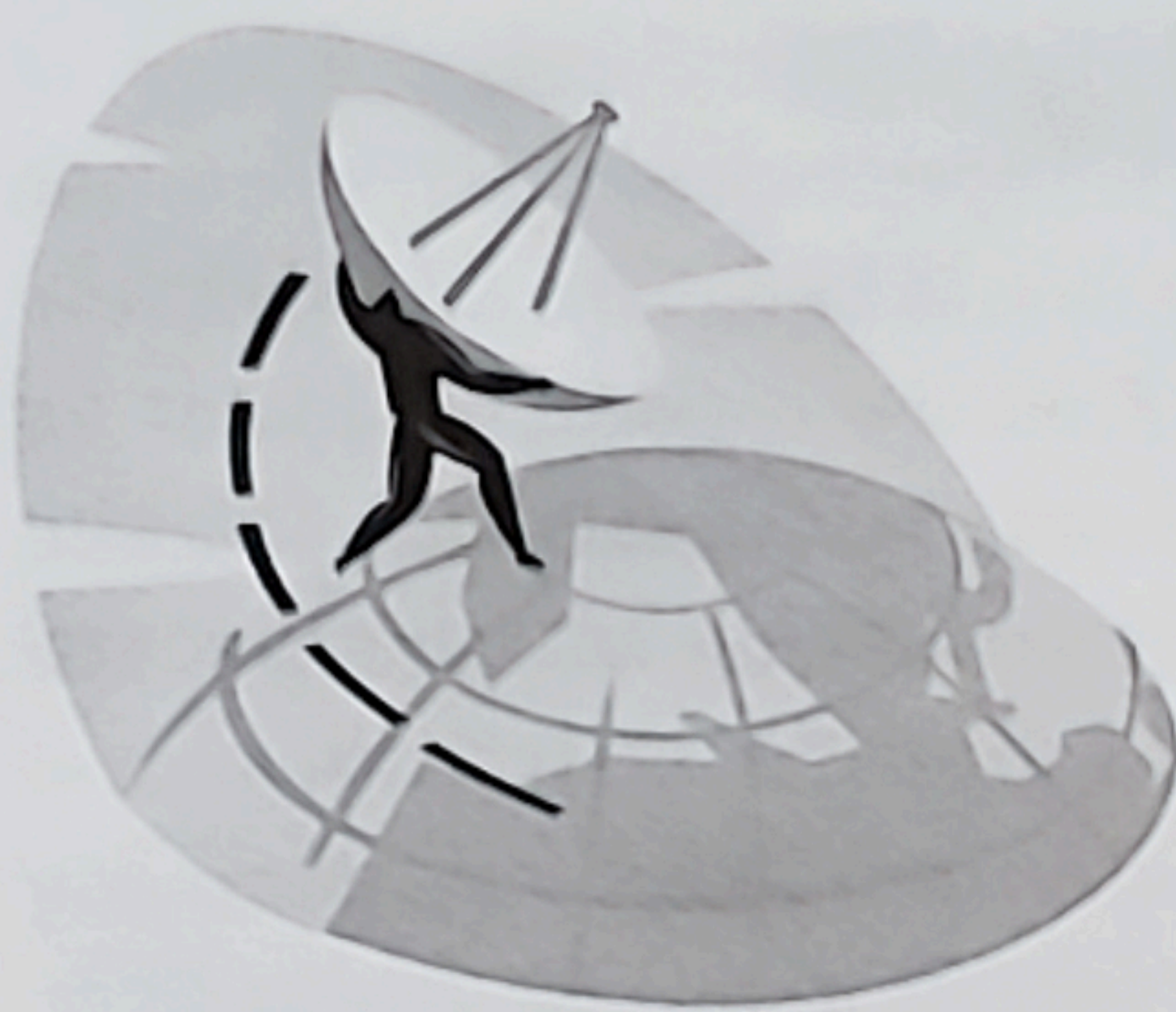
World Languages: State of the State

by Michele Anciaux Aoki, PhD, PMP

There are two myths in the U.S. that impact our policy and practice in world language education:

Myth #1: Americans don't need to learn other languages because everyone else in the world is learning English.

Myth #2: It's a good thing that we don't need to because we Americans are terrible at learning languages.



...regarding world languages in Washington ... there is an incredible growth in grassroots demand, interest, and action.

If Myth #1 were true, most branches of the federal government today would not be complaining about a shortage of speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Japanese, Farsi, Uzbek, Hindi, and Urdu. Businesses would not be offering differential pay for Spanish speakers. Parents would not be paying extra for their children to attend before and after school language programs.

Myth #2, on the other hand, provides an excuse for not making an effort to teach languages in our schools. Have you ever heard someone say, "I studied two years of Spanish in high school and can't remember a word now"? Thus the reasoning goes, if we're not good at learning languages, why bother teaching them?

Belief in these myths became evident when the Washington State Commission on Student Learning (CSL) enacted Education Reform. When the four learning goals were defined, World Languages were not included. Learning another language was likely not envisioned by the Legislature to be a necessary part of a good, basic education for *all* students.

Fast forward to 2007, and you'll see that not much has changed at the state level regarding the status of world languages. There are no World Language Essential Academic Learning Requirements, no Grade-Level Expectations, and no Washington Assessment of Student Learning for languages. However, digging a little deeper, we see that the current "state of the state" regarding World Languages in Washington shows an incredible growth in grassroots demand, interest, and action.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A HISTORY OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

WORLD LANGUAGES SURVEY

In 2004, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Washington Association for Language Teaching, the University of Washington, and the Washington State Coalition for International Education, conducted the first survey of World Languages. K-12 public schools received an electronic survey

designed to report on languages taught in our state. Approximately 19% of schools (431 out of 2,212) responded.¹

In addition to providing data regarding which languages are most commonly taught in our schools, the survey allowed teachers to articulate what type of support they desired for world language education in Washington State. Comments were summarized by Caleb Perkins, OSPI Supervisor for Social Studies and International Education at the 2004 P-20 International Education Summit in Olympia as follows:²

1. More support desired – professional development, specific guidelines
2. Advocacy desired – strong State voice for World Languages
3. World Languages to be part of the core curriculum
4. More World Languages at elementary and middle school
5. More than two years preferred and at least two years required for high school graduation

EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING SYMPOSIUM

Based on the strong interest expressed for beginning the teaching of languages earlier, the University of Washington hosted an Early Language Learning Symposium fall 2005 which attracted over 140 educators. The program featured teachers and principals from the major public school language immersion programs in the Puget Sound area. Symposium participants learned from local experts while the immersion teachers had the opportunity to network with each other.

Most public elementary schools are not yet teaching languages as part of the regular school day. However, we discovered that there are growing numbers of before- and after-school language programs supported by parent groups, PTAs, and community organizations, such as Associates in Cultural Exchange, Successful Schools in Action, and Foreign Language For Youth. In addition, many heritage language communities are expanding their programs.

What these programs strongly indicate is that American students can be excellent language learn-

ers – especially if they start early. A new generation of students is developing language learning skills at an early age if they are fortunate to be in a school where parents and community members have insisted on providing language classes. Thus there is a hidden achievement gap that is not being discussed. Since the education system has not considered learning another language a part of “basic education,” many students in our public schools will never be given the opportunity to develop this critical 21st century skill.

VOLUNTARY WORLD LANGUAGE STANDARDS

In December, 2005, Superintendent Terry Bergeson adopted Voluntary World Language Standards³ for Washington, based on the national Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century.⁴ This was a major step forward. While schools are not required to use the standards, some districts, such as Issaquah, have held workshops for their world language teachers to learn about the standards and resources available to support them. Other districts, such as Seattle, are using the standards as the basis for evaluating textbooks in a new adoption for French and Spanish. In addition, we can now tap into the huge array of resources developed by states such as New Jersey and Nebraska that have made a significant commitment to language learning.

EXPANDING CHINESE LANGUAGE CAPACITY

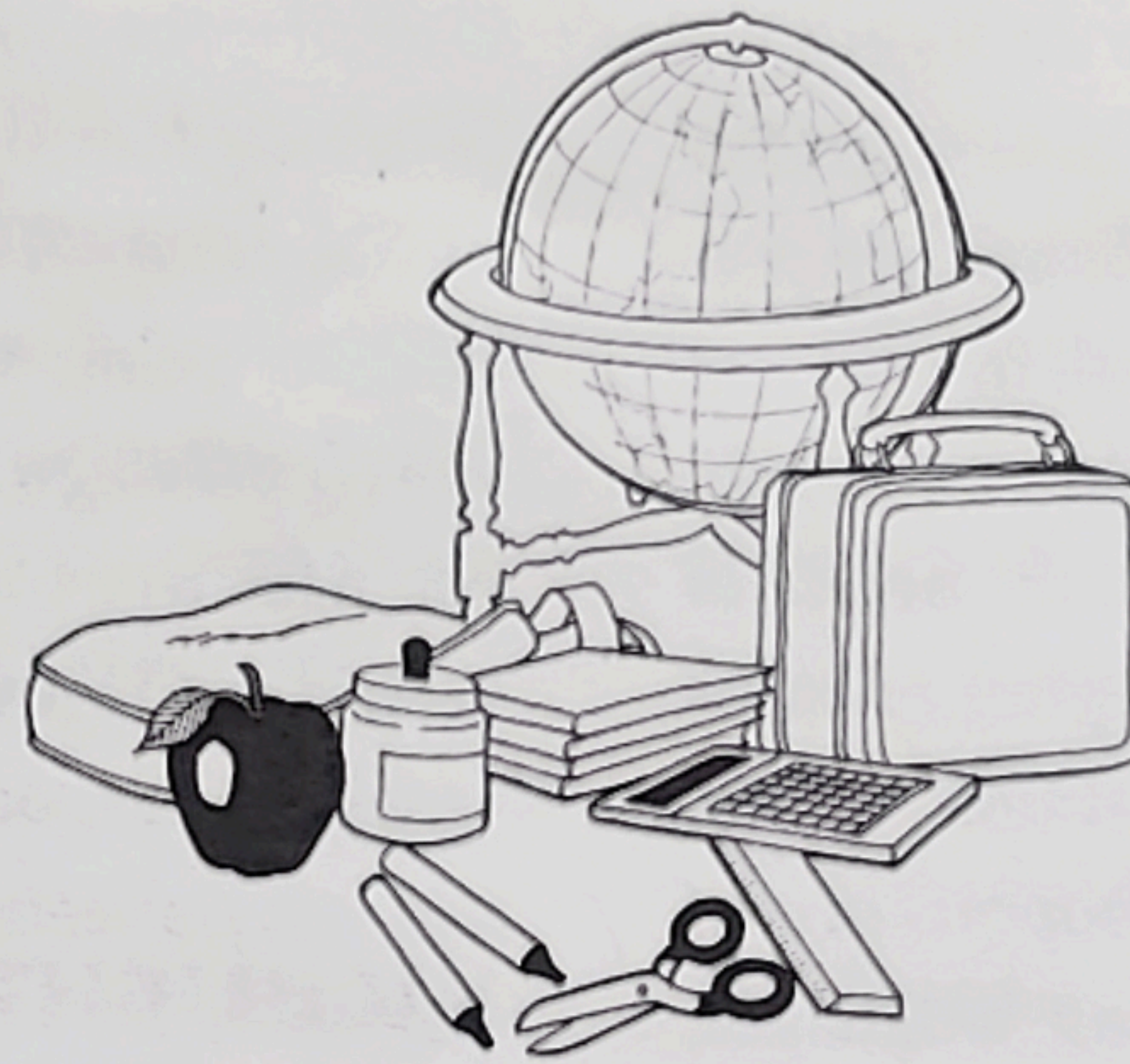
At the P-20 International Education Leadership Summit held in January, 2006, business leaders urged the educators to set an ambitious goal: 10% of Washington students learning Chinese by 2015. The business community understands the critical importance of a workforce with the cultural sensitivity and communication skills required to work effectively with their counterparts across the globe, especially China, which has become one of Washington's major trading partners. Approximately seventy Chinese language educators in our state have organized themselves into a Chinese Language Teachers Network, and are taking steps to develop a pipeline for teachers of Chinese preschool through college. The Washington State Coalition for International

Education continues to support this effort with a web site⁵ and some funding through our State Innovations Grant.

MAPPING AND ENHANCING LANGUAGE LEARNING PROJECT

In the fall of 2006, four National Resource Centers at the University of Washington's Jackson School of International Studies received funding from the U.S. Department of Education to launch a four-year project entitled "Mapping and Enhancing Language Learning" (MELL) in Washington state. The MELL project⁶ is building on the initial results from the 2004 World Languages Survey and beginning to gather longitudinal data. While the current results are still preliminary, over time, the MELL project will be able to show state policy makers trends in language programs in our state's K-12 public schools. Table 1 below as an example, compares the languages offered based on responses from the 2004 World Language Survey and 2007 MELL Survey.

Caveat: We are not comparing the same schools



in two different time periods. There is overlap, but many schools that responded in 2004 have not provided 2007 data, and many schools that provided 2007 data did not participate in 2004. Over time – with a more complete sample – we will be able to track more accurately trends in languages offered.

What is particularly noteworthy is that approximately 19% of Washington State high schools in 2007 self-report that they do not offer any world languages. This is startling given that two credits or more of world languages are a college admissions requirement for most universities. How will these students be able to meet the basic four year college admission requirements? More importantly, are these high school graduates prepared for the globally connected world of the 21st century?

WASHINGTON LEARNS AND WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION

Launched in 2005 by Governor Christine Gregoire, the **Washington Learns**⁷ initiative promised to look at education in Washington State for the first time

TABLE 1: MELL COMPARISON OF 2007 AND 2004 WORLD LANGUAGE SURVEYS¹¹

Total Public High Schools	367	100%	160	100%	
Offer World Languages	296	81%	N/A		
Do Not Offer World Languages	71	19%	N/A		
Offer Specific Languages:					
Spanish	269	90.9%	137	85.6%	5.3%
French	157	53.0%	98	61.3%	-8.2%
German	80	27.0%	64	40.0%	-13.0%
ASL	64	21.6%	46	28.8%	-7.1%
Japanese	68	23.0%	39	24.4%	-1.4%
Latin	7	2.4%	10	6.3%	-3.9%
Chinese	17	5.7%	7	4.4%	1.4%
Russian	9	3.0%	6	3.8%	-0.7%
Arabic	0	0.0%	1	0.6%	-0.6%
Native American Languages	3	1.0%			1.0%

Calculated based on total schools that do offer languages. Source: http://depts.washington.edu/llc/mellwa/mell_comparisons.htm

in a systemic way – from preschool to college. One of its ten-year goals is: that *All* students will graduate from high school with an international perspective and the skills to live, learn, and work in a diverse state and a global society.



While early drafts of the Washington Learns recommendations mentioned the importance of learning other languages, the final report issued to the Legislature and the public in November 2006 did not. If the intention is to create a *world-class,*

*learner-focused seamless education system to prepare all Washingtonians to be competitive worldwide and participate in a healthy democracy,*⁸ the plan must include world languages. The question now is when.

WORLD LANGUAGES AND COLLEGE READINESS

In the fall of 2006, the Higher Education Coordinating Board published a policy brief entitled “College Readiness in the Arts, Social Studies, and World Languages.” This effort was part of Washington’s 2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education, *Section 8, Helping Students Make the Transition to College*, in which the HEC Board aimed to define college readiness in the subject areas of the arts, social studies, and world languages in order to:

- Define what students must know and be able to do to succeed, without remediation, in two-year and four-year colleges, universities and technical schools.
- Align requirements for college success with the learning outcomes emphasized in K-12 reform.
- Adopt college readiness definitions to be used by K-12, higher education institutions, and employers to improve student transitions to colleges, universities and/or the workplace.

The report pointed out the discrepancies between high school graduation and college admissions requirements in this state. It also referred to a 2006

study by the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and The Society for Human Resource Management, which identified that “*Knowledge of Foreign Languages* will ‘increase in importance’ in the next five years, more than any other basic skill, according to over 60 percent (63.3 percent) of the employer respondents.”⁹

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2007

During 2007, activity around world languages has increased in this state providing an optimistic view of the future. Highlights include:

BILLS INTRODUCED

- House Bill 1517 – Enhancing public school world language instruction, reinstates the position of a world languages supervisor at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- Senate Bill 5714 – Creates a pilot program of Spanish and Chinese language instruction and funds a limited number of new programs.

Although neither bill was enacted during the session, SB5714 was passed out of the Senate without a single Nay vote. HB1517 was sent to the Governor as an amendment to a larger education bill which the Governor vetoed. The bill did not specify a funding source and there were questions about some provisions. However, there are indications both bills will be reintroduced in the 2008 session.

FLAP (Foreign Language Assistance Program) Grant. Seattle Public Schools received a FLAP grant to launch new elementary Chinese language programs. Three programs were begun last winter and have now expanded this fall to include all K-2 students in these three schools. The curriculum focuses on teaching math content in Chinese, along with songs, games, and cultural activities.

Startalk. With new federal funding through Startalk, Betty Lau from Seattle Public Schools developed a cohort of Chinese teachers working on alternative route certification. When they can become fully certified teachers in the public schools, a critical step will have been taken to address the shortage of qualified teachers.

Two-Way Dual Language Programs. Two new two-way dual language programs were launched this fall for Spanish/English in Mt. Vernon and Seattle School Districts. These programs serve both native Spanish speakers and non-Spanish speaking students and allow both populations to become fluent in both Spanish and English, while increasing academic success.

Assessment Training. Interest in assessing the oral fluency and listening comprehension skills of language students continues to grow. Three workshops on oral proficiency assessment were presented by the Center for Applied Linguistics this year in Bellevue and Seattle for over sixty teachers.

World Language Endorsement Review. A committee is currently reviewing the endorsement requirements for K-12 teachers in World Languages. The committee's recommendations will be sent to the Professional Educator Standards Board in January, 2008.

STATE OF THE STATE IN SUMMARY

What's working in our state right now? Many people at the grass roots are demonstrating tremendous initiative, creativity, and tenacity in developing suc-

cessful models of language learning across the state. These innovators believe that the opportunity to learn a language must be part of every child's education. It's a matter of equity and fairness. Language teachers are learning to network and are challenging themselves to teach language in new ways. They are moving from traditional teaching methods to content-based instruction and project-based learning.

What's missing right now? A commitment from the Legislature to provide support so that world languages can become part of a world-class education in Washington State. Will 2008 be the year that we move from grassroots activism to state-level leadership?

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- 3 "Voluntary World Language Standards." 23 Oct 2007. <http://www.k12.wa.us/curriculuminstruct/socstudies/WorldLanguages/voluntarystandards.aspx>

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RESEARCH - VISION - ACTION

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Leading our new state chapter is a labor of love for many of your fellow educators statewide and me. During the past two years, they have built a solid foundation for which to launch a visionary and exciting professional development plan and program that brings to Washington State the services, networks and professional relationships that Phi Delta Kappa International and its members in our state have developed during the past 102 years. Visit our websites, www.pdkwa.org and www.pdkintl.org and come to our receptions, awards luncheons, summits, and conferences and experience high-caliber professional development and meaningful interaction with the participants.

In 2008, your State Chapter will continue to become a center of inquiry, strengthen its foundational structure, offer exciting and valued conferences, and publish its spring 2008 journal. We invite

you to attend our reception for PDK members and guests at the OSPI Conference (January 30, 2008) in Spokane and our April 19th High Performing Educators Conference and Awards Luncheon that will be held in Tacoma.

We want you to join Phi Delta Kappa – Washington State's Center for Educational Inquiry and become an active member of this learning community by publishing in our new journal and future research and professional development conferences.

PDK-WA is the first state chapter in Phi Delta Kappa's 102-year history. Please join us as we work to be and become a professional organization that collaborates with you and other key leaders to develop a knowledge-base and training opportunities for future teachers and educator leaders at all levels in our public and private schools and universities.

tem in ways that intentionally improve the system. And – my bias – that approach will lead us back to the essence of our profession more ongoing, job embedded, professional development where we can see our great educators day by day making a difference for all students, including those who now struggle academically.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In closing, we sincerely thank our Washington state respondents for their candid, informed and pas-

sionate responses to our reflective questions. Indeed, they expressed similar and diverse insights related to the PDK/Gallup Poll. In light of these representative responses from a superintendent, a principal, a teacher and a dean, we hope readers can consider their own reflection on the progress of K-12 education as we continue the good work of continuous improvement of our schools for the students in Washington State.

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- 5 "Expanding Chinese Language Capacity." 23 Oct 2007 <http://internationaledwa.org/chinese/default.htm>
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