

APPENDIX D

Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions

1) Why should Connecticut students study a world language?

- a) Research indicates that citizens with knowledge of more than one language and culture enrich both their communities and themselves.¹
- b) Students who are able to function in more than one language and culture provide a basis for leadership in the state as well as in the international marketplace.
- c) Students with an understanding of diverse cultures develop an acceptance of differences, which is essential in a democratic society.
- d) New technologies are expanding the global community in which all Connecticut students will someday operate.

2) Why study another world language at an early age?

- a) Research and experience demonstrate that younger children are decidedly better equipped to acquire a world language than older children. Also, learning to speak, read, write and function in another language takes a long time.
- b) Early introduction to a second language offers students a wider variety of language contexts. These contexts will foster language proficiency, help to develop insights into the nature of languages and create an understanding of other disciplines via the world language. They will produce cultural awareness and knowledge about multilingual communities. Effective world languages instruction at an early age can take advantage of a “window of opportunity”: it can use psychological and physiological abilities of the young child which later no longer exist. The early development of cognition and tolerance of that which is “other” is the best guarantee for a functional, generous and tolerant local and global community.

3) How were the major goal areas of language study selected and how are they prioritized?

Traditionally, world languages learning stressed mainly linguistic acquisition. While the communication goal is still extremely important, students in the 21st century should use their knowledge of world languages in ways that exceed that goal. The national standards task force identified five goal areas that encompass all of the reasons to study a foreign language and called them the *five C's of foreign language education*: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. They are not hierarchically arranged; instead, they are inextricably interwoven. The reasons for world languages learning have become broader based, and the goals attempt to respond to more practical needs of a larger community and the future.

4) Why are the standards clustered by grade levels (K-4, 5-8, 9-12) and not by proficiency level (beginner, intermediate, advanced)?

The state world languages standards are grouped K-4, 5-8 and 9-12 to be aligned with the content standards for the other subject areas in *The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards*. This grouping also (1) matches a common school or grades configuration and (2) encompasses the grade-level language instruction seen as most beneficial for Connecticut's students, i.e., to achieve proficiency, beginning in kindergarten and continuing through Grade 12 and, ideally, beyond.

¹ See “The Case for Multilingual Citizens in the 21st Century” by Jeffrey J. Hunks, in *Northeast Conference Reports Foreign Languages for All: Challenge and Choice*. Barbara H. Wing, ed., National Textbook Company, 1996, 1-18.

5) How will a district whose program starts in middle school or high school use these standards?

A district whose program does not begin in kindergarten will have to design its curriculum for its designated entry point using the content and performance standards listed for the earliest grade levels (K-4), which are the “beginner” levels. Of course, activities will have to be modified to be age appropriate. How far along the continuum of content and performance standards students will get will depend on the number of years of study available to them, as well as other factors. However, it is important to keep in mind that a shorter length of study, such as 7-12 or 9-12, will preclude the achievement of the more advanced performance standards described in this guide.

6) Why do the standards specify that world languages are for *all* students?

Every child can benefit from learning a second language, regardless of socioeconomic status or educational plans; it can be argued that non-college-bound students stand to gain as much as others from instruction in a language other than English.²

Skills and insight that may result from studying a world language will be needed by all students, who must be prepared to live and work in a world that demands international and cross-cultural interaction.

7) How do we create transitions and different entry levels with a standards-based program?

Students in a standards-based program will be assessed according to the standards associated with specific levels, through a variety of measures including proficiency testing, class performance and ongoing teacher evaluations. Ideally, placement is individualized according to student proficiency and motivation, availability of programs and other logistical factors. Flexibility is key.

8) How will teachers learn to reflect the standards in their teaching?

Teachers will be provided with opportunities to revitalize and expand their expertise through professional development activities. Many workshops and seminars have already taken place around the country to acquaint teachers with the national standards. State and local professional organizations as well as local school districts will be crafting professional development activities needed to translate national and state standards into curriculum and classroom practices that facilitate student success.

9) What is the role of grammar?

Language is communication. Consequently, students must be given ample opportunities to explore, develop and use communication strategies, learning strategies and critical thinking skills, as well as the appropriate elements of the language system.

Traditionally, in a grammar-driven language course, what a student *knew about* the language was the primary focus. Now, in a proficiency-driven communicative program, what a student can *do* with the language is the primary focus. Thus, the role of grammar is to serve its sole purpose: to order and structure communication so that it is easily understood.

10) What is the relationship of state standards to local districts?

State standards are intended to serve as a gauge for excellence as local districts plan and implement curriculum in the schools. The state standards are voluntary and do not usurp the role of the local districts. The state standards and framework do not constitute curriculum and do not serve as substitutes for local frameworks and curriculum.

² See pages 2 and 3 in Chapter 1 and pages 166 and 167 in Chapter 5, “The New World Languages Learner.”

The usefulness of the standards lies in their definition of the field and their reflection of the profession. The state standards set forth for local districts the possible levels of achievement and benefits for students who engage in an extended sequence of language study.

11) Are the state standards mandatory?

No. These voluntary standards should serve as a model to local policy makers, program planners and curriculum developers as they consider their own programs and the role of world languages in their schools. Regardless of changing fiscal or political circumstances, the standards will have an impact on classrooms as teachers modify their instruction to help students make progress toward achieving the five C's of world language education: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. The Connecticut State Department of Education endorses the standards set forth as desirable, but not mandatory, for local districts.

12) What languages should be offered at the local level, especially in an elementary program?

Each district must carefully assess the cultural and linguistic needs of its own population as well as the resources available for implementing a long-term language program. In the process of developing local standards, the first step is the drafting of a vision statement that reflects local goals.

The most frequently offered world languages in Connecticut are (in order) Spanish, French, Latin, German and Italian. As indicated by the wide variety of language activities in Chapter 2, there are also programs in Japanese, Polish, Russian, Chinese and Portuguese. Programs in other languages such as Arabic and Korean should also be considered.

13) Why are there two separate standards on culture? Are these redundant?

Although the term "culture" is used in both content standards 2.4 and 4.8, the perspectives are slightly different. Content standard 2.4 states that students will "demonstrate an understanding of . . . the cultures studied." Standard 4.8, on the other hand, takes this understanding one step further and asks students to make "comparisons of the cultures studied and their own."

14) What happens if students don't achieve these performance standards at the designated level?

As stated in Chapter 1, the standards "are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to illustrate, suggest and stimulate creative teaching and learning." Clearly, student performance depends on many factors besides grade level, including years of language study, hours per week of exposure and related language experience such as travel and home environment.

World language programs are specifically designed to accommodate multiple entry points for students. At each grade level there are always beginners as well as those who are more proficient.

15) Some languages are more difficult for native speakers of English. How can students be expected to achieve high standards in these languages?

This guide provides an overall vision for all languages. It is not intended to meet the curricular demands of every world language, particularly those with other alphabets or writing systems. Local districts will design their own curriculum, choosing the appropriate performance standards for each language and its sequence of courses.

16) If a district begins an elementary language program, will language enrollments at the high school drop?

Districts that have had an elementary language program for many years report that they have experienced no significant decline in language enrollments at the high school level. For example, 1996-97 elective world languages enrollments at the secondary level in Glastonbury, which began a world language for all students in Grade 3, were as follows: Grade 7, 95 percent; Grade 8, 90 percent, and Grades 9-12, 84 percent.³

17) Given what needs to be included each day in elementary school classes, how can time be found to add world language instruction?

The new approach to world language instruction is content-related; that is, curriculum that students are already studying at their grade level serves as the basis for instruction in the world language to reinforce or enhance what the students already know, e.g., children in Grade 1 learn about community helpers in English and in the world language.

18) The content and performance standards do not stress the development of listening, reading or writing skills or learning strategies. Why?

The content and performance standards point out what students should know and be able to do in the target language, and they do include the use of the five language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and cultural awareness. They are not, however, a curriculum, and teachers must add the essential skills, knowledge and instructional strategies necessary to enable students to achieve the standards, along with the assessment component and the resources required.

³ See Appendix F, "A Case for Foreign Languages: The Glastonbury Language Program," by Christine Brown, director of foreign language, Glastonbury Public Schools.

