



WORLD LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR K-16

SUMMARY:

Language is fundamental to our lives, it helps us present ideas, discoveries, needs and aspirations and informs how we understand others, ourselves and cultures around us. Numerous studies show that learning a second language increases academic achievement and provides cognitive benefits to students. Additionally, being exposed to world languages at a young age increases the likelihood of acquiring a high level of fluency. American businesses and the federal government report that they need more multi-lingual speakers to support economic, diplomatic, scientific and cultural needs. The United States prides itself on being a multicultural nation and our citizens speak more than 350 languages. However, the majority of Americans remain monolingual and there is not a national mandate to provide world language instruction nor are there defined programs to develop a core of teachers that can provide world language instruction.

By knowing the languages of others and understanding the world around them our students will be true 21st century students who collaborate, communicate, demonstrate creativity, critical thinking and good citizenship. Every elementary school in the country should offer a world language as part of a well defined K-16 instructional sequence that provides students with exposure to one or more languages and cultures and allows students to not only learn a world language but also progress toward fluency.

WHEREAS, studying world languages results in higher scores in verbal and math standardized tests, strengthens critical thinking skills, creativity, problem solving capabilities and memory function;

WHEREAS, studying world languages increases global awareness, cultural understanding and employment opportunities;

WHEREAS, the ability to speak, read and write in a world language in addition to English is essential to attract business, engage in world trade, participate in scientific research, foster diplomacy, understand cultural nuances and respond to global humanitarian emergencies.

WHEREAS, the United States has neglected languages in its curriculum and lags behind most nations of the world, in the percentage of its citizens who have some knowledge of a second language.

WHEREAS, more than sixty-five million U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home and although that number has been increasing since the 1970s this represents only 20.7 percent of the total population, and only a fraction speaks, reads, and comprehends the non-English language well enough to use it fluently.

WHEREAS, the percentage of students learning a world language has significantly declined from 31 percent in the late 1990s to 15 percent today and there is not a national mandate to include world language instruction in the elementary or secondary curriculum.

THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Virginia PTA supports development of a well articulated K-16 world language instructional sequence that provides students with exposure to one or more languages and cultures beginning in elementary school and that makes use of age- and developmentally appropriate curriculum, instructional activities, and materials; and allows students to not only sustain but to progress toward fluency.

RESOLVED, that the Virginia PTA supports programs to increase the number of language teachers at all levels of education so that every child in every grade has the opportunity to learn a language in addition to English. This may include but is not limited to a state credentialing system so that qualified teachers can find work in other regions of the United States and a federal loan forgiveness program.

RESOLVED, that the Virginia PTA supports efforts to provide language learning opportunities and college credits for heritage speakers, who may have learned a world language at home but who are not fluent in that language. This includes curriculum and college credits for Native American Languages and American Sign Language.

RESOLVED, that the Virginia PTA recognizes the value of students experiencing other cultures and immersing in multilingual environments and encourages high schools and universities to facilitate learning abroad opportunities for students and supports a restructuring of federal financial aid to help low-income undergraduates study abroad during the summer and academic year.

January 2019, approved by General Membership