

**A Blueprint for Action on Language Education**  
**Summary of the Proceedings at the National Language Policy Summit**  
**January 10-11, 2005**

On 10–11 January 2005 the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) convened a national gathering to establish an agenda for language education. This ACTFL initiative continues the call for action raised at the National Language Conference of June 2004. At this writing, organizers of the National Language Conference have been circulating among federal agencies a white paper of recommendations that emerged from the June 2004 conference. Unprecedented in its call for national attention to developing citizens' language competence, the conference emphasized language capacity in the national interest as it has never been explored before. Uniquely in America, language education has not been—and is not yet—a national priority. With a diversity of sectors represented, the conference called for skills to meet the demands of a global economy, a post-9/11 security awareness, and an internationally collaborative approach to common challenges. Recognizing that demands for improved language education have long-term implications for educators and that implementation strategies require consensus among stakeholders, ACTFL leadership decided its first event in the Year of Languages should be a policy summit. Given the diversity of interests inherent in Americans' competence in international economic and diplomatic affairs and the variety of organizational structures in the education sector, ACTFL decided to convene a set of individuals who could address policy in government, business, and academic sectors and extend this working group through off-site participation.

By combination of on-site discussion, video teleconference, dial-in telephone conversation, webcast, and e-mail, interested individuals were able to raise and respond to issues identified in the draft federal white paper from the National Language Conference and explore suggestions for implementation. The School of Education of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill welcomed over 30 on-site participants and hosted the inclusion of almost 2,000 others electronically.

If indeed American society is to facilitate the acquisition of competence in other languages, individuals and groups need to take specific actions toward meeting such a goal. To determine fruitful steps to fulfill this mission, the participants formed three discussion sessions, one each for business, government, and academe. Each developed a set of priorities on which the group itself could act, determined the persons or organizations that will move this agenda, and set deadlines and milestones for achieving their goals. The groups reported at regular intervals in plenary session, including to those participating by remote means. These priorities also informed the off-site discussions, and participants in remote locations devised priorities for their locations.

## Raising the Priority of Language Education

“The focus on international education in languages can’t be primarily or ultimately at the higher-education level. It’s critical that we have great centers, but we must teach languages much more broadly at K–12.”

—former Governor James B. Hunt, North Carolina

The importance of learning languages by the youth of America is valuable in and of itself for the general cognitive development that it brings as well as the awareness of and appreciation for languages as an important element in basic education. Awareness of language diversity fosters tolerance, respect for democracy, and sensitivity to difference. Language learning is becoming requisite for young people to understand and navigate an increasingly complex and connected world.

Although language and international education are essential to America’s future, they are appreciated more by the federal government for their contribution to diplomacy, national security, and international commerce than they are by the states, which are the major source of funding for education. In his remarks to set the societal context for education issues, James B. Hunt, former governor of North Carolina, advised the audience that federal agencies—especially the Departments of Defense and State and some members of the U.S. Congress—understand the need for this critical skill. But the task of building support for expanded language education requires building coalitions of citizens, seeking commonalities of interest, and developing advocacy in the business sector.

America’s economic security depends on international commerce. State offices dealing with economic development, exports, and regional cross-border issues, and providers of emergency services to growing numbers of foreign visitors and recent immigrants all appreciate the need for effective communication in multiple languages. Numerous speakers from this sector presented evidence of their requirements during the June 2004 conference. For education administrators to appreciate the need for language competence, these requirements need greater visibility.

There is general recognition that America needs individuals with skills in a great diversity of languages. Translating this need into education policy and implementing a response in formal education require promoting, recruiting, financing, developing, and expanding various aspects of language education. Not all schools and colleges can be expected to offer a dozen languages or more, and not all should be expected to offer the same critical languages, but all should offer a choice among several high-need languages. The call for attention to less commonly taught languages does not indicate the country needs fewer individuals competent in commonly taught languages. To the contrary, the national need is for more individuals with higher levels of competence across a diversity of languages. The need for individuals with skills in high-utility languages such as French and German has not diminished. It continues. This goal calls for a transformation of values clearly articulated in public that Americans be fully literate in English and one or more additional languages of their choice.

Gov. Hunt suggested that the nation needs a commitment to language and international education by both the federal and state governments. Although education is primarily a state responsibility, the federal government's specific interest in international affairs requires a federal emphasis to ensure the citizenry is well prepared to meet international challenges.

Taking the effort one step closer to the local communities is also important. The linguistic resources available in individual communities across America need to be identified and actualized in order to meet local needs. Heritage speakers<sup>1</sup> are a rich resource for the United States to begin to build its linguistic capacity and these heritage groups are present in every community.

### **Moving an Agenda of Language Competence in America**

The theme of "connectedness" that Gov. Hunt proposed informs the summit's agenda for language competence along two major dimensions: (1) language skills are connected to their use across multiple domains and (2) to move a national agenda, the "agents of change" must build coalitions of advocates in their respective sectors, i.e., business, government, and academe. Ray Clifford, former chancellor of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, noted that solving the challenge of language education demands engaging federal, state, and local government and that language education must be integrated into education across various subject areas. The concept of "language across the curriculum" thus takes on a significant role in that applications of language skill become integrated in various disciplines.

Advocates need to engage local and state authorities as well. Each exercises influence on education, and none can be neglected. The danger of incomplete follow-through is not immediately evident but can be illustrated: states have mandated earlier language education, but then not followed up with adequate funding. This results in a series of "unfunded mandates," and with no accountability mechanism in place, the decision to implement early language programs is left up to individual School Boards or the building principal, who often do not have the resources to do so.

### **Priorities for a Partnership between Business and Language Education**

"The official language of DaimlerChrysler is English, but that policy is misleading. Even though senior management may have strong English language skills, day-to-day business in Stuttgart is done in German. Their employees at many levels throughout the world, whether in Detroit, Japan, Alabama, or Brazil are well served by being able to interact with their headquarters in their native tongue!"

—Prof. John Grandin, University of Rhode Island,  
International Engineering Program

---

<sup>1</sup> Heritage speakers are defined as those who learned a language other than English through the home or community experience.

Business groups, industrial associations, and government export planners periodically undertake studies to determine future markets, changes in clientele, and risks to development. The business discussion group pointed to surveys by the Committee for Economic Development, the Localization Industry Standards Association, the Asia Society, the American Council on Education, the Institute for International Education, and the Rand Corporation, as well as a research series in international business and finance. As an item for immediate attention, members of the business group will notify ACTFL staff regarding existing surveys so that a review of current surveys can be conducted to determine the needs in this area. These findings will form the basis for a survey specifically oriented toward language and cultural knowledge for international business.

The business representatives will enlist the assistance of chief executive officers, strategic planners, and human-resource professionals to:

- Advocate support for language education in America's schools
  - Write letters to appropriate officials, such as the White House and Congress
  - Meet with senior government officials to advocate attention to language and international education
- Establish corporate climates that promote language competence
  - Recognize the contribution of heritage languages to business climate and corporate activities
  - Encourage employees to volunteer support for school programs, e.g., speaking to promote international business, advocating language education before school boards and media
  - Replicate successful internship programs between universities and international business
- Expand adopt-a-school programs with a specific emphasis on foreign languages

The calendar for these activities is clear: the business group identified the priority of establishing a group of executives to accept the charge of moving this agenda. The group agreed to identify the relevant studies within a month for the ACTFL staff to collect. ACTFL will communicate with the business group after the materials have been collected. The goal of expanding internship programs is to begin within a month, with expansion of adopt-a-school programs to be a subsequent activity. The business group will build messages about the importance to business of multilingual employees and to integrate advocacy of language competence in corporate climate within six months. The matter of corporate climate will be a continuing item of emphasis.

These priorities are national, regional, and local and require the effort of language professionals across the country to enlist business support to move this agenda. For example, St. George's Independent School, Collierville, Tennessee, is taking this challenge to its board members with affiliations to local industries, such as Federal Express. This model needs replication across the country: public, independent, and parochial schools all have boards whose members serve because they care about the quality of education. Individual teachers, local and state language organizations, and regional leaders need to present the case for language education to such individuals, to chambers of commerce, and to boards of realtors, all of whom prosper when education meets the emerging needs of the future workforce.

### Priorities for a Government Partnership for Language Education

“... language instruction needs to begin well before high school and continue throughout the educational pipeline.”

—*A Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities*  
(federal white paper, draft, August 2004)

The government discussion group identified action items, leaders to implement the actions, and deadlines for each identified activity. The group decided:

- To endorse the federal white paper, stressing its application to the national interest, and circulate the endorsement to language advocates and language educators
- To promote a national strategy to develop language competence among Americans
- To recommend implementation, through the National Security Education Program, of an articulated K–16 Chinese program as a model to demonstrate the feasibility of developing competence in a less commonly taught language
- To explore expansion of this model to other languages via the Intelligence Community’s Foreign Language Executive Committee (FLEXCOM) and other federal interagency mechanisms
- To advocate the rescheduling of the foreign language National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test for 2007
- To endorse the need for national leadership for language education
- To note the possibilities through the Joint National Committee for Languages (JNCL) for new legislative initiatives to address gaps in national support for language education
- To strongly endorse the establishment of a National Civilian Linguist Reserve Corps
- To strategize a national language outreach and support program

The government discussion group endorsed the White Paper at its Chapel Hill session, and several additional agenda items are clearly near-term goals. Congress has provided authority and funding for several of these initiatives through recent legislation. P.L. 108-487, for example, expands the National Security Education Program (NSEP). The Chapel Hill discussion identified a K–16 pilot program in Chinese as a near-term priority that NSEP will pursue through a request for proposals. NSEP foresees awarding funding for this project within six months. Exploring the possibilities for expansion of this model will be undertaken via the Intelligence Community’s Foreign Language Executive Committee and other federal interagency mechanisms.

P.L. 108-458 gives the Director of National Intelligence the task of conducting a “pilot project to assess the feasibility and advisability of establishing a Civilian Linguist Reserve Corps....”

The task of developing a strategy for a national outreach program is projected to take three months. The group defined mid-term (six-month) goals of identifying gaps in current legislation and developing legislative proposals to fill these gaps. The K–12 assessment project proposal from ACTFL was funded and work will get underway by summer 2005. Advocating

the test administration for Spanish as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) will take place over the next six months.

The government group defined as nine-month goals the development of a federal office to advocate language competence and the establishment of the Civilian Linguist Reserve.

### **Priorities for Academe in Moving a National Language Agenda**

“The matter of language competence goes beyond jobs, markets, and security. It’s part of who we are, and it demands public-policy initiatives to raise quality and expand the cadre of teachers, to conduct research on language learning on the model of how people learn science, and to integrate language into the larger context of things that surround language experience.”

—Thomas James, Dean of Education,  
University of North Carolina

Common themes emerged from the three discussion groups, notably the need to work simultaneously at local, state, and national levels and the advisability of a national language advisor on the model of the national science advisor.

Academic institutions can influence American society at large by promoting language competence in their own environments and ensuring that others know that academe values such skills. Some academic actions require a commitment of resources on campus, while others require seeking resources from donors and philanthropic foundations and using an academic “bully pulpit” to bring sectors together to promote skills required in the national interest. The academic discussion group set its priorities as:

- Raise the consciousness of the American public, its leaders, and the education sector to the need and value of learning languages and cultures
- Pursue funding for language-education research and assessments
- Expand model programs of language education
- Seek support for professional development for teachers
- Expand available types of immersion language experiences

This revolutionary agenda to align education resources with the national interest has numerous goals for each of these five points. Pursuit of this agenda requires building alliances and working within extant policy structures to seek financing for the necessary expansion of language education. Some of the items on the agenda have their source from the New Visions Project<sup>2</sup> that sought to identify critical needs of the profession and begin making progress. The recommendations included here build upon the areas identified in the New Visions project: Teacher Recruitment and Retention; Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Articulation;

---

<sup>2</sup> The New Visions Project, funded by the U.S. Education Department, was a collaboration between the National K-12 Language Resource Center at Iowa State and ACTFL to develop a strategic plan for language education.

Research; and Professional Development--all with working committees already making progress. Some of the items on this agenda can begin immediately, some are near- to mid-term, and still others will require continuous emphasis.

*1. Raising the consciousness of the American public, its leaders, and the education sector.*

In support of this goal, priorities are to:

- Establish the position of National Language Advisor
- Support a fully funded public-awareness campaign for language skills
- Extend the agenda of education in language and culture to the US Department of Education
- Create a movement among philanthropists to support local, state, and national initiatives in language-and-culture education
- Convene a national education commission on language-and-culture education using the National Governors Association, the Education Commission of the States, the Council of Chief State School Officers, et al.
- Convene state and local cross-sector summits modeled on the Year of Languages Summit at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Replicate the language-policy summit in locations across the country
- Support the States' Institutes initiative of the Asia Society
- Continue to work to change curricula in America's schools to include languages in the early elementary grades
- Establish teacher recruitment, mentoring, and retention programs in order to build the language teaching cadre

*2. Pursue funding for language-education research and assessments*

- Collect data on all existing language programs in the U.S.
- Seek to ensure that Title VI funding is increased to support K-16 language programs
- Disseminate to policy makers and appropriate educators the relevant and reliable research on the effectiveness of long sequences of language study
- Encourage research on models for language learning across age groups and types of learners
- Fund K-16 assessments of language study at state and national levels
- Use provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act* to conduct research on the impact of studying other languages on reading and writing in English
- Use the *No Child Left Behind Act* to support language programs in public schools, in particular to establish a national assessment as an integral part of school curricula
- Collaborate cross-nationally on language research and assessment

*3. Expand model programs of language education and create options*

- Use National Security Education Program funds for model K-16 programs
- Support new legislation to fund expansion of K-16 model programs across a broader spectrum of education

- Fund research and development of alternative models of language education, including virtual classrooms and other technologically delivered instruction as well as independent and adult learning
- Create pilot sites for assessment of longer, articulated sequences of instruction, investigating differences in starting at different stages of education and tracking progress
- Coordinate with the high school redesign movement to model new options for secondary-level language learning

*4. Seek support for priorities in professional development*

- Identify incentives to explore K–16 options for content and delivery of language instruction
- Seek funds for projects to offer secondary-school options, such as language maintenance, credit for language-education initiatives
- Train secondary teachers to develop new course and curricular options
- Fund pilot programs of teacher education that link language and education departments in postsecondary institutions
- Use NCATE standards to redesign teacher education

*5. Expand available types of immersion language experiences*

- Study domestic as well as study abroad, service learning, and expanded internship programs
- Language camps and family language experiences
- Language maintenance, weekend and technology-mediated immersion, and broad experiences requiring target language as the medium of instruction

“Foreign languages are to the humanities as math is to the natural sciences.”

—Thomas Adams, National Endowment for the Humanities

### **Moving the Agenda**

“Don’t be cowed by those who say we don’t have the money.”

—Gov. James B. Hunt

This blueprint provides a basis for activity that has already begun across the country. During the video discussion, numerous participants discussed local plans for community- and

state-based approaches to economic summits, a state language advisor, proclamations to support language study, and the like. To grasp the current “*Sputnik* moment,” language advocates must write legislators, address school boards, and write supportive pieces—from op-ed pages to professional articles on language-education policy. If we fully recognize the contribution of languages to our society across numerous domains, we must each define the pieces we can contribute to enhancing the nation’s skills and improving its familiarity with other cultures. Then we must pursue this agenda to achieve not only public financial support but a societal transformation valuing competence in multiple languages.

*ACTFL wishes to recognize and thank Kurt E. Müller, formerly of the Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), University of Maryland, for attending the summit and summarizing the proceedings with the draft of this blueprint for action.*