

The Importance of Foreign Language Learning

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in their Global Education Policy Statement identifies five major challenges we face in the 21st century both individually in our state education agencies and collectively as a national organization of education leaders. The second challenge listed is: "Our current standards and curricula do not adequately emphasize the necessity of mastering world languages, geography, and culture."

According to the New York State Department of Economic Development, "New York ranked third in the nation in export activity and international investments and is at the heart of the largest and richest consumer market in the world."

World Languages and global awareness are listed as essential for students in the 21st century by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

According to the National Research Council, "a pervasive lack of knowledge about foreign cultures and foreign languages in this country threatens the security of the United States as well as its ability to compete in the global marketplace and produce an informed citizenry."

The National Research Council also concluded that "early language learning in elementary and secondary school is key to establishing a pipeline of students who can eventually reach a high enough level of proficiency in foreign language and culture to meet national needs."

According to the 2000 census, only 9 percent of Americans can speak a second language, whereas over 50 percent of Europeans speak one or more foreign languages.

Strong evidence shows that time spent on foreign language study strongly reinforces the core subject areas of reading, English language literacy, social studies and math. Foreign language learners consistently outperform control groups in core subject areas on standardized tests, often significantly. (Armstrong & Rogers 1997; Saunders 1998; Masciantonio 1977; Rafferty 1986; Andrade 1989; Kretschmer & Kretschmer 1989)

"Interest in and support for language study has been strengthened in the United States in recent years by the growing recognition that proficiency in more than one language benefits both individual learners and society. For the individual language learner, research has found a positive link between second language proficiency and cognitive and academic ability. (And) a multilingual workforce enhances America's economic competitiveness abroad, helps maintain our political and security interests, and promotes tolerance and intercultural awareness." (Marcos & Peyton 2000)

Students who studied four or five years of a foreign language have consistently outperformed students not taking foreign languages. In, 2006 students who studied four or five years of a foreign language scored higher on the critical reading, the math and the writing sections of the 2006 SAT than students who had studied any other subject besides except for science and math for the performance at more than four years was the same.(College Board 2006; Cooper 1987; Eddy 1981)

Students who were in "rigorous" programs in high school-that included three years of foreign language study-were likely to earn better grades in college and less likely to drop out. (Horn & Kojaku 2001)

The benefits to society are many. Americans fluent in other languages improve global communication, enhance our economic competitiveness abroad, and maintain our political and security interests. (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004)

The above summaries and quotations were compiled by the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers
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