

IRRC

From: Smith, James M.
Sent: Tuesday, January 03, 2006 2:22 PM
To: IRRC
Subject: FW: Legislative Concern for Pennsylvania Education

#2499

-----Original Message-----

From: Bonnie Youngs [mailto:byoungs@andrew.cmu.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, January 03, 2006 2:06 PM
To: Smith, James M.
Subject: Legislative Concern for Pennsylvania Education

Dear Sir,

I ask that you read the information below, but the short version is that the United States has recently finished the 2005 Year of Languages and the 2006 Year of Study Abroad began on January 1st (languagepolicy.org). More than two-thirds of the states in this country have approved world language standards and recently Indiana, a state similar to Pennsylvania in that one wouldn't initially consider that state as having multilingual issues, has mandated the study of world language as early as middle school.

In an October 2005 EPLC breakfast meeting address in Pittsburgh, Gerald Zahorchak noted that an increase in economic opportunities for Pennsylvania's students after high school graduation is a priority of the Pennsylvania Department of Education. His observations regarding the economic competition that Pennsylvania engages in with the other states in this country were very appropriate. Although Pennsylvania has an increasing migrant non-first language population (for example, Lancaster County is home to 55 different languages), we are not as populated as other states in this regard. For example, California, Texas, Arizona, etc. have a much higher population of Spanish-speakers. If companies from abroad were to choose states based on these data alone, Pennsylvania would not be competitive. Certainly, Pennsylvania will not increase her Spanish-speaking population, but couldn't we encourage Dr. Zahorchak's and PDE's plan to encourage economic growth by teaching world lang!

uage so that we could become at least competitive in some areas and provide an attractive workforce? Pennsylvania cannot afford to lose potential investment capital due to lack of a rather straightforward solution as teaching world languages to our children.

Aside from national and international issues like terrorism and intelligence efforts, there are more basic needs. Our country could use more world language speakers in areas such as healthcare. All high school graduates will not go on to a four year college education (one reason given as to why all students should not be required to learn world language). What type of work might these students do, then? Perhaps they'll be phone operators for Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Perhaps they'll be hospital care employees, moving patients from one location to another within a healthcare facility. Perhaps they'll be soldiers sent to a foreign country. Perhaps they'll be physical therapists and a situation could arise in which it would helpful to speak to their patients in Spanish or Japanese. Perhaps they'll be secretaries for Bayer, Heinz, Sony, PNC or Mellon Bank. Perhaps they'll be truck drivers between the east and west coasts, or from the north to the south. Perhaps they'll b!

e football, basketball or baseball professionals and could help in speaking to teammates from foreign countries. Any of these situations could generate a need for 'basic language survival skills', the level proposed in the Academic Standards for World Languages.

If you care to read on, the letter below was written to address concerns over how and why world languages be taught to all students in Pennsylvania. I encourage you to do so, but more so, I encourage you to contact me if you have any questions related to what is written both above and below here.

Sincerely,

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Pennsylvanian
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The Academic Standards for World Languages for all students have not yet been approved. World Languages is the only core content area that still has not approved mandated academic standards. I request that you add your voice to the voices of Pennsylvania educators, students, business leaders and parents who understand that world language study is an essential component of the skills all PA children need to function in our multicultural-multilingual environments and ensure that Pennsylvania can compete in the global marketplace

Recent misunderstandings surrounding the adoption of the world language standards have been expressed by some in Harrisburg. These points have been addressed by world language professional organizations and individuals throughout the state:

1) There is a lack of qualified teachers to teach world languages.

The adoption of academic standards for world languages will encourage our young people to enter into world language teacher training programs. There is an increased awareness in Washington D.C. of the need for language specialists due to current world affairs. Academic standards will communicate the equity and worthiness of world language teaching as a viable profession.

2) Intellectually challenged students cannot learn a world language.

All other countries with similar challenges have special needs students who leave school knowing multiple languages. We have many models of how to meet all students' needs through the inclusion model, differentiation in instruction and assessment, accommodations and adaptations- which are already in place for other content areas and are currently alive in many world language classrooms. These best practice models simply require continued replication in all world language classrooms.

3) The proficiency levels for world languages are defined as advanced, proficient, basic and below basic.

The world language proficiency levels are not patterned after the proficiency levels for language arts. Proficiency in a world language follows the national standards for world languages and the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (actfl.org). Proficiency in a world language is defined as attaining survival skills in an authentic setting. A student can achieve proficiency in one or more of the standards and move through stages of increasing levels of achievement over time in a program of study.

Our state continues to move forward to reform all levels of our schools to ensure that we are teaching our students the skills they will need to compete globally for high skilled jobs and to be life long learners in a diverse world community. Please ensure that world language education be a vital part of these initiatives. Adoption of the Proposed Academic Standards for World Languages is an important first step in

this process.