

Executive Summary

2016 ASIA SOCIETY CELIN LEADERSHIP FORUM:

BUILDING THE FIELD OF CHINESE EARLY LANGUAGE AND IMMERSION EDUCATION

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Speakers and leaders in Chinese Early Language and Immersion Network (CELIN) gathered in Chicago on April 28 at the 2016 Asia Society CELIN Leadership Forum to discuss how to increase the number and quality of Chinese early language and immersion programs in the United States. During the Forum, experts shared research findings from over the past 30 years about early language and immersion education, and representatives from well-established schools, school districts, states, and national programs shared their experiences and lessons learned in developing programs in their contexts. Participants engaged in roundtable discussions to discuss needs, strategies, and next steps about specific topics. The key points of the discussions are summarized here.

Language Skills Are Critically Needed, but Language Learning in the United States Is Decreasing

The national economy and the need for jobs have been key themes in recent political discourse. It is clear that the United States must enhance the multilingual and intercultural competency of its residents in order to be successful in global markets and political arenas. The need is particularly acute for students in grades preK-12. Without proficiency in languages as well as skills to engage globally, they will find themselves woefully unprepared in higher education and the workforce.

The Benefits of Learning Languages

At the same time, an increasing number of studies and reports are confirming the benefits of knowing other languages in addition to English: increased cognitive abilities, enhanced executive brain function, higher school achievement, and better business acumen.

The Strength of Dual Language Programs

One type of language program that is receiving increased attention is dual language, in which students are fully immersed and taught in two languages—English and another language selected by program staff and the community. Despite the differences in program type, all dual language programs seek to develop students' oral proficiency and literacy in both English and the other language, promote high levels of academic achievement, and expand students'

worldview with a focus on cultural empathy, tolerance, and inclusion. Research also demonstrates that students learning English reach higher levels of academic achievement than students in other types of programs, and English-speaking students have the opportunity to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, and global awareness.

An increasing number of schools and districts across the country are considering this model of education. But how do individuals, schools, districts, and states establish and sustain effective dual language immersion programs?

The following eight strategies emerged from the reports and discussions as critical to the success of dual language programs in Chinese and in all languages:

Strategies for Establishing and Sustaining Effective Dual Language Programs

1. Policymakers and education leaders must have a vision for, and the will to, develop global competence in all students.

Strong and visionary leadership is the key to successful programs. Schools and districts with strong programs, which have become models for other districts to follow, have a leader or a set of leaders with a clear vision for the students. These leaders visit successful programs and implement key elements of those programs' success in order to meet their own program needs. Several states have also committed to developing global competence and high language proficiency in their future workforce by legislating policies and devoting funding for schools to establish dual language programs in multiple languages (e.g., Delaware, Utah, and North Carolina).

2. Build grassroots support of constituent groups.

Parents, businesses, and communities are key constituent groups whose grassroots efforts will enable dual language programs to take hold and grow. Parents need to know how to support and nourish language learning in school and at home and become partners in their children's learning, particularly when they do not know the language being learned.

Local businesses and community organizations are natural partners with dual language programs, because they can help establish local and international connections and link language learning to real-world opportunities. Program staff can help these leaders strengthen connections between places, people, goods, and services by connecting with elders and other leaders in the community to promote the language (e.g., having a table about Chinese at a store during Chinese New Year), holding performances or workshops at local cultural institutions and museums (e.g., the Smithsonian in Washington, DC), taking groups on field trips (e.g., Chinatown and Japantown in San Francisco, or Koreatown in Los Angeles), and having students and parents speak on local TV or radio shows to make the program visible and have their voices heard. In the case of rural areas, schools can hold a

"Skype Night" in which students communicate with students in another country and speak the target language while their family members observe the interactions.

3. Rigorous standards and expectations related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment are in place and communicated clearly.

Successful dual language programs teach not only language but also culture and subject matter. They use curricula for language and subject matter classes that are aligned with state and district standards and use state-mandated assessments in reading, writing, math and, where possible, social studies and science. All instruction takes place in the focal language. Without the support of English in those classes, instruction must be comprehensible and rich in meaning. Instruction is also student-centered and differentiated to meet the needs of diverse students.

4. Collaborate across programs, schools, districts, states, and national or international organizations to leverage resources and maximize outcomes.

Collaboration can take many forms. It can include school-university partnerships, in which university staff and prospective teachers work with teachers in schools to provide research and resources, and teachers in schools provide pre-service teachers the opportunity to work with them in their classes and understand the school culture. School-community partnerships enable community members to be part of school life. School-based and summer programs afford students and teachers the opportunity to engage intensively in language learning beyond the academic year (e.g., the STARTALK program at the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland). Collaboration can also include national or international organizational partnerships, such as language learning projects or scholarships co-sponsored by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Asia Society's Center for Global Education, the College Board, Confucius Institutes, and the embassies of the languages taught.

5. Share success stories to advocate for language learning policies and funding streams.

Stories about the success and key features of a program generate pride, motivation, and a sense of ownership among students and parents and inspire others to replicate the program in their contexts. Sharing might include students and their parents presenting at community and school meetings to show how they have learned the language and their proficiency in it; videos shown at events and online of classes in action and students talking about their experiences; and district and state superintendents talking about the importance of their program for everyone living there. An example of the power of sharing is the STARTALK summer programs. Heightened awareness and enthusiasm about the summer programs has resulted in over 240 in-school programs being established during the 2016-2017 academic year.

It is also beneficial for staff from one school to visit programs with similar student populations and learn about their strengths and challenges. The more that we can learn from other schools, districts, and states about best practices, student achievement, and lessons learned, the more tools we will have for advocacy and support.

6. Student learning pipelines are open, equitable, and articulated to build high proficiency and literacy in both English and the other language.

It is critical that we bridge gaps in language learning between grades K-8, high school, and college; create smooth pathways for continued learning; and recognize the levels of proficiency that students reach. Students must be motivated and rewarded to continue learning and developing proficiency in the language and know the life and career opportunities that are available as a result. A number of language pipeline initiatives, with clearly stated proficiency requirements, are underway (e.g., Minnetonka Public Schools, Oregon Public Schools).

States are also recognizing language proficiency through the Seal of Biliteracy and global seals such as the International Skills Diploma Seal in Georgia, which is available to graduating high school students who complete an international education curriculum and engage in extracurricular activities and experiences that foster the achievement of global competencies. These seals signal to employers and higher education institutions that a student is prepared to participate in the global economy, and they are strong incentives for students to continue their study and learning of a language, both in and outside the classroom.

7. Teachers are recruited, retained, and supported throughout their professional lives.

Effective teachers are critical to effective programs. However, there is a serious gap in the United States between the need for teachers and the supply of teachers. There are several ways that teachers can be supported and prepared to be effective in U.S. language programs, and we can work together to bring this about:

- To promote the learning and teaching of less commonly taught languages (including Chinese), we rely heavily on foreign-born guest teachers from various countries. However, it is a challenge to obtain visas for these teachers. At the federal level, resolve the challenge regarding teacher visas and streamline the process for securing H1-B visas, so that teachers can work in this country. It is also difficult to arrange for OPT (Optional Practical Training) for language teachers, which should match what is given to STEM program graduates.
- Make clear to teachers the opportunities and benefits of teaching languages in K-12 schools. Help teachers understand and commit to the mission and operation of the dual language program.
- Recognize that the professional lives of teachers include pre-service learning; holding a license and credentials; continued learning through ongoing, meaningful, and purposeful workshops, mentoring, and coaching; and leadership development. Teachers

can be encouraged throughout their careers to continue to change and grow, and teacher leaders can be compensated for the leadership they provide. [*The Teachers We Need: Transforming World Language Education in the United States*](#) (published by Asia Society) clearly explains how to prepare the variety of world language teachers for K-16 sectors.

- Strong leaders who set clear expectations of roles and responsibilities and work with teachers as a team are the backbone of teacher supply systems. Teachers benefit from having peer coaching and sharing from fellow teachers.
- Districts and states should communicate with and learn from each other about ways that teachers are hired and supported throughout their careers.
- District, states, and universities can develop partnerships to streamline credentialing and licensing of teachers and to share plans to recruit and credential teachers.

8. Tap into new ideas and tools to develop non-traditional spaces for language learning.

Many new technologies are available to make remote, virtual, and digital learning engaging and to extend it beyond the classroom. Uses of technology must connect language learning with students' interests, which might include rockets, robots, and games that connect students in the United States with those in communities around the world speaking the language they are learning.

Conclusion: The Need for Language Learning Is Urgent

Students in the United States need to be able to learn languages in addition to English, in the home and throughout their education, in order to develop global competence and live productive lives. This need is real, and the urgency of the matter has propelled us to shift from asking "why" language learning might be important to "how" we will move forward effectively, together. The strategies described above are a good start.