

**“Nearly every sector of our increasingly global economy and culturally diverse workforce needs multilingual, cross-culturally aware workers.”**

Maria Carreira & Regla Armengol,  
*Heritage Languages in America: Preserving a National Resource*

## **Reaping the Benefits of Multilingualism and Language Ability**

In today's global society, the ability to speak more than one language is a valuable asset. Americans fluent in languages other than English enhance our economic competitiveness abroad, improve global communication, help to maintain our political and security interests, and promote tolerance and intercultural awareness (Pratt, 2002; Sollors, 2002).



Research has found a positive link between proficiency in more than one language and cognitive and academic skills (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997; Bialystock & Hakuta, 1994; Cummins, 1992; Hakuta, 1986). Some studies indicate that individuals who learn a second language are more creative and better at solving complex problems than those who do not (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991; Cummins, 1992). Standardized test results show that students who have focused on foreign language studies routinely achieve among the highest scores in all subjects tested (The SAT College Board, 2002).

Although the opportunities for learning languages may vary depending on where we live in the United States, there are many ways that we can encourage the study of languages in our homes, in our schools, in our work places, and in our communities.

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# **Working Together to Build a Multilingual Society**

**“The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language, and no single language is capable of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension.”**

Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Reading*

## **The Need for a Multilingual Society**

The United States has a critical need for individuals who are proficient in languages other than English and who can work in the fields of

- international diplomacy, foreign relations, and trade
- business, marketing, media, and public relations
- national security and defense
- interpreting and translating
- law
- engineering
- education
- medical and health professions
- environmental professions
- service professions
- community development



Proficiency in more than one language benefits individuals and the country as a whole.

Parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers, business leaders, and labor leaders can take action to make the vision of a multilingual society a reality.

This brochure was prepared with funding from the U. S. Department of Education under contract No. ED-99-CO-0008. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education.

November 2003



# Promoting Multilingualism

## What Parents Can Do

- Enroll** your children in language courses.
- Expose** your children to people from different language and cultural backgrounds.
- Use a language** other than English with your children.
- Speak positively** to your children about the value of knowing another language.
- Enjoy** videos, music, and books in other languages in your home.
- Give** your children opportunities to participate in summer language programs and camps.
- Have an exchange student** from another country stay in your home.
- Discuss with your children's teachers** what you can do to reinforce your children's language development.
- Talk with other parents**, PTA members, and the principal about getting a language program started in your children's school.

## What Teachers Can Do

- Set up an in-class lending library** with books, magazines, and videotapes in other languages.
- Plan** activities that encourage students to develop an appreciation for the linguistic and cultural diversity represented in your school and classroom.
- Give** your students opportunities to use the languages they know in and out of class -- in the school, at other schools, or at community events.
- Encourage** parents who speak a language other than English to use it with their children.
- Ask** community members who use languages other than English in their careers to discuss career opportunities with your students.
- Invite** foreign exchange students to make presentations about their language and culture.
- Align** your school's foreign language curriculum with the national standards for foreign language learning.
- Travel and study** abroad to expand your knowledge of other languages and cultures.  
(See Lindholm-Leary, 2000, for further suggestions.)

## What School Administrators Can Do

- If your school or district does not have a language program**
  - Develop** a rationale for establishing a program by reading research and other professional literature on the benefits of second language learning.
  - Work** with district administrators and the school board to establish a steering committee made up of parents, language teachers, district administrators, and business and community members to investigate the feasibility of establishing a program.
  - Learn** about different types of language programs to determine the most appropriate one for your school or district.
  - Generate** community support for language programs at PTA meetings and teacher conferences.
  - Invite** community leaders, business representatives, teachers, and administrators to district-wide planning meetings.

## If your school or district already has a language program

- Ensure** that all students have opportunities to study languages and to gain high levels of proficiency.
- Provide** opportunities for students who already speak languages other than English to develop advanced skills in those languages.
- Hire** teachers who are proficient in the languages they teach.
- Provide resources** and professional development for language teachers.
- Create** opportunities for collaboration among language teachers.
- Purchase** language materials for school and district libraries.
- Devote** sufficient time to the study of languages (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1998).
- Help to create** well-articulated course sequences.
- Hold** career days to provide information about jobs that require skills in more than one language.
- Use** student and community resources to strengthen the program through tutoring, international fairs, cross-cultural exchanges, and guest speakers.

## What Policymakers Can Do

- Budget** financial resources to establish and improve second language programs in schools, districts, or states.
- Maintain** ongoing professional development for second language teachers.
- Establish policies** that promote the study of second languages at all levels by all students and that respect the diversity of students in your community and state.
- Support** research on the effectiveness of various program models and instructional practices.
- Advocate** for the establishment of standards for student and teacher language performance at local, state, and national levels.

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