

A Response to the National Security Language Initiative by the Language Profession

The Joint National Committee for Languages and the National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL/NCLIS) are composed of sixty-four member organizations representing approximately 200,000 language educators and professionals. JNCL/NCLIS members deal with the languages taught, studied and used in the United States including the commonly taught and less-commonly taught languages, English to Speakers of Other Languages, American Sign Language, the classics and bilingual education. Our member organizations are involved across all educational levels (Pre-K to adult learners) and are engaged in teaching, research, translation and interpretation, distance learning/computer-assisted instruction, materials development, assessment, student and faculty exchanges, and study abroad, among other areas.

JNCL/NCLIS applauds the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) and the President's efforts to increase language capability in our country. NSLI is an encouraging beginning for establishing a broad, meaningful language policy to put the U.S. on equal footing with other nations. This Initiative enhances our national security, economic competitiveness, international understanding, and educational excellence. JNCL/NCLIS and our members stand ready to support and assist in the implementation of the policies and efforts of the NSLI. We look forward to working with the Administration and Congress to create, shape and implement programs that will make NSLI and future endeavors in language education successful. In this regard, we would note that the success of NSLI will depend upon all those involved agreeing on a few guiding principles.

- **The Place of Language Education:** While NSLI focuses on languages currently critical for national security, there is a critical need for *all* languages. Strong language skills are needed domestically, as well as for interacting with the rest of the world in commerce, diplomacy and peace keeping, and scientific and cultural exchange. A quality, world-class education requires that foreign languages be a core academic subject for all students, offering varied instructional models with multiple entry points throughout the curricular sequence. Learning foreign languages prepares students for global understanding and living in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual world. Study of and through another language provides essential communication skills, and enhances learning through improved cognitive development, transferable reading skills, reinforcement of other subject areas, cultural literacy and sensitivity, and tolerance for diversity.
- **The Need for Lengthy Learning Sequences:** Acquiring a superior level of language competence (i.e., an ILR rating of 3 or higher) needed for our national competitiveness requires long sequences of study. Beginning language study early and continuing such study in extended instructional sequences with established and commonly agreed upon benchmarks provides one of the best opportunities for students to achieve proficiency, and also enhances potential success in acquiring additional languages. It is never too early or too late to begin a properly-sequenced course of language study.
- **The Need for Qualified Teachers:** Languages must be taught by teachers who are not only fluent in the language but also pedagogically qualified. The teacher shortage in all languages must be addressed in a proactive manner. To create a cadre of high quality teachers in both commonly and less-commonly taught languages requires a solid infrastructure for professional preparation, major incentives in teacher recruitment, and ongoing professional development. The development of innovative teacher training and

certification programs is particularly crucial for teacher development in the less-commonly taught languages.

- **Language Study and Cultural Immersion Abroad:** Study abroad and educational exchanges are highly valuable cultural experiences, and opportunities for such study should be available to every student, teacher and administrator. As a setting for language acquisition, study abroad is most effective when offered in a context that provides pre- and post-travel language study.
- **Support for Heritage Speakers:** Heritage language speakers should be provided the opportunity to develop high levels of competence in their native languages as well as in English. With their existing proficiency in languages other than English, heritage language communities in the U.S. offer a rich source of candidates for programs leading to superior levels of language ability in both languages. Study of all heritage languages, critical and otherwise, offers invaluable language learning experience and cultural insight.