STANDARDS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Preparing for the 21st Century

Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language.

Statement of Philosophy
Standards for Foreign Language Learning

In 1993, a coalition of four national language organizations (the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, the American Association of Teachers of French, the American Association of Teachers of German, and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese) received funding to develop standards for foreign language education, grades K-12.

This was the seventh and final subject area to receive federal support to develop national standards as part of the Bush Administration's America 2000 education initiative, which continued under Goals 2000 in the Clinton Administration. An eleven-member task force, representing a variety of languages, levels of instruction, program models, and geographic regions, was appointed to undertake the task of defining *content standards*—what students should know and be able to do—in foreign language education. At each stage of development, the task force shared its work with the broader profession and the public at large. The resulting document represents an unprecedented consensus among educators, business leaders, government, and the community on the definition and role of foreign language instruction in American education.

The standards do not describe the current status of foreign language education in this country. While they reflect the best instructional practice, they do not describe what is being attained by the majority of foreign language students. *The Standards for Foreign Language Learning* will not be achieved overnight; rather, they provide a gauge against which to measure improvement in the years to come.

The standards are not a curriculum guide. While they suggest the types of curricular experiences needed to enable students to achieve the standards, and support the ideal of extended sequences of study that begin in the elementary grades and continue through high school and beyond, they do not describe specific course content, nor recommended sequence of study. They must be used in conjunction with state and local standards and curriculum frameworks to determine the best approaches and reasonable expectations for the students in individual districts and schools.

The Five C's of Foreign Language Education

The purposes and uses of foreign languages are as diverse as the students who study them. Some students study another language in hopes of finding a rewarding career in the international marketplace or government service. Others are interested in the intellectual challenge and cognitive benefits that accrue to those who master multiple languages. Still others seek greater understanding of other people and other cultures. Many approach foreign language study, as they do other courses, simply to fulfill a graduation requirement. Regardless of the reason for study, foreign languages have something to offer everyone. It is with this philosophy in mind that the standards task force identified five goal areas that encompass all of these reasons: *Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons,* and *Communities*—the five C's of foreign language education.

Communication

Communication is at the heart of second language study, whether the communication takes place face-to-face, in writing, or across centuries through the reading of literature.

Cultures

Through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the *cultures* that use that language and, in fact, cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs.

Connections

Learning languages provides *connections* to additional bodies of knowledge that may be unavailable to the monolingual English speaker.

Comparisons

Through *comparisons* and contrasts with the language being studied, students develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture and realize that there are multiple ways of viewing the world.

Communities

Together, these elements enable the student of languages to participate in multilingual *communities* at home and around the world in a variety of contexts and in culturally appropriate ways.

"Knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom"

All the linguistic and social knowledge required for effective human-to-human interaction is encompassed in those ten words. Formerly, most teaching in foreign language classrooms concentrated on the *how* (grammar) to say *what* (vocabulary). While these components of language are indeed crucial, the current organizing principle for foreign language study is *communication,* which also highlights the *why*, the *whom*, and the *when*. So, while grammar and vocabulary are essential tools for communication, it is the acquisition of the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages that is the ultimate goal of today's foreign language classroom.

Standards for Foreign Language Learning

Communication

Communicate in Languages Other Than English

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

Cultures

Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

Connections

Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information

Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

Comparisons

Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

Communities

Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home & Around the World

Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Following is an abbreviated sample of the goals, standards, and progress indicators for grades four, eight, and twelve as they appear in "Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century."

COMMUNICATION

1.1 Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

This standard focuses on interpersonal communication, that is, direct oral or written communication between individuals who are in personal contact. In most modern languages, students can quite quickly learn a number of phrases that will permit them to interact with each other. In the course of their study, they will grow in their ability to converse in a culturally appropriate manner.

Sample Progress Indicators

Grade 4: Students ask and answer questions about such things as family, school events, and celebrations in person or via letters, e-mail, or audio and video tapes.

Grade 8: Students exchange information about personal events, memorable experiences, and other school subjects with peers and/or members of the target cultures.

Grade 12: Students exchange, support, and discuss their opinions and individual perspectives with peers and/or speakers of the target language on a variety of topics dealing with contemporary and historical issues.

1.2 Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.2 involves one-way listening and reading in which the learner works with a variety of print and non-print materials. The context in which the language is experienced and the ability to control what they hear and read may impact students' development of comprehension. As a result, the ability to read may develop before the ability to comprehend rapid spoken language. In addition, content knowledge will often affect successful comprehension, for students understand more easily materials that reflect their interests or for which they have some background.

Sample Progress Indicators

Grade 4: Students comprehend the main idea of developmentally appropriate oral narratives such as personal anecdotes, familiar fairy tales, and other narratives based on familiar themes.

Grade 8: Students use knowledge acquired in other settings and from other subject areas to comprehend spoken and written messages in the target languages.

Grade 12: Students demonstrate an increasing understanding of the cultural nuances of meaning in written and spoken language as expressed by speakers and writers of the target language in formal and informal settings.

1.3 Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

This standard focuses on the formal presentation of information, concepts, and ideas in spoken and written form and is concerned, in most cases, with one-way speaking and writing. Students with little or no previous language experience are likely to produce written and spoken language that will contain a variety of learned patterns or will look like English with words in the other language. This is a natural process and, over time, they begin to acquire authentic patterns and to use appropriate styles. By contrast, home-background students will write in ways that closely resemble the spoken language. Moreover, they will control informal oral styles. Over time these learners will develop the ability to write and speak using more formal styles.

Sample Progress Indicators

Grade 4: Students prepare illustrated stories about activities or events in their environment and share with an audience such as the class.

Grade 8: Students prepare tape or video recorded messages to share locally or with school peers and/or members of the target cultures on topics of personal interest.

Grade 12: Students prepare a research-based analysis of a current event from the perspective of both the U.S. and target cultures.

CULTURES

2.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

This standard focuses on the ***practices*** that are derived from the traditional ideas and attitudes (*perspectives*) of a culture. Cultural practices refer to patterns of behavior accepted by a society and deal with aspects of culture such as rites of passage, the use of forms of discourse, the social "pecking order," and the use of space. In short, they represent the knowledge of "*what to do when and where*."

2.2 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

This standard focuses on the ***products*** of the culture studied and on how they reflect the perspectives of the culture. Products may be tangible (e.g., a painting, a piece of literature, a pair of chopsticks) or intangible (e.g., an oral tale, a dance, a sacred ritual, a system of education). Whatever the form of the product, its presence within the culture is required or justified by the underlying beliefs and values (*perspectives*) of that culture, and the cultural practices involve the use of that product.

CONNECTIONS

3.1 Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

Learning today is no longer restricted to a specific discipline; it has become interdisciplinary. Just as reading cannot be limited to a particular segment of the school day, so too can foreign language build upon the knowledge that students acquire in other subject areas. In addition, students can relate the information studied in other subjects to their learning of the foreign language and culture. Foreign language instruction thus becomes a means to expand and deepen students' understanding of, and exposure to, other areas of knowledge. The new information and concepts presented in one class become the basis of continued learning in the foreign language classroom.

3.2 Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

As a consequence of learning another language and gaining access to its unique means of communication, students are able to broaden the sources of information available to them. They have a "new window on the world." At the early levels of language learning, students can begin to examine a variety of sources intended for native speakers, and extract specific information. As they become more proficient users of the foreign language, they can seek out materials of interest to them, analyze the content, compare it to information available in their own language, and assess the linguistic and cultural differences.

COMPARISONS

4.1 Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

This standard focuses on the impact that learning the linguistic elements in the new language has on students' ability to examine English and to develop hypotheses about the structure and use of languages. From the earliest language learning experiences, students can compare and contrast the two languages as different elements are presented. Activities can be systematically integrated into instruction that will assist students in gaining understanding and in developing their abilities to think critically about how languages work.

4.2 Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

As students expand their knowledge of cultures through language learning, they continually discover perspectives, practices, and products that are similar and different from their own culture, and they develop the ability to hypothesize about cultural systems in general. Some students may make these comparisons naturally, others may not. This standard helps focus this reflective process for all students by encouraging integration of this process into instruction from the earliest levels of learning.

COMMUNITIES

5.1 Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

This standard focuses on language as a tool for communication with speakers of the language throughout one's life: in schools, in the community, and abroad. In schools, students share their knowledge of language and culture with classmates and with younger students who may be learning the language. Applying what has been learned in the language program as defined by the other standards, students come to realize the advantages inherent in being able to communicate in more than one language and develop an understanding of the power of language.

5.2 Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Each day millions of Americans spend leisure time reading, listening to music, viewing films and television programs, and interacting with each other. By developing a certain level of comfort with their new language, students can use these skills to access information as they continue to learn throughout their lives. Students who study a language can use their skills to further enrich their personal lives by accessing various entertainment and information sources available to speakers of the language. Some students may have the opportunity to travel to communities and countries where the language is used extensively and, through this experience, further develop their language skills and understanding of the culture.

SAMPLE LEARNING SCENARIO: NEWSCAST

Standards Targeted

1.1 Interpersonal Communication
1.3 Presentational Communication
2.1 Practices of Culture
3.1 Furthering Connections
5.1 School and Community
5.2 Life-long Learning

Description

In the Spanish II class in Williamston High School, a small, rural community in Michigan, students worked in groups to write, produce, and videotape a fifteen-to-twenty minute Spanish language news show that included news events; a live, from-the-scene report; weather; sports; and commercials. The news events included items from the Spanish-speaking world, the United States, the state, and local areas.

Reflection

1.1—Students work cooperatively in groups using the language to produce the newscast.
1.3—Students produce the newscast in the language studied.
2.1—Students present news stories that reflect a perspective from the culture studied.
3.1—Students develop news items on a variety of topics.
5.1—Students use the language in the classroom.
5.2—Students develop insights necessary for media literacy.

If the students were asked to view taped newscasts and commercials from two Spanish speaking countries and use them as models for their project, an emphasis could be placed on Standards 1.2 and 4.1 (in preparing for the project, students view newscasts and compare and contrast language styles) and Standard 4.2 (students note cultural similarities and differences in the videotapes they viewed). This type of preparation for the project would also provide the opportunity to target Standard 2.2 with students analyzing a product of the culture studied. This scenario could be applied to any language at a variety of levels.

SAMPLE LEARNING SCENARIO : CHINESE CALENDAR

Targeted Standards

1.2 Interpretive Communication
2.2 Products of Culture
4.2 Culture Comparisons

Description

In Ms. Chen-Lin's Chinese class in West Hartford, CT, eighth graders are learning about the Chinese calendar. Students listen to the folkloric tale of how the years got their names, which the teacher explains using story cards. The students then use artistic expression to recall the details of the story by making posters that announce the race of the twelve animals in the story. They are encouraged to include on their poster the date, time, location, and prize in Chinese. On the next day, the class explores the importance of a calender in the students' own culture and in others. The students discuss the differences found in the Chinese and American calendars. They then make a calendar using Chinese characters to be used in their homes. They include birthdays, family celebrations, school activities, and other special events.

Reflection

1.2—Students comprehend the story of the Chinese calendar told in the target language
2.2—Students read about and discuss products of the culture
4.2—Students compare and contrast products found in the two cultures.

In this activity, the students understand the calendar explanation more easily because the teacher accompanies the story with visuals. The use of artistic expression to check for their understanding allows students with various learning styles to be successful in showing what they understood from the story. The follow-up discussion helps students reflect on the importance of a calendar within a culture and the role that the calendar plays in American culture.

National Standards in Foreign Language Education
a collaborative project of ACTFL, AATF, AATG, AATI, AATSP, ACL/APA, ACTR, CLASS/CLTA, & NCSTJ/ATJ

c/o American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Inc.
700 S. Washington St., Suite 210
Alexandria, VA 22314