

April 8, 2004

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons
Elementary and High School Principals
Supervisors of World Languages

FROM: William L. Librera, Ed.D.
Commissioner

**SUBJECT: World Languages Graduation Requirements
Competency-Based Exit Testing in Spring 2004**

The new high school graduation requirement in world languages allows students to demonstrate language competency through recommended proficiency assessments in lieu of seat-time. Districts may provide eighth grade and high school students the option of taking and passing this assessment in order to receive five high school credits. This memo provides guidance about department recommended assessments in pursuing this option.

A department convened World Languages Assessment Technical Advisory Committee has recommended a menu of options to be used by districts to determine if students have achieved the state level of language proficiency designated as *Novice-High*. The *Novice-High* level of proficiency is a description of student language ability as defined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages *ACTFL K-12 Performance Guidelines* and is an appropriate and achievable benchmark for students completing a sequence of study in elementary programs. A description of student performance outcomes for the *Novice-High* level may be found in the revised 2004 World Languages Standards.

I wish to emphasize that regarding the elementary world languages requirement, research affirms that language learning takes a long time, and in order for students to attain measurable levels of proficiency as demonstrated through a valid and reliable competency-based exit test at the end of grade 8, language learning should begin at the earliest grades and be part of a spiraling and recursive curriculum as in other core areas. **Students who have participated in quality, well articulated K-8 world languages programs will be well positioned to pass a competency-based assessment and take advantage of this option.**

It is also important to note that the state five-credit requirement is a **minimum** requirement since many colleges require two or more years of language study for admission. Additionally, many districts may have a local world languages graduation requirement that exceeds the five-credit state requirement.

Testing Options

1. *Language Learning Solutions* Online Assessment

The *Language Learning Solutions (LLS)* online assessment is aligned to the New Jersey world languages standards and is delivered, graded and reported online with all components password-accessible to students, school personnel, and the department. The online assessment requires computers (PC or Macintosh) that are connected to the Internet and are running current standard web browsers to access appropriate assessment instruments.

The assessment will initially measure language proficiency for four target languages - Spanish, French, German and Japanese - with additional languages to be added each year. The **reading** portion will be delivered using Computer Adaptive Technology (CAT) that uses an algorithm to probe for accurate measure of proficiency. This portion of the assessment will measure five benchmark levels from Novice through Intermediate-Mid proficiency based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages *ACTFL K-12 Performance Guidelines*. In addition to receiving a diagnostic measurement for each student, the computer adaptive reading portion of the test will also provide districts with a diagnostic report to analyze strengths and weaknesses of programs offered through grade 8. This component of the assessment will be graded automatically in “real time” with results immediately available to authorized teachers and administrators.

In the **speaking** component of the test, students will respond verbally to four speaking prompts. Their recorded samples will be securely transmitted over the Internet to LLS servers to be distributed to trained raters for scoring. LLS servers will provide streaming audio for the collection of student speaking samples. The speaking prompts are appropriate to demonstrate the student’s ability to function in real life situations in the target language and will be delivered randomly to ensure the integrity of the assessment. An understanding of second language culture is conveyed in connection with the speaking task and in the text of the reading component.

For **results reporting** and **data analysis**, LLS will provide individual reports which can be downloaded and printed for each student taking the exam. Aggregated test data for individual schools and districts will also be provided to authorized personnel and organizations.

The test developers are well qualified in terms of language pedagogy. LLS is currently working on language learning tools for Dow Jones and Mitsui Corporation for distribution in Japan. In addition, they are engaged in assessment projects in Oregon, Louisiana, Virginia and Wyoming in conjunction with the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS), a National Foreign Language Resource Center located at the University of Oregon.

The **cost** is \$11 per student which includes administration and reporting of results. Districts interested in pursuing this option should contact LLS at their toll free number: **1-888-718-7887**. The LLS assessment will be available on May 1, 2004. Four New Jersey school districts, Edison, Haddonfield, Linden, and Northern Valley have successfully piloted this assessment in early spring and report that students enthusiastically participated in the testing program.

LLS, in collaboration with the department, will be providing training sessions at no cost for district teachers who wish to become certified raters to determine student language proficiency levels. Districts are not required to participate in the online assessment program in order for

their teachers to attend training sessions. The sessions will offer both onsite and online training that offers valuable information and hands-on experience on assessing for proficiency. Information will be posted on the world languages homepage this summer that provides the dates and locations of the training sessions at www.state.nj.us/njded/aps/cccs/wl. Click on “Professional Development.”

2. **The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Oral Proficiency Interview or Modified Oral Proficiency Interview**

The **ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI)** is currently used worldwide by academic institutions, government agencies, and private corporations for purposes such as academic placement, student assessment, program evaluation, professional certification, and hiring and promotional qualification. The OPI is also recognized by the American Council on Education (ACE) for the awarding of college credit and is available in 37 languages. The cost is \$129 per student since this test can only be administered by ACTFL certified oral proficiency testers. To arrange for OPI testing, contact Language Testing International at (914) 948-5100.

The **Modified Oral Proficiency Interview (MOPI)** is modeled on the OPI and is often used to test lower proficiency ranges. This assessment must also be administered by testers who have been certified by ACTFL. Districts may choose to have a staff member(s) trained to become certified MOPI testers. The cost for a three-day staff training that includes the individual teacher’s application for certification is approximately \$800 per teacher. While there is a one-time cost for training staff, this model has economic advantages for the long term as there is no future cost to administer the test to students. In addition, teachers would receive valuable training in assessing for language proficiency. The department is currently exploring the feasibility of providing regional MOPI training sessions for a cadre of New Jersey teachers with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. For more information on MOPI training, contact Elvira Swender, ACTFL professional program coordinator, at (914) 963-8830 Ext. 238.

3. **Other Recommendations Regarding Exit Testing**

The World Languages Technical Advisory Committee recommends that the competency-based exit test be administered at the end of grade 8 or during high school since all students are required to study a world language in grades K-8. Students who are **native speakers** and already have proficiency in another world language may elect to pursue other options. These include:

- Studying another world language in addition to English offered in the district’s world languages program;

- Using their native language to satisfy the requirement when entering the ninth grade or subsequent grade levels. *Students that have been speaking their native language since a very young age and throughout their prior educational experience will satisfy the world languages requirement;*
- Taking an additional English or English as a Second Language (ESL) class and using that second English class to fulfill the world languages requirement; or
- Continuing to further develop and enhance heritage language speaking and literacy skills in a district program designed for heritage speakers if the language is offered in district, or continue study in an out-of-school program if the world language is not taught in the public school district. Legislation was passed in August 2001 which permits students in public schools the opportunity to receive instruction in and **graduation credit** for a world language **not taught** in the public school district (N.J.S.A.18A:35-4.18). Guidelines for districts that have students requesting to pursue this option are available online at www.state.nj.us/njded/aps/cccs/wl by clicking on “Applicable Statutes and Regulations.”

The committee further recommends that other assessments, including local district options, not be considered at this time. In order for local assessment to be implemented in a reliable and valid manner for world languages, curriculum supervisors and teachers must have the opportunity to work with the new standards and to construct appropriate learning experiences and both formative and summative assessments that are standards-based. The committee will be reconvened shortly to create parameters for the development, administration and scoring of local assessments. The committee will also continue to explore other assessment options once the 2004 revised standards are disseminated and implemented in school districts.

New graduation requirements become effective for the grade 9 class entering high school in fall 2004. Students in the 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-04 grade 9 classes will remain exempt from the state requirement, but not from any district world languages requirements. District administrators will soon be receiving a **2004 World Languages K-12 Implementation Guide** to provide updated information on all aspects of the implementation of world languages programs. In the meantime, should you have any questions, please contact Janis Jensen, world languages coordinator, at (609) 777-4658 or at janis.jensen@doe.state.nj.us.

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