

Richard Barnell, President
Vista School Board
Vista School District
Canby, OR

January 1, 2013

Dear Mr. Barnell,

I understand that you anticipate making critical decisions about the future of foreign language education in your school district. I am writing to insure that you are informed about the recent research regarding the benefits of early language learning.

A foreign language study by Taylor Ward in 2003 focused on third-grade foreign language students who continued their foreign language study through and including the fifth-grade in Louisiana public schools. The researcher found that the foreign language students significantly outperformed their non-foreign language counterparts on every state standardized subtest (the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the 21st Century [LEAP 21] test) and significantly outperformed their non-language peers on the language portion of the fifth-grade Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). Taylor Ward's findings build on earlier studies showing how language learning correlates with higher academic achievement on standardized test measures (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997; Cade, 1997; Carr, 1994; Johnson, Ellison & Flores, 1961; Lopato, 1963; Rafferty, 1986; Sheridan, 1976).

The European Commission recently collected data from 30 country-specific experts in Europe across a wide range of European languages. Data were evaluated by an inter-disciplinary team of European experts who concluded: 1) multilinguals are open to a variety of perspectives and are able to think divergently and convergently; 2) multilinguals have enhanced problem-solving capabilities; 3) multilinguals have expanded metalinguistic awareness (ability to analyze how language is used and use languages to achieve goals); 4) multilinguals have stronger memory abilities that improves the learning process; 5) multilinguals possess robust interpersonal communication skills; and 6) multilingualism may slow the rate of decline of certain cognitive processes as a person ages.

A recent study at Cornell found that children who learn a second language early in life, strengthen their executive attention, or ability to attend to important input, dismiss unimportant input, and decide what actions to take as a result of the important input (Booker, 2011).

These are just a few reviews of emerging research that supports earlier research conducted in the 70s, 80s, and 90s that showed the myriad of benefits of early language learning related to academic success. In addition to research, recent discussions among policy makers, U.S. government agencies and business leaders recommend that knowledge of other languages and cultural competence are crucial for our country's future national and global security and competitiveness. For example, a policy innovation memorandum, written by leaders of the Language Policy Research Network at the Center for Applied Linguistics provides a review of the status of foreign language instruction in the U.S. As of 2008, just one in five public school students was studying a foreign language. On the contrary, in most developed countries, foreign

language education begins between the ages of five and ten, is mandatory, and is systematically tested along with core subjects. The memorandum reports that 75 percent of Americans believe all students should know a second language and a majority supports foreign language graduation requirements for high school. Moreover, during a recent meeting that included the FBI, the Departments of Defense, State, Education and Homeland Security, and a variety of experts including foreign language teachers and the Institute of International Education, leaders agreed that the U. S. does not have enough foreign language speakers now nor in the pipeline to meet our national security needs, which includes economic stability in an increasing global marketplace. Business leaders remarked that college graduates do not have the cross-cultural and linguistic skills needed for competing in a global economy. Finally, outcomes from the *Language and Culture Summit: A Strategic Imperative* sponsored by the Department of Defense endorse the enhancement of language and cultural capabilities within the U. S. Leaders from the Department of Defense, industry, and universities established initiatives that prioritize the learning of languages and cross-cultural competence by making them core competencies. The key conclusion from the summit stated that knowledge of other languages and cultural competence are crucial for the United States' future national and global security.

As the Pacific Northwest Representative for the National Network for Early Language Learning, I would be happy to speak with you further about the benefits of learning other languages and have included my contact information below. Thank you for your careful consideration of this matter.

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