

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

May, 2006

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 as a Second Language, American Sign Language, the classics and bilingual education. Our organizations are involved across all educational levels (Pre-K to adult learner) 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. We have watched with considerable interest over the last few years as international events and national activities have converged to make this significant initiative possible. We were pleased to participate in the National Language Conference and subsequent discussions which helped facilitate a national initiative. NSLI is an encouraging beginning. 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 successful. In this regard, we would note that the success of NSLI will depend upon all those involved agreeing on a few guiding principles.

- A quality, world-class education requires that foreign languages be a core academic subject throughout the curriculum. Study of and through another language provides essential skills and enhances learning through improved cognitive development, transferable reading skills, reinforcement of other subject areas, cultural sensitivity, and tolerance for diversity.
- Acquiring the high levels of language competence needed for our national security requires long-sequences of study. Beginning language study early and continuing such study in well articulated instructional sequences provides the best opportunity for achieving proficiency, and also enhances potential success in acquiring additional languages.
- Languages must be taught by qualified teachers. The teacher shortage must be addressed in a proactive manner. To create a cadre of high quality teachers in both commonly and less-commonly taught languages, requires major incentives in teacher recruitment and professional development.
- 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 forum for language acquisition they are most effective when offered in a context that provides pre- and post-language study.
- Heritage language speakers should be provided the opportunity to develop high levels of competence in their native languages as well as English. Virtually every world language is spoken by someone living in the U.S. With their existing proficiency in languages other than English, heritage language communities offer a rich source of candidates for programs leading to advanced levels of language ability in both languages.
- All languages are critical; some are needed internally; others for interacting with the rest of the world. Defining certain languages as critical and/or priorities depends on a great variety of factors which change over time such as national needs in education, law enforcement, defense, intelligence, diplomacy, health care, trade, economic development, and tourism, among others.