

Governor's World Language Expansion Initiative: Preparing a Globally-Competitive Delaware Workforce

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

World language capacity is crucial to Delaware in order for the state to maintain and strengthen its domestic economy. Governor Markell has spoken publicly about the importance of young Delawareans learning a world language, saying that Delaware graduates who enter the job market without the ability to speak a world language other than English are at a significant disadvantage.

Currently, most students in Delaware public schools do not begin learning another language until they reach high school. A few students have the opportunity to begin in middle school, while an even fewer number have a language learning experience of any kind in elementary school. Compared to their Asian and European peers who begin learning additional languages as early as five years old, Delaware students lag considerably behind.

The *Governor's World Language Expansion Initiative* addresses these issues by proposing an aggressive world language education plan that prepares generations of Delaware students with the language skills to compete in an ever-changing global economy at home and around the world. In essence, Delaware will begin to graduate globally-competitive students with advanced-level proficiency in languages, giving them an economic edge in the multilingual and multicultural workforce of the 21st century.

Delaware students will begin their study of either Mandarin Chinese or Spanish in an elementary immersion program in kindergarten or first grade and continue immersion language study into middle school. These students will be able to achieve Advanced Placement credit by the ninth grade and will be encouraged to begin study of an additional world language such as Arabic that could also culminate in additional Advanced Placement credit by graduation. Delaware students may also be able to participate in dual-credit options with Delaware institutions of higher education to further their language abilities and enter college with a number of world language credits that could easily count toward a minor or major in the language.

A robust world language performance-based assessment system is at the core of this aggressive plan. This system will assess program effectiveness and monitor the progress of student language growth against established proficiency targets. This also ensures students exit their K-12 experience with the needed advanced-level language skills.

Achieving these goals requires a shared recognition of Delaware's place in the world and the world's place in Delaware. As Delaware strives to redesign world language learning for all students, it is imperative that all citizens understand that learning another language is a crucial skill that gives Delaware an economic advantage in the global marketplace.