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**TO:** Members of the State Board of Education

**FROM:** Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*

**DATE:** March 24, 2009

**SUBJECT:** Results of the External Review of the Voluntary State Curriculum for World Languages

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**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this item is to report the results of an external review of the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum for World Languages conducted by Westat and to present this curriculum for State Board acceptance.

**BACKGROUND/HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

Impetus to develop the Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC) resulted from the call for rigorous content standards articulated in NCLB legislation and the 2002 Maryland report, *Achievement Matters Most: The Final Report of the Visionary Panel for Better Schools*. An important recommendation of the Visionary Panel report was for state and local school systems “to align every aspect of education...to support the classroom teacher.” This initiative also recommended development of a statewide grade K – 12 curriculum that specifies by grade and subject area what students are expected to know and be able to do. The World Languages VSC defines what students should know and be able to do at four levels of language learning.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

MSDE began the work of drafting the World Languages VSC in 2003. Representatives from Maryland’s local school systems and institutions of higher education joined with MSDE staff to develop initial drafts. The documents underwent a series of subsequent reviews where scope and sequence, assessable content, and consistency were examined and revised by MSDE and selected world language specialists from across the state.

The World Languages VSC design process and format were similar to those used earlier by other core content VSC development teams. At the top level, *content standards* are broad statements of what students should know and be able to do. Within each content standard are *indicator statements* that vary in number within and across content standards and language levels. Indicator statements break the content standards into “teachable components.” Finally, *objective statements*, written with the most specificity, describe what students are expected to know and be able to do at each proficiency level. They are intended to guide teachers in the delivery of instructional activities and, therefore, should be measurable.

Representatives from the local school systems and higher education participated in the various steps of the development, review, and revision of the VSC. Throughout the process, Division of Instruction staff conducted district visits to collect feedback and input from world language teachers and administrators about the VSC. Visitors to the mdk12 website have also had the opportunity to provide feedback on the document. In addition to collecting feedback, the district visits and focus groups provided opportunities to observe curriculum implementation and to collaboratively determine professional development needs, and discuss possible MSDE and local school system partnerships to address identified needs.

In 2008, Westat was awarded the contract to review the World Languages VSC. To carry out this review, Westat drew on the expertise of the three nationally recognized content experts from the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and an expert educational measurement specialist. Westat developed review protocols and scoring rubrics to use in evaluating the World Languages VSC and then summarized that information and provided specific comments and suggestions for revisions to Maryland's world languages leadership. As soon as the preliminary report was available, supervisors of world languages from across the state began carefully reviewing and discussing the recommendations. The resulting draft of the World Languages VSC reflects the revisions and enhancements made in response to the expert review.

**ACTION:**

This item is presented for Board acceptance.

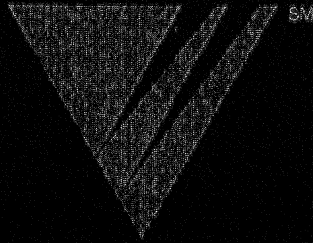
NSG/mlg

Attachment A	Executive Summary From the External Review of the Maryland World Languages Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC)
Attachment B	World Languages VSC
Attachment C	2008-09 Maryland World Languages Enrollment Report

# World Languages

## External Review of VSC

### Attachment A



# **Findings From the External Review of the Maryland Foreign Language Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC)**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Authors**

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Westat**

**and**

**Lynn Thompson  
Center for Applied Linguistics**

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# Findings From the External Review of the Maryland Foreign Language Voluntary State Curriculum

The purpose of this report is to present findings of an external review conducted by Westat and the Center for Applied Linguistics of the four learning levels of the Maryland foreign language Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC). This task represents the concluding effort in finalizing the foreign language state content standards before presentation to the State Board of Education for acceptance. Our report discusses the following:

- Westat and its subcontractor, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), and their qualifications for carrying out this work;
- An overview of the process for developing the VSC in foreign language; and
- Findings of the external review of the foreign language VSC.

## 1.1 Westat and the Center for Applied Linguistics

Headquartered in Rockville, Maryland, Westat is an employee-owned research firm known for its quality of work and professional staff in a broad range of research areas including statistical design, survey research, and program evaluation. Since 1961, Westat has grown steadily by serving federal and local government agencies, private businesses, and other clients. Westat's most important resource is its staff of more than 1,900 social scientists, statisticians, data processing professionals, program area specialists, survey operations experts, and support personnel who offer expertise in every aspect of program evaluation, survey design, and implementation.

We have a history of involvement with education projects that have received national recognition for their quality, relevance, and capacity to help instructional leaders improve student achievement. Among these projects is our longstanding work as contractors for sample selection and field administration for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), our evaluation of the city-state partnership between the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the city of Baltimore for the state of Maryland, and numerous other evaluation projects addressing school improvement on the national, state, and local levels.

The external review of the Maryland foreign language VSC draws on Westat's in-depth understanding and familiarity with instructional programs in Maryland, as well as the skills and knowledge of nationally recognized experts in foreign language and educational measurement who are supporting our efforts. This review of state content standards for foreign language is the fourth of such endeavors for the state of Maryland; our earlier efforts addressed the social studies, the fine arts, and physical education VSCs. Westat is also currently conducting an external review of the Maryland school library media VSC document.

Westat's history with MSDE regarding the agency's efforts to finalize state content standards began with a review of the PreK through 8 social studies standards. We analyzed input according to specified criteria from a team of nationally recognized experts and produced a report of the findings that was presented to the State Board of Education. For the review of the grade-by-grade Maryland fine arts VSC, Westat implemented a more formalized organizational structure to facilitate data collection, analysis, and reporting than that used for the social studies VSC review. To standardize the process, we developed scoring rubrics for each review criterion to help ensure that reviewers were basing their input on the same definition. We also developed a template of the VSC as a tool for content specialists for entering their scores and providing brief explanations of their score assignments. The same procedures were used in the review of the Maryland physical education VSC and for our current review of the state's foreign language content standards.

For the external review of the foreign language VSC, Westat partnered with curriculum specialists in second language acquisition from the Center for Applied Linguistics. CAL, a private, nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., works to improve the teaching of foreign languages in the United States and for more than 45 years has contributed to seminal research and development in the fields of bilingual education and English as a second language. CAL has expertise in conducting language research, test development, curriculum development and evaluation, training seminars, and information collection and dissemination. One of CAL's strongest assets is its expert multi-disciplinary professional staff of applied linguists, psycholinguists, second language acquisition researchers, foreign and second language educators, and research and measurement specialists.

## Development of the Foreign Language Voluntary State Curriculum

The foreign language VSC was developed by MSDE as an outcome of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requirement for rigorous content standards. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, developed in 1996 and revised in 1999 and 2006 as part of the Foreign Language Education Project, was also influential as it presented content standards defining what students should know and be able to do with foreign languages and the proficiency levels that should be attained by students.

In 2002, the report *Achievement Matters Most: The Final Report of the Visionary Panel for Better Schools* challenged the state and local school systems to align all components of education—curriculum, assessment, teacher preparation and professional development, leadership, and funding—to support the classroom teacher. In response to this report and challenges of the federal requirements, in 2003 MSDE staff and representatives from local school systems developed an initial draft of the foreign language VSC. The foreign language VSC is similar to the VSCs in other core content areas in format, but it delineates discrete instructional targets in four proficiency levels—*Beginning, Emerging, Developing, and Advancing*—rather than by grade as in the other content areas. The foreign language VSC committee used the five goals—Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities—and 11 associated standards of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*<sup>1</sup> to develop the state foreign language content standards.

Consistent with other state VSC documents, content standards are broad statements of what students should know and be able to do. In the foreign language VSC document, each standard is paired with the associated goal at this top hierarchal level. Under each foreign language standard are indicator statements that vary across learning levels. Indicator statements break the standards into “teachable” components, and objective statements, written with the most specificity, describe what students are expected to know and be able to do at a given proficiency level. Objective statements are intended to guide teachers in the planning and delivery of daily instructional activities.

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<sup>1</sup> American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Alexandria, VA, 1999.

The review process for foreign language was consistent with that of other core content areas. An external review by content specialists of national repute is one of the final activities before presentation to the State Board for acceptance and statewide implementation.

The review criteria addressed the following:

- Content rigor/developmental appropriateness;
- Scope and sequence;
- Alignment with national curricular expectations (i.e., 1999 foreign language standards);
- Clarity of language;
- Parallel levels of specificity across language learning levels; and
- Parallel levels of specificity in relation to the VSC for reading/English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.

## The External Review of the Foreign Language VSC

The purpose of this report is to present findings of the external review of the four learning levels of the Maryland foreign language Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC). To carry out this review, we drew on the expertise of recognized experts in foreign language<sup>2</sup> and educational measurement. The foreign language specialists independently reviewed the VSC for the combined criteria of content rigor and appropriateness for the intended language learning level<sup>3</sup>, scope and sequence, and relation to national curricular expectations. A separate review of clarity of language and parallel specificity was conducted by the measurement specialist.

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<sup>2</sup> Westat hired three foreign language specialists to independently review the VSC. However, one reviewer unexpectedly withdrew before the beginning of the review period because of scheduling conflicts.

<sup>3</sup> While developmental appropriateness was addressed, its conventional definition— age- and grade-appropriate dimensions of responsiveness (i.e., physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and aesthetic capabilities) — was not suitable for this review. This is because rather than providing grade-by-grade instructional targets, the foreign language VSC provides expectations for four language learning (proficiency) levels that may not necessarily be grade or even age dependent. Because the nature and scope of content rigor is closely related to its appropriateness for the intended level, in consultation with MSDE, a decision was made to combine the scoring rubrics of content rigor with “developmental appropriateness.” The resulting rubric is entitled “Content Rigor/Appropriateness for Intended Level of Language Learning” and adds “for the intended level of language learning” to each score scale description of content rigor.



To assist experts in their review and facilitate data collection, Westat developed two major review tools: Review Protocols, i.e., templates of the four learning levels of the foreign language VSC, and scoring rubrics. We created two versions of the Review Protocol: one for foreign language specialists to evaluate subject area content and one for the measurement specialist to assess clarity of language, and parallelism in the VSC.

The scoring rubrics provided reviewers with quantitative scales for assessing each criterion. They specify features to consider in assigning a rating and are based on dimensions and standards specified by MSDE in the scope of work for this activity, as well as language widely used in educational publications and current national discussions. Possible scores range from 1 to 4, with 4 being considered as *outstanding* or *exemplary* and *consistently* meeting criteria; 3, *satisfactory* and *generally* meeting criteria; 2, *weak* or *uneven* and only *sometimes* meeting criteria; and 1, *poor* and *rarely* or *never* meeting the criteria.

A holistic scoring method was used. Reviewers assigned a single score that reflected the “best overall fit” to the set of descriptors for each scale point. In addition, we required reviewers to provide comments and suggestions, particularly if their assigned score was less than 4 (exemplary). This requirement was to ensure that the panel provided MSDE not only with quantitative ratings of adequacy, but also a rationale for weaknesses noted and possible guidance for VSC refinement.

At the outset of the two-week review period, we provided the panel with documents critical to the VSC review. They included detailed written Instructions for Reviewers, a draft of the foreign language VSC, scoring rubrics, and four separate Review Protocols for each proficiency level of language learning. To ensure that reviewers clearly understood our expectations, we required that they submit for approval a sample of their completed review for one content standard prior to beginning the full review.

At the end of the review period, Westat staff examined the Review Protocols for completeness and, if necessary, contacted reviewers for clarification. When data resolution issues were completed by Westat, the quantitative and descriptive data were more closely examined by CAL for analysis. MSDE agreed to have the senior content consultant serve as arbitrator in instances of reviewer disagreement in lieu of Westat recruiting a substitute for the third reviewer. The consultant assumed an additional role reviewing supporting commentary to confirm the alignment between assigned scores.

## Findings and Recommendations<sup>4</sup>

Reviewers found the draft foreign language VSC to be comprehensive and closely aligned with the national foreign language standards. One of its key strengths is the use of language learning levels to accommodate the wide variety of languages and language programs in Maryland. The following is a summary profile of the review by criterion.

- **Content Rigor/Appropriateness for the intended language learning level.** Although the estimated mean score for this criterion was acceptable (3.22), there was significant disagreement between the two reviewers in standard 3 (across all learning levels) and in standard 4 (for the Beginning and Emerging levels). These differences, affirmed by the senior content consultant, were attributable to the choice of language used to describe the instructional targets. Instances of ambiguous, redundant, and inconsistent wording of indicators and objectives often compromised the instructional intent of the targets, the extent to which they were “teachable,” and their appropriateness for the intended language learning level.

We recommend that MSDE consider incorporating language revisions suggested by reviewers in the completed Review Protocols.

- **Scope and Sequence.** The estimated mean score for this criterion was acceptable (3.38). However, the senior consultant felt the scores overestimated the extent to which scope and sequence was acceptable given reviewer concerns. Distinctions between proficiency levels are not sufficiently clear, in large part because of the identical wording of many indicators across the VSC. Therefore, the systematic progression of expected knowledge and skills across the VSC is not clearly articulated. Other concerns include presumption of prior knowledge of the language at the most basic proficiency levels and instructional targets that are too advanced for the designated level.

We recommend that MSDE revise the terminology used to characterize each language learning level. The language used to describe the instructional targets should be explicit and provide clear distinctions appropriate to each learning level as this will help define the scope and progression of skills across levels.

- **Relation to National Curricular Expectations.** Reviewers found that the VSC aligned with *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the national standards for foreign language learning. Both the mean score for this

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<sup>4</sup> The data in this summary present only part of the picture. A more detailed, informative, and practical source of information for MSDE to consult when considering document modifications is conveyed by reviewer comments and suggestions presented in each Review Protocol.

criterion, 3.74, and reviewer comments indicated that this criterion was acceptable.

- **Clarity of Language.** The estimated mean score of 2.20 indicated several problematic issues. Although the educational measurement specialist was the primary reviewer of this criterion, the foreign language specialists also expressed concerns about the ambiguous, vague, and redundant language of many indicators and objectives across the VSC. The vague wording of objective statements, specific wording of indicator statements, and redundancy of standards and/or topics sometimes compromise the alignment of content standards, indicators, and objectives. Distinctions between parallel indicators and/or objectives across grades are not always clearly articulated, particularly when the same or nearly identical wording is repeated across levels. When it does occur, variation in language is not sufficiently nuanced to distinguish the instructional intent of different types of languages that may be taught (e.g., classical languages) nor differences between each proficiency level.

As previously stated, we recommend that MSDE reexamine the VSC to ensure consistent and unambiguous use of terminology. Language choices should be meaningful and show clear and appropriate distinctions between language learning levels, and provide unambiguous articulation of what students should know and be able to do.

- **Parallelism Within the Foreign Language VSC.** Parallelism within the foreign language VSC was acceptable. The score of 3.00 for each learning level indicated consistency in the degree of specificity with which expected knowledge and skills is articulated.
- **Parallelism Between the Foreign Language VSC and the Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics VSC Documents.** The score of 2.00 indicated that the articulation of expected knowledge and skills is inconsistent with that of the reading/ELA and mathematics VSC documents. The hierarchal format of the foreign language VSC does not completely align with the reading/ELA and mathematics documents. The reading and math VSCs present multiple topics within a given content standard and usually present multiple indicators within a single topic. The foreign language VSC does neither. In comparison with the other VSC documents, the foreign language VSC provides less elaboration of the instructional targets and fewer examples. It also does not provide assessment limits. However, this may be considered a moot point considering foreign language learning is unlikely to be assessed statewide in the near future.

We recommend that MSDE revise the structural organization of the VSC to better align with that of the hierarchal convention of other Maryland VSC documents. MSDE should also reexamine the VSC language to ensure there is sufficient

elaboration of instructional targets so they have clear and consistent meaning to a wide audience.

## Summary

The findings of this external review reveal that the draft foreign language VSC is acceptable pending recommended revisions. The major areas of concern are clarity of language with respect to the need for clear and unambiguous instructional targets, appropriate and well-defined distinctions between the four unique levels of language learning, and a logical organization of the VSC to better align with that of the reading/ELA and mathematics VSC documents.

In addition to specific recommendations offered in the previous section, we strongly suggest that MSDE develop a preface that explains the principles and assumptions under which the foreign language VSC was written and organized. An introductory overview that explains the structure and organizing principles of the VSC could help address many of the issues cited above. We also suggest that MSDE refer to the Wisconsin foreign language standards document ([www.dpi.wi.gov/standards/pdf/fl.pdf](http://www.dpi.wi.gov/standards/pdf/fl.pdf)) as a model for revisions. Its framework is similar to Maryland's standards document, but it is more comprehensive. It provides a rationale for the organizing structure of the document and, relevant to concerns raised in the Maryland document, provides an explanation of the wording of their performance standards (comparable to Maryland's indicator level statements). These and other explanations may assist MSDE in providing the clarity that reviewers found lacking in the Maryland document.

An explanatory preface to the document will provide clear guidance to Maryland foreign language teachers and other stakeholders. It will also serve as a valuable tool to help ensure that all Maryland students receive quality foreign language instruction.

## Appendix. External Review of the Maryland Foreign Language Voluntary State Curriculum

### Project Staff

#### Westat Staff

**Joy Frechtling**  
Vice President  
Corporate Project Officer

**Sandra Rieder**  
Senior Study Director  
Project Director

#### Panel of National Content Experts

**Eileen Lorenz**, a Senior Project Consultant at the Center for Applied Linguistics, is currently project advisor to the K-5 Chinese FLES Curriculum Project. Ms. Lorenz has served on the ACTFL Young Learners Task Force, a national committee whose purpose was to develop the *ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners*. Previously, Ms. Lorenz was an elementary school principal, a K-6 foreign language curriculum specialist, and an immersion and foreign language teacher, with over 30 years experience in public schools. She supervised the development of K-5 curricular units for French immersion classes and K-3 curricular materials for Chinese immersion. As principal, Ms. Lorenz was responsible for using formative and summative data to monitor local- and district-wide initiatives (including NCLB) to ensure that standards in English language arts and mathematics were implemented. She holds a B.A. degree from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, with a major in French and a minor in Education and Spanish as well as a Master's of Education from George Washington University.

**Marty Abbott** is currently the Director of Education for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Prior to this, Marty served in the Fairfax County Public Schools as a language teacher, foreign language coordinator, and Director of High School Instruction. She was responsible for the development of the school system's foreign language curriculum and assessments. She has served on national committees to develop student standards, beginning teacher standards, and performance assessments in foreign languages. She was President of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in 2003. Marty also was co-chair of the national public awareness campaign 2005: *The Year of*

*Languages.* She holds a B.A. degree in Spanish with a minor in Latin from the University of Mary Washington and a Master's Degree in Spanish Linguistics from Georgetown University. She has been involved in developing and reviewing state standards and local curriculum in foreign languages for numerous states and school districts.

**Lynn Thompson**, a Research Associate at the Center for Applied Linguistics, served as senior foreign language consultant for this review. She has over 20 years of experience in both foreign language and English as a second language test development, teacher training, and foreign language curriculum development and evaluation and has directed numerous language program evaluations at the local, district, and state levels. Ms. Thompson is nationally known for her work in designing assessment instruments for the measurement of language proficiency, achievement, attitudes, and motivation, especially for elementary and secondary school students. She has directed numerous language program evaluations at the local, district, and state levels. Most recently, Ms. Thompson led comprehensive evaluations of the K-8 Chinese curriculum for the Chinese American International School (San Francisco, CA) and the K-5 Spanish curriculum for Poquoson City Schools (Poquoson, VA). Her publications include: *Foreign Language Assessment: 30 Years of Evolution and Change* (ERIC/CLL News Bulletin, 2001), *Student Oral Proficiency Assessment (SOPA): A Foreign Language Listening and Speaking Assessment for Children Grades K-7. Administrator's Manual* (Thompson, Boyson & Rhodes, 2001), and *Directory of K-12 Foreign Language Assessment Instruments and Resources* (2000). Ms. Thompson has an M.S. degree and Ph.D. course work from Georgetown University in Applied Linguistics and an M.A. in International Communication from The American University in Washington, D.C.

**Gail Goldberg** is an educational measurement specialist. Her areas of expertise are the design, development, and review of formative and summative assessments, scoring design, and implementation processes for student assessments. Her work also includes providing teacher professional development in instructional practice and assessment. In addition to her contributions in the technical review and scoring of fine arts assessments developed for the State of Maryland, Dr. Goldberg has served as a consultant for state agencies in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Missouri, Ohio, and Colorado. She has reviewed student assessments ranging from grades 3 through 12 and studies relating to curriculum alignment for national organizations such as Achieve, HumRRO, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Her work reflects familiarity with state curriculum standards and alignment with assessment and instructional practice. Dr. Goldberg is also the author of numerous publications and scholarly articles.

# World Languages

## Voluntary State Curriculum

### Attachment B