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ABSTRACT

This brief report discusses the future of language education in light of recent actions taken by the 104th Congress, driven by the "Contract with America," to balance the budget and eliminate the deficit. Such actions challenge federal funding for education reform, Goals 2000, and content standards. It is concluded that after a decade of growth and success culminating in the inclusion of foreign languages in the "core" subject areas of Goals 2000, but also evidenced in the Foreign Language Assistance Act, the National Security Act, the new International Education Act, increased educational exchanges in the United States Information Agency, more support for foreign languages in the National Endowment for the Humanities, and a fourfold increase for foreign languages in higher education, languages could easily find themselves back in the situation of the 1970s when they received little attention. (JL)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

### Reform or Recidivism: Languages' Future

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February 1995

At his Second Annual State of American Education Address on February 1, 1995, Secretary Richard Riley reiterated this Administration's serious commitment to education reform. Riley stated that "... we are no longer a nation at risk, but a nation on the move ... a nation turning the corner, raising its standards and reaching for excellence for the 21st century." The Secretary cited a number of themes regarding continuing education reform. Most prominent among them were: accountability, raising standards, and expecting excellence. He noted that, thanks to Goals 2000: Educate America Act, "...44 states are now moving forward in designing - from the bottom up -- an education system for the 21st Century." In addressing the current national mood reflected in the 104th Congress, Secretary Riley concluded that "the need to reduce the federal budget deficit must be balanced against the need to invest in America's future." Education is that future.

On the other hand, two weeks earlier at a House of Representatives' Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on education rescissions, the powerful new Chair of the full Committee, Rep. Robert L. Livingston (R-LA) challenged the need for any federal funding for education reform. Rep. Livingston took issue particularly with funding for *Goals 2000* and standards which he suggested should be "killed in the cradle." At the same hearing, the General Accounting Office suggested over \$1.5 billion in federal education spending that could be cut by merging some programs and eliminating 21 categorical programs such as Foreign Language Assistance and Workplace Literacy.

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Driven by the Contract with America, the 104th Congress, in its desire to balance the budget, eliminate the deficit, reduce taxes, increase defense spending, and get tough on criminals, is going to have to find a significant number of federal programs to eliminate in order to achieve their goals. Already Congressional hearings have been held on the elimination of the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities (NEA and NEH) and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). The new Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jesse Helms (R-NC), has indicated that all of the cultural and educational programs, including the venerable Fulbright program of the US Information Agency (USIA) and the Agency for International Development (AID) will be reexamined and could be eradicated. The Christian Coalition and its allies in Congress have made the elimination of the Department of Education one of their top priorities.

Numerous social and education programs most likely will come under fire as well. At this point, Adult Education, the National Literacy Education Act and the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act, which are all due to be reauthorized this year, are on neither of the appropriate House or Senate Committees' agendas. Adult and literacy education may simply be jettisoned and vocational education may be rolled into the broader debate of job training or welfare reform.

According to JNCL's 1994 annual state survey, The Impact of Education Reform: A Survey of State Activities, the majority of the states were cautiously optimistic about the future of language learning because of recent reform efforts and programs such as the Foreign Language Assistance Act. While fewer states are gathering data as a cost-saving measure, our calculations indicate that about 4.5% of the nation's public elementary school students are studying a second language. At least five states indicated that elementary language enrollments

were experiencing greater growth than secondary or middle school enrollments. Of the forty-nine states that are in the process of developing content standards, forty have included foreign languages. Seven have actually developed foreign language assessments. Nine states include foreign language study in their "core" elementary curricula.

Certainly, this implies that the education reforms generated by Goals 2000: Educate America Act are beginning to have some impact in the states. The emphasis on excellence created by content and performance standards, and reinforced through assessment, has become the keystone of many states' reforms. Fewer states have moved to address the issue of equity as defined by opportunity-to-learn standards and fewer still have moved to address the issue of skill standards delineated in the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. Other significant concerns for reform, such as professional development and technology, were addressed through reauthorization of all federal elementary and secondary education programs in the Improving America's Schools Act passed last year. Consequently, while most states have commenced education reform, there is still a great deal to accomplish.

In mid-February, the Clinton Administration's budget request was sent to the new Congress requesting a sizable increase in education funding. The bulk of the increase was devoted to current education reforms for *Goals 2000*, professional development, technology, school-to-work, and a \$14 billion G.I. Bill for America's Workers that incorporates current education and labor monies from such areas as adult education, literacy, vocational education, job training and placement. Significantly, the President's budget not only preserved language and international education -related programs, but in a few instances even sought increases.

On the other hand, one week later, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,

HHS and Education passed a budget reduction plan that slashed or eliminated \$1.5 billion in current education programs. Language and literacy programs were particularly hard hit with many projected for termination this year. This is not even the Republican budget or the annual appropriations bill. This legislation, HR845, is a specific rescission action that will cut or end current FY 95 programs such as *Goals 2000's* National Programs, Workplace Literacy, International Educational Exchanges, Star Schools, Tech Prep, and others.

While the Senate may not concur with such draconian cuts and the President may very well veto them, they are indicative of future trends in spending on education, labor, health and other social programs as Congress moves to enact the "Contract with America". The mid-term elections not only ushered in a more conservative and budget-conscious Congress, but they also produced a number of governors and state legislatures that are more concerned with tax cuts and deficit reductions than with education. Decreased federal support for education reform may send not just a signal -- but also a justification -- to the states for stopping reform in its tracks.

In conclusion, after a decade of growth and success culminating in the inclusion of foreign languages in the "core" subject areas of Goals 2000, but also evidenced in the Foreign Language Assistance Act, the National Security Education Act, the new International Education Act, increased educational exchanges in USIA, more support for foreign languages in NEH, and a fourfold increase for foreign languages in Higher Education, languages could easily find themselves back in the scandalous situation of the 1970s. It's really still up to us. These new elected officials (and the old ones as well) must hear a very clear message from us, our students, their parents, and our allies that we will not allow government to mortgage our nation's future for the immediate political gain of fiscal recidivism.