

*New Visions in Action*

# **National Assessment Summit Papers**

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Editor

Marcia Harmon Rosenbusch

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National K–12 Foreign Language Resource Center  
Iowa State University

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## Introduction

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Assessing foreign language proficiency is not what it used to be. In the past ten years, the landscape has changed drastically, prompting the profession to think in radically different ways about how, when, why, and to whom we should administer assessments. Recent changes forcing us to reconceptualize assessment include:

- **Policy:** The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has mandated that students be assessed in mathematics, reading/language arts, and science and that their progress toward proficiency be reported. This is a blessing and a curse. It is a curse in that what gets tested gets taught. If languages are not tested, they will be low priorities for funding and inclusion in the curriculum. The blessing, however, is that, since assessment is not mandated by the federal government, the language teaching profession can take control of assessment policy in ways that math and English teachers cannot. This freedom is a tremendous creative opportunity for the field.
- **Research:** Research on assessment has made huge advances. In the past, “assessment” was often synonymous with “measurement.” Recent research on the washback effect of assessment on teaching, systemic validity (the degree to which an assessment reflects the goals of an educational program), and performance assessment suggests that assessment and learning are not discrete realms but points on a continuum. Test developers now recognize more clearly their role as an integral part of the educational enterprise; they are not just outside observers.
- **Technology:** Paper and pencil tests are no longer the only assessment option. Technology expands the creative possibilities of assessment in two ways. First, it allows formats such as adaptive testing, video, and voice recognition that were unthinkable until recently. Second, the networking potential of the Internet allows tests to be delivered almost anytime, anywhere, at a fraction of the cost of traditional paper and pencil tests.

These fundamental changes in policy, research, and technology formed the backdrop for the National Assessment Summit held in Washington, D.C. in April 2005. Participants from a variety of organizations identified to represent diverse perspectives in the field gathered to think collectively and creatively about the challenges, opportunities, and issues raised by these changes and to begin setting priorities and strategies for moving the profession forward.

## ***Background***

The National Assessment Summit was an outgrowth of New Visions in Action (NVIA), a joint effort by the National K–12 Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at Iowa State University and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). NVIA is an initiative designed to improve foreign language learning through collaborative efforts within the field.

New Visions actively sought partners to help carry out aspects of its agenda. The Pacific Northwest Council for Languages (PNCFL) offered to assist on assessment issues and the original idea for the National Assessment Summit came from PNCFL. Realizing that a national conference was beyond its financial and logistical capabilities, PNCFL turned over operations to NVIA and ACTFL. This free sharing of ideas and responsibility without regard to ownership and turf is an excellent example of “New Visions thinking” and the positive effect this initiative has had on the culture of our field.

## ***Purpose***

The National Assessment Summit was designed to bring together users and producers of assessments and engage them in a discussion of unmet assessment needs and untapped assessment capacities. The meeting was truly a summit in that national foreign language organizations and associations were asked to nominate representatives to bring their organization’s perspective to the forum and also to take back to their organization ideas for action. Specifically, the National Assessment Summit aimed to identify a set of priorities for the next two years (2005-07). Organizations with the capacity and desire to contribute to this agenda will spend the next two years pursuing the tasks they have agreed to address. At a follow-up National Assessment Summit in 2007 in Portland, Oregon, under the sponsorship of the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon and the Center for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, these organizations will gather to report on progress made and to consider an agenda for the following two years (2007-09).

## ***Summit Priorities***

The National Assessment Summit identified seven priorities for the coming two years. Each priority is addressed in a section of this series of papers and is authored by one of the participants.

- 1) **Articulation:** Assessment is not an end in itself but a means for improving educational practice. Good assessments tied to a common scale have the potential to inform articulation decisions by focusing placement decisions and program models on demonstrated student performance. Jacque Bott Van Houton from the Kentucky Department of Education clarifies the challenges in developing extended sequences of articulated instruction and the role of assessment in addressing this issue.
- 2) **Assessment Literacy:** Assessment literacy refers to the ability to understand, analyze, and apply information on student performance to improve instruction. Unless teachers have a clear understanding of the types, purposes, and appropriate uses of assessments and the student performance data they produce, they cannot

use that data to improve teaching and learning. Peggy Boyles of the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (CSC) addresses the need for teachers to become literate consumers of assessment information. She cites a number of successful initiatives that use assessment data effectively and paints a picture of teachers viewing assessment as a critical part of being a self-reflective educator.

- 3) **Suite of Assessments:** Given the diversity of needs and backgrounds of Summit participants, it is not surprising that a clear consensus emerged calling for a “suite of assessments” from which schools, districts, states, universities, and individuals could choose. New Visions in Action Co-Chair Ann Tollefson describes why one size does not fit all and how a diverse array of assessment options can best serve the myriad needs in the field. She notes, however, that while the specific assessment instruments may differ, it is important that this suite of assessments all be based on the same standards and performance descriptors to facilitate common understanding. The foreign language field is fortunate to have the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, and the *ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners* that can serve as common touchstones for developers and users of various assessment tools.
- 4) **Test Database:** Assessment options must be disseminated in an efficient and user-friendly manner. Margaret Malone and David MacGregor from the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) describe an effort to develop an online database of assessment tools. Building on existing databases, the new database will be searchable, allowing teachers and administrators to identify appropriate assessments that fit their particular needs, and will provide a tutorial in selecting appropriate assessments.
- 5) **Models and Anchors:** Elvira Swender of ACTFL outlines the need in the profession for models of appropriate assessment and anchor examples of student performances. These concrete examples can serve to facilitate the development of assessment literacy and to guide future development efforts. She describes a number of national and local efforts that can serve these purposes and also describes a new initiative that promises to create new models and anchors and make them available to practitioners and researchers in the near future.
- 6) **Research:** Research findings from assessment provide new possibilities for fair and efficient assessment and a common understanding of assessment needs. Ursula Lentz of CARLA reviews the role of assessment research to improve proficiency levels and programs noting specific efforts that incorporate cutting-edge research in shaping practical language assessment tools. Lentz concludes by proposing a set of tasks to be addressed by researchers over the next two years.
- 7) **Advocacy:** Success in all of these areas depends on the profession’s ability to clarify the importance of language learning for the social, economic, and military security of the country and to advocate for language programs. Martha Abbott of ACTFL reviews efforts to educate the public and policy makers about the centrality of language to the national educational mission. Abbott identifies target audiences and strategies for bringing the message about languages to them.

Taken as a whole, these papers describe state-of-the-art language assessment and articulate a two-year agenda for improving assessment and educational practice. A variety of organizations and individuals will work to move this agenda forward and will report back on their progress at the 2007 Summit. This distributed but coordinated effort will use the energy, resources, and talent of a variety of organizations to make this vision a reality.

## Achieving Articulation through Assessment

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Across America, there is a greater call than ever before for students to achieve high levels of language competency in a variety of languages (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005; *Campaign Urges America to Learn Foreign Languages*, 2004; National Association of State Boards of Education, 2003; Sandrock & Wang, 2005) and emerging support for this achievement to be accomplished in a more systematic manner. The new voices entering this discussion lend credence to what the profession has known for decades – that only a well-articulated sequence of language learning in the schools can produce these results. A consistent theme at the National Assessment Summit and in this series of papers is that reliable information on student performance obtained through high-quality assessments is a key to creating such sequences. Whatever actions follow will have to address the longstanding, systemically embedded barriers to:

- beginning language learning at an early age and continuing long enough to develop the desired competency;
- understanding what language learning is and how to be successful at it;
- developing a system for instruction targeted at functional use of languages;
- placing students appropriately into courses;
- transitioning seamlessly from level to level and institution to institution; and
- assessing learners' skills and knowledge through commonly accepted criteria.

The federal government's focus on the important role of language in the intelligence community has been a driving force in the current round of awareness raising. This was most obviously demonstrated at the National Language Conference (2005), which produced a white paper, *A Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities*, that outlined an action plan for building greater language capacity. Support is also coming from those with interest in global economics and immigrant and migrant populations in the U.S. Groups that are education-related, such as the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), States Institute for International Education, Asia Society, and Longview Foundation, also are now becoming more vocal and visible in their support for language learning. These new voices contributing to the discussion signal the emergence of a somewhat new public awareness and a broader understanding of the situation. Their influence and that of others has resulted in grants for innovative projects and new legislation to fund capacity-building programs, such as the National Chinese Flagship Initiative funding that includes an articulated K–16 program in

Chinese language instruction.

The idea of building capacity by creating a pipeline suggests that people are acknowledging and acting on the need for longer and more intentional sequences of foreign language study. The recent decision by the College Board to add four new language Advanced Placement examinations (Italian, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese) in the next few years, supports the idea of articulation, expands the language choices, and implies that capacity-building should also be accompanied by an expectation of a high level of language proficiency that can be guaranteed through the quality check of assessment. Research, as well as common knowledge, tells us that well-articulated programs are the best way to facilitate students' advancement to the highest level of language competency.

### ***The National Educational Context***

What is happening with foreign languages is reflective of the national education agenda that has recently turned its focus to systemic and systematic ways of getting all students to achieve at higher levels through initiatives such as Reading First, Refocusing Secondary Education, Advance Placement grants, the American Diploma Project, etc. The intent behind these initiatives is to raise expectations, increase rigor, and devise ways for learners to demonstrate their progress and proficiency, or, in other words, to cause increased learning. Leading the current charge is the federal government's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This legislation directs states to comply with national standards in developing or redesigning their own content area standards and indicators and to implement assessments that demonstrate elementary and secondary students' yearly progress. The areas of focus are reading/language arts, including English as a second language, mathematics, and, soon to be added, science. A residual effect may be that some states are also addressing achievement for all in additional subject areas, (i.e., social studies in Arkansas, Delaware, New Mexico, and Washington). Consequently, states, districts, and schools are benchmarking the skills, competencies, and content that can measure what their students are expected to know and be able to do at each level, then testing to make sure they meet those standards.

What this means is that assessment, more than ever before, is driving articulation and instruction. Such measures serve to inform decisions about instruction, placement, and promotion and help to monitor the achievement of learning goals at classroom, district, state, and national levels. While there are certainly drawbacks to an improperly implemented assessment-driven curriculum, there can be no doubt that benefits include coherently organized sequences of instruction between grades and across levels, that is, vertical and horizontal articulation.

### ***Foreign Language Articulation Today***

Unfortunately, foreign languages are not part of the current national, or in most cases, state assessment agenda. This does not mean that state standards and benchmarks are not being developed and/or redefined as part of the general effort or that districts and schools are not creating or reviewing content guides and curriculum maps. To the contrary, work in other content areas has spurred a flurry of activity affecting many K–12 foreign language programs. However, without the supporting systemic assessment as a cross check, it is likely that these programs will continue to exhibit many of the negative

effects of poor systemic articulation. These include:

- **Repetition of content:** All too frequently, students are still forced to relearn the same introductory content as they transition from primary to middle school, from middle to high school, and from high school to college.
- **Reduction of student motivation over time:** With repetition as a factor, students tire of learning the same content over and over, and often perform at low expectations, and eventually lose interest. This loss of motivation is a contributing factor to high attrition rates.
- **Reliance on seat time to fulfill requirements:** School, district, or state foreign language graduation or pre-college curriculum requirements are nearly always measured by seat time rather than by performance levels, even in articulated programs. The result is that some high achieving students are stuck *servicing time*, while many fulfill the requirement without having reached the benchmarks expected by universities.
- **Lack of transparency and coherence of learning:** The profession has still not been able to articulate clearly enough to language learners and others what students should be able to do at certain levels of competency and how they can progress in a logical manner. While the national standards, proficiency guidelines, and performance guidelines have been beacons to guide instruction and learning, they are perceived by many as difficult criteria for formal instruments to assess. With assessment needs in mind, it may be time for a revision in thinking and practice.
- **Inaccurate placement in postsecondary:** The situation of false-beginners still exists in college where some freshmen choose to perform poorly on placement exams so that they can assure themselves of “an easy A” for content already addressed in high school. On the other hand, in cases where foreign language in high school is required for admission into postsecondary institutions, seat time, not performance, is often used as a determiner, which is unfortunate since it is frequently inaccurate. This situation exists because there is no commonly accepted criteria or assessment to evaluate the learners’ performance.
- **Financial concerns and personnel costs:** Each year significant amounts of money are expended because of the need for remediation, when elimination of content duplication would solve the problem. University professors are often amazed that high school teachers equate two years study in high school to one in college, but textbooks and curricula affirm that concepts and content do overlap. Therefore, we end up paying for the delivery of the content to the students at the secondary level and turn around and pay for delivery of almost the same content at the postsecondary level. Duplication is expensive in terms of teacher and student time when there is no value added to the student’s learning.
- **Too few students achieving at high levels:** Finally, and most importantly, foreign language teachers are forced to leave their positions because of a lack of students, especially at the higher levels of study. Despite their good intentions and hard work, the guiding light of standards and guidelines, improved and research-

based instructional strategies, up-to-date and visually stimulating textbooks accompanied by their wealth of ancillary materials, and authentic voices and culture available to us at a click of a mouse, the lack of students forces teaching positions to be cut.

Without long, organized, and coherent sequences of study, only a very few students can achieve proficiency at high levels. “Why, then, is articulation in foreign languages so difficult to accomplish, especially when the field agrees it is essential for effective language learning in school?” (Welles, 1995). The answer surfaces when we look at what the profession has discovered in past national convocations, what we have been able to do to advance this quest for articulation, and what missing piece still exists, today.

### ***Not a New Question***

The question about why articulation of foreign language programs is so difficult to accomplish was posed ten years ago in the context of an early national effort to discuss sequential foreign language education across levels and institutions. Initiated by the Coalition of Foreign Language Organizations in 1987, the project aimed to create a forum for dialogue and resulted in a 1994 NEH-funded conference, *Achieving Consensus on Articulation in Foreign Language Education* held in Washington, D.C. Subsequently, the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) dedicated a special issue of the *ADFL Bulletin* ([26] 3, 1995) to the topic. It presented a discussion of challenges, obstacles, and the current realities of the day, as well as a description of model articulation projects (most funded by Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education [FIPSE] grants) and recommendations for future endeavors.

At the 1994 conference, Coalition member organizations demonstrated their solidarity in a Statement on Articulation (1995) and declared their conviction that both vertical and horizontal articulation were needed for students to become competent users of a language. While they stopped short of laying out a plan, the Coalition provided a common understanding of what they believed was needed by language teachers for articulation to take place, as well as what resources were in place for this to occur. They then challenged the profession to work together toward the goal of articulation by focusing on implementing the national standards, developing dialogue across all levels and institutions, focusing on the learner and content, and taking into account a variety of student accomplishments at every level.

On one hand, regrettably, much of what was said then is still the substance of discussion today. However, ten years hence, both scholarly and action research, as well as the development and implementation of national, state, and local foreign language documents, have led toward some common beliefs about language learning that bridge many of the divides previously hindering our achievement of alignment. A look at the progress made and improvements suggested, can show how far the profession has come and reveal what needs to be done next in the goal of language learning alignment.

### ***Recommendations***

1. Based on second language acquisition theory and brain research, there is common agreement that: (a) children acquire certain aspects of language more easily than adults, and (b) teenagers and adults learn rather than acquire languages, but can

- also become proficient. This understanding supports arguments to begin learning a foreign language at an early age and layer on additional language learning throughout one's formal and lifelong education.
2. Content-related and content-based instruction is important at all levels of learning. This approach has been slow to catch on in the U.S. apart from immersion and bilingual classrooms. Today, in China, where English language learning is required beginning in grade 3 and methods are slowly changing to reflect research, students learn from English textbooks with chapters on environmental biology, business technology, chemical analysis, and other content-related topics. More and more common in French high schools are European sections, where social studies and science classes are taught entirely in the target language. Masters degree programs in Germany are offered in English. Such high level use of language can only be achieved if students have had time to develop proficiency through long sequences of articulated content-rich language learning.
  3. The national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999) provides a thoughtful and useful framework for teaching and learning. The Standards document, which was first published in 1996, sets inter-related goals (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) for students' language learning expressed as content standards. Agreeing on what students should know and be able to do was but the first step, a so-called catalyst for reform (Lafayette, 1996) that paved the way for development of meaningful curriculum and authentic assessment. The standards have been implemented widely in curricula and foreign language textbooks. Still, some question how learning goals such as Connections, Comparisons and Communities can be assessed.
  4. The *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Reading and Listening*, first published in 1986 and since revised (*Writing: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2001; Speaking: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1999*) present a description of stages of proficiency abilities by focusing on what learners can and cannot do in discrete skills. These proficiency abilities represent professional consensus based on language learning research and classroom observation on how students progress with their learning. Their infusion into American foreign language instruction and assessment is pervasive, but Liskin-Gasparro (2003) raises questions about the nature of language elicited in assessments using them as criteria and the non-native speaker norm and Chalhoub-Deville and Fulcher (2003) urge that psychometric research be focused on the use of ratings for assessment purposes.
  5. The *ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners* (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1998) describe how well K–12 students demonstrate competency in three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) at three benchmark levels in five domains of performance. A cumbersome document, the performance guidelines have led to benchmarking on the local level in many states and school districts in order to provide a more simplified standard for measurement of students' continuous

progress. One of the contrasts between the Performance Guidelines and the European Global Scale (Council of Europe, 2001) is the performance guidelines' inclusion of combined "can do/cannot do" descriptors (i.e., in regards to the latter, makes false starts; lacks awareness of . . . ; may not comprehend . . . ; can be understood by those interacting with language learners, etc.) in contrast to the "can do" language of the European scale. In addition, there is a growing appreciation for learning languages for a variety of purposes and at a variety of performance levels, thus shifting the focus from an attainment of the former notion of "proficiency" to a view of multiple levels of "competency." It may, therefore, be time to revisit the Performance Guidelines to better align them with the European scale used in the various *Linguafolio* projects underway in the U.S. Finally, various institutions and organizations have designed prototypes of portfolios for the collection of student work to address the limitations of standardized tests and provide a variety of student accomplishments at every level. These include paper and electronic portfolios, as well as the *LinguaFolio USA!*, an on-going project based on the European Language Portfolio and sponsored by the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL). This innovative tool goes beyond the average portfolio, also acting as a self-evaluation and reflective learning instrument that records students' intercultural information and documents their language competencies. With implications for use by both foreign and English language learners (as it is being used in Ireland), this tool could make more transparent to those outside the profession just how alike learning a foreign language and English as a second language really are.

### ***What Next?***

The advances in theory and practice, the development and implementation of national standards, proficiency and performance guidelines, and learner portfolios have brought us closer than ever before to achieving an aligned curriculum. However, there are still missing pieces: a reinvigorated, intense dialogue within the profession; a common criteria for assessment accepted by all; and local and national formative and summative assessments.

The need for collaboration and dialogue among the varied members of the profession, which was called for by the Coalition of Foreign Language Organizations in 1994, surfaced again as a common theme at the New Visions in Action National Assessment Summit (2005). An intentional dialogue related to the social realities of foreign language learning is needed among Pre-K–20 stakeholders for the profession to come to consensus on curriculum and assessment.

A common, valid, and reliable criteria for evaluating language competency is essential. ACTFL's Proficiency (1999; 2001) and Performance Guidelines (1999) are the established American criteria for assessments, but neither is without criticism. The Council of Europe's *A Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF)* (2001), with both global and illustrative descriptors, has been adopted by the 41-member countries' ministries of education and language schools (Goethe Institute, Alliance Française, Cervantes Institute, etc.), and is also being piloted in schools in Japan, Canada, and South America. While the European rating scale is also debated

(Fulcher, 2004; North, 2004), it is an instrument American foreign language educators would be well advised to investigate, particularly in light of the recently developed video providing English speech samples for each level. A validated alignment of the similar scales and revisions to ACTFL's guidelines reflecting a more positive "can do" approach, could facilitate mobility among levels and institutions, as well as among nations. It could also provide the common criteria for assessment.

Because it drives instruction and articulation, much as autonomous learning drives student achievement (Little & Perclova, 2001), assessment is also an essential element and another missing piece. Assessment and self-assessment, based on common criteria, are needed for foreign language students, teachers, parents, and administrators to understand language learning, meet the benchmarks, achieve proficiency, and document progress. The work by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), with support from the American Council on the Teaching for Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR), on the development of the Spanish National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) promised to provide a model for research and development. Unfortunately, the NAEP Spanish language exam was suspended before it could be implemented (National Assessment Governing Board, 2003).

Thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Title VI: International Research and Studies Program, ACTFL is in a position to move forward with a national assessment project of its own. ACTFL will draw from the work done on the NAEP exam, as well as other existing assessments, such as the Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP), and the Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments (MLPA), among others to develop a prototype for standards-based, performance-based assessments (See Swender in this series of papers for more detail).

Formative and summative assessments, based on common criteria and benchmarks also play an essential role in articulating language learning by helping learners understand the learning process and mark progress as they meet benchmarks along the way. It is essential that a variety of proficiency and performance assessments, based on common criteria, be made available to meet the needs of all learners and provide a global view of learners' abilities.

### ***The Two-Year Plan***

What can be done within the next two years to advance the articulation agenda?

1. ACTFL can work on the national, regional, and state levels to promote discussions among K–16 foreign language educators about common learner expectations. These discussions should focus on identifying model programs based on standards and indicators that are benchmarked at transition points, particularly between high school and postsecondary institutions.
2. In its continuation of the states' *LinguaFolio USA!* project, NCSSFL can advance the notion of a common national instrument to self-assess, to record formal evaluations and intercultural activities, and to develop autonomous learning. This instrument, when based upon common criteria, would support the aim for alignment by facilitating student mobility from school to school, school to postsecondary education, and postsecondary education to the work place.

3. Working from the perspective of truly desiring to improve the language learning process for all, an investigation of common, universal assessment criteria can be initiated, with an open-minded examination of *A Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001) and with research studies that will collect meaningful evidence about proficiency and performance rating scales.
4. ACTFL can implement its grant-funded project to develop a blueprint for performance and proficiency assessment in languages on a national scale and to create a framework appropriate for a national test and local assessments.
5. ACTFL and its partner organizations can forge an even stronger campaign to encourage legislators and other policy makers to recognize the intrinsic and economic value of long sequences of well-articulated foreign language programs that produce communicatively and culturally empowered citizens for America.

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# Assessment Literacy

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More than ever before our educational systems are under pressure to be accountable for student performance and to produce measurable results because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Foreign language teachers have watched their mathematics, reading/language arts, and science colleagues anxiously await high-stakes test scores that are reported in faculty meetings or even in the local newspaper. Even though foreign language is not one of the core content areas for which NCLB requires assessment and the public reporting of results, educators realize that accountability through assessment is critical; without it foreign language programs are more easily reduced or eliminated from the K–16 curriculum.

No longer can foreign language teachers just gather chapter test scores or letter grades and report them to students and parents on multiple occasions throughout the school year. Nor can they dismiss the results of a particular test score in light of what they “intuitively” feel they know about the student. Falsgraf (2005) asserts that foreign language teachers need a strong knowledge of assessment practices and how to use assessment results because it will allow them to be both “student-centered and empirically rigorous” by “supplementing that intuition with empirical data on student performance.”

Assessment also is the key to a smooth transition when students move across levels within the K–12 sequence and when moving from secondary to postsecondary levels of education. As a profession, we must identify the common goals and expectations in the K–16 pipeline, use performance-based assessments at every level, and make recommendations based on these data.

## ***Definition of Assessment Literacy***

A priority that arose early in the discussions at the National Assessment Summit is the need to develop in foreign language teachers an understanding of the principles and practices of testing and assessment, known as “assessment literacy.” Foreign language teachers and administrators need the necessary tools for analyzing and reflecting upon test data in order to make informed decisions about instructional practice and program design.

By developing assessment literacy, foreign language educators will not only be able to identify appropriate assessments for specific purposes, such as student placement or program evaluation, but will also be able to analyze empirical data to improve their instruction without negative repercussions should the initial outcomes not be what teachers had hoped for in early test results. With this opportunity, there is an emerging

priority: to provide professional development for inservice and preservice foreign language teachers so that they become literate in assessment analysis.

Simply collecting assessment data and dutifully recording it on individual student record reports is not enough. Moving from a passive interpretation to an active application of assessment data that will impact teaching and the curriculum is the crucial bridge that must be built and crossed in order for data to be meaningful and useful to the classroom teacher. To develop assessment literacy, foreign language professionals need a toolbox filled with skills and strategies that will enable them to decode assessment results, analyze their meaning, respond to what the results reveal, and apply them in teaching and in program evaluation. Based on her research of foreign language teachers in Indiana, Hoyt (2005) proposes that the toolbox of assessment literacy include: knowing appropriate test practices, acquiring a wide range of assessment techniques, and utilizing tests that accurately assess higher-order concepts.

Participants in the National Assessment Summit recommended sustained professional development for teachers to achieve assessment literacy and suggested that the availability of assessment resources, preferably online, is critical. They recommended that training be both online as well as face-to-face at the district level, through Language Resource Centers, at the annual meetings of national, regional, or state language associations or organizations, and as an integral part of the teacher preparation program for preservice teachers. Several examples of professional development for assessment already in existence are provided in the next section.

## ***Professional Development for Practicing Teachers***

### **School District**

Examining how some school districts have successfully developed assessment literacy in their teachers can exemplify the processes used and the outcomes experienced for other districts. In this section several examples of professional development in assessment are provided.

**Fairfax County, Virginia:** The district coordinator in Fairfax County, Paula Patrick, reports positive changes in foreign language instruction with the introduction of the formative and summative performance-based assessments, Performance Assessment for Language Students (PALS) for grade 7-12 students. Both teachers and students field-tested the writing and speaking rubrics, which were designed to reflect the language development of students by instructional level in the Fairfax County foreign language program. Every summer the district offers staff development in performance-based assessment to teachers in order to guide them in writing good formative tasks. Teachers also receive training in the evaluation of writing and speaking samples with the district's scoring rubrics in order to maintain inter-rater reliability. In the summer, a committee is formed to validate the samples that were sent in by teachers at the end of the previous school year.

“Teachers were pleasantly surprised at what their students could really ‘do’ with the language,” Patrick said. “They also felt more ownership of and responsibility to each level of the county’s articulated language program.” She notes, however, that because teachers assessed their own students, results are not as objective and reliable as in second-rater assessment. Teachers received both countywide and class averages on the

PALS assessments, but Patrick asserts that more feedback is needed in terms of analytic data in addressing the different domains of performance. In order to really impact improvement in instructional practices, teachers need to know the strengths and weaknesses of their students. For example, are students meeting expectations in use of vocabulary, but not meeting district expectations in regard to comprehensibility?

Understanding and utilizing this type of data would provide an important link in assessing district programs. Patrick clarifies further that the time needed both for teacher professional development and for work with data is a limitation that prevents a more in-depth analysis of assessment data.

**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:** Funded by a federal FLAP (Foreign Language Assistance Program) grant award, the Pittsburgh Public School district developed an online assessment (PPS ORALS), based on ACTFL's Proficiency Scale (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1999, 2001) and the SOPI test, to test K–12 students' oral proficiency and to provide tools for teachers to begin to analyze and act upon assessment data. These tools included: a) scoring rubrics, b) a rating feedback sheet to assist teachers in analyzing student performance by categorizing 16 areas of strengths and weaknesses, c) an instructional tip sheet to help teachers adjust their teaching strategies to address some of the language functions in which students show weaknesses as revealed by the student assessment data, and d) professional development workshops in decoding, analyzing, and responding to district assessment data.

According to district supervisor Dr. Thekla Fall, the fundamental professional development effort has been “to help teachers truly understand the test, tasks, and rating” (personal communication, April 20, 2005). Training is offered each year to new staff members, and as a refresher, for those who have rated PPS ORALS for several years. Additionally, teachers are trained in developing and creating assessment tasks. Both parents and students are able to go to the district's website to see a sample rubric used in evaluating student performance. The next level of Pittsburgh's planned professional development is to train teachers to use the feedback comments that accompany every rating. These comments define the areas in which the students did well and what the students will need to be able to do to attain the next level.

## **Professional Meetings and Summer Institutes**

**Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon:** CASLS will offer the first of a number of workshops on assessment at the ACTFL Conference (November, 2005). These assessment workshops will present practical tools for gathering data on students and ideas on how to use that data to modify teaching from a base of empirical information. Additionally, during 2005-2006 CASLS will collaborate with the New Jersey Department of Education, using the data derived from the STAMP test (see Online Assessment Resources in this paper), to show teachers how to adjust their teaching and curriculum to maximize student performance.

**National K–12 Foreign Language Resource Center, Iowa State University and the Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC:** At the ACTFL Conference (November, 2005), a workshop will introduce participants to the Student Oral Proficiency Assessment (SOPA), a valid assessment used by K–8 second language programs to assess student second language oral proficiency. Participants in the workshop will have hands on training in how to administer the SOPA and rate students using the SOPA

Rating Scale. Participants will receive the Oral Proficiency Assessment Manual, the SOPA Rating Scale, and sample scripts.

**Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota:** Offers a week-long summer institute that guides teachers as they design performance assessment tasks and scoring guides based on the three modes of communication (Summer, 2005).

**National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawaii:** Offers a two-week workshop in Honolulu in which participants gain an understanding of the fundamentals of creating sound language tests, with a particular emphasis on designing tests to facilitate placement decisions. Participants use computer programs, such as Excel, to practice setting up, analyzing, and interpreting assessment data (Summer, 2005).

### **Online Professional Development**

**Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) University of Minnesota:** Offers the Virtual Assessment Center (VAC) to provide teachers background information and step-by-step assistance in developing and interpreting second-language assessments. This online professional development component can provide some of the basics in the development of assessment literacy in addition to resources on theory and sample assessments and rubrics. For example, in one section of the module, teachers are given strategies to help them in providing students with assessment feedback that would show students where, when, and how they can improve their performance. The Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments (MLPA) were developed to determine whether Minnesota students had attained minimal proficiency in a second language (intermediate low and intermediate mid/high). The data have been used for the purpose of certifying that students have met the designated levels and to facilitate the process of articulating expectations of student performance at the end of secondary studies and the beginning of postsecondary studies and for fulfilling a proficiency level in programs using proficiency rather than seat time for satisfying a language requirement.

### ***Preparation of New Teachers***

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) principles (2002) address the need for preservice teachers to understand and use a variety of assessment strategies to monitor student learning, to inform language and culture instruction, and to report student progress. This emphasis on assessment supports the efforts of many university preservice programs at the undergraduate level as they focus on assessment issues.

**Wake Forest University, North Carolina:** Dr. Mary Lynn Redmond reports that through their preparation in both technology and methods, preservice teachers in the program at her university learn to design rubrics which they use in their methods course for assessment of interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational communication (personal communication, July 19, 2005). She explains that preservice students are taught to use reflection as a valuable tool to make good judgments about teaching and assessment. “We try to help them form the big picture and to see that assessment is a big part of what they do in planning specific language outcomes,” says Redmond. “Teaching and assessment

practices are constantly being re-evaluated. It is really an on-going process and a thread that is woven from start to finish through the program.”

## ***Online Assessment Resources***

### **Foreign Language Test Database**

The foreign language test database as described by Malone and MacGregor (in this series of papers) is a three-year project beginning in October 2005 that will provide a free database of K–16 foreign language tests in 25 languages and a tutorial on selecting and using appropriate tests and assessment resources.

### **Online Assessment**

CASLS has developed the Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP), which is an online summative assessment of reading, writing, listening, and speaking proficiency for novice low to intermediate high levels of proficiency available in seven languages. The test items are based on authentic materials and realistic tasks. Items assessing the listening skill are currently being field-tested and the piloting of these items is scheduled to be completed by 2006. STAMP data are then reflected back to teacher and learners. All of the assessment information comes back aggregated and disaggregated in multiple ways to allow teachers, students, and administrators to draw conclusions about how individuals and classes of students perform on various item types to verify where students are in terms of language performance.

CARLA Coordinator of Proficiency Projects at the University of Minnesota, Ursula Lentz, reports that the Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments (MLPA) is a battery of computer-delivered instruments that have been designed to measure learners’ proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening at two intermediate levels on the ACTFL scale in French, German, and Spanish that will soon be available online. The primary purpose of these assessments is to appropriately place students in a college program after completing their secondary studies or to determine that students have attained the required proficiency level either after one or two years of language study at the college level. The computer-delivered reading and listening assessments provide immediate, automatic scoring for both the student and administrator of the tests.

### ***Recommendations***

In order to develop “assessment literacy” on a national level, participants at the National Assessment Summit suggested that the first priority is to develop a universal understanding of what constitutes a good assessment and to build a common, articulated set of criteria for exemplary assessments. There is an urgent need to organize and encourage professional development through both online training of teachers and through assessment workshops at national, regional, and state meetings. Professional development programs also need to offer training to help teachers use the data derived from assessments to adjust teaching practices and to provide concrete evidence of student performance for curriculum review purposes. Summit participants also suggested that an ACTFL Assessment Special Interest Group (SIG) be formed so that interested teachers and administrators would have a forum for ongoing discussion. Clearly this assessment

literacy initiative needs to learn from, be directed by, and involve language educators at all levels, from kindergarten through postsecondary.

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## Suite of Assessments

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In this world dominated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the language profession must be in a position to provide reliable assessment results that demonstrate the achievement and proficiency that students develop in our classes. By publishing and publicizing these results, even if done outside the arena of the NCLB-tested content areas, we enhance the status of language learning within the education community and with the public at large.

There are, of course, other enormously important benefits to having well designed standards-based assessments that are appropriate for the wide variety of students in our classes and the varied situations in which they are learning a language. Reliable, valid assessment data provide substantive information for program evaluation, articulation, and improvement. Multiple measures help us be sure our assessment results are accurate. Further, when we as a profession have the ability to measure student learning affordably, reliably, and within a reasonable time frame, we are better able to measure the value that is added from level to level. This information can inform instruction, providing teachers vital information about student learning and the effects of best practices and research-based pedagogy. It can also inform student placement and proficiency for graduation.

In essence, multiple well-designed standards-based assessments can light the path to standards-based teaching, helping us change the paradigm from the traditionally teacher-centered classroom to more student-centered instruction and programming. These assessments have the potential to allow every school and every teacher to compare and validate teaching and learning in their programs with programs around the nation and world.

For the learners, well-designed assessments that are appropriate for them and their situation offer substantive, useable feedback on their learning. With this information we can describe not only students' proficiency, but also where they are now as compared to where they were as they began a program, a course, or a year. In this process, student growth and achievement can be acknowledged as we share with them substantive, useable feedback regarding their language learning.

The importance of having a suite of well-designed, standards-based language assessments, therefore, can be measured by their potential to affect the status of language learning within the K–16 curriculum, to provide substantive information to the profession for program design and articulation, and to motivate and provide feedback to the individual learner. The question then becomes what kinds of assessments will meet the definition of “well-designed standards-based assessments,” provide reliable and valid results, and still be appropriate to assess the learning of the wide variety of students that are found in foreign language classrooms? A question that follows is, do we currently

have such assessments, and if not, what does the profession need to do to develop this suite of assessments?

## ***Challenges in Assessing Languages***

No other subject area faces quite the same challenges in addressing assessment as does the foreign language profession. All children study math and reading in every grade every day in every elementary and most secondary schools in the nation, so assessments in those areas can be designed with that assumption in mind. That is, of course, not true of foreign languages.

With the exception of the special education arena, it is difficult to imagine the same experiential and proficiency gap in math, for example, that exists between the heritage language learner and the novice learner in a first-year middle school classroom. A similar gap exists between students who began their language study in kindergarten and those with two years of high school study.

As compared to the “core subject” offerings of reading/language arts and mathematics, there is no end to the variety of foreign language programs in this country. In our elementary schools, for example, we have many different models including FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School), partial immersion, immersion, technology-supported, content-based, and exploratory programs and multiple combinations of each.

In further contrast, our systems provide multiple points of entry, which means learners in different grades can begin their study of a language at different points in time. Consequently, we are challenged not only to measure linguistic sophistication but also to do so with assessments that are developmentally appropriate for different age levels, e.g., we must be able to assess language development in the novice range with kindergarteners as well as with high school students. To further complicate the situation, we must measure multiple languages, many of which require differing amounts of time for adult learners to achieve proficiency and in which English speakers experience different types of challenges.

In order to make informed, defensible decisions about the best use of our resources, the profession needs to ask itself some difficult but important questions:

1. What does the profession need to know in order to further its knowledge about language learning?
2. What is the minimum we need to know for purposes of admission, placement, advancement, credit, and graduation?
3. How do the answers to question #2 differ and how are they similar among the K–5, 6–8, 9–12, and postsecondary levels?
4. What does the profession need in order to provide the much sought after “scientifically based research” that will be able to influence district, state, and national support for and policy in foreign languages?

In answering these questions and in surveying what is available and what needs to be done, we have at least six other pressing challenges:

1. **Accessibility:** How can we assure that educators and students in every school, from the most rural to the most urban, have access to well-designed, standards-based assessments?

2. **Reliability among raters and programs:** How can we design assessments and train raters so that the resulting information and data are reliable across raters, programs, and geographical boundaries?
3. **Validity:** How can we design assessments that are valid across programs and geographical boundaries?
4. **Time constraints:** How can we construct assessments to get the results we need with the minimum amount of time taken from the already stretched school day and year?
5. **Affordability:** How can we assure that assessment vehicles are affordable for even the most financially challenged programs and schools without sacrificing the quality of the information gleaned from them?
6. **Interpretation and use of resulting data:** What kind of teacher training and support in the interpretation and use of the assessment information we gather will best inform and improve teaching and learning?

With those issues and challenges as a basic framework for investigation and discussion, the profession must take stock of what assessments already exist and what assessments are still needed in order to assure a “suite of assessments” that will enable us to meet the wide variety of our needs and challenges.

### ***Assessments Currently Available***

Consider the first task, examining what already exists. In addition to assessments developed by teachers, districts, and states, we have a number of foreign language assessments currently available nationally for elementary and secondary school students.

We have assessments such as the OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview), the MOPI (Modified Oral Proficiency Interview), SOPI (Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview), SOPA (Student Oral Proficiency Assessment), and the ELLOPA (Early Language Learning Oral Proficiency Assessment) – all of which provide the capability of measuring proficiency through directed conversation reflecting characteristics of the Interpersonal Mode while offering flexibility according to the level and age of the learner. However, these types of assessments are based on face-to-face interviews and are consequently labor and resource intensive.

We have assessments such as the STAMP (Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency), the MLPA (Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments), and the recently funded NOELLA (National Online Early Language Learning Assessment), which give us the capability of using technology to assess large numbers of individual learners in the Interpretive and Presentational Modes. These types of assessments are easily accessible to all students and are less expensive than face-to-face interviews. They cannot, however, assess the Interpersonal Mode.

We have curriculum-dependent assessments such as the Advanced Placement (AP) exams as well as assessments that are more curriculum-independent such as those offered by the International Baccalaureate and the language-specific organizations—the American Association of Teachers of French, the American Association of Teachers of German, the American Council of Teachers of Russian, and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese.

There are also both summative and formative assessments and assessment models. The majority of the assessments available today are “events” or “snapshots” that measure and describe student proficiency at a moment in time, i.e., they are summative assessments. But we also have formative or ongoing assessments such as *LinguaFolio USA!*, a recently proposed portfolio method of providing an on-going, layered collection of multiple measures of language experiences and learning.

### ***Recommendations for the Next Two Years***

Given the current landscape of foreign language assessment, what can we do in the next two years to assure multiple well-designed, standards-based measures of student learning among which individual teachers, schools, and districts can choose intelligently to meet the needs of their particular students and programs?

The participants at the National Assessment Summit recommended the following as part of a two-year plan to address the profession’s assessment needs.

The profession should:

- Develop a set of articulated criteria describing good assessments; and
- Describe existing assessments using the defined criteria, so that teachers and schools looking for well-designed, standards-based assessments will have good information with which to make the best choices given their needs and resources.

It is encouraging to note that the process has already begun as evidenced in the following projects:

1. The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) recently received a grant to further develop and refine its database of foreign language assessments, which will help in this process of choosing among assessments (see Malone and MacGregor in this series of papers).
2. The National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) plans to move forward in the development of a national model of *LinguaFolio USA!* that is patterned after the European portfolio model and can be adapted by schools and districts nationwide (see Van Houten in this series of papers).
3. The American Association of Teachers of German has offered to collect models of assessments currently being used.
4. The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Princeton University will identify, suggest, and pilot model assessments as they are developed.
5. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) recently received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to gather together a task force charged with putting all of these efforts together into an ongoing initiative to address the wide variety of assessment needs of the profession today and well into the future (see Swender in this series of papers).

# Foreign Language Assessment Database

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At the National Assessment Summit, a number of national priorities for foreign language assessment emerged. Included in the priorities was the need for a centralized database to provide information about available foreign language assessments for users at all levels. The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) received funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Title VI, International Research and Studies, to update, merge and improve two existing online, searchable foreign language assessment databases. In addition to database improvements, the project will provide moderated assessment reviews as well as a user tutorial on assessment use and selection. This project will contribute to the foreign language assessment field by providing a central source for language assessments, user reviews of these assessments, and assistance to users in selecting assessments for their purposes.

## ***Importance of an Assessment Database***

In recent years, accountability, often demonstrated through testing, has been emphasized in all aspects of education. This focus has been evidenced by the advent of the standards movement and the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. While NCLB does not mandate testing for foreign languages, it does include foreign languages as a core academic subject: “The term ‘core academic subjects’ means English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

With this emphasis, the availability of quality assessments at all levels of education has become more urgent. This is especially true in foreign language education, which is often a lifetime pursuit. Diagnostic, achievement, proficiency, performance, and progress-based foreign language assessments are needed at the K–12 and university levels, as well as in professional and government sectors. Thus, locating adequate assessments for foreign languages has become a priority for foreign language educators. At the same time, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999) describe content standards for foreign languages that define what students should know and be able to do with foreign languages.

Valid and reliable assessments must be available to measure the degree to which the standards are being met. Several needs exist:

1. Lack of assessments is a major issue facing foreign language educators. There is a paucity of assessments in both the commonly taught and less commonly taught languages, the latter being especially worrisome in light of recent events that underline the critical shortage in the U.S. of proficient speakers of these languages (House of Representatives, 2001).
2. Lack of information about what does exist and how best to use it is another major issue, one that this assessment database addresses.
3. In addition to the need for access to assessments of foreign languages, foreign language educators also need assistance in selecting assessments appropriate for their language teaching situations.
4. As Boyles also discusses (in this series of papers), there is a lack of “assessment literacy” or an understanding among foreign language educators about what assessment is and what educators should seek in appropriate, valid, reliable, and affordable assessments for their students. This lack of assessment literacy makes the choice of any available assessments, however appropriate, a difficult path for educators to manage; if educators do not know what is needed and appropriate, then even the best assessments cannot be of help. In the recent *ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] Tests and Testing* (2005), authors Stoyhoff and Chapelle not only provide reviews of 20 ESOL tests, but have written four additional chapters on understanding tests, using test manuals, evaluating test usefulness, and decisions in developing a test. This volume recognizes the importance of testing for ESOL teachers, and testing is no less important for foreign language teachers. Therefore, addressing assessment literacy for foreign language educators in particular is an important aim of the project.

## **Landscape**

Currently, there are two primary, free foreign language assessment databases searchable on the Internet. The Foreign Language Test Database (<http://www.nclrc.org/fltestdb/>) is a searchable database of foreign language assessments designed for use with secondary and post-secondary students; it has been hosted on CAL’s website since 1999. Developed in 1991 through the National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC), the database originated in response to a high volume of requests for information on foreign language assessments. CAL solicited entries from assessment developers across the country and abroad and organized them into an electronic database. The information was updated when the database was published on the CAL website, and an option to add assessments to the website was included. Currently, the database comprises 154 assessments in 69 languages.

A second database, the Directory of K–12 Foreign Language Assessment Instruments and Resources (<http://www.cal.org/CALWebDB/FLAssess/>) was developed by the National K–12 Foreign Language Resource Center at Iowa State University and the Center for Applied Linguistics (Thompson, 2004). Originally a synthesis of two annotated assessment collections at CAL: the *Foreign Language Assessment in Grades K–8: An Annotated Bibliography of Assessment Instruments* (Thompson, 1997) and a collection of instruments used in grades 9–12, CAL has hosted this combined database on its website since 2000. This database includes descriptions of language assessments in 25

languages that are currently being used in elementary, middle, and secondary foreign language programs around the country.

Additionally, a prominent online testing database, the Buros Institute of Mental Measurement database, provides 61 short descriptions of foreign language tests. Professional reviews of all 61 tests can be ordered online for a charge. However, this database does not focus solely on foreign language tests and is not free of charge to users.

A number of databases exist that address foreign language teaching materials, the most comprehensive being the Language Materials Project (<http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/>); however, these databases do not include language tests. The lack of online foreign language assessment databases is disappointing in light of the current national conversation about the need for testing. However, experience in developing such a database shows that to develop a good database of assessments necessitates a great deal of painstaking work to locate, obtain, evaluate, and write about existing assessments.

The existing materials show that the Foreign Language Test Database (<http://www.nclrc.org/fltestdb>) and the Directory of K–12 Foreign Language Assessment Instruments and Resources (Thompson, 2004) are the most easily found and exhaustive, online, free, searchable databases for foreign language assessments. Each database contains a great deal of information, free of charge, for users. In addition, the K–12 directory includes a number of teacher-developed foreign language assessments useful for classroom-based assessment. Developing these into one comprehensive database for all foreign language assessments could greatly assist the field in meeting the need for assessment of student progress. Adding a tutorial on their use and assessment selection will make them even more useful to the target audience.

### ***Goals for the Next Three Years***

CAL's Foreign Language Test Database project will begin on October 1, 2005, and continue for three years. The project has three main objectives. First, CAL staff will revise currently outdated entries in both databases and publicize the databases. Second, they will revise the format based on feedback from online focus groups involving potential and existing users. This will involve combining the two databases, adding a CAL-moderated user review section, and changing the overall design. Third, they will educate users on approaches to selecting and using appropriate foreign language assessments through an online tutorial.

The first year of the project focuses on updating the content of the databases. This phase of the project will involve contacting the developers of all assessments in both databases, as well as eliciting additional entries of foreign language assessments. After contacting all developers, CAL staff will request information on all assessments for inclusion on the website. After the project is completed, the NCLRC and the National K–12 Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at Iowa State University will periodically update the databases.

During the second year of the project, the CAL team will begin working on the new website interface for the database. This phase of the project will include determining the new platform for the database, as well as conducting a series of focus groups to gather feedback on the categories necessary for inclusion in the database and the design of the CAL-moderated user review of database entries. The focus groups will comprise the target audience, including foreign language educators at all levels with varying

backgrounds in language testing and comfort in using technology. Such focus groups will allow CAL staff to develop user-friendly pages that will allow users to find appropriate information quickly. The focus groups will also allow CAL to develop new headings or explanations of assessments, as determined useful by the focus groups.

In the third year, CAL will develop a user tutorial on how to choose an assessment appropriate for the examiner's/examinee's purposes. The structure and content of the tutorial will be reviewed by leaders in the language testing and foreign language fields and will be piloted with target users. Providing this online tutorial addresses another of the National Assessment Summit priorities, the need for professional development in assessment for foreign language teachers as noted by Boyles (in this series of papers).

## **Conclusion**

CAL welcomes the opportunity to update and merge the two existing online foreign language databases to better serve the needs of the field. In addition to merging, updating, and re-formatting the existing two foreign language assessment databases, CAL will add a moderated review process and develop an online tutorial in assessment selection. In this way, the project will address three needs identified at the National Assessment Summit: the need for a single database, the provision of moderated user reviews to help future assessment users make informed decisions about specific assessments, and an approach to increasing assessment literacy in its users. While no one project can or should address exhaustively the complex needs for foreign language assessment, this project will help to address a few urgent issues simultaneously. This project will increase opportunities for teachers and other language professionals to learn more about assessments and assessment use.

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## Models and Anchors

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Models and anchors have been determined to be critical components for effective assessment of language competencies. Consequently, a desired outcome of the National Assessment Summit is to make available to the profession, and to the public at large, useful models of language assessments for different aspects of language and for varied purposes and levels of instruction. An additional desired outcome of the Summit is to make available, when appropriate, anchor performances to assist in evaluation and in the reporting of results.

Models are critical for effective assessment. A model defines that which is being measured; models provide a means for measurement. A model operationalizes the idea of what is to be assessed so that it can be measured. Assessment models provide a common nomenclature, a common yardstick, and therefore, a common approach for educators. By their definition, assessment models reflect what is valued by the community, shaping what is considered important. If and when an assessment model is widely accepted within a community, there are serious implications for a washback effect that can transform curriculum, textbook writing, and instructional practices.

Anchors define, visualize, and concretize the specific performance of the model that is being measured. Anchors allow assessors to differentiate performance and to standardize the reporting of outcomes. Good anchors increase rating reliability because they minimize individual interpretation, which can result in rating drift and a loss of standardization.

There are a number of national, state, and district assessment initiatives currently operational or in development. These assessments, and others not included in this document, need to be analyzed and catalogued according to where they are most effective in the broad assessment landscape (i.e., is the instrument best for screening; for placement; for monitoring individual progress; for testing achievement, performance, or proficiency, etc.). Once the “suite of assessments” or “landscape of assessments” is catalogued, the models and anchors can be made accessible to the profession.

At this time, a number of national initiatives of language performance assessment models are available to the profession. Other initiatives are currently in development by various national, state, and local organizations and districts. In order to overview the current landscape of assessments, a brief description of selected performance assessment models is outlined in the next section.

### Language Performance Assessment Models

Assessment	Competencies Assessed	Description	Organization
<b>ACTFL OPI</b> (Oral Proficiency Interview)	Interpersonal Listening/Speaking	Oral proficiency interview between a certified ACTFL tester and an examinee. A criterion-referenced test that compares an individual's performance of specific communication tasks with the criteria for each of 10 proficiency levels described in the <i>ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: Speaking</i> (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1999).	ACTFL/LTI <a href="http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3348">http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3348</a> <a href="http://www.languagetesting.com/acad_opi.htm">http://www.languagetesting.com/acad_opi.htm</a>
<b>WPT</b> (Writing Proficiency Test)	Presentational Writing	Writing assessment consisting of tasks and contexts in English that represent the range of proficiency levels from novice to superior. Responses are written in the target language and compared to the criteria stated in the <i>ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: Writing</i> (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2001).	ACTFL/LTI <a href="http://www.languagetesting.com/acad_opi.htm">http://www.languagetesting.com/acad_opi.htm</a>
<b>IPA</b> (Integrated Performance Assessment)	Interpersonal Speaking; Interpretive Listening/Reading; Presentational Writing/Speaking	Cluster assessment consisting of three tasks, aligned within a single theme or content areas and designed to be used with scoring rubrics that rate according to the <i>ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners</i> (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1998) and <i>Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</i> (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999).	ACTFL <a href="http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3565">http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3565</a>
<b>SOPI</b> (Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview)	Presentational Speaking	A performance-based, tape-mediated speaking test that relies on audiotaped instructions and a test booklet to elicit language from the examinee. The SOPI can be individually or group administered. Examinee responses are individually reviewed by trained raters.	Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) <a href="http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0014simulated.html">http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0014simulated.html</a>
<b>COPI</b> (Computerized Oral Proficiency Instrument)	Presentational Speaking	Uses computer technology to elicit a speech sample, giving examinees more control of the testing situation in terms of topics selected as well as response time. As with the SOPI, speech samples are assessed by trained raters.	Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) <a href="http://www.cal.org/projects/copi">http://www.cal.org/projects/copi</a>

<b>SOPA</b> (Student Oral Proficiency Assessment) and <b>ELLOPA</b> (Early Language Learning Oral Proficiency Assessment)	Interpersonal Listening/Speaking	Interview between a tester and a pair of language learners designed to assess elementary school students' ability to understand and speak a foreign language. The ELLOPA captures the more subtle progress of students in the earlier stages of language learning.	Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and the National K–12 Foreign Language Resource Center at Iowa State University <a href="http://www.cal.org/projects/wesopa">http://www.cal.org/projects/wesopa</a>
<b>MLPA</b> (Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments)	Interpretive Reading and Listening; Presentational Speaking and Writing	A battery of proficiency-based, second language assessment tools for reading, writing, listening, and speaking in French, German, and Spanish that are based on the ACTFL scale. The contextualized tasks in these assessment instruments place test takers in realistic situations where they need to use the target language.	Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition at the University of Minnesota (CARLA) <a href="http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment/MLPA.html">http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment/MLPA.html</a>
<b>STAMP</b> (Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency)	Interpretive Reading; Presentational Speaking and Writing	A summative assessment, appropriate for grades 7 through 12 and post-secondary levels (from novice low to intermediate mid, benchmarked to the ACTFL scale). Reading elements are computer adaptive and computer graded, while trained raters grade the writing and speaking elements.	Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) <a href="http://casls.uoregon.edu/stamp2.php">http://casls.uoregon.edu/stamp2.php</a>

### National Initiatives in Development

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Competencies Assessed</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>CAST</b> (Computer Assisted Screening Tool)	Presentational Speaking	An Internet delivered, level specific, screening test of speaking proficiency in Arabic and Spanish. CAST is intended for students, teachers, and professionals and provides information about the approximate range of speaking ability and provides diagnostic feedback for improving speaking skills.	ACTFL, CAL, Brigham Young University, Defense Language Institute, San Diego State University's LARC Center <a href="http://larcnet.sdsu.edu/testing.php?page=cast">http://larcnet.sdsu.edu/testing.php?page=cast</a>
<b>NAEP</b> (National Assessment for Educational Progress)	Interpersonal Listening/Speaking; Interpretive Reading and Listening; Presentational Writing	Intended to provide a comprehensive national source of information on what American students know and can do in foreign languages (specifically Spanish). The assessment framework, including four types of tasks (see competencies assessed), is assessed within three modes of communication. The date for the administration of the FL	National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) <a href="http://www.nagb.org/pubs/FinalFrameworkPrePubEdition1.pdf">http://www.nagb.org/pubs/FinalFrameworkPrePubEdition1.pdf</a>

		NAEP has been postponed.	<a href="http://www.cal.org/flnaep/page2.html">http://www.cal.org/flnaep/page2.html</a> <a href="http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/Modes/p_2.html">http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/Modes/p_2.html</a>
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**Selected Curriculum Dependent, State-wide, and District-wide Initiatives Currently in Use**

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Competencies Assessed</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Organization</b>
<b>PALS</b> (Performance Assessments for Language Students)	Presentational Speaking; Presentational Writing	Assessment tasks, both formative and summative, linked to the <i>ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners</i> (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1998). Comprehensive scoring rubrics reflect the development of productive language (speaking and writing) within an academic setting.	Fairfax County, VA Public Schools <a href="http://www.fcps.k12.va.us/DIS/OHSICS/forlang/PALS/">http://www.fcps.k12.va.us/DIS/OHSICS/forlang/PALS/</a>
<b>New York State Regents Examination – Languages Other than English</b>	Interpretive Reading and Listening; Presentational Writing, Interpersonal Speaking	A statewide summative test, addressing either two or three years of language instruction, including both fixed- and constructed-response item types with some communicative language use listening and speaking.	New York State Education Department <a href="http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ci/ai/lote.html">http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ci/ai/lote.html</a>
<b>PPS ORALS</b>	Presentational Speaking	An online assessment program to test K–12 students’ oral proficiency. Scoring rubrics are based on the <i>ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: Speaking</i> . (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1999).	Pittsburgh, PA Public Schools <a href="http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/onlinetest.asp">http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/onlinetest.asp</a>

## **Goals for the Next Three Years**

ACTFL has recently been funded by the U.S. Department of Education, International Research and Studies Programs, to carry out a research initiative that will contribute to the profession's knowledge of and access to assessment models. The goals of this project for the next three years include identifying, describing, and analyzing existing assessment models and anchors as outlined below:

1. Identify the purpose of the assessment: screening, placement, program assessment, individual progress measurement, etc.;
2. Describe the model: items, prompts, stimulus, etc.;
3. Describe the evaluation system: scoring guide, rubrics, outcome reporting, etc.;
4. Provide student exemplars (samples of real student performance across levels);
5. Describe what the assessment measures and/or content features it measures most effectively; and
6. Describe the optimal use of the assessment.

Once the current landscape of language assessment has been evaluated to identify models and anchors, the funded project proposes to develop a national blueprint for K–16 assessment of languages, and to develop a prototype for standards-based, performance-based assessments.

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## Assessment Research

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Given the difficult choices confronting administrators when faced with the reality of budget shortfalls and increasing demands on schools—including the requirements resulting from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act—it is not surprising that little priority is given to foreign language study. Unlike other elective areas such as art and music, foreign language study is often perceived by parents and students as nothing more than a necessary step for admission to college, rather than as a practical subject having intrinsic value. When asked to compare foreign language to other subject content areas, educational administrators and supervisors rated foreign language at, or near, the bottom of program priorities in local schools or districts and were “unaware of scientifically based research that suggests the benefits of foreign language study to cognitive development and first language literacy” (Keatley, 2004). To enable language educators to provide evidence to stakeholders of the benefits of foreign language study and student progress toward defined goals, appropriate assessments are needed.

In fact, the NCLB Act states that “a special emphasis on implementing educational programs and practices that have been clearly demonstrated to be effective through rigorous scientific research is valued. Federal funding will be targeted to support such programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As a result of the emphasis on research-based evidence, assessment has taken a prominent position in all areas of education. This focus on assessment presents foreign language educators with the opportunity and challenge to use assessment data to research varied aspects of language learning and to disseminate the results of this research to impact practice and policy at the local, state, and national levels.

Research studies using assessment data can: 1) measure program effectiveness and student performance, 2) define articulation levels, 3) provide data on the impact of foreign language learning on overall achievement and on the NCLB-tested content areas of English/language arts and mathematics, 4) provide data on cultural literacy, and 5) provide data on the impact of language learning on learner attitudes toward members of different cultures. These data can be used to improve teaching and assessment for all types of foreign language programs.

### ***The Current Landscape***

Few research studies have been conducted that use assessment data to demonstrate the effectiveness of various language instructional models, and even fewer studies have used the rigorous scientific methodology encouraged by the NCLB Act. The

limitations of time, expertise, and other resources make it challenging for language departments in K–12 and postsecondary institutions to conduct formal research on data from the assessments in use and, at the same time, researchers in the profession have limited access to data generated by K–16 assessments.

A Department of Education-funded centralized database of foreign language assessment instruments, spanning all levels of assessment, K–Postsecondary, is currently under development at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL). It will include a moderated review section and a tutorial to assist in the selection of appropriate assessment instruments (see Malone and MacGregor in this series of papers). This database could be expanded in the future to include data resulting from the use of these assessment instruments in a variety of K–12 schools and districts. A database that includes this type of assessment data would provide the access to data that is needed by researchers to examine questions related to the effectiveness of various program models, teaching strategies, and assessment instruments. Answers to these questions are ones that the profession has been seeking for some time.

Disseminating the results of research on assessment to the profession could result in a washback effect that could transform program administration, instruction, assessment, student proficiency levels, and funding at every level of instruction. For example, assessment results can be used to identify effective programs that can be replicated, while programs shown to be less effective can be improved, restructured, or replaced. Administrators would have data to not only allocate funding to effective programs but also to improve those programs whose students do not meet benchmarked language levels.

If students were assessed at the end of grades 4, 8, 10, and 12 to determine whether they had attained the language levels defined by the performance guidelines for K–12 learners (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1998), they could enroll seamlessly in appropriate secondary and post-secondary level classes. An increase in the number of students identified with higher levels of language proficiency would provide colleges and universities the opportunity to teach more and varied higher-level classes. Classes for special purposes might attract funding from organizations that have an interest in higher level and specialized language learning. Additionally, data from research would provide support to administrators, parents, and policy makers wishing to expand language programs.

## ***Assessment Resources***

A non-inclusive list of organizations and resource centers that conduct foreign language assessment, that gather assessment data which could be shared with researchers, or that have a unique opportunity for research or assessment data collection, is included in the following section. The list is intended to provide a general sense of where the profession is at the current time.

### **Language Resource Centers (LRCs)**

The federally funded LRCs conduct and disseminate research on various aspects of assessment related to the teaching of foreign languages and cultures.

**Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and the National K–12 Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at Iowa State University** have developed the following

validated assessment instruments for K–8 language programs: 1) SOPA (Student Oral Proficiency Assessment) offered in a variety of languages for K–8 students and used in a number of schools and districts in various states to assess students in immersion as well as less intensive elementary school foreign language programs; 2) ELLOPA (Early Language Listening and Oral Proficiency Assessment) offered in a variety of languages, for Pre-K–Grade 2, and used in several states; and 3) the CAL Oral Proficiency Exam (COPE) offered in a variety of languages for grades 5–8. Three additional informal companion instruments have been developed to be completed by students or teachers: 1) “What do You Think?” Questionnaire (a language and cultural attitudes instrument); 2) Student Self-Assessment (SSA), used concurrently by some sites that use the SOPA; and 3) the Teacher Observation Matrix-SOPA (TOM SOPA) used by teachers as a separate teacher rating of student proficiency. Data from the use of these instruments in most schools and school districts could be made available (pending permission of schools) and added to a database of assessment data from programs around the U.S.

**Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota** conducted an articulation project that resulted in the development of the Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments (MLPA), a battery of proficiency assessments for French, German, and Spanish to determine whether students have met the criteria for intermediate low and intermediate mid/high on the ACTFL scale (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1986). Data from the assessments is currently collected by secondary and post-secondary schools rather than by CARLA. Schools using the MLPA have offered to provide test data for research purposes and when the ongoing conversion to online MLPA delivery is completed, data from the MLPA could be made available for inclusion in a database of assessment data.

**Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon** has developed the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP), a computer-adaptive test that identifies students’ proficiency from Benchmark 1 (novice low) to Benchmark 5 (intermediate mid) level. Speaking, reading, and writing assessments will be available for Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Spanish, and Turkish. Data from these assessments are housed in SLA Web, an online database of student performance data, located on the CASLS website and could be made available to a database of assessment data.

**Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at Pennsylvania State University** is currently developing the Advanced Language Proficiency Assessment. This project provides data from instruments that consider discourse and pragmatic ability, among other competences. Data from CALPER’s Dynamic Assessment of L2 Development project could potentially benefit language teaching and assessment practices for placement of undergraduate Spanish learners and oral proficiency of French speakers.

## **National Organizations and Associations**

**American Association of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ)** could provide data from assessment research projects it has conducted, while the **American Association of Teaching of German (AATG)** could provide data from the annual nationwide test it makes available to all German teachers for use with their students. Other language

organizations may well have similar data that, once identified and made available, could inform the discussion on assessment research.

## **Other Resources**

Glastonbury, Connecticut public schools, in partnership with the University of Connecticut's Modern Language Department and College of Education, is conducting a research project that focuses on developing a prototype of content-based language assessments. The project begins with an analysis of the impact of foreign language learning on the Connecticut mastery tests and examines the possible impact on English language skills and other content areas mandated for testing by NCLB.

Other school districts have developed assessment instruments for use with their students (or adapted existing instruments) and may be interested in working with researchers to analyze the data they have gathered (see Boyles' article in this series of papers for two school districts involved in gathering student assessment data).

The Wyoming Department of Education will have data on student achievement in Spanish elementary schools programs when it begins its five-year K–6 pilot program in fall 2005. These data will report on what effect taking 100-200 minutes from the regular curriculum per week to teach Spanish has on students' reading, writing, and mathematics. Since data on elementary language programs is limited, this project will provide the profession valuable data.

Professional organizations, such as the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) could contribute data and identify data sources at the state level. States and districts with language requirements for graduation or special diplomas could also provide data. The Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NECTFL) would welcome proposals on assessment for its MEAD fellowship program to facilitate research projects on assessments. The fellowship provides mentoring and access to resources on research topics that are of interest to candidates.

Findings from research projects, such as the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) pilot and ACTFL's Integrated Performance Assessments (IPAs) validation could provide research data on performance assessment; while data from instruments such as NCSSFL's *Linguafolio USA!* project and validation of Fairfax County, Virginia's, Performance Assessment for Language Students (PALS) (2004) rubrics can provide needed data on an alternative assessment and application of rating criteria.

## **Recommendations**

The diversity of K–12 foreign language programs and programs in post-secondary institutions across the country and the existing types of assessments, makes it clear that a variety of assessment tools is required to gather research data on articulation, impact of foreign language instruction on other content areas, overall academic achievement, and cultural attitudes and literacy. The substantial investment of resources needed to develop new assessment instruments supports the use of new funding for the development of and research on new assessments that will "fill the gap." Assessments for less commonly taught languages, the varied models of elementary school foreign language programs, unaddressed proficiency levels, assessments to meet state benchmarks, and prototypes to assess content-based and immersion language programs will be a welcome addition to the

existing menu of assessments. Both existing and newly developed assessments, however, should be described and measured against defined criteria to provide a common basis for data gathered from the use of the assessments.

A coordinated effort on research is supported among the recommendations in the White Paper resulting from The National Language Conference held in June 2004, i.e., “Develop a strategic posture for language research and coordinate language research initiatives” (February, 2005, p. 8). The National Assessment Summits planned for 2007 and 2009 will provide forums to measure progress towards the goals set at the 2005 Assessment Summit and inform the strategic long-range plan for language research. Such a plan could be refined and finalized at the next Summit. A partial list of achievable two-year goals that can inform the agenda of the 2007 National Assessment Summit follows.

#### **A. Research Projects:**

- Conduct articulation projects between secondary and post-secondary schools using existing assessments. State foreign language supervisors or directors of language instruction could initiate projects between language departments at post-secondary and secondary schools in the state.
- Validate rubrics for rating performance-based assessments developed for use in districts and schools, such as the PALS developed by Fairfax County Public Schools, VA, and collect data on rater reliability.
- Initiate pilot projects to use existing large-scale proficiency assessments to compare ratings of student performance on performance-based assessments, such as the ACTFL Integrated Performance Assessments and portfolio assessments.
- Identify unmet assessment needs and form collaborative groups to seek funding and develop valid, affordable, and practical assessments.

#### **B. Information-related Projects:**

- Explore expanding the database at CAL to include current and future research data and other relevant research information.
- Develop/add a clearinghouse for assessment research projects and publications related to foreign language to facilitate collaboration on future projects.
- Develop a monitored assessment listserv such as L-Test for foreign language teachers and professionals who are not researchers but who need a forum to ask questions and obtain information.
- Gain greater exposure for new and existing research-related data and information through publication on the websites of Language Resource Centers (LRC), states, districts, and professional organizations.
- Disseminate results of research not only through publications in professional journals, websites, and specialized professional conferences, but also through mainstream media and sessions targeting teachers, administrators, and teacher educators at annual conferences of state and

regional language organizations. Annual newspaper reports of student performance on state mandated tests and recent articles on language-related issues in newspapers and magazines indicate growing interest in assessment and provide an opportunity to present assessment research on foreign language learning to the public.

The current emphasis on assessment and research-based evidence, together with the nationally identified need for students to attain higher levels of foreign language proficiency present the foreign language research community a unique opportunity to impact all aspects of language learning and teaching. By accomplishing interim goals and developing a long-range strategic plan for coordinated and collaborative assessment research and ongoing dissemination of research findings to all stakeholders, the current focus on assessment can have a historic impact on foreign language education in the U.S.

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# Promoting Language Advocacy Through Assessment

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While language assessment may appear to be a topic of concern only to language professionals and school administrators, it is also quite pertinent to the larger public community in this age of accountability in education. The representatives of language organizations who gathered at the National Assessment Summit felt that the relationship of advocacy to assessment issues was critical to the language profession. This paper reflects the discussion and priority setting of the group.

With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act currently determining the priorities in schools across America, labeling unsuccessful schools as “failing,” and requiring alternatives for students in these failing schools, the current focus in public schools is to deliver the product (education) in the most cost-effective manner, to make it accessible to all students, and to demonstrate measurable results in student achievement. This “business model,” as many educators refer to it, is also applicable to the language profession. Language programs must be held to the same level of accountability if we are to expect to play a central role in the curriculum in schools in the U.S. Indeed, the implementation of a standards-based, well-articulated language program would ensure that we are “walking the walk” and not just “talking the talk” when it comes to advocacy for language programs.

Languages have historically been neglected in the curricula of school districts across the country. As a nation, our geographic isolation, historical “melting pot” image, and the wide use of English in the world, have all contributed to the public’s image of foreign language learning only necessary for a few, primarily the “intelligent college-bound students.” In addition to this challenge of providing access to language programs, each year hundreds of language students are unable to continue learning a language in a sequential program either because there is no “next level” in which to continue or they are told that they did not learn enough in the previous year and must either repeat a level or start over. The sad truth is that in a K–16 academic career, it is feasible that a student could “start over” as many as three times as he or she moves from elementary school to middle school to high school to college. Every language educator has anecdotal evidence of this public perception of languages being difficult to learn and, therefore, not for everyone.

Language educators applauded when the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) scheduled the very first National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test in foreign languages to be administered in 2004. However, the complex nature of administering a speaking component combined with the NCLB emphasis on mathematics and language arts, has caused the postponement of the NAEP for foreign languages to the

year 2012. In the absence of a national assessment, our need to advocate for language programs becomes even more critical. Over the next several years, we must define a clear rationale for languages in the curriculum K–12, provide data to support that rationale, and adapt our message for various constituent audiences in a well-thought-out public relations campaign.

### ***Truth in Advertising***

Ever since September 11, there has been increased attention to the linguistic gap in the United States. The “language problem” has received significant media coverage and the call to get students to the advanced levels of proficiencies has been clear. However, many students in classrooms across the country still exit programs with very little communicative ability. Only a handful of school systems have developed performance assessments matched to their curricula and currently no state has implemented a statewide language assessment. It will be difficult to carry our message to the public until we begin to “produce” competent users of the language. Only with defined benchmarks and outcomes, at both the state and local levels, will we be able to impact instructional practice. The accountability process should not end with the teachers of mathematics, science, and language arts. Because the NCLB Act has named foreign languages as a core subject, we must hold our profession to the same accountability standards as NCLB requires of English language arts and mathematics to gain the visibility and acceptance of school administrators and policymakers.

### ***Economic Impact***

If we continue the analogy between business and education, it is safe to say that very few corporations would support a program that does not produce results. If we consider the students’ communicative competence as our “product,” each time we force students to repeat a level or start over in a sequence, there is little return on our investment. Tom Welch, Director, Seeding Innovation Programs, Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development, used data from Fall 2004 provided by Dr. Linda Pickle based on the placement rates at Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky, which requires two years of foreign language study. He determined that of 1,460 incoming freshmen to the university, 75% of those student have to remediate or get sent back to the beginning level of language study. In effect, such large-scale repetition resulted in a total of \$459,900 in tuition “down the drain” (T. Welch, personal communication; May 10, 2005).

One could continue to figure out extravagant costs for students who exit language programs and are unable to perform. The reality is that these costs figure heavily into the public sentiment about language programs. Ray Clifford (2004), former Chancellor of the Defense Language Institute (DLI), the institution that provides language training to U.S. military personnel, has often stated that DLI exists only because of the failure of the K–16 educational system to produce competent linguists.

### ***Common Yardstick***

This lack of a cohesive language program with common benchmarks and assessments, has worked against gaining support from school administrators and the public-at-large. Now is the time to unite as a profession and create these assessments for ourselves rather than wait for the situation to become so dire that languages lose even

more ground or national or state assessments are created without input from the language profession.

Discussions from the National Language Policy Summit held at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in January 2005 as one of the national events for *2005: Year of Languages*<sup>1</sup>, resulted in the National Security Education Program (NSEP) initiating an additional Flagship program that would involve the K–12 sector with the goal of producing advanced level speakers of Chinese upon their exit from grade 12. Titled the Chinese K–16 Pipeline Project, the project will attempt to provide a prototype of a well-articulated K–16 language program in order to “feed” students into the NSEP Graduate Language Program and later into government agencies that have critical language needs. With the current needs in both government and business for competent linguists, this could become a “national model” for building the multilingual citizenry that the U.S. needs now in order to compete globally in both business and diplomatic relations.

### ***Publicizing Current Research Results***

A well-planned advocacy campaign would highlight the research that is currently available while identifying gaps that need to be filled. Several bibliographies have been compiled that include powerful results that could be effective in promoting languages for all students. These include: the effects of language learning on achievement in basic skills, such as reading, writing, and mathematics; achievement on national standardized tests, such as AP and SAT; increased mental flexibility; a superiority in concept formation; and a more diversified set of mental abilities. Additional research on language learning points to improved verbal and spatial abilities, sociocultural benefits, and increased career opportunities. More research is needed in terms of language learning models, standards-based instruction, language layering, the needs of heritage learners, and instructional best practice. The language profession needs to support the K–12 level with increased language research in these areas.

### ***Targeting Audiences for Next Steps***

Over the next several years, we need to craft our clear message, gather our data, and work hard to reach out to specific groups that can help us move our agenda forward.

1. The Federal Government should:
  - a) Schedule the administration of the Foreign Language NAEP. We need to encourage NAGB to reinstate the Foreign Language NAEP; members of Congress can be encouraged to bring this matter to the attention of those who can influence the NAGB decision.
  - b) Encourage the U.S. Education Department to identify a department liaison for languages and support necessary language research.
  - c) Encourage the U.S. Education Department to fund additional K–16 Pipeline Projects modeled on the NSEP Chinese K–16 model.

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<sup>1</sup> For more about information about this ACTFL-sponsored public awareness campaign with wide support from language organizations and the U.S. Congress, and the sustained campaign, entitled *Discover Languages*, visit: <http://www.yearoflanguages.org>.

2. Language Organizations should:
  - a) Encourage language-specific organizations to adapt the message for their specific languages in order to provide assessment data on their individual languages. The American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) regularly sends letters to those administrators who are contemplating cutting a German program with facts and figures to advocate for saving the program. [Personal communication by e-mail from Helene Zimmer-Loew, April, 2005]
  - b) Encourage Language Resource Centers (LRCs) and the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) to approach the research agenda in a systematic way that will support the NCLB focuses with scientifically based research.
  - c) Encourage the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NADSFL) to develop performance assessments.
3. The College Board and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) should:

Work to ensure that national standardized tests, such as the Advanced Placement (AP), and the SAT II are standards-based.
4. States should:
  - a) Identify model state assessments and collect data on their efficacy.
  - b) Publicize the economic impact of students repeating levels or starting over in language sequences.
  - c) The National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) has offered to solicit outside stakeholders to provide feedback on the National Assessment Summit White Paper.
5. Administrators and Local Policy Makers should:

Encourage State Boards of Education and local School Boards to support long sequences of language instruction with clear benchmarks and assessments.
6. Teachers should:
  - a) Encourage teacher involvement in assessment development.
  - b) Involve teachers in classroom action research as a way of increasing the “teacher voice” in research related to language advocacy and best practice.
  - c) Identify exemplary programs that reflect well-articulated language sequences with appropriate benchmark assessments.
7. Parents and Students should:
  - a) Be involved in the process of understanding how their language proficiency will be assessed.
  - b) Participate in *Discover Languages*, sponsored by ACTFL, a campaign designed to provide a sustained public awareness promotional effort among the general public.

## **Conclusion**

The issues raised at the National Summit regarding assessment and advocacy will play an important role in the effort to change public attitude about the critical lack of language skills and the need for language education. Developing a consensus among language professionals about benchmarking language development and assessing the level of proficiency of our students in well-articulated programs is essential in combating the long-held belief among the American public that languages are only for the chosen few. A national standards-based assessment will have a significant impact on instructional practice, on facilitating the effort to articulate programs, and on delivering an exceptional return on investment by producing students with high levels of communicative competence.

## **References**

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## Conclusion

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The seven focus papers generated from the discussion and examples shared at the National Assessment Summit frame the issues, concerns, and opportunities to use assessment to improve language learning in the U.S. Now is the time to take up the charge outlined by these statements and the specific recommendations to benefit language students. That work must involve all of our language organizations.

### ***Why Is Assessment Important at this Time?***

The issues raised in these papers are not new. Language educators have long complained about placement tests and a lack of articulation from institution to institution. Through the exploration of and experimentation with a wider variety of assessment practices and products, language educators at all levels have moved from testing only the specific components of the language taught (vocabulary and grammar rules) to focusing on how well students can truly communicate in meaningful contexts using their new language. Our assessment practices in foreign languages now emphasize application of knowledge of the language; an accountability to students, parents, and the public; creative use of technology to elicit and capture students' language performance; and an overarching focus on our standards for learning languages.

However, since the standards movement has impacted all subject areas, assessment has taken on a higher profile as a tool for students as much as for teachers. An assessment system must be transparent to the students so that they know clearly the target, that is, what they are expected to be able to do in their new language. They also need to know how well they are performing, clearly understanding how far they have moved along the continuum from beginner to native-like use of the language. In the current era of accountability, language learning, like other subject areas, must now provide assessment evidence of continuous progress to students, parents, the next level's teacher, and administrators.

Assessment is now viewed by students, administrators, and institutions as critical for making decisions for placement, advancement, program entry or exit (admission or graduation), and even certification for a wide variety of careers. Assessment is not just to pass out of a requirement, but is essential for very practical needs, from being employed by Wal-Mart to gaining admission to Wharton, the graduate business school at the University of Pennsylvania. In fact, the foundation for the Chinese K–16 Pipeline project, designed to develop highly proficient users of Chinese, is assessment, and applicants for this project had to develop a detailed assessment component.

Assessment is also critical for public relations efforts, as described in Abbott's paper (in this series of papers). The public asks for proof of the impact of their educational investment, whether it is in reading/language arts, mathematics, science, or languages. While not federally mandated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, as are these other disciplines, the need to prove that students are achieving targeted levels of proficiency in language is no less strong. The language teaching profession must respond with accurate and descriptive measures that capture students' performance of language tasks that the public values, not abstract language analysis. Such a suite of assessments, anchored in our national standards and performance guidelines, needs to be recognized nationally as a consistent and valid appraisal of what students can do.

### ***What Are the Overarching Recommendations from the Summit?***

The seven papers, each focusing on a different aspect of the language teaching profession's assessment agenda, have three key concepts in common:

1. Assessment plays a key role in focusing language learning and communicating what language educators and the public expect that students will be able to do in their new language;
2. Assessment of language learning requires a variety of measures to assist students in their language learning, from quick checks of specific language components to formative measures evaluating how students can combine various elements of language for a communicative purpose, and to summative tasks in which students showcase the language performance they can sustain in open-ended, meaningful tasks; and
3. Users must match language assessments to the purpose for using the instrument, selecting the most appropriate measures for decisions of placement, admission, advancement, graduation, and employment.

To achieve these goals for language assessment, this report presents the following overarching recommendations for action in the next two years, representing consensus among the participants of the National Assessment Summit as summarized by the authors of the seven specific papers, which are indicated in parentheses:

1. Promote Pre-K–Postsecondary discussion about common learner expectations, identifying specific transition point benchmarks and universal assessment criteria, plus the kind of data needed for various purposes (Articulation, Suite of Assessments, Models and Anchors, Advocacy)
2. Promote common anchors or a set of standards and guidelines to align students' learning across levels and institutions, while also employing a suite of assessments matched to specific educational purposes (Articulation, Suite of Assessments, Database, Models and Anchors, Advocacy)
3. Create national awareness of performance and proficiency assessment and the program models needed to deliver the expected performance, moving beyond language educators to policymakers and stakeholders (Articulation, Research, Advocacy)

4. Develop a coordinated assessment literacy initiative, helping language educators evaluate assessment measures, analyze data generated, and apply results to their teaching, curriculum, and program design. (Assessment Literacy, Suite of Assessments, Database, Research)
5. Develop readily accessible resources to showcase existing assessments of language learning, support assessment literacy, and provide student exemplars (Database, Models and Anchors, Research)
6. Coordinate and expand data gathering, with achievable research on the most effective practices, various program models, validation of performance-based rubrics, and the impact of language learning, to develop any assessments needed to fill identified gaps and support an advocacy campaign (Research, Advocacy)

### ***How Can these Ideas Move into Action?***

This composite agenda defines what needs to occur in the next two years (2005-2007) to address the assessment issues raised in these discussion papers, providing organizations with a menu. Within each paper are very specific action items ready to be adopted by individuals, institutions and organizations, both assessment developers and assessment users. Collaboration is essential.

Individuals should identify their specific area of interest and offer assistance to the appropriate local, state, regional, or national entities. Individuals need to pilot and provide feedback on assessment measures, practices, and impact. Individuals must step forward to initiate articulation discussions and assessment literacy within their local setting, linking to the broader efforts of professional organizations.

Institutions need to host the articulation and assessment literacy discussions. Institutions must develop collaborative program models to demonstrate what a K–16 pipeline could look like, experimenting and sharing lessons learned to help other institutions. Institutions can experiment with a variety of assessment measures and participate in the necessary research outlined in these papers.

Organizations have already helped to identify this action agenda. To create momentum and achieve these two-year goals now requires that each organization identify one or more key recommendations that will become a content focus for what the organization already does or is willing to accomplish. The selection of a key recommendation should follow careful evaluation of the strengths and profile of the organization's members, purpose, and resources. With an adopted target goal, each organization can use its existing networks, publications, other communication tools, and members to create awareness, enlist volunteers, and promote activities in support of the initiative. The goal area can become the thematic focus for the organization's existing workshops, conferences, and other professional development efforts.

### ***It Is Time to Communicate Our Message***

It is time to communicate the message of why students need to learn languages by proving how and when. Assessment is crucial. If the language education profession takes charge of this effort, assessments will positively impact change. Now is the time for individuals, institutions, and organizations to emulate other disciplines and use assessment as the lever for change. What better way to support *2005: The Year of*

*Languages and the sustained campaign Discover Languages*  
(<http://www.yearoflanguages.org>)?

## **National Assessment Summit Participants**

Organizations of language educators working at the national, regional, state, and local levels that use and produce assessments were invited to send a representative to the summit.

### ***National Language-specific Organizations***

*(Invited through the National Standards Collaborative)*

American Association of Teachers of French, Jayne Abrate  
American Association of Teachers of German, Helene Zimmer-Loew  
American Council of Teachers of Russian, Maria Lekic, University of Maryland  
American Council of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, Lynn Sandstedt

### ***Regional Language Organizations***

Peggy Boyles, Oklahoma State University, Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages,  
Laura Franklin, Northern Virginia Community College, Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages,  
Daniel Morris, Southern Oregon University, Pacific Northwest Council For Languages,  
Sue Barry, Auburn University, Southern Conference on Language Teaching, (Representative unable to attend), Southwest Conference on Language Teaching

### ***Language Resource Centers***

*(Invited through the Council of Directors of LRCs)*

Ursula Lentz, Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota  
Scott Walters, Center for Language Education and Research, Michigan State University  
Yashy Tohsaku, Language Acquisition Resource Center, University of California-San Diego  
Catherine Keatley, National Capital Language Resource Center, Georgetown/George Washington University

### ***Assessment Producers and Advisors***

*(Invited through the National Standards Collaborative)*

Nelly Furman, Modern Language Association and Association of Departments of Foreign Languages  
Meg Malone, Center for Applied Linguistics

Ed McDermott, U.S. Department of Education  
Nancy Rhodes, Center for Applied Linguistics  
Elana Shohamy, Tel Aviv University/Georgetown University  
Tom Welch, Kentucky Department of Education  
Tom Matts, The College Board, Advanced Placement (Invited, unable to attend)

### ***National Council of State Supervisors For Languages***

Ruta Couet, South Carolina Department of Education  
Kristin Hoyt, Indiana Department of Education  
Janis Jensen, New Jersey Department of Education  
Ann Tollefson, Wyoming Department of Education  
Jacque Bott Van Houten, Kentucky Department of Education

### ***National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages***

Christy Brown, Glastonbury (CT) Public Schools  
Jacquelyn Cinotti-Dirmann, Duval County (FL) Public Schools  
Yu-Lan Lin, Boston (MA) Public Schools  
Paula Patrick, Fairfax County (VA) Public Schools  
Priscilla Russel, Princeton (NJ) Regional Schools

### ***American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages***

Marty Abbott, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages  
Bret Lovejoy, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages  
June Phillips, Weber State University (UT)  
Elvira Swender, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

### ***New Visions in Action Steering Committee***

Carl Falsgraf, Center for Applied Second Language Studies, University of Oregon  
Myriam Met, National Foreign Language Center, University of Maryland  
Rita Oleksak, West Hartford (CT) Public Schools (now of Glastonbury (CT) Public Schools)  
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