

## AOE Testimony on S.17 and World Language Education

### Addendum to January 21, 2021 Testimony

**Testimony To:** Senate Education Committee

**Respectfully Submitted by:** Jess DeCarolis and Martha Deiss

**Date:** March 25, 2021

#### Previous testimony

- [Civics Education in Context](#)
- [Reflections on S.17](#)

#### Civics Education and Learning: State Scan

##### Qualitative Scan

After the Agency of Education's (AOE) January 2021 testimony, curriculum directors were surveyed regarding K-12 civics learning and engagement opportunities provided within their respective SU/SDs. Despite the small number of respondents, the survey did provide insight into several items of note:

- All respondents stated that Civics and/or Civics Concepts are taught within their SU/SD.
- The concepts of constitutional government, human rights, individual rights, inalienable rights, and voting are taught within each responding SU/SD. Most reported other concepts such as popular sovereignty, natural rights, classical republicanism and social contract theory are also taught.
- All SU/SDs reported that the U.S. Constitution, as well as principles of judicial review, checks and balances and federalism, are taught.
- All responding SU/SDs report extended civic learning opportunities are available, with several noting opportunities across the K-12 continuum. Extended learning opportunities and civic engagement activities include student council, volunteering, service learning and community service.

##### Expanded SCED Code Scan

An expanded pull of SCED (School Codes for the Exchange of Data) code data from the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) of courses that, based on the descriptive information available, include some or all civics concepts described in S.17 was completed and reviewed. Again, this is a rough instrument but does allow for some sense of standardization in how this information is collected, and does include a variety of "types" of classes. For instance, this includes courses such as Civics and Government as well as Abenaki and Local History, American Heritage, American History in a Global Context, Restorative Justice, Women in the

White House, etc. As stated in prior testimony, these data also are weighted toward middle and high school course-taking, with some elementary courses reflected as possible.

- In FY20, there were 26,704 enrollments in “social studies” classes of varying length/credit type (e.g., semester, year-long, quarter credit, etc.)
- In FY20, there were 10,821 unique students enrolled in “social studies” classes

## **State Activities to Support Civic Literacy**

### **Legislator Supports**

- Volunteer for school-based, civics-focused educational opportunities, such as mock trials, Vermont History Day and We the People, to model civic engagement, engage in intergenerational learning with young people, as well as to serve as judges, if and when applicable.
- Support voter registration within the schools. Partner with the AOE and the League of Women Voters to conduct voter registration of 17year-olds in the high schools.
- Support the AOE and the Secretary of State’s Office to develop [Vermont specific civic resources](#) to include on respective websites.
- Team up with Governor Scott to recognize the [Good Citizen Challenge](#) winners; visit schools to increase student participation in the Challenge and other civics related opportunities.
- Reach out to ‘But Why?’ on VPR and answer the tough questions posed by elementary students to heighten interest and engagement.
- Support the Vermont Historic Commission and the AOE in the state-wide celebration of the nation’s 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- Proactively reach out to your school districts and offer to speak with young people about your work in the Legislature starting as early as kindergarten.

### **AOE Supports**

- Develop, with the field, a sample PK-12 Civics standards-based curriculum aligned to state-adopted C3 standards and field-developed Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs) and publish on the AOE website.
- Provide professional development for PK-12 civic education.
- Support voter registration within the schools.
- Provide resources and lesson samples aligned with the field-developed PBGR sample on the AOE website.
- Partner with the legislature and the Secretary of State to develop [Vermont specific civic resources](#).
- Support the Vermont Historic Commission in the state-wide celebration of the nation’s 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- Leverage the AOE/PBS partnership to continue to develop educator kits and content for elementary age students.

## World Language Education Information

Over the past two+ years, the Agency of Education (AOE) has advanced the importance of a strong world language education for K-12 students through leadership and support initiatives such as: (1) adoption of new national world language standards, (2) facilitation of field-developed Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements and indicators, and (3) a collaboration with the Vermont Foreign Language Association (VFLA) to award the Seal of Biliteracy to Vermont students who have demonstrated proficiency in two or more languages upon graduation.

### Regulatory Framework

An overview of the regulatory framework supporting world language proficiency is included below:

- [Education Quality Standards](#) (EQS 2120.5) (*d. global citizenship (including the concepts of civics, economics, geography, world language, cultural studies and history)*) requires annual, rigorous and comprehensive K-12 global citizenship learning opportunities (including world language) for Vermont students.
- [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language World-Readiness Standards for Learning Foreign Languages](#)

In 2019, the Vermont State Board of Education adopted the *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language World-Readiness Standards for Learning Foreign Languages* (ACTFL) to guide the teaching of world languages within Vermont. The goal areas of the ACTFL standards, known as the 5C's (Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, Communities) create a roadmap to teach learners to communicate effectively while using a lens of cultural understanding. The focus of the standards on real-world application prepares students for career and college readiness, as well as world-readiness. When the field was surveyed prior to adoption, 91% percent of the respondents were already using the ACTFL standards. One stated reason for use is that these standards allow for the integration of transferable skills, including effective communication in a second language (79%); provide a clear goal of cultural competency (78%); and use terminology that is consistent in a proficiency-based system (75%).

### Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements and Indicators

In December 2019, nearly twenty K-12 world language teachers from across the state assembled on several occasions in Montpelier to begin the process of developing a sample set of K-12 [World Language PBGRs](#) and indicators that could be utilized by all SU/SDs. This sample set differs from other content samples on the AOE website, as they are not grade-banded, but rather banded by level of language acquisition -- Novice, Intermediate, Advanced. The educators noted that students in Vermont access world language opportunities differently and developed the proficiencies and indicators accordingly. The goal of the document was to describe for all audiences what world language learners should be able to do at various proficiency levels, while also assisting SU/SDs in developing learning requirements and expectations that could promote consistency in world language education across the state.

## Seal of Biliteracy

In December 2020, the Agency of Education joined the Vermont Foreign Language Association in recognizing the Seal of Biliteracy as a means to honor Vermont students who have demonstrated proficiency in two or more languages upon graduation. Over this several year process, the VFLA has, in consultation with the AOE, worked tirelessly to verify that the Seal is an equitable opportunity as there are multiple entry points to earn this recognition, including: learning a world language at school; learning English at school; learning a world language, indigenous language, or American Sign Language at a location other than a Vermont public school; or Heritage Learning, which includes students in multilingual households who may lack literacy skills in that language. Students who are homeschooled are also eligible for this recognition.

The AOE has joined forty states and the District of Columbia in recognizing the importance of the Seal as its value and purpose serve to:

- Provide a purpose and goal for world language education for Vermont students at all grade levels.
- Encourage speakers of critical languages residing in Vermont to maintain oral proficiency and maintain or develop literacy.
- Recognize the value of linguistic and cultural diversity in Vermont and in Vermont schools.
- Provide non-native speakers of English the opportunity to have their heritage and the diversity they bring to our schools recognized.
- Honor the commitment needed to achieve a high degree of proficiency in a second language.
- Encourage the development of articulated, sequential courses of study for students from elementary school through college.
- Encourage speakers of critical languages residing in Vermont to maintain oral proficiency and maintain or develop literacy.
- Recognize the value of linguistic and cultural diversity in Vermont and in Vermont schools.
- Provide non-native speakers of English the opportunity to have their heritage and the diversity they bring to our schools recognized.
- Provide universities with a method to recognize and give credit to applicants for attainment of high-level skills in multiple languages.
- Prepare students with 21st century skills that will benefit them in the labor market and global society.

## Course Offerings Overview

Findings from both AOE data and a recent VFLA survey provide evidence that Vermont schools provide predominantly French and Spanish World Language offerings. There is evidence that some supervisory unions/districts (SU/SDs) provide additional World Language opportunities, such as Arabic, German, Russian, Chinese and Japanese.

Students in some SU/SDs also participate in offerings from VTVLC or through independent studies. For example, in the 2019-2020 school year, several Vermont students were enrolled in Lithuanian, Spanish, Latin, German and French independent study opportunities.

A review of school code data for FY20 identified that 26,433 unique students enrolled in a total of 60,788 world language courses of varying length (e.g., trimester, semester, year-long, etc.) across 49 SU/SDs.

When students are first exposed to a World Language varies considerably across the state. An AOE review of school websites in 2018 suggested that several SU/SDs offer no elementary World Language opportunities, while within other SU/SDs students are exposed to French and/or Spanish at an early age. At the elementary level, World Language opportunities often vary by school within an SU/SDs. For example, currently one SU has one elementary school participating in year four of a Spanish language immersion program, while another is in year one, and the other three elementary schools within the SU do not appear to have an immersion program at all (although one of the three schools does appear to offer Spanish classes).

While the AOE encourages SU/SDs to provide consistent access to learning opportunities for all students within their schools, we also recognize that piloting programs, such as language immersion, can be an effective means to grow programs district-wide over time. Utilizing field-developed PBGRs and indicators, as well as the Vermont Portrait of a Graduate sample -- where community members, students and educators identified the importance of both studying a non-native language and learning about other cultures -- can be effective tools for expanding access to not just World Language learning opportunities, but also to support the development of transferable skills and civic literacy.

Additionally, the AOE recognizes that accessing qualified staff consistently across the state can be a challenge. We would encourage those SU/SDs and schools who may have difficulty supporting full-time positions consider partnering with entities like VTVLC who, through grant funding from the AOE, has significantly expanded its services at no or low cost to districts/schools.