



ACTFL

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE
TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

NEED INDICATORS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The recently enacted **Every Student Succeeds Act** (ESSA) contains a new set of block grants that will flow through the states and are intended to fund, in large part, a “well-rounded education.”

Any school district that receives an allocation above \$30,000 must conduct a “needs assessment.”

While ACTFL asserts that every student should have access to foreign language learning, there are compelling reasons to consider funding language programs to serve certain students, address specific gaps, and target instruction within geographic areas with large heritage populations.

There is ample evidence that learning a foreign language not only makes students more “well-rounded,” but also strengthens their performance in other academic subjects and can level the playing field for disadvantaged students.

In approaching your needs assessment, consider the following questions:

1. Does your student population include students eligible for free and reduced price meals? If yes, what percentage of the population do they comprise?

There is evidence that dual language immersion programs can counteract the negative impacts of low socioeconomic status, as measured by eligibility for free and reduced price meals, on academic performance.

2. Does your student population include English language learners? If yes, what percentage of the total school population are ELLs?

Dual language immersion programs have been shown to close the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs.

3. Does your student population include, in particular, minority students of low socioeconomic status? If yes, what percentage of the population?

African American students of low socioeconomic status enrolled in a dual language immersion program scored at least one grade level higher in Reading and more than two grades higher in Math than comparable students not in the program.

4. Does your school district include a substantial number of students that underperform on standardized tests? If yes, what percentage of the population?

Elementary school students that participate in Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools (FLES) programs have shown evidence of outperforming their non-language learning peers on standardized tests in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Additionally, students in dual language immersion programs generally outscore their peers who are not in language programs.

5. Visit the Asia Society's [Mapping the Nation webpage](#) and browse through the "Key Indicators." Does your state rank highly in terms of jobs related to exports, employees of companies that import/export goods, international student economic value or any other key indicator?

In addition to the cognitive benefits students obtain from studying foreign languages, students who learn foreign languages also receive practical benefits in the forms of increased career opportunities, and an ability to communicate with a greater percentage of the population.

If your answer to any of the above questions is "yes," there are studies indicating that foreign language learning will improve the academic performance of your student population.

Thomas and Collier's (2010) landmark study on foreign language instruction in North Carolina demonstrates that dual language immersion programs strongly counteract the negative impact of low socioeconomic status (as measured by eligibility for free and reduced price meals) on school performance. This study also showed that, in particular, low-SES African American students scored at least one grade higher in Reading and more than two grades higher in Math than comparable students not in the program.¹

Other longitudinal studies performed by Collier and Thomas (2004) on one-way and two-way immersion programs illustrate that dual language schooling addresses the achievement gap for English learners. As stated in their report, "this is the only program

¹ Thomas, W.P., Collier, V.P., & Collier, K. (2010). English learners in North Carolina. North Carolina Department of Education.

for English learners that fully closes the gap; in contrast, remedial models only partially close the gap."²

In addition to immersion programs, other models of language learning also provide significant benefits to students. According to a 2010 study conducted by Carolyn Taylor and Robert Lafayette, elementary school students that participate in Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools (FLES) programs significantly outperform their non-language learning peers on standardized tests in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.³

If applicable, we encourage you to include this information in your district's needs assessment.

Finally, even if your answer to each of the above questions is "no," we strongly urge you to consider including foreign language learning programs as a use of your Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant under Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). All students who study languages are better prepared for the 21st century economy, perform better on standardized tests and demonstrate improved cognitive development and skills compared to their monolingual peers.

² Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2004, Winter). The astounding effectiveness of dual language education for all [Abstract]. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 2(1).

³ Taylor, C. & Lafayette, R. (2010). Academic achievement through FLES: A case for promoting greater access to foreign language study among young learners. *The Modern Language Journal*, 94(1), 22-42.