



The State of K-12 World Language Education: Data from the National Center for Education Statistics



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Learning languages empowers people to connect with each other, enabling interaction and cultural understanding. **Access to high-quality language education is a right for all students.** In addition to promoting communication, language skills, and an appreciation for diverse viewpoints, learning languages provides cognitive benefits and equips students with global and cultural competencies that they need to succeed in the global marketplace. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Raise the Bar: Lead the World initiative to advance educational excellence and equity (2023a), “we must do all we can to improve the learning environments in which English learners are learning English and increase access to high-quality language programs...” to meet the key goal to “provide every student with a pathway to multilingualism” (2023b).

To ensure access to world language education for all, **it is critical to examine what language instruction is available to K-12 students across the country.** Unfortunately, there is no systematic collection of world language enrollment data in the United States, and comprehensive data on language education, particularly at the K-12 level, is lacking (American Councils for International Education, 2017).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), located within the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences, is the federal statistical agency that collects and analyzes data related to American education. While NCES does not currently conduct studies focused exclusively on language education, it provides multiple reports that include statistics related to K-12 language programs, learners and teachers in the United States. **This overview of these reports shows what the data reveal about the current state and shifts over time in world language instruction in U.S. schools.** It concludes with a discussion of key findings, calls to address gaps in data collection, and implications for educators and policymakers.

Staff and Contributors

This report was developed by ACTFL staff Larry Paska, Marty Abbott, Vanessa Verdin-Padilla, and Meg Malone, in collaboration with consultant Francesca DiSilvio.

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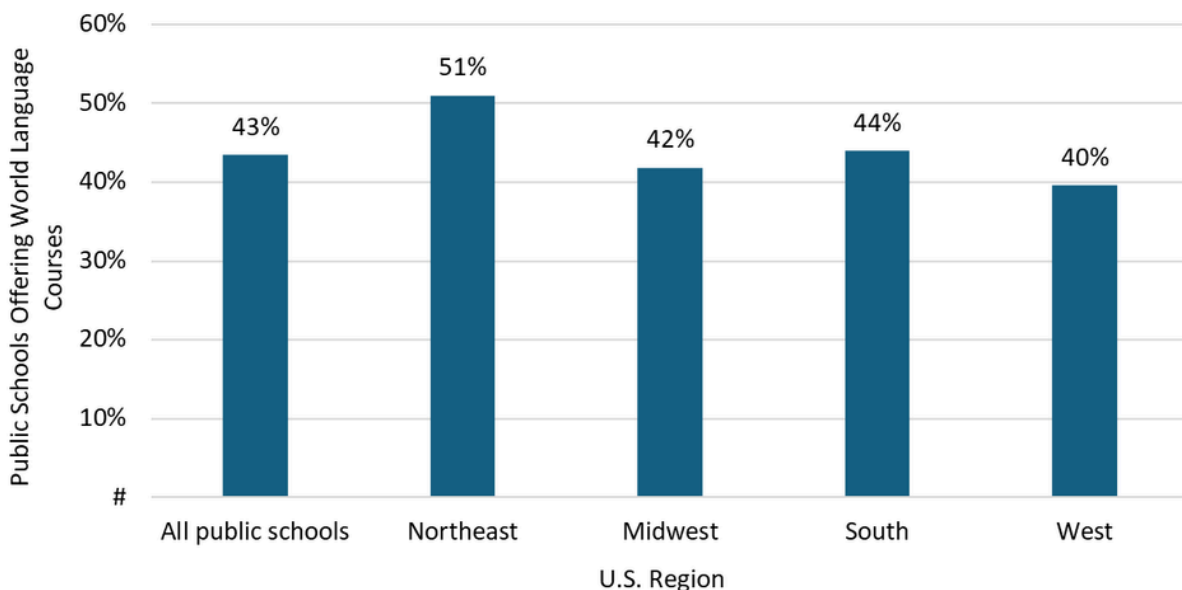
School Pulse Panel

This survey is conducted monthly, and leaders in U.S. Public Schools report on different topics each month. In January 2024, the topic was world language programs. Here are a few highlights from that survey.

According to this survey, 43% of public schools reported offering classes in world languages, with the highest percentage by region in the Northeast, at 51%. There were large differences in offerings by school level, at only 20% of elementary schools compared to 61% of middle or combined schools and 82% of high schools. While distributions were similar based on school location (urbanicity), racial/ethnic student enrollment, and neighborhood poverty level, it is notable that 92% of schools enrolling 1,000 or more students offered classes in world languages.

Figure 1

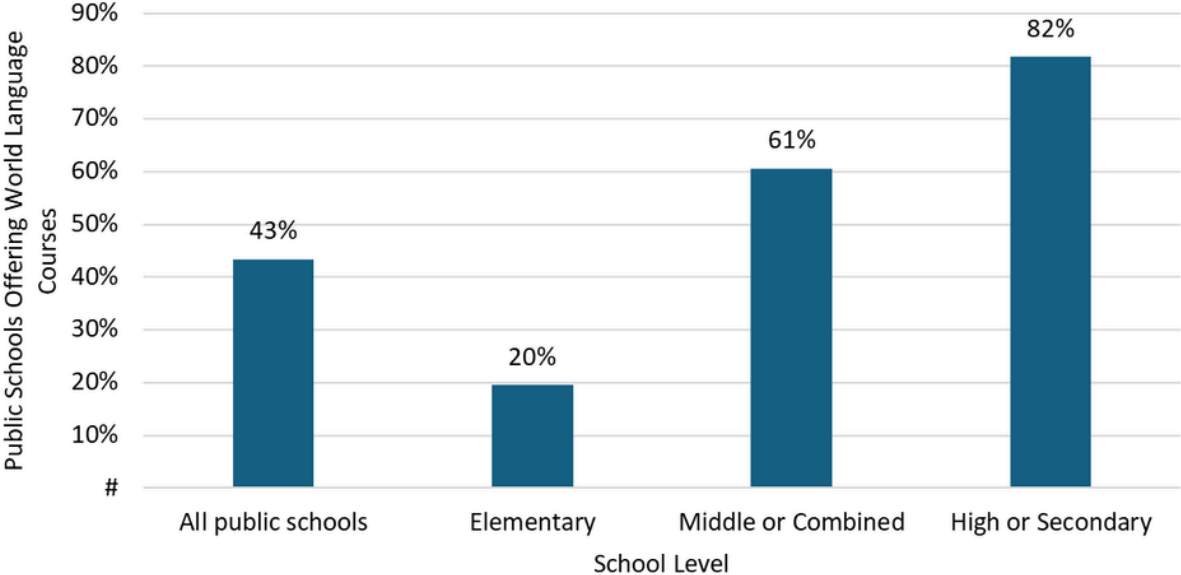
Percentage of K-12 Public Schools Offering World Language Courses by Region



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Assessment of Educational Progress Data Explorer, School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

Figure 2

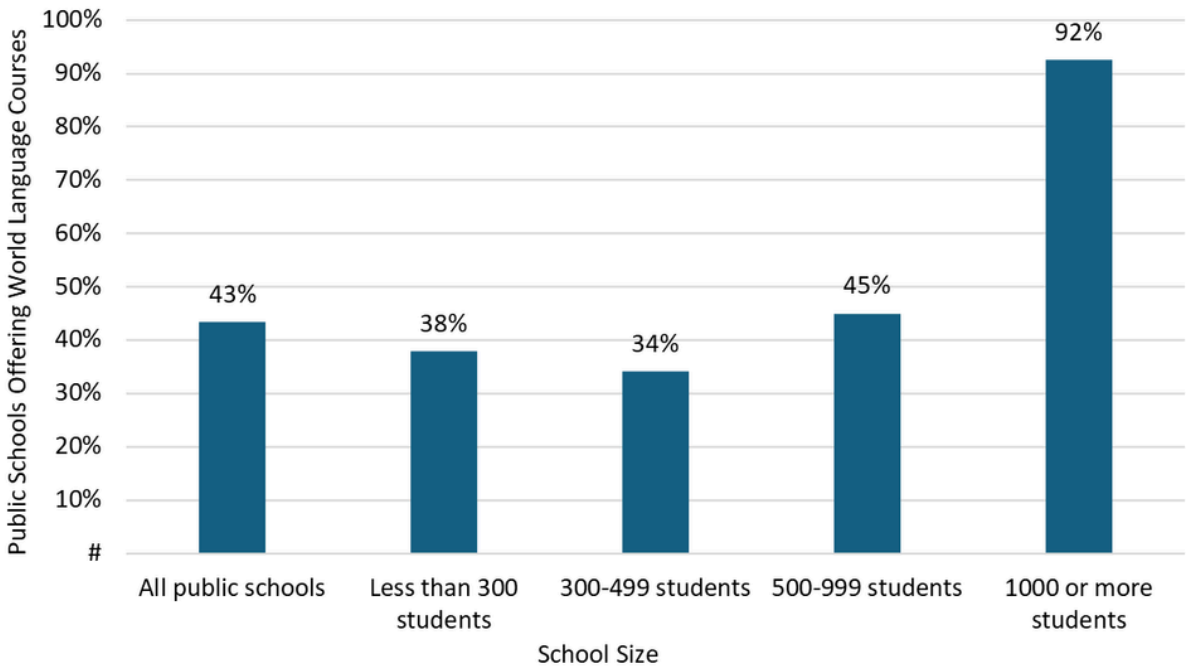
Percentage of K-12 Public Schools Offering World Language Courses by School Level



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

Figure 3

Percentage of K-12 Public Schools Offering World Language Instruction by School Size



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

Across all public schools that offer a world language, 40% taught classes in Spanish, 12% in French, 4% in American Sign Language (ASL), 4% in German, 3% in Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), and 2% in Latin—with Arabic, Italian, and Japanese as the other world language courses with reportable results (around 1%). These distributions were similar by region except for higher levels of French (20%) and Italian (5%) within schools in the Northeast. In elementary schools, only Spanish (16%) and Chinese and French (1% each) had reportable results, while high schools had higher percentages of offerings in all languages—79% in Spanish, 34% in French, 14% in ASL, 12% in German, 6% in Chinese, 4% in Latin, 3% in Italian, and 4% in Japanese. Distributions and relative rankings were similar based on school location (see Table 1, below), racial/ethnic student enrollment, and neighborhood poverty level.

Table 1

World Languages Taught in Public Schools by School Location

Language	All public schools	City	Suburban	Town
American Sign Language (ASL)	4%	5%	3%!	4%
Arabic	1%!	2%!	‡	‡
Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)	3%	5%	2%	‡
French	12%	15%	14%	8%
German	4%	3%!	5%	4%!
Italian	1%	2%!	2%!	‡
Japanese	1%	3%	‡	‡
Latin	2%	2%!	2%!	‡
Spanish	40%	43%	41%	33%

Note: Table created with data gathered from Taken from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50, which indicates that the standard error for this estimate is 30% to 50% of the estimate's value.

‡ Reporting standards not met.

As Table 2 (below) shows, distributions were also similar by school size except for offerings in schools with 1,000 or more students, at 92% for Spanish, 58% for French, 15% for ASL, 23% for German, 10% for Chinese, 10% for Latin, and 7% for Japanese.

Table 2

World Languages Taught in Public Schools by School Size

World Languages	All public schools	Less than 300 students	300-499 students	500-999 students
American Sign Language (ASL)	4%	5%	3%	2%
Arabic	1%!	‡	‡	‡
Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)	3%	1%!	1%!	4%
French	12%	6%	6%	12%
German	4%	2%!	2%!	3%
Italian	1%	‡	1%!	1%!
Japanese	1%	‡	‡	‡
Latin	2%	‡	1%!	1%!
Spanish	40%	32%	31%	41%

Note: Table created with data gathered from Taken from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50, which indicates that the standard error for this estimate is 30% to 50% of the estimate's value.

‡ Reporting standards not met.

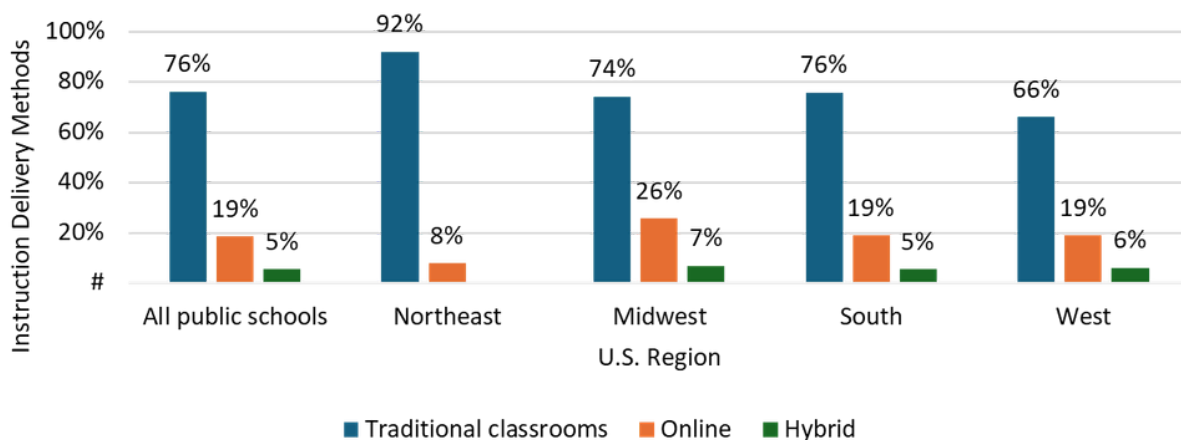
Of public schools offering world language courses, 76% reported teaching them in traditional classroom settings, 19% in online settings, and 5% in a hybrid format

(<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/spp/results.asp#wdl-programs-jan24-chart-3>).

A higher percentage of online instruction for world languages was reported in the Midwest (26%), town and rural schools (31% and 29%, respectively), high schools (26%), and schools with less than 300 students (40%) (see Figures 4 and 5, below). Online instruction was most common in the teaching of ASL (41%) and German (34%) (National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.)). The survey also asked if any world language classes were offered in collaboration with other institutions. Of those schools, 12% reported teaching world language courses in collaboration with a local high school, 7% with a community college, 4% with a university campus, and 1% with a heritage community school (see Table 3, below). Also, 23% of schools that offered ASL taught these classes in collaboration with a community college.

Figure 4

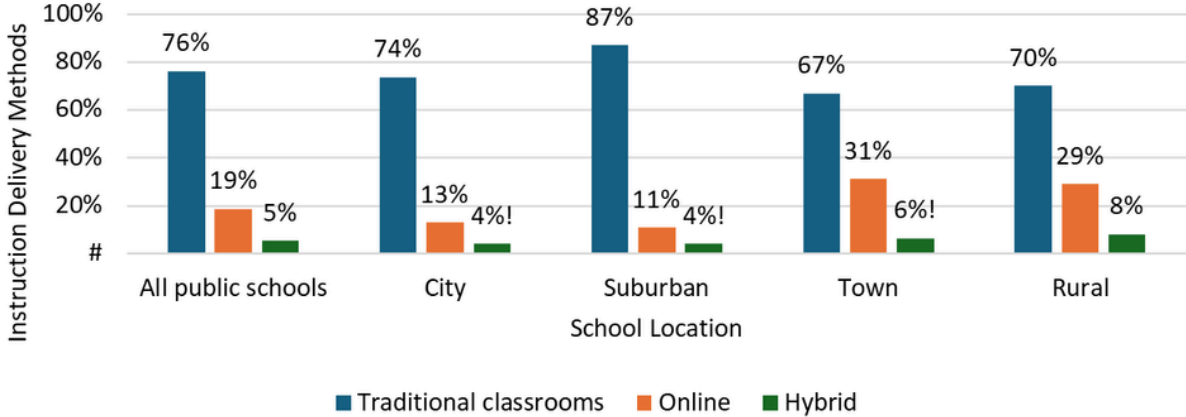
Instruction Delivery Methods in Schools by Region



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

Figure 5

Instruction Delivery Methods in Schools by School Location



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50, which indicates that the standard error for this estimate is 30% to 50% of the estimate's value.

Table 3

Percentage of Schools that Confirmed Collaboration of World Language Courses with Other Learning Institutions

Confirmed collaboration with a Local High School	12%
Confirmed collaboration with a Community College	7%
Confirmed collaboration with a University Campus	4%
Confirmed collaboration with a Heritage Community School	1%!

Note: Table created with data gathered from Taken from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

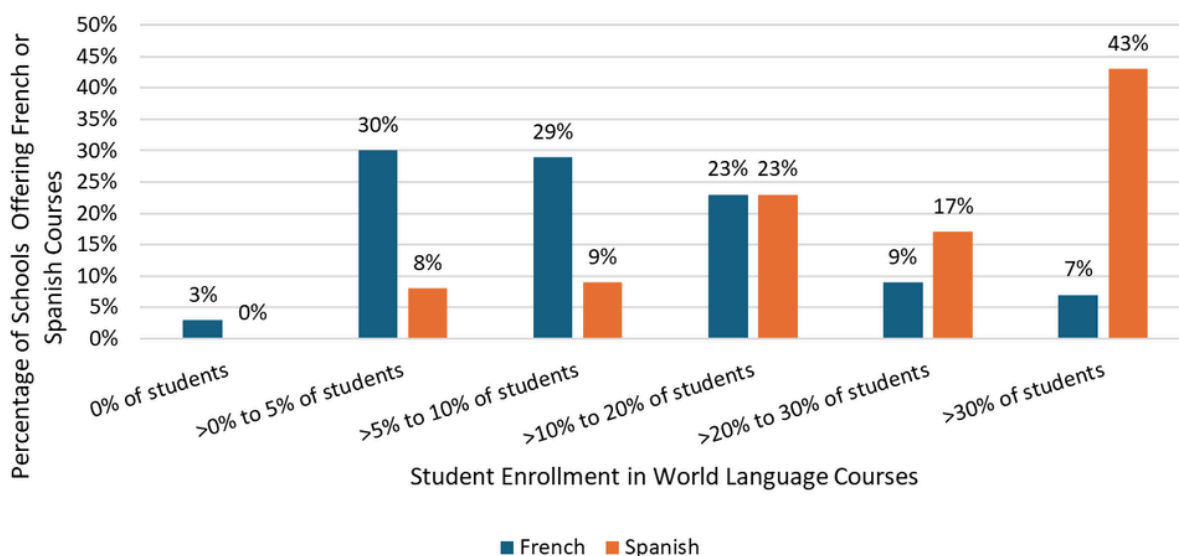
! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50, which indicates

that the standard error for this estimate is 30% to 50% of the estimate's value.

Schools were asked to estimate the number of students enrolled in world language classes, by language. As Figure 6 (below) shows, of schools that taught Spanish, 43% indicated that greater than 30% of students were enrolled in Spanish and 17% indicated that between 20% and 30% of their students were enrolled in Spanish. By contrast, of schools that taught French, 30% indicated that up to 5% of students were enrolled in French and 29% indicated that between 5% and 10% of their students were enrolled in French.

Figure 6

Percentage of Student Enrollment in World Language Courses by Schools Offering French or Spanish Courses



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

One-quarter of public schools reported offering some type of dual language program, 13% offered a one-way immersion program, 9% offered a two-way immersion program, 6% offered a developmental program, and 3% offered a heritage language program (<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/spp/results.asp#wdl-programs-jan24-chart-4>).

Percentages total to more than 100 as schools were instructed to select all that apply for this question.

These distributions were similar by region except in the West, where 12% of schools offered a two-way immersion program, compared to 10% offering a one-way immersion program. Two-way immersion programs were also relatively more common in city schools (16%) and schools with greater than 75% students of color (16%). Table 4 (below) shows that dual language program offerings were most common at the high school level, in 35% of schools. This includes 24% of high schools offering one-way immersion programs, and 7% offering heritage language programs.

Table 4

Types of Dual Language Programs Offered at Public Schools by School Level

	Develop- mental Program	Two-way Immersion Program	One-way Immersion Program	Heritage Language Program
All public schools	6%	9%	13%	3%
Elementary	4%	9%	7%	1%
Middle or Combined	8%	10%	17%	4%
High or Secondary	10%	8%	24%	7%

Note: Table created with data gathered from Taken from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50, which indicates that the standard error for this estimate is 30% to 50% of the estimate's value.

Distributions were also similar by school size, except in schools with 1,000 or more students, in which 50% of schools offered some type of dual language program, 30% offered one-way immersion, 19% offered two-way immersion, 17% offered developmental programs, and 7% offered heritage language programs, as shown in Table 5 (below).

Table 5

Types of Dual Language Programs Offered at Public Schools by School Size

	Develop-mental Program	Two-way Immersion Program	One-way Immersion Program	Heritage Language Program
All public schools	6%	9%	13%	3%
Less than 300 students	5%	5%	10%	3%
300-499 students	4%	7%	10%	1%!
500-999 students	6%	13%	14%	5%
1,000 or more students	17%	19%	30%	7%

Note: Table created with data gathered from Taken from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50, which indicates that the standard error for this estimate is 30% to 50% of the estimate's value.

The most common partner languages for these programs across schools were Spanish (71%), French (10%), ASL (5%), Chinese (4%), and German (3%), as

seen in Table 6 (below). High schools with dual language programs included 4% offering Arabic, 3% offering Hindi, 4% offering Italian, 4% offering Japanese, and 5% offering Russian, as seen in Table 7 (below).

Table 6

Percentage of Public Schools with Dual Language Programs by Partner Language

Spanish	71%
French	10%
Other	7%
American Sign Language (ASL)	5%
Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)	4%
German	3%
Arabic	2%!
Italian	2%!
Japanese	2%!
Russian	2%!
Hindi	1%!
Latin	1%!
Dutch	‡!
Korean	‡

Portuguese	‡
Turkish	‡

Note: Table created with data gathered from Taken from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50, which indicates that the standard error for this estimate is 30% to 50% of the estimate's value.

‡ Reporting standards not met.

Table 7

Percentage of Public High Schools with Dual Language Programs by Partner Language

Spanish	70%
French	21%
German	8%!
American Sign Language (ASL)	7%!
Other	6%!
Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)	5%!
Russian	5%!
Arabic	4%!
Italian	4%!
Japanese	4%!
Hindi	3%!
Latin	3%!
Dutch	‡
Korean	‡
Portuguese	‡
Turkish	‡

Note: Table created with data gathered from Taken from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

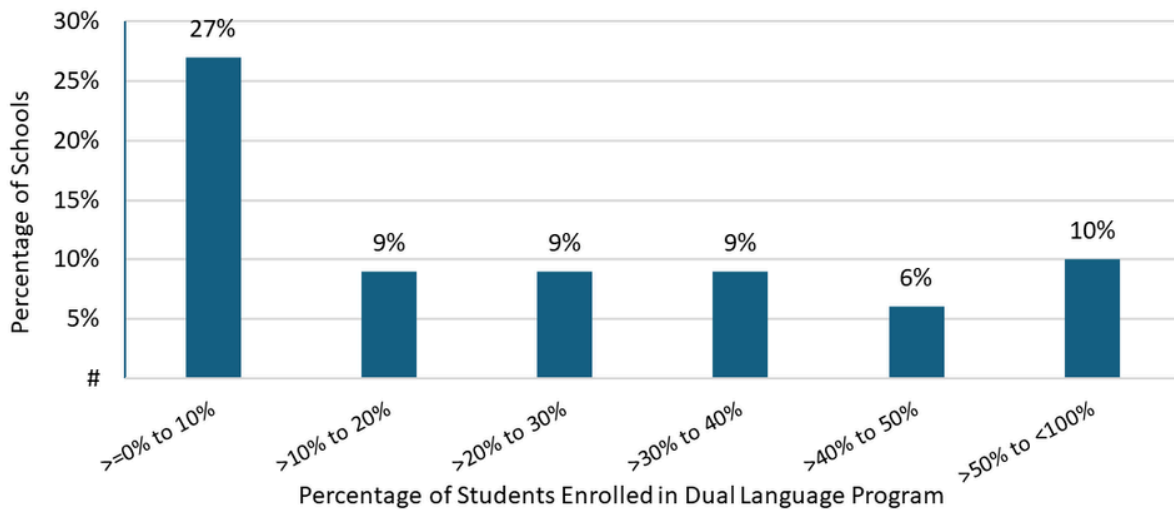
! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50, which indicates that the standard error for this estimate is 30% to 50% of the estimate's value.

‡ Reporting standards not met.

Schools with dual language programs were asked what percentage of their students were in the program. Of those schools which were able to provide an estimate, the largest percentage (27%) reported that the program enrolled up to 10% of their students, while 10% of schools enrolled more than 50% of students in the program, and 9% enrolled every student (Figure 7, below). A large majority of schools with dual language programs (82%) required that educators were certified to teach in these programs, and 28% reported that they offered a Seal of Biliteracy, including 48% of high schools.

Figure 7

Percentage of Public Schools with Dual Language Programs by Dual Language Program Student Enrollment



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.), School Pulse Panel Survey, January 2024.

National Teacher and Principal Survey

The National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) is a large sample survey of U.S. public and private K-12 schools that produces estimates at a national level. It consists of the Principal Questionnaire, School Questionnaire, and Teacher Questionnaire. The NTPS was most recently collected in 2020-21 with previous collections in 2017-18 and 2015-16 (public schools only). In addition, the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), designed to collect data on teacher retention and attrition, was administered in 2021-22 to a sample of teachers who completed the NTPS in 2020-21. NTPS and TFS questionnaires, publications, and other information about these surveys can be found at <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/> and the dataset is available in <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>.

According to the 2020-21 NTPS, of the K-12 schools that had teaching vacancies in world languages¹ for the current school year, 42.5% of public schools and 31.7% of private schools found it very difficult to fill or were not able to fill the vacancies (Table 8, below). The difficulty was most acute in town and rural public schools (52.7% and 57.1%, respectively) and in public schools with lower student enrollment (74.7% for less than 100, 54.4% for 100-199 students, and 51.2% for 200-299 students). The 42.5% of public schools that reported it was very difficult or they were unable to fill 2020-21 vacancies in world languages is significantly higher than reported in 2015-16, at 36.5% (National Center for Education Statistics Data Lab, (n.d.)). The 2021-22 TFS indicated that 81.4% of public school teachers of world languages who were teaching during the 2020-21 school year remained at the same school the following year, while 11.0% moved to another school, and 7.7% left teaching (Taie & Lewis, 2022, Table A-2, p. A-3). These figures are similar to the percentages of stayers, movers, and leavers for public school teachers overall and in other fields of instruction.

Table 8

Percentage of K-12 Schools That Found It Very Difficult or Were Not Able to Fill Vacancies in World Languages by School Type and Selected School Characteristics: 2020–21 Academic Year

School Type and Selected School Characteristic	Foreign Languages
All Schools	39.60%
All Public Schools	42.50%
● Traditional Public School	44.30%
● Charter School	31.30%
Community Type	
● City	36.20%
● Suburban	36.60%
● Town	52.70%
● Rural	57.10%
School Level	
● Elementary	43.50%
● Middle	48.60%
● Secondary/High	38.10%
● Combined/Other	46.20%

Student Enrollment	
● Less than 100	74.70%
● 100-199	54.40%
● 200-499	51.20%
● 500-749	46.80%
● 750-999	36.20%
● 1,000 or more	32.40%
Percent of K-12 students who were approved for free and reduced-price lunches	
● 0-34	40.80%
● 35-49	44.40%
● 50-79	42.70%
● 75 or more	43.00%
Reported effect of COVID-19 on instruction	
● Offering only distance-learning instruction	33.70%
● Offering a hybrid of in-person and distance-learning instruction	44.70%
● Offering only in person instruction or no effect on instruction offered	42.30%
All Private Schools	31.70%
School Classification	

● Catholic	37.50%
● Other Religions	30.60%
● Nonsectarian	27.20%
Community Type	
● City	27.10%
● Suburban	37.20%
● Town	35.71%
● Rural	28.10%
School Level	
● Elementary/Middle	13.91%
● Secondary/High	31.10%
● Combined/Other	34.90%
Student Enrollment	
● Less than 100	35.80%
● 100 - 199	40.20%
● 200 - 499	27.60%
● 500 - 749	29.30%
● 750 or more	13.31%
Reported effect of COVID-19 on instruction	

● Offering only distance-learning instruction	22.1%!
● Offering a hybrid of in-person and distance-learning instruction	33.30%
● Offering only in person instruction or no effect on instruction offered	28.20%

Note: Table recreated from Taie & Lewis, 2022, Table A-7, pp. A-24, A-26.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30% and 50% (i.e., the standard error is at least 30% and less than 50% of the estimate).

‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable analysis, or the coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is 50% or greater (i.e. the standard error is 50% or more of the estimate).

² Elementary schools offer at least one grade of K to 4, and the number of elementary grades is higher than the number of middle grades. Middle schools offer at least one of grades 5 to 8, and the number of middle grades is greater than the number of elementary or secondary grades. Secondary/high schools are defined as schools that enroll more students in grades 9 through 12 than in lower grades. Combined/other schools include all other combinations of grades, including K-12 schools. School level categories in the 2020–21 NTPS differ from those in previous survey administrations; caution should be exercised when comparing estimates by level over time. For more information, see Appendix C: Description of Variables.

In the 2020-21 NTPS, schools were asked to report if they offered a dual language or foreign language immersion program, defined as a program for which the goal of instruction is proficiency in two languages, not including English as a Second Language (ESL). These programs were offered by 12.9% of public schools and 16.3% of private schools (National Center for Education Statistics Data Lab, (n.d.)). In the 2017-18 NTPS, these programs were offered by 14.7% of public schools and 19.7% of private schools, with the highest percentages in public schools with large student enrollment (20.8% for 750-999 and 24.0% for 1,000 or more) (Taie & Golding, 2019, Table 3, pp. 11-12). Looking at the state-level data, there were eight states in which more than 20% of schools offered a dual language or foreign language program: Delaware (26.8%), District of Columbia (30.1%), Florida (21.0%), Hawaii (20.5%), Louisiana (25.4%) New Hampshire (22.6%), New Mexico (36.8%), and Texas (25.9%)

(https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/ntps1718_table_03_s1s.asp).

For schools with students in third grade, the 2017-18 NTPS also asked how many minutes per day during a typical school week most third grade students spent on different classes. The average number of minutes per week third-grade students were reported spending on world languages was 120 for public schools and 90 for private schools (Taie & Golding, 2019, Table 7, pp. 19-20). The amount of time students spent in world language instruction for all schools at 100 minutes was lower than all other areas except for music (70 minutes) and art (60 minutes).

High School Transcript Study

The High School Transcript Study (HSTS) is a periodic survey that provides information about high school graduates' courses, credits earned, grade point averages, and the relationship between graduate characteristics and scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). It is conducted with a nationally representative sample of public and private high schools and graduating seniors from each school. The HSTS was most recently collected in 2019, with previous collections in 2009, 2005, 2000, 1998, 1994, 1990, and 1987. Information about the HSTS and links to 2019 results can be found at <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/hsts/> and the dataset for all years is available at <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/hsts>.

According to the 2019 HSTS, high school graduates in 2019 earned on average 2.2 Carnegie credits in world language and literature courses—the same as 2009; this contrasts to credits for English language and literature, mathematics, and life and physical science courses, which increased from 2009 to 2019 (Table 9).

Table 9

Average Carnegie Credits Earned of Grade 12 Students by Academic Course Subjects from 1990 to 2019

Academic Course Subject	1990	2000	2009	2019
English language and literature	4.1 *	4.2 *	4.3 *	4.5
Mathematics	3.2 *	3.6 *	3.9 *	4.2
Life and physical sciences	2.8 *	3.3 *	3.5 *	3.7
Social science and history	3.5 *	3.7 *	4.0	4.0
Visual and performing arts	1.5 *	2.0 *	2.2	2.3
World language and literature	1.6 *	2.0 *	2.2 *	2.2

Note: Table created with data gathered from National Assessment of Educational Progress Data Explorer. High School Transcript Study, 1990-2019.

** Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2019.*

In 2019, the average world language Carnegie credits earned by female high school graduates was 2.31 compared to 1.99 for male graduates. There were also differences in average credits earned by race/ethnicity in 2019, at 2.60 for Asian/Pacific Islander high school graduates compared with 2.21 for Hispanic graduates, 2.16 for White graduates, and 1.86 for Black graduates. See Table 10 (below) for average Carnegie credits earned in world languages and literature of Grade 12, broken out by race and gender.

Table 10

Average Carnegie Credits Earned in World Languages of Grade 12 Students in 2019 by Overall, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender

Overall	2.2
Race/Ethnicity	
● White (Not Hispanic)	2.16
● Black (Not Hispanic)	1.86
● Hispanic	2.21
● Asian American or Pacific Islander	2.6
● American Indian or Native	1.5
● Other	2.22
Gender	
● Male	1.99
● Female	2.31

Note: Table created with data gathered from National Assessment of Educational Progress Data Explorer. High School Transcript Study, 1990-2019.

2019 high school graduates earned higher average GPAs in world language and literature, as well as all other academic course subjects, than graduates in 1990, 2000, and 2009 (see Table 11). The increase in GPA was highest for world languages at .18 to 3.07 in 2019. In 2019, the average world language GPA for female high school graduates was 3.24 compared to 2.89 for male graduates. There were also differences in average GPA by race/ethnicity in 2019, at 3.41 for Asian/Pacific Islander high school graduates compared with 3.15 for White graduates, 3.00 for Hispanic graduates, and 2.72 for

Black graduates. See Table 12 (below) for average grade point average of grade 12 students by race and gender.

Table 11

Average Grade Point Average of Grade 12 Students by Academic Course Subject from 1990–2019

Academic Course Subject	1990	2000	2009	2019
English language and literature	2.52*	2.77*	2.85*	2.97
Mathematics	2.33*	2.59*	2.65*	2.77
Life and physical sciences	2.39*	2.68*	2.70*	2.85
Social sciences and history	2.56*	2.82*	2.88*	3.01
Visual and performing arts	3.13*	3.38*	3.42*	3.48
World language and literature	2.57*	2.83*	2.89*	3.07

Note: Table created with data gathered from National Assessment of Educational Progress Data Explorer. High School Transcript Study, 1990-2019.

** Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2019.*

Table 12

Average Grade Point Average Earned in World Languages of Grade 12 students in 2019 by Overall, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender

Overall	3.07
Race/Ethnicity	
● White (Not Hispanic)	3.15
● Black (Not Hispanic)	2.72
● Hispanic	3
● Asian American or Pacific Islander	3.41
● American Indian or Native	2.97
● Other	3.09
Gender	
● Male	2.89
● Female	3.24

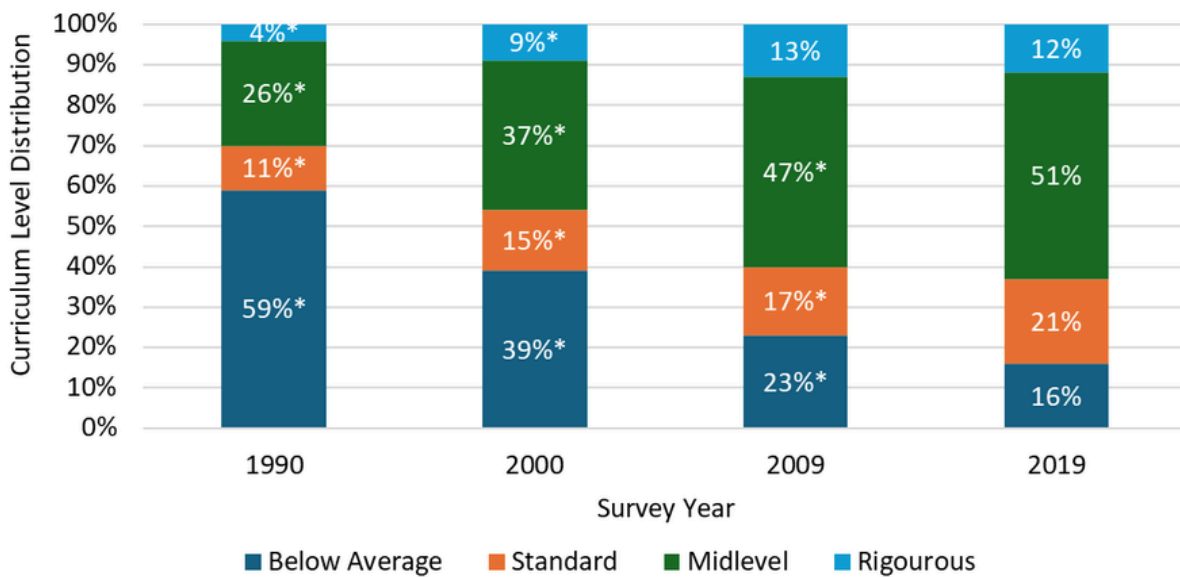
Note: Table created with data gathered from National Assessment of Educational Progress Data Explorer. High School Transcript Study, 1990-2019.

The HSTS defines three curriculum levels to measure college preparedness, based on academic courses taken and number of Carnegie credits earned. A midlevel curriculum requires 1 Carnegie credit in world language courses, and a rigorous curriculum requires 3 world language credits. No world language credits are required for a standard curriculum. In 2019, 12% of graduates attained a rigorous curriculum and 51% attained a midlevel curriculum, which was significantly higher than 2009 at 47% (see Figure 8, below). Although there was no significant change in the percentage of graduates attaining a

rigorous curriculum compared to 2009, there has been a 7-point increase since 1990. In 2019, about 54% of female high school graduates attained a midlevel curriculum compared to male graduates at 48% (see Figure 9). There were also differences in attainment of a rigorous curriculum by race/ethnicity in 2019, at 28% for Asian/Pacific Islander high school graduates compared with 13% of White graduates, 10% of Hispanic graduates, and 5% of Black graduates (see Figure 10, below).

Figure 8

Changes in Overall Curriculum Level Distribution of Grade 12 Students from 1990 to 2019

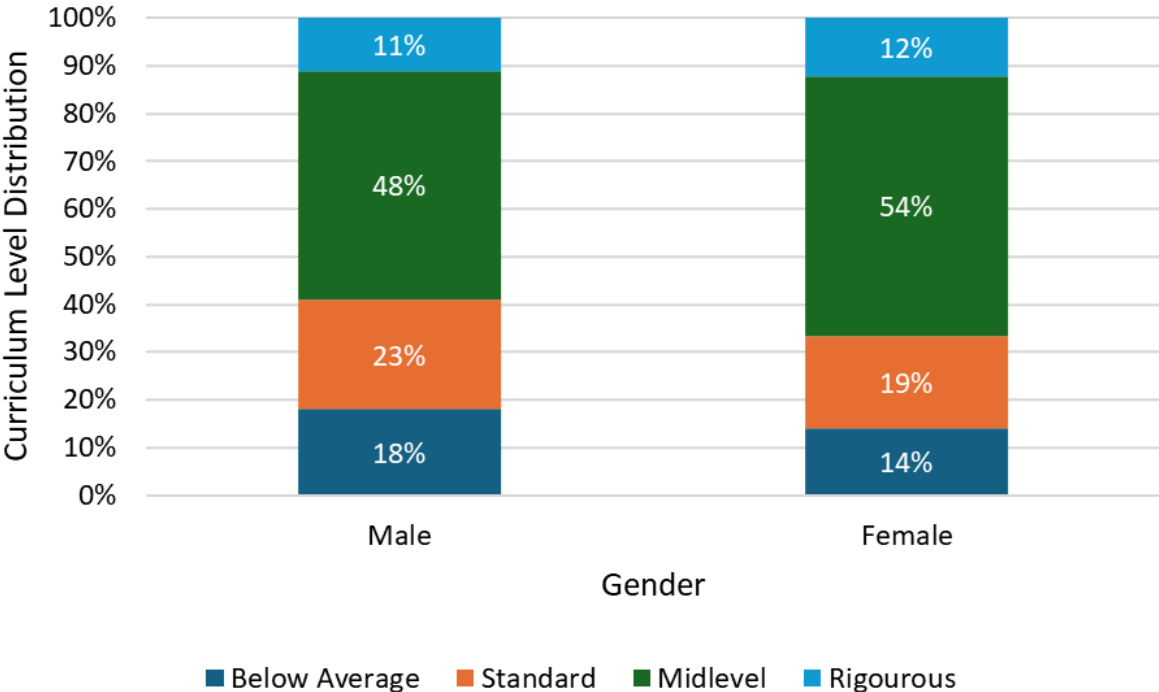


Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Assessment of Educational Progress Data Explorer. High School Transcript Study, 1990-2019.

* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2019.

Figure 9

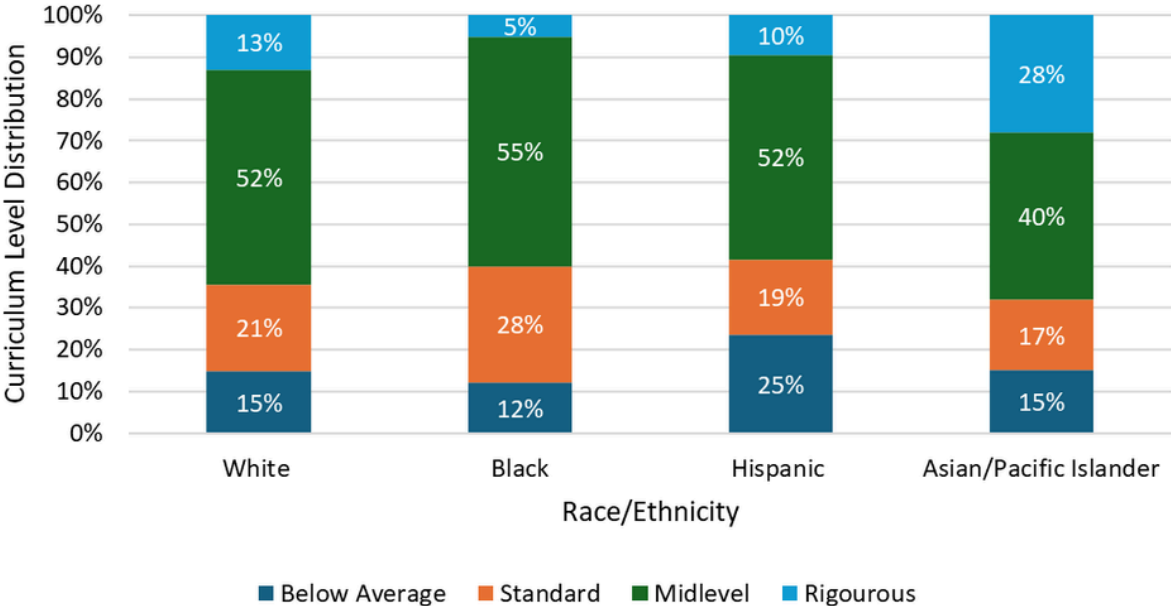
Curriculum Level Distribution in Grade 12 by Gender in 2019



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Assessment of Educational Progress Data Explorer. High School Transcript Study, 1990-2019.

Figure 10

Curriculum Level Distribution in Grade 12 by Race/Ethnicity for 2019



Note: Figure created with data gathered from National Assessment of Educational Progress Data Explorer. High School Transcript Study, 1990-2019.

National Indian Education Study

The National Indian Education Study (NIES) is designed to describe the condition of education for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students in fourth and eighth grade in public, private, Department of Defense, and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) funded schools. A survey questionnaire is completed by AI/AN students who participate in the NAEP assessment, and a survey is also given to the reading/language arts and mathematics teachers and administrators of the schools of participating students. Data for the NIES was most recently collected in 2019 with previous collections in 2015, 2011, 2009, 2007, and 2005. The NIES questionnaires and the 2019 report can be found at <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nies/>.

The 2019 NIES asked students about attending classes in school that were taught in AI/AN languages, which could include subjects such as reading and mathematics or supplemental culture or language classes. In grade 4, 43% of students reported no classes taught in an AI/AN language, 23% attended classes in these languages never or hardly ever, 10% once or twice a month, 11% once or twice a week, and 14% every day or almost every day (Rampey, et al., Table 21, p. 34).

The percentages of classes taught in AI/AN languages once or twice a week or every day/almost every day were significantly higher in high density schools than in low density schools, and significantly higher than both in BIE schools (16% and 26%, respectively).

In grade 8, 50% of students reported no classes taught in an AI/AN language, 24% attended classes in these languages never or hardly ever, 6% once or twice a month, 8% once or twice a week, and 11% every day or almost every day. As in grade 4, the percentages of classes taught in AI/AN languages once or twice a week or every day/almost every day were significantly higher in high density public schools than low density public schools and significantly higher than both in BIE schools (24% and 40%, respectively).

Compared to the 2015 NIES, more students overall in both grades were attending classes taught in a Native language at least once a week—25% in 2019 compared to 17% in 2015 in grade 4, and 19% in 2019 compared to 13% in 2015 in grade 8 (Ninneman, et al., Table 6, p. 11). Table 13 (below) shows data

for grade 4 and grade 8 students that reported attending classes in an AI/AN language once a week or more, once or twice a week, and every day or almost every day by school type and in 2019 and 2015.

Table 13

Grade 4 and Grade 8 AI/AN Students Attending Classes Taught in an AI/AN language, by School Type/Density in 2019 and 2015

Grade and school type/density	Q: "How often do you attend classes in school that are taught in an AI/AN language?"	
	NIES 2015 "Once a week or more"	NIES 2019 "Once or twice a week" and "Every day or almost every day"
Grade 4		
● All AI/AN Students	17%	25%
● Low Density	8%	14%
● High Density	26%	26%
● BIE Schools	60%	42%
Grade 8		
● All AI/AN Students	13%	19%
● Low Density	6%	6%
● High Density	16%	25%
● BIE Schools	56%	64%

Note: Table recreated from Ninneman, et al., Table 6, p. 11; Rampey, et al., Table 29, p. 43.

The 2019 survey asked school administrators to report whether their school was an AI/AN immersion school. The data showed that overall, 2% of AI/AN students in fourth grade and 6% of AI/AN students in eighth grade attended AI/AN immersion schools in 2019, with significantly higher percentages of BIE immersion schools at 23% in grade 4 and 25% in grade 8 (see Table 14).

School administrators in all schools, including immersion schools, were also asked whether their students received instruction about their AI/AN oral or written languages. Overall, administrators reported instruction about Native oral languages for 49% of AI/AN students in fourth grade and 45% of AI/AN students in eighth grade compared to 43% and 42% for Native written languages in these grades (see Table 15).

In both grades, AI/AN students in high density public schools were significantly more likely to receive instruction about Native oral and written languages than AI/AN students in low density public schools, and students in BIE schools received significantly more instruction than public school students (98% in grade 4 and 96% in grade 8 for oral language, and 77% in grade 4 and 87% in grade 8 for written language). These distributions of fourth- and eighth-grade students receiving instruction in oral and written AI/AN languages were similar in the 2009 NIES, the most recent survey where this question was reported (Mead, et al., Figure 3-4, p. 44).

Table 14

AI/AN Language Immersion Schools by School Type/Density

Q: Is your school and AI/AN language immersion school?	All AI/AN Students	School Type/Density		
		Low Density Public Schools	High Density Public Schools	BIE Schools
Grade 4				
Yes	2%	#%	3%	23% ^{a,b}
No	98%	100%	97%	77% ^{a,b}
Grade 8				
Yes	6%	4%	7%	25% ^b
No	94%	96%	93%	75% ^b

Note: Table recreated from Rampey, et al., Table 30, p. 44.

AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. BIE = Bureau of Indian Education. School density indicates the proportion of AI/AN students enrolled. Low density public schools have less than 25% AI/AN students; high density public schools have 25% or more. All AI/AN students includes all AI/AN students sampled throughout the nation in public, private, BIE, and Department of Defense schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Rounds to zero.

^a Significantly different ($p < .05$) from low density public schools. Comparisons are among the school type/density categories.

^b Significantly different ($p < .05$) from high density public schools. Comparisons are among the school type/density categories.

Table 15

Instruction of AI/AN Cultures by School Type/Density

Q: Do Students in your school receive instruction about AI/AN cultures in any of the following areas?	All AI/AN Students	School Type/Density		
		Low Density Public Schools	High Density Public Schools	BIE Schools
Grade 4: Oral Language				
Yes	49%	27%	61% ^a	98% ^{a,b}
No	51%	73%	39% ^a	2% ^{a,b}
Grade 8: Oral Language				
Yes	45%	24%	72% ^a	96% ^{a,b}
No	55%	76%	28% ^a	4% ^{a,b}
Grade 4: Written Language				
Yes	43%	26%	48% ^a	77% ^{a,b}
No	57%	74%	52% ^a	23% ^{a,b}
Grade 8: Written Language				
Yes	42%	24%	65% ^a	87% ^{a,b}
No	58%	76%	35% ^a	13% ^{a,b}

Note: Table recreated from Rampey, et al., Table 30, p. 44.

AI/AN = American Indian/Alaska Native. BIE = Bureau of Indian Education. School density indicates the proportion of AI/AN students enrolled. Low density public schools have less than 25% AI/AN students; high density public schools have 25% or more. All AI/AN students includes all AI/AN students sampled throughout the nation in public, private, BIE, and Department of Defense schools. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

^a Significantly different ($p < .05$) from low density public schools. Comparisons are among the school type/density categories.

^b Significantly different ($p < .05$) from high density public schools. Comparisons are among the school type/density categories.

Conclusion

Data available from the various surveys conducted by the **National Center for Education Statistics** described in this paper help to provide a partial picture of the state of world language education in U.S. K-12 schools.

The School Pulse Panel's World and Dual Language Programs survey, collected in January 2024 and released in March 2024, provides quick turnaround data on the percentage of K-12 public schools that offer world language classes and dual language programs, which can be analyzed by school level, size, region, locale, racial/ethnic student enrollment, and neighborhood poverty level, as well as by language and program type. The survey results are experimental data, and it is unknown if the world languages survey topic will be repeated in future data collections.

The National Teacher and Principal Survey provides data on both K-12 public and private schools and includes a few questions related to world language instruction. The survey's core module, repeated every cycle, asks whether schools offer a dual language or foreign language immersion program, and questions about the difficulty of filling teacher vacancies and third-grade instructional time by field, including world languages, appear only in every other cycle of data collection. While results can be analyzed by school type, level, size, locale, and free or reduced-price lunches, they are not reported by language.

The High School Transcript Study provides data on graduates of K-12 public and private high schools that were sampled for the NAEP assessments. It reports on the average number of credits and GPAs earned by graduates in world language and literature, as well as the percentage of graduates who have met the requirements of various curriculum levels, including midlevel and rigorous which include world language course requirements. Results can be analyzed by gender and race/ethnicity and compared across academic course subjects and four cycles of data collection, but they are not reported by language.

Finally, the **National Indian Education Study** surveys fourth- and eighth-grade American Indian and Alaska Native students participating in the NAEP assessments to examine to what extent AI/AN students are exposed to Native

language and culture at school. It includes student reports of the frequency of classes in school taught in an AI/AN language and school administrator reports of the percentages of students who attend AI/AN language immersion schools and who receive instruction about Native oral and written language. Results can be analyzed by grade level and school type/density.

Currently, there are no questions about world language instruction included in the survey questionnaires given each year to students, teachers, and schools administrators who participate in the NAEP assessment. However, the 2026 Mathematics Pilot and Reading Pilot surveys for schools—available from <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/experience/archive.aspx>—contain a question (14) asking whether languages other than English are available to all students, some students, or not available to students during the school year.

Despite the richness and robust data collection for these various sources, comprehensive study of world language enrollments in U.S. K-12 schools is still sorely needed. To ensure that every student has access to high quality language education and a true pathway to multilingualism, we need systematic and regular collection of data on the number and types of language programs in public and private schools at all levels, by language, and the number of students enrolled in these programs, with clear definitions of program types and continued attention to language immersion programs and study of AI/AN languages. It would also be helpful to ask for specific information about instructional time, as it varies a great deal from one context to another. Moreover, collecting information about the specific language learning progressions of high school graduates to examine their years and levels of language study – including sequences begun in middle or elementary school – would provide critical comparison data.

Recommendations

ACTFL offers four recommendations for improved data collection on K-12 world language learning:

1. **Maintain an annual topic on world language in the School Pulse Panel;**
2. **Update the National Teacher and Principal Survey to provide a clearer definition of dual language/foreign immersion program to make it comparable to the School Pulse Panel and thus obtain instructional time data;**
3. **Obtain and report more detailed information by language and level for credits in the High School Transcript Study; and**
4. **Repeat the three National Indian Education Survey questions related to language instruction from 2019 in every study.**

As a recent Modern Language Association (MLA) report (Lusin et al, 2023) has shown, **enrollments in higher education language courses are declining.** Coupled with the information assembled in this report, it is clear that policymakers, educators and advocates of world language learning should work together to find ways to collect more data on world language teaching and learning in U.S. K-12 schools. **Language learning contributes to global security, business, diplomacy, workforce development and many other sectors; robust data on current trends in language teaching and learning are needed to support such global efforts.**

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