

# Status of Foreign Language Programs in the NECTFL States



*Marcia Harmon Rosenbusch, Iowa State University;  
Janis Jensen, New Jersey State Department of Education*

## Introduction

The focus of this article is an examination of the results of a survey that was developed, disseminated, and analyzed by the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NECTFL) and the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at Iowa State University. The impetus for the survey was a discussion that took place in Spring 2003 at the "Day with the States" pre-conference meeting for representatives of member states of the Northeast Conference. After sharing stories of cut-backs in foreign language programs in their states, participants agreed on the need for data to verify their observations and clarify for decision makers the impact of recent federal, state, and district policies on kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) foreign language programs.

The assumption of the participants' discussion was that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), which President George W. Bush signed into law in January 2002, was an important factor in the observed program cuts. Therefore, as background to the survey, in this article the authors describe key aspects of the NCLB Act, examine important controversies that surround NCLB, review the reactions of educators and the public to the legislation, and clarify the conclusions and recommendations of reports that have examined the impact of NCLB on the arts and foreign language education. The authors then describe the survey instrument and research methods, report the survey results, and provide recommendations to the field.

## No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

### What is the NCLB Act?

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. According to the Center on Education Policy (2003), the two major purposes of the law are to: "raise student achievement across the board and to

eliminate the achievement gap between students from different backgrounds" (p. iii). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (n.d.) identifies key measures in the legislation that are designed to accomplish these purposes: testing, accountability, teacher quality, reading, flexibility, and funding.

### Testing

During the 2003-2004 school year NCLB required all states to develop and begin administering annual proficiency tests in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3-5, 6-8, and 10-12. By 2008, states must begin to similarly implement assessments in science (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2003). These test data will be used to measure the performance of each school, which will be reported annually (see Accountability). Additionally, students will be selected from every state to participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in mathematics and reading to verify the results of testing at the state level.

### Accountability

States are required to establish a definition of student proficiency in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science through a variety of prescribed indicators and to bring students in all demographic sub-groups (race, ethnicity, poverty, disability, and limited English proficiency) up to the defined level of proficiency. Schools that fail to meet state-defined adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years are identified as needing improvement. Schools that have not made AYP after year four are subject to reconstitution, which may include contracting private management, converting to a charter school, or restructuring staff (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], n.d.).

### Teacher Quality

By the end of the 2005-06 school year, states must ensure that every public ele-

mentary and secondary school teacher who teaches a core academic subject is highly qualified to teach in his/her subject content area. NCLB defines "highly qualified" as holding full state certification (which may be attained through alternate routes) and able to demonstrate subject matter mastery through a degree in the subject matter or a subject matter test (Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs, 2004).

### Reading

Every state must implement a reading program for grade K-3 students that is based on methods "backed by scientific research" (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, n.d.). According to Laitsch (2003), the U.S. Department of Education has aligned its efforts in reading around the report of the National Reading Panel (2000), which is based on a meta-analysis of research studies and which "heavily emphasized using phonics" (p. 2).

### Flexibility

Within defined guidelines, the NCLB legislation allows greater flexibility to states and local school districts in the use of "federal non-Title I funding" for programs and services of their choice. Their decisions on the use of these funds do not require the prior approval of the U.S. Department of Education (House Education & the Workforce Committee, 2003, p. 5).

### Funding

Overall funding for the Department of Education increased over the past three years (2001-2003) by \$13.2 billion, with increases designated for NCLB-related programs such as Title I Aid to Disadvantaged Students and Reading First Grants (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2003).

### Why is NCLB Controversial?

The controversy surrounding NCLB is focused primarily on the increased feder-

**Marcia Harmon Rosenbusch** (Ph.D., Iowa State University) is an Adjunct Associate Professor with a joint appointment in the Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Foreign Languages and Literatures at Iowa State University (ISU). She is the Director of the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC), funded by Title VI of the U.S. Department of Education, which focuses its work on the improvement of student learning of foreign languages in the nation. Dr. Rosenbusch established the elementary school foreign language teacher preparation program at ISU and focuses her research on early foreign language education.

**Janis Jensen** (M.Ed., Seton Hall University) is World Languages Coordinator for the New Jersey Department of Education where she is responsible for all aspects of the implementation of K-12 world languages standards. She presently serves as president of the National Network for Early Language Learning and immediate past president of the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages. She is co-author of the Foreign Languages Chapter of the 2005 ASCD Curriculum Handbook. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) is an international education organization with members worldwide.

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### **Impact at State and Local Levels**

Because the U.S. Department of Education must approve each state's accountability plan, standards, and assessments, the role of the federal government in education has increased dramatically through NCLB. An example of this impact is found in the area of reading. Reading materials purchased with federal dollars by the state or local school districts must be developed according to findings from “scientifically based research,” a term that is defined in the legislation.

The U.S. Department of Education aligned its expectations for reading instruction with the conclusions drawn by the National Reading Panel in its 2000 report. Reading professionals criticize the report's focus on the use of phonics in the teaching of reading, an instructional strategy they identify as “too narrowly and ideologically focused” (Laitsch, 2003). Additionally, Garan (2001) analyzed the procedures used in the meta-analysis of research studies on reading on which the report's conclusions are based and finds them “flawed” (p. 8). The requirement of scientifically based research “gives the U.S. Department of Education, rather than the states, significant power in deciding what products and programs and which teaching and professional development techniques are based in scientific research” (Laitsch, 2003, p. 3).

Requiring teachers to be highly qualified could be a very positive aspect of the NCLB act, however, some educators are concerned that if the focus is a test of subject matter knowledge, the results could be the opposite. Berry, Hoke, & Hirsch (2004) report that research on teacher quality “sends a strong message

to policy makers and practitioners that teachers need to know their subject matter and how to teach it” (p. 686). They contend that the current leadership in the U.S. Department of Education has chosen to emphasize only subject-matter content knowledge and does not show evidence of valuing pedagogical knowledge. Indeed, the U.S. Secretary of Education (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2002) encouraged alternate routes to certification stating that, “states will need to streamline their certification system to focus on the few things that really matter: verbal ability, content knowledge, and, as a safety precaution, a background check of new teachers” (p. 40).

The Center on Education Policy (2003) identifies eight practical concerns and five technical issues related to the assessment and accountability requirements of NCLB that pose important challenges. The report concludes that the issue that is most contentious for states is that of meeting AYP. “It could be difficult for states to develop plans for measuring AYP that will accurately target the schools that have not performed well without also incorrectly targeting schools due to measurement anomalies” (p. 45).

A PACE (Policy Analysis for California Education) Policy Brief (Novak & Fuller, 2003) provides an example of such an anomaly: “Schools serving middle-class children, for example, are 28 % more likely to be labeled ‘needs improvement’ by the feds when serving five student subgroups than schools serving one group” (p. 1). Complicating the issue is the fact that students are counted in more than one subgroup, for example, Latino children from low-income homes. Additionally, if the district tests just 94 % (instead of the mandated 95 %) of one subgroup, such as students with learning disabilities, “the school or entire district is stigmatized, labeled failing by the federal government” (p. 2).

According to the Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives (n.d.), the amount of funding allocated for NCLB has increased from \$17.4 billion in Fiscal Year 2001 (FY01) to \$24.3 billion in FY04. Although this represents an important funding increase for education, it does not provide sufficient funds for schools to carry out all required changes. In 2003, the Center on

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Education Policy reported that the federal government is providing only about 7% of the total funding for public elementary and secondary schools (p. iv). This situation is complicated by the fiscal crisis most states are facing. Funding problems, therefore, threaten the successful implementation of NCLB (p. iii).

### **Reaction of Educators and the Public**

Results of several surveys of educators and the public indicate that both groups have expressed reservations about the impact of NCLB in terms of local control, funding, and accountability through state mandated standardized tests. Results of these surveys are reported here.

In a 2003 report from Public Agenda for the Wallace Foundation (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet, 2003), school superintendents (60%) and principals (53%) view as a “major concern” the intrusion by the federal government through NCLB into areas traditionally left to local government. Another issue is that NCLB relies too much on standardized testing; this issue was of greater concern to principals (73%) than superintendents (64%). Both superintendents (89%) and principals (88%) view NCLB as an “unfunded mandate” since the amount of funding allocated has been less than originally promised.

Results from a 2001 survey of public school teachers in grades 2-12 in 47 states conducted by the National Board on Educational Testing and Policy (Pedulla, 2003), indicate that teachers believe that state-mandated tests have a narrowing effect on what they teach. In states with high stakes testing for students, 43% of the teachers reported that they have changed the amount of time spent on various activities in order to prepare students for the state-mandated testing program. In fact, roughly 75% of all teachers agreed that state-mandated testing led them to teach in ways that contradicted their own idea of good educational practice. Additionally, more than 70% of all teachers did not see great benefit in the state testing program.

A Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitude toward public schools (Rose & Gallup, 2003) reports "while the public sees improved student achievement as an important goal, it rejects the strategies used in NCLB" (p. 1). Survey results indicate that 73% of the respondents believe that reform in education should come through the existing public schools. When asked whether the federal government, the state government, or local school board should have the greatest influence in deciding what is taught in the public schools, 83% of respondents reported that decisions should be either made by the local school board (61%) or at the state level (22%); only 15% felt decisions should be made by the federal government. While 84% believe that the job a school is doing should be measured on the basis of improvement shown by students, 66% believe a single test cannot provide a fair picture of whether a school is in need of improvement. Testing only "English and math" with statewide tests to determine whether a school needs improvement was acceptable to 15% of the respondents, but 83% believe tests should be based on other subjects also (p. 10).

### **What is the Impact of NCLB on Foreign Language Education?**

In the NCLB act, the definition of core academic subjects includes foreign languages: "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, n.d.).

As a core academic subject, therefore, federal funds allocated for NCLB may be used for foreign language education. However, the fact that NCLB accountability provisions mandate state testing in the core subjects of reading/language arts, mathematics, and science but not foreign languages may mean that state and local decision makers are less inclined to support the study of foreign languages. Two national reports discussed in the following section examine the impact of NCLB on arts and foreign language education and provide recommendations for policy makers. Additionally, a document developed by North Carolina seeks to ensure that foreign languages and the arts are included as an integral part of the curriculum at the local level.

### **Council for Basic Education Report**

In March 2004, the Council for Basic Education (von Zastrow) released results of a survey of elementary and secondary school principals on how NCLB was affecting the teaching of liberal arts in U.S. public schools. The survey explored

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### ***"A decreased commitment was reported for the arts, foreign languages, and elementary social studies."***

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K-12 students' access to a curriculum in the liberal arts in the schools of almost 1,000 principals in the states of Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, and New York.

Survey results indicate that approximately three-quarters of all principals reported increases in instructional time for reading, writing, and mathematics—subject content areas, except for writing—for which their schools are held accountable by NCLB. Similar increases were also found in professional development for these three areas. A decreased commitment was reported for the arts, foreign languages, and elementary social studies.

For foreign languages, both increases (11%) and decreases (9%) were reported in low-minority schools, but for high-minority schools, 23% of the principals reported decreases in foreign language instruction (p. 17). Most of these principals reported that instructional time had decreased greatly and only 9% reported increases in foreign language instruction. In high minority schools, 29% of principals expected further decreases in the future and half of these expected the decreases to be large. In contrast, in low-minority schools, only 14% predicted declines in the future.

The report notes that, "The possibility that minorities are more likely to experience a narrowing of the curriculum raises important questions of educational equity" (p. 9). Since one of the goals of NCLB is to decrease achievement gaps in reading/ language arts, mathematics, and science among minorities, a new inequity may replace that gap if instruction in foreign languages and the arts is decreased due to NCLB.

The anniversary of Brown vs. Board of Education brings into focus the fact that the experience of Blacks and Whites in our nation's schools continues to be unequal (Cose, 2004). The finding of the Council for Basic Education that high minority schools are more likely to experience negative rather than positive effects in foreign language instruction as a result of NCLB (von Zastrow, 2004) is especially ironic when more African-American respondents (30%) and Hispanics (42%), in contrast to whites (17%), believe that NCLB will result in a "big improvement" in the quality of education in this country (Cose, 2004, p. 51).

To ensure access for all students to a "rich liberal arts curriculum," the report of the Council for Basic Education (von Zastrow, 2004) includes recommendations to educators and policy makers:

1. Integrate the liberal arts into school improvement strategies.
2. Better prepare teachers to integrate the liberal arts into reading instruction.
3. Incorporate all liberal arts courses into standards and accountability systems.
4. Maintain high goals for excellence in the liberal arts and track progress towards those goals (p. 25).

### **National Association of State Boards of Education Report**

The National Association of State Boards of Education formed a study group in 2003 in response to NCLB to examine the current status of the arts and foreign languages in the school curriculum. In the report that resulted, it is noted that parents and the public want children to have a well-rounded "comprehensive" education that includes "history, civics, geography, foreign languages, and the arts, in addition to other core subjects" (p. 4). The study group drew two important conclusions from their work. The first conclusion is that there is a body of research that identifies the benefits of including the arts and foreign languages in the curriculum. Second, these subject areas have been marginalized and are "increasingly at risk of being lost as part of the core curriculum" (p. 5).

To address these two conclusions, ten recommendations for state policy makers were formulated:

1. Adopt high-quality licensure requirement for staff in the arts and foreign languages that are aligned with student standards in these subject areas.
2. Ensure adequate time for high-quality professional development for staff in the arts and foreign languages.
3. Ensure adequate staff expertise at the state education agency to work in the areas of the arts and foreign languages.
4. Incorporate both the arts and foreign languages into core graduation requirements, while simultaneously increasing the number of credits for graduation.
5. Encourage higher education institutions to increase standards for admission and include arts and foreign language courses when calculating high school grade point averages.
6. Incorporate arts and foreign language learning in the early years into stan-

dards, curriculum frameworks, and course requirements. Also, encourage local school districts to incorporate the arts and foreign languages into instruction in the early years, whenever possible.

7. Advocate continued development of curriculum materials for the arts and foreign languages from the textbook publishing industry.
8. Incorporate all core subject areas, including the arts and foreign languages, into the improvement strategies promoted by the No Child Left Behind Act.
9. Urge the National Assessment Governing Board to increase the frequency in the administration of NAEP assessments for both the arts and foreign languages.
10. Urge Congress and legislatures to make a greater commitment to the arts and foreign languages (p. 17-25).

### The Balanced Curriculum

In 2003, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction developed a document to guide curriculum design and implementation at the elementary level and to assure that schools “teach all areas of the curriculum, not just those that are assessed” (p. 1). The focus of this curriculum is on integrating the content and skills of the varied disciplines. “For example, one of the most effective strategies for teaching the entire curriculum is to teach English language arts and mathematics in conjunction with science, social studies, healthful living, foreign languages and the arts” (p. 1).

In addressing the teaching of foreign languages at the elementary school level, the document defines the best way to deliver foreign language instruction at this level of instruction, addresses how research supports the teaching of foreign languages, and provides additional reasons for offering the study of foreign languages. Additionally, the document also includes various sample schedules and scenarios of how to implement a balanced curriculum in the existing school day for the varied disciplines, with specific examples for foreign languages.

### Methods

#### Instrument

The Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NECTFL) and the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center at Iowa State University (NFLRC) collaborated in Spring 2003 on the design of a survey instrument to gather

information about foreign language program cut backs and/or elimination in Northeast Conference states.<sup>1</sup> The information sought relates to actions taken in schools/school districts in the 2002-2003 academic year that would impact programs in the next academic year, 2003-2004. Since NECTFL intended to distribute the survey primarily by electronic mail, and to receive survey responses similarly, the survey was kept short, for a total of eight items (Appendix A).

The survey begins with a paragraph describing the rationale for the survey: “to inform policy makers at the state and national level of the changes in status of foreign language programs in order to positively impact future policy decision in the area of second language education” (Appendix A). The first three survey questions collect demographic information on the respondent: name of school district (question 1), state (question 2), and relationship to school district (teacher, administrator, parent, other) (question 3). Respondents who selected “other” were asked to clarify their response.

Questions 4 through 6 ask the respondent to identify the grade level/s for the upcoming year in which their school/school district’s foreign language program had been eliminated entirely (question 4) or scaled back in some way (question 5), and to identify at each grade level whether foreign language teaching positions had been eliminated (question 6). Question 7 asks the respondent to identify specific languages that had been eliminated for the upcoming year. The final question (question 8) is open-ended and asks for the respondent’s opinion on why these actions were taken, “What do you believe was the impetus for the elimination or scaling back of your district’s foreign language program?” (Appendix A).

#### Survey Distribution

In May 2003 the NECTFL Executive Director, Rebecca Kline, distributed the survey to presidents of state language associations in Northeast Conference states as an attachment to a letter she sent by electronic mail (Appendix B). In this one-page letter, she described the purpose of the survey as the need for statistical data to accompany anecdotal information on the elimination and scaling back of foreign language programs in the region. Additionally, she described how the idea for the survey had come about. In the letter, she requested that association presidents forward the survey as soon as possible to all members of their organization so that responses could be received by email or fax in the NECTFL office by June 30, 2003.

Survey responses were tabulated by NECTFL staff and sent electronically to the NFLRC for analysis. NFLRC staff analyzed the data and prepared a written report of the survey results, which was sent to the executive director of NECTFL in Spring 2004.

### Data Analysis

The total number of survey responses received was 184. In order to obtain an accurate count of programs, positions, and languages cut back or eliminated, multiple responses from a school/school district were eliminated. To this end, the following steps were taken, resulting in 165 valid responses:

(1) Respondents who indicated that they played more than one role in the school/school district were defined as having the role of highest rank: administrator > teacher > parent > other. For example, some who indicated they were teachers also clarified in “other” that they were also the foreign language department chair, coordinator, or supervisor; therefore, these individuals were categorized in the role of “administrator.” The category “other” included both a “former student” and a “taxpayer” who also indicated they were teachers, thus, these individuals were categorized as “teachers.”

(2) When multiple responses were received from the same school/school district and the data reported were different, the response of the respondent of higher rank was selected for analysis on the assumption that this person would have a more in-depth understanding of the program. When the respondents were of the same rank and the information was different, the most complete response was used if it also included the information that was in the less complete response. When the data from respondents of the same rank were different but complementary, one response was used for analysis and the complementary information from the other response was added to it. An example of this situation is when responses were received from two teachers, one of whom reported on the high school and middle school levels and the other on the elementary school level.

Frequencies were calculated on the 165 valid responses for both the demographic questions and the survey items. Ninety-three percent of the respondents provided written comments to question 8 (Appendix A), which asked them to report their beliefs about the impetus for the elimination or scaling back of the foreign language program. The first author analyzed the comments of the 154 survey respondents who answered this open-ended item in five ways:

***“Over one-fifth of the 165 survey respondents (22%) reported that their school/school district had eliminated one or more grade level/s in the foreign language program...”***

- (1) the responses were read and categorized to identify potential themes;
- (2) using a copy of the full document of responses, a word processing program was used to highlight for each theme all terms related to that theme; responses were then tabulated by theme;
- (3) using a table format with respondents' comments in one column and a blank column for each theme, the responses were identified by theme by marking an "X" in the appropriate column;
- (4) to verify the identification of themes, an individual not familiar with the study was given written identifiers for each theme and asked to categorize the themes in a separate table;
- (5) the two tables were compared and the differences found were negotiated between the two raters, resulting in a refinement of the descriptors of the themes and agreement on all themes identified. The number of occurrences of each theme was tabulated and the percentage of occurrences of the theme in the comments was calculated.

## Results

### Subjects

Valid responses were received from 10 of the 14 states in the NECTFL region (Table 1).<sup>2</sup> The majority of the responses were received from teachers (77%), followed by administrators, a category which included foreign language department chairs, coordinators, and supervisors (21%) (Table 1). An analysis of responses by state indicates that 81% of the 165 responses came from three states: New Jersey had the highest number of respondents (76), followed by Pennsylvania (31), and Maine (26) (Table 2).

### Grade Levels Eliminated and Scaled Back

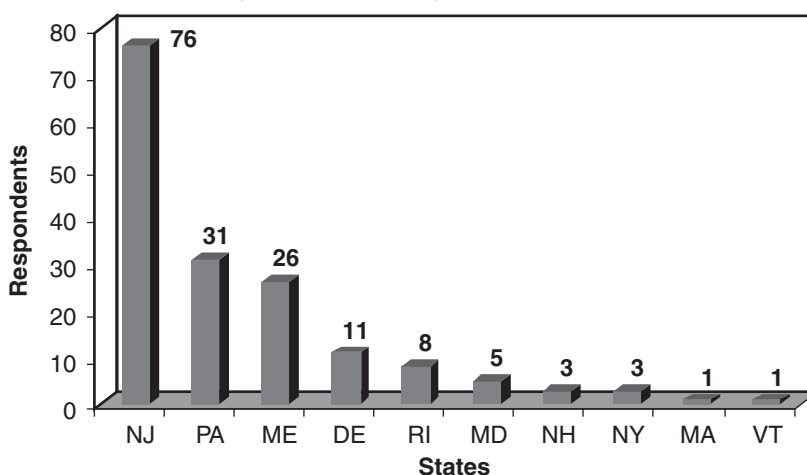
Over one-fifth of the 165 survey respondents (22%) reported that their school/school district had eliminated one or more grade level/s in the foreign language program, resulting in 118 grade level cuts for the 2003-2004 academic

**Table 1. Survey Respondents' State and Rank.\***

State	Administrators	Teachers	Parents/Other	Missing Data
DE	0	11	0	0
MA	1	0	0	0
MD	4	0	0	1
ME	1	24	0	1
NH	0	3	0	0
NJ	21	55	0	0
NY	2	1	0	0
PA	3	27	1	0
RI	2	5	1	0
VT	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>

\*The category "Administrators" includes principals and foreign language department chairs, coordinators, and supervisors.

**Table 2. Number of Survey Respondents by State.**



**Table 3. Grade Levels Eliminated.**

Grade Level	Number Eliminated	Grade Level	Number Eliminated
K	- 14	7	- 11
1	- 17	8	- 10
2	- 17	9	- 5
3	- 11	10	- 5
4	- 12	11	- 4
5	- 8	12	- 3
6	- 1	<b>Total</b>	<b>- 118</b>

year (Table 3). The foreign language program at every grade level, kindergarten through grade 12, was impacted by these cuts. The greatest number of cuts was reported in the lower grades (kindergarten through grade 4) and middle school (grades 7 and 8). Grades 1 and 2 had the highest number of cuts and grade 6 the lowest, followed by grade 12.

Almost two-fifths of the 165 survey respondents (39%) reported that one or more grade levels had been scaled back in their school/school district for the 2003-2004 academic year, almost double the number who had reported grade levels eliminated.

208 grade levels had been scaled back (Table 4). The greatest number of grade levels scaled back occurred in the upper elementary and middle school grades (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8). The lowest number of grade levels scaled back was found at the lowest grades (kindergarten and grades 1

***“Almost a quarter of the 165 survey respondents (24%) reported that foreign language teaching positions had been eliminated...”***

**Table 4. Grade Levels Scaled Back.**

Grade Level	Number Eliminated	Grade Level	Number Eliminated
K	- 8	7	- 19
1	- 8	8	- 20
2	- 13	9	- 15
3	- 19	10	- 15
4	- 20	11	- 16
5	- 22	12	- 15
6	- 18	<b>Total</b>	<b>- 208</b>

**Table 5. Number of FTE Teaching Positions Eliminated.\***

Grade Level	FTE Eliminated	Grade Level	FTE Eliminated
K	- 5.5	7	- 5.5
1	- 7	8	- 9
2	- 7.5	9	- 12
3	- 8.5	10	- 14
4	- 9	11	- 10
5	- 8	12	- 9.5
6	- 4.5	<b>Total</b>	<b>- 110</b>

\*FTE = Full Time Equivalent

**Table 6. Languages Eliminated.**

Language	Number Eliminated	Language	Number Eliminated
French	- 15	Chinese	- 1
Spanish	- 12	Hebrew	- 1
German	- 7	Russian	- 1
Italian	- 7	ESL	- 1
Latin	- 5	Sign Language	- 1
Japanese	- 3		

and 2) and the highest grades (9, 10, 11, and 12). The grade level most frequently scaled back was grade 5, followed by grades 4 and 8.

**Teaching Positions Eliminated**

Almost a quarter of the 165 survey respondents (24%) reported that foreign language teaching positions had been eliminated for the 2003-2004 academic year in their school/school district. A total of 110 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) teaching positions were eliminated (Table 5). These cuts in teaching positions occurred at every grade level but were most frequently found at the upper middle school and high school levels (grades 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) followed by the upper elementary grades (3, 4, and 5). The greatest number of teaching positions cut was at grade 10 (14 FTE), followed by grade 9 (12 FTE); the least number cut was found at grade 6 (4.5 FTE).

**Languages Eliminated**

Over one-fifth of the 165 survey respondents (22%) reported that in their

school/school districts one or more languages had been eliminated for the 2003-2004 academic year. Twenty respondents reported one language eliminated, 14 reported two languages eliminated, and 2 reported three languages eliminated for a total of 11 different languages eliminated (Table 6). The language that respondents reported most often eliminated was French (15), followed by Spanish (12). Foreign languages that were eliminated in only one program included Chinese, Hebrew, and Russian. Additionally, both English as a Second Language (ESL) and American Sign Language (ASL) were eliminated in one program.

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**Beliefs about Impetus for Changes**

Of the 165 respondents, 154 (93%) provided written comments to the question, “What do you believe was the impetus for the elimination or scaling back of your district’s foreign language program?” Responses ranged in length from one word to a paragraph of 378 words.

Seven themes were identified in the written comments: insufficient funds, administrator support, state testing, student disinterest, unqualified teachers, community/parent support, and Spanish favored (over other languages) (Table 7). The theme most frequently identified in all written comments was that of insufficient funds (43%), followed by administrator support (18%) and state testing (14%).

**Insufficient Funds**

Of the 154 respondents who provided written comments, 43% reported insufficient funding as the impetus for the elimination or scaling back of their school/school district’s foreign language program (Table 7). In their comments they identified as problematic a variety of funding problems at the city, county, and state levels:

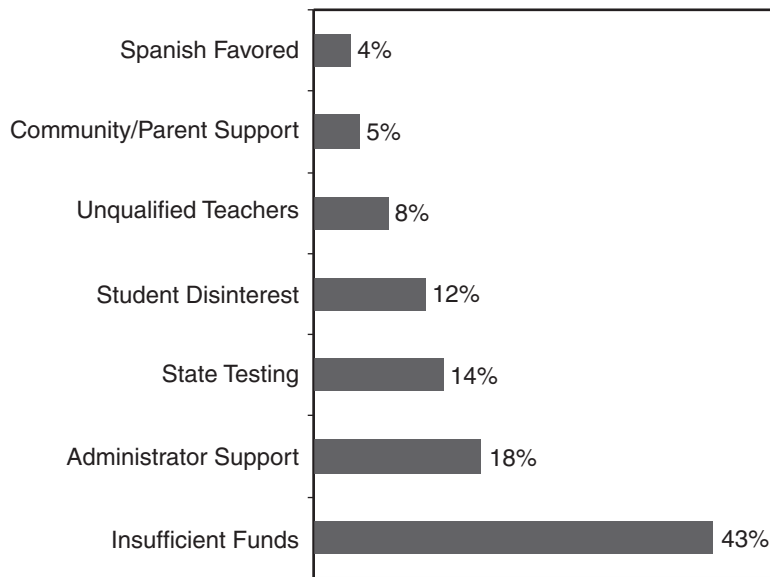
- *Our city council asked the schools to cut an enormous amount of money so that taxes would not be raised. Also, the school department was required to pay half the cost of a new elementary school, which the city council was expected to pay. (Maine)*
- *Inadequate funding at the state and county levels. (Delaware)*

Some respondents noted that the focus on preparing students to pass state tests in mathematics and reading as required by NCLB resulted in increased funding for these content areas to the detriment of others, including foreign languages.

- *Budget, No Child Left Behind Remedial Programs Take Priority. (Pennsylvania)*
- *The district wants to see improved scores on the math and reading assessments of this test [PSSA] and that is where they put their money, time and support. (Pennsylvania)*

Problems with funding resulted in cutbacks to programs at varied grade levels, which, in turn, led to teaching positions being cut back or eliminated. In some cases, the teacher was asked to teach more students by shortening the length of the classes. Funding problems also meant that program expansions were put on hold or eliminated. One respondent reported that because of funding cuts the program was changed from a foreign language teacher in the classroom to a videotape program.

**Table 7. Beliefs about Why Program Was Eliminated or Scaled Back.**



- *My district scaled the program back from 2 days to 1 day per week. Because I am [in] a small district, this amounted to cutting me back by half a day, or \$5,000. (New Jersey)*

- *The district plan was to move our FLES program from 3rd grade down to 2nd grade, starting with the 2003- 2004 school year. Due to budget constraints, the program will remain at the 3rd grade. (Maine)*

- *Our district has undergone several changes in the past three years. Scaling back has occurred because the population in our middle schools has grown we have added a middle school but no teachers have been added at this level. (Rhode Island)*

- *Because the amount of state funds that our school district will receive in the upcoming year is being cut back, it was necessary to eliminate several professional and non-professional positions. Eliminating one World Language teacher and switching the 3rd and 4th grades over to a videotape program was one of the cost cutting decisions that was made. (New Jersey)*

Several respondents reported that budget problems affected the number of languages offered in the program.

- *Budget cutbacks caused the elimination of distance learning studios in our high schools. They were too expensive and thus goes the Latin, ASL [American Sign Language] and Japanese programs. (New York)*

- *Our 3 sending districts in [county] and [county] had just implemented elementary programs as feeders to our HS.*

*Already French and German have been eliminated. And only Spanish is being taught in all 3 of our sending districts. This is being done to save money. (New Jersey)*

#### **Administrator Support**

A lack of support for foreign language education on the part of school administrators was identified as a factor affecting program viability by 18% of the 154 survey respondents who provided written comments (Table 7). Of those who identified administrator support as problematic, 37% reported that they believe this lack of support is related to the focus on testing core academic subjects as mandated by NCLB, 37% cited budget, and 26% noted the administrator's lack of appreciation for foreign languages.

- *At the middle school level, our administrator wanted to raise MEA [Maine Educational Assessment] scores in math, science, and social studies so he took time away from us and gave it to those programs. We lost 1/3 of our teaching time, but have not lost our jobs. (Maine)*

- *The principals of the schools of which I am responsible as K-12 Director of Foreign Languages and Cultures, were given a figure to cut from each school (this as "site-based management"). Alas, the first to go were the non-tested, non-MCAS [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System] "extras" such as foreign language. (Massachusetts)*

- *99% of administrators in my district are monolingual, and they don't see it as a priority. It almost seems that sports take precedence. (New Jersey)*

- *I don't believe my superintendent is supportive of early language learning. The board tells me that cutbacks were caused by a special needs child's requirements, he just recently moved into our district. I believe the impetus for scaling back was partly money but mostly ignorance to the benefits of early language learning! (New Jersey)*

#### **State Testing**

Resources needed to carry out state testing of student skills in mathematics and reading as a result of NCLB was identified as the source of foreign language program cut backs and elimination by 14% of the 154 respondents who provided written comments (Table 7). Some respondents theorized that if accountability and testing also had been mandated for foreign languages, funding for foreign language programs would have been made available.

- *In the elementary grades, foreign language instruction will be scaled back to make more time to address No Child Left Behind mandates. Our schools are implementing new math/reading programs to improve assessment scores. (New Jersey)*

- *In one of our middle schools, FL programs were apparently eliminated to allow the school to hire a teacher to work with students to increase scores on our state testing program (DSTP [Delaware Student Testing Program]) in the areas of reading, mathematics, and writing. These scores are tied to [grade level] promotion and type of graduation diploma. (Delaware)*

- *We have made proposals to provide first year study in our middle school and all efforts have been thwarted. I believe this is due to the emphasis being placed on PA standardized testing in math/ English at the expense of expanding other curriculum. If we would be required to test for competency in the world language as a requirement for graduation, then we would certainly see the focus change. (Pennsylvania)*

- *In Pennsylvania and in our district, everything that "matters" seems to revolve around the PSSA [Pennsylvania System of School Assessment] tests. If you teach a subject that is not believed to directly affect these tests, you are not looked at as being important, or as one of our administrators called us, you are not a "real teacher." The district wants to see improved scores on the math and reading assessments of this test and that is where they put their money, time and support. (Pennsylvania)*

### **Student Disinterest**

Respondents frequently related student disinterest in foreign language study to low enrollment in foreign language classes. Lack of student interest in foreign language study was identified as a source of program and position cut backs and elimination by 12% of the 154 respondents who provided written comments.

- *We are a small district and scheduling becomes difficult especially with juniors and seniors. We are an elective so when students must choose between math, science or foreign language, we usually suffer the loss.* (Pennsylvania)
- *French was eliminated largely due to low enrollment. I, however, believe that the district's difficult financial situation also influenced the elimination of the French program.* (New York)

### **Lack of Qualified Teachers**

A lack of qualified foreign language teachers was identified as an important factor in cutting back or eliminating teaching positions in the foreign language program by 8% of the 154 respondents who provided written comments.

- *The district could not find a qualified teacher to fill the position.* (Maine)
- *Additionally, our district is having difficulty finding qualified and certified teachers. Posts may not be filled if qualified teachers cannot be found.* (Delaware)
- *Our program has not yet been scaled back in [school district]. However, if it were to be scaled back at any point it would be for the lack of qualified world language teachers... If we wish our profession to grow we must ensure the availability of top quality teachers.* (New Jersey)

### **Community/Parent Interest**

A lack of community and/or parent interest in foreign language education was identified as contributing to cuts in the foreign language program by 5% of the 154 respondents who responded to the open-ended question.

- *Our district went on strike while I was teaching and during that time there was not a great deal of support from our community. Some parents feel it is unnecessary as they urge their children toward jobs rather than furthering their education after high school... The implementation of foreign language courses is an expense (as would be any expansion of courses) that our community does not feel is warranted. Because many of the citizens in our community may not speak another language, they do not recognize its value.* (New Jersey)

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***“The number of responses received, while not sufficient to be statistically representative of the number of teachers in the NECTFL region nor membership of the state organizations, can serve to inform the situation of current foreign language programs in the Northeast Conference states.”***

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### **Spanish Favored**

The favoring of Spanish by administrators or parents was identified by 4% of the 154 respondents as a factor in the elimination or reduction in the teaching of other languages.

- *Stress on Spanish as more important or more necessary.* (Delaware)
- *Unwillingness to hire extra personnel to accommodate all languages in 7th and 8th grade; the view that only Spanish is “useful”...* (Pennsylvania)
- *We could not find a qualified applicant to teach Latin... Latin position was made into a Spanish position.* (Maryland)

### **Combined Factors**

One respondent cleverly captured a number of the factors that had been noted by others in explaining the current state of foreign languages, and added one more—the impact of 9/11.

- *The “trickle-down” theory:*
  1. *The state budget crisis + lack of funding = black cloud.*
  2. *Black cloud + pervasive idea that foreign languages are not important = doom.*
  3. *Black cloud + doom + popular idea that special ed. kids shouldn't have to “suffer” from the requirement = torrential rain.*
  4. *Black cloud + doom + torrential rain + prevalent xenophobic attitudes heightened by post-September 11 war rhetoric = major flooding. (Maybe it should be called the “rain-cats-and-dogs” theory?)*

## **Discussion**

### **Survey Response**

The fact that responses to the survey were not received from 4 of the 14 Northeast Conference States may be due

to several factors: (1) the survey was distributed by electronic mail and depended on all state foreign language organizations having developed a current list of e-mail addresses of members for distribution, which may not have been a correct assumption; (2) the survey was sent to just one member of the state foreign language organization, the president, so should that individual not have been able to access e-mail for whatever reason, the message would not have been distributed within the state; and (3) the survey was distributed to states in the last two months of the academic year, a very busy time for K-12 educators, a fact that may have affected its distribution and response to it.

The number of responses received, while not sufficient to be statistically representative of the number of teachers in the NECTFL region nor membership of the state organizations, can serve to inform the situation of current foreign language programs in the Northeast Conference states. The fact that over one-fifth of the survey respondents (22%) reported elimination of some aspect of the foreign language program in their school/school district and almost two-fifths (39%) reported that their program had been scaled back in some way confirms the perception of those who first purposed this survey at the Day with the States meeting at NECTFL 2003, that important cuts in foreign language programs are taking place.

### **Cut Backs and Elimination of Programs and Positions**

Survey results indicate that the greatest number of program cuts were reported in kindergarten through fourth grade, and the greatest number of grade levels scaled back included third, fourth, and fifth grades. Additionally, important cuts in teaching positions were also reported in the elementary grades. When interpreting these results, it is important to note that there is a much lower percentage of elementary schools that teach foreign language nationwide (31%) than secondary schools (86%) (Rhodes & Branaman, 1999). The elimination and scaling back of programs at the elementary school level, therefore, should be of great concern to the profession because the elimination of these programs reduces the profession's capacity for establishing sequential programs that articulate from the early grades through high school and college, the ideal to which our profession aspires (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999, p. 22).

A belief in the profession that the growth of Spanish programs is squeezing out other languages was not fully supported

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***“...the greatest number of program cuts were reported in kindergarten through fourth grade...”***

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by the survey results, since Spanish was the second most frequently eliminated language when there were cuts. Yet the fact that a 1997 national study by Rhodes and Branaman (1999) reported that Spanish was the most frequently taught language at both the elementary (79% of schools) and secondary levels (93%), indicates that cuts in the Spanish programs have less impact on language study opportunities than cuts in programs teaching other languages because Spanish is taught more frequently at both the elementary and secondary levels.

To understand the implication of cuts in other languages that respondents reported in this study, the 1997 national study (Rhodes & Branaman, 1999) provides a helpful perspective. In that study, the languages reported as less frequently taught at elementary levels were: French 27%; German – 5%; Latin and Japanese – 3%; Hebrew, Italian, and American Sign Language – 2%; Russian – 2%; and Chinese – 0.3%. At the secondary levels, the languages reported as less frequently taught were French 64%; German – 24%; Latin – 20%; Japanese – 7%; Italian and Russian – 3%; American Sign Language – 2%; Chinese – 1%; and Hebrew – 0.2%. Therefore, the cuts reported for these languages have an important impact on the opportunity to learn a less commonly taught language for PK-12 students in the Northeast Conference states.

### **Perceptions of Change: Did NCLB Impact Foreign Language Programs?**

The fact that so many survey respondents (93%) took time to respond to the open-ended question about the impetus for the program changes, may be an indication of the level of concern they feel about changes in the status of their programs. Certainly, their written responses provide valuable insight into how they perceive that these changes impact their programs.

In identifying insufficient funding as the most important threat to their programs, survey respondents cite budget shortages at the state, county, and local levels, together with a focus of funding and effort on NCLB initiatives and other state mandates, as factors resulting in reduced funding for foreign language programs. It is a fact that the slowing of the national economy has resulted in budget problems in recent years for state and local

government and thus, for schools/school districts. Yet, even had budgets been adequate, foreign language programs might not have received sufficient funding.

As the report of the Council for Basic Education (von Zastrow, 2004) indicates, because of NCLB, principals are focusing their resources on the subject content areas of reading and mathematics, for which schools are held accountable for AYP. NCLB, therefore, does appear to be a factor contributing to reduced funding for foreign languages. Adding to this problem, Congress has not demonstrated a commitment to the arts and foreign languages through funding in recent years. The report of the National Association of State Boards of Education (2003) suggests that, “Additional funding should be made available to states, universities, and local school districts to help develop programs surrounding the arts and foreign languages, as well as high-quality assessment systems” (p.6).

Survey respondents report that school administrators were the second most important factor impacting cuts in foreign language programs. They tie this lack of support on the part of administrators to the focus on state testing of core content areas for NCLB and an insufficient budget for their school/school district. Over one-quarter of those who wrote comments about administrator support report that a lack of appreciation for foreign languages was a factor in administrators’ decisions. Therefore, in tight budget times, even had NCLB not existed, these administrators might still have targeted cuts in the foreign language program.

The most direct link from NCLB to foreign language program cuts is evident in state testing, the third most frequently named factor perceived by survey respondents to negatively impact foreign language programs. In fact, all of the 21 written comments that identify state testing as a concern, clarified that the fact that foreign languages is not considered a core academic content area tested by the state had led to scaling back or cutting the foreign language program. Only three respondents to the survey, however, used the term “No Child Left Behind.” It is not clear that the other respondents recognize that NCLB is the source of the mandated state testing of mathematics and reading/language arts.

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***“...because of NCLB, principals are focusing their resources on the subject content areas of reading and mathematics...”***

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***“...cuts in foreign language programs have been greatest, and are predicted to continue at a high level, for high minority schools.”***

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Few in the profession may be aware of NCLB and its implications for foreign language education. Yet, reports by both The Council for Basic Education (von Zastrow, 2004) and the National Association of State Boards of Education (2003) identify foreign languages as one of the liberal arts at risk because of the NCLB focus on reading/language arts and mathematics. The fact that these are the core content areas for which school districts currently are held accountable for demonstrating AYP for all students has resulted in school districts concentrating their resources in these areas to the detriment of the liberal arts, including foreign languages.

Of special concern is the fact that cuts in foreign language programs have been greatest, and are predicted to continue at a high level, for high minority schools. This unfortunate outcome of NCLB must be addressed to prevent high minority schools from being even more disadvantaged in providing foreign language programs for their students (von Zastrow, 2003). The irony of this outcome for NCLB is brought into even sharper focus when it is revealed that more African-Americans and Hispanics believe that NCLB will result in a “big improvement” in the quality of education than do whites (Cose, 2004).

The leadership in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2003) should be congratulated for providing, at this critical moment in U.S. education, an alternative approach to NCLB’s focus on only select core content areas of mathematics and reading/language arts. “The Balanced Curriculum” provides a model at the elementary school level where foreign languages, as well as social studies, healthful living, and the arts are integrated with English language arts, mathematics, and science to provide students with a comprehensive education.

### **Recommendations**

The examination of the NCLB act, national surveys, reports on the impact of NCLB, and a state’s curriculum document in response to this act all suggest ways that our profession can work together to improve the role of foreign languages in the curriculum. The following recommendations are offered to begin a dialogue in the profession about how we might better address foreign language education in our nation’s schools in the future.

**1. Collect and report data to the profession, policymakers, and the public on foreign language programs at the district, state, and national levels.**

The survey NECTFL and the NFLRC designed and administered in member states verifies that cuts have been made to foreign language programs in the region's states. District and state supervisors of foreign languages should compile similar annual data and report results to students, parents, the community, and the state professional organization. To determine whether cuts have been made to programs regionally and nationwide, regional, and national organizations also should regularly gather and report foreign language program data. These data provide evidence of the impact of federal, state, and district policies on foreign language programs that is invaluable in advocating foreign language education.

**2. Advocate for an articulated sequence of foreign language instruction that begins in early elementary school and continues uninterrupted through the postsecondary level.**

The NECTFL survey results indicate that important foreign language program cuts occurred at the level in which foreign language education is least taught, the elementary school. As a profession, we must advocate that this level be the last one cut when decisions to reduce a program are made. Cuts in elementary school foreign language programs postpone for yet another generation our goal as a profession of providing students a long uninterrupted sequence in the study of a second language. Educators at postsecondary levels should be very concerned about the impact of NCLB on PK-12 foreign language education, because program cuts at these levels will negatively impact postsecondary programs in the future.

**3. Advocate for the inclusion of foreign languages and the arts in the K-12 curriculum.**

As educators we must recognize the unique role of the arts and foreign languages in connecting to "deeply cultural and expressive aspects of peoples' lives that are at the center of what it means to be human" (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2003, p. 4). At the district, state, and national level we must advocate for teaching a K-12 curriculum that includes foreign languages, art, and music.

**4. Integrate foreign languages with reading/language arts, mathematics, and science to enhance student learning and to ensure the place of foreign languages in the curriculum.**

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***"Cuts in elementary school foreign language programs postpone for yet another generation our goal as a profession of providing students a long uninterrupted sequence in the study of a second language."***

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It is important for our profession to recognize that integrating foreign languages with other content areas strengthens the position of foreign languages in the curriculum and provides an enhanced learning experience for students. We need to become familiar with immersion program research that suggests that when the focus in the foreign language classroom is on content taught in the foreign language, the rate and quality of second language learning improve.

**5. Collaborate with teacher preparation programs to assure that well-prepared teachers enter and stay in the profession.**

We must recognize that the recruitment and retention of teachers and their professional development is the responsibility of the entire profession, not just that of teacher education programs at colleges and universities. We need to explore ways we can collaborate to assure that we will have sufficient numbers of well-prepared teachers of foreign languages for present and future needs.

**6. Stay informed about NCLB and other federal, state, and local policy issues that impact foreign language education.**

The responses of some participants in the survey suggest that they are not aware of current state and federal policies that are impacting foreign language education. Even more important, they may be unaware of national reports that suggest ways to strengthen foreign language education to counter the effects of such policies. Information is power, and we in the profession should take active roles in our professional organizations to assure that our organizations collaborate to stay informed and make critical information available to members through the organization's website and publications.

**7. Support the teaching of all languages, especially the less commonly taught languages.**

As a profession, we must work to counter the elimination of any language from the

foreign language program, but we must argue most strongly against cuts in the less commonly taught languages to maintain diversity in the languages students have the opportunity to learn.

**8. Build support for foreign language education among students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community.**

We need to collaborate to educate others about the value of foreign languages as an important part of the K-16 curriculum.

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## Notes

1. The 14 states and areas that are in the region of the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NECTFL) are Connecticut, Delaware, Greater Washington (DC), Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia.
2. Responses were not received from Connecticut, Greater Washington (DC), Virginia, and West Virginia.

## Appendix A. NECTFL Survey

### Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

#### Survey on the Status of Programs in Conference States

The purpose of this survey is to inform policy makers at the state and national level of the changes in status of foreign language programs in order to positively impact future policy decisions in the area of second language education. Your response is critical to provide a complete report of the status of programs in your state.

Please complete the following information about your district program and forward to nectfl@dickinson.edu.

1. Name of your school district \_\_\_\_\_
2. Your state \_\_\_\_\_
3. Your relationship to your school district (Mark all that apply):  
 Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Administrator \_\_\_\_\_  
 Parent \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Clarify "Other") \_\_\_\_\_

4. Indicate the grade level/s at which your district's foreign language programs have been eliminated *entirely* in 2003 for the upcoming academic year (2003-04) (Place an "X" by all that apply):  
 K \_\_\_\_\_, 1 \_\_\_\_\_, 2 \_\_\_\_\_, 3 \_\_\_\_\_, 4 \_\_\_\_\_,  
 5 \_\_\_\_\_, 6 \_\_\_\_\_, 7 \_\_\_\_\_, 8 \_\_\_\_\_, 9 \_\_\_\_\_,  
 10 \_\_\_\_\_, 11 \_\_\_\_\_, 12 \_\_\_\_\_
5. Indicate the grade level/s at which your district's foreign language programs have been *scaled back* in some way for the upcoming school year (2003-04) (Place an "X" by all that apply):

K \_\_\_\_, 1 \_\_\_\_, 2 \_\_\_\_, 3 \_\_\_\_, 4 \_\_\_\_,  
5 \_\_\_\_, 6 \_\_\_\_, 7 \_\_\_\_, 8 \_\_\_\_, 9 \_\_\_\_,  
10 \_\_\_\_, 11 \_\_\_\_, 12 \_\_\_\_

6. Indicate the number of foreign language teaching positions *eliminated* for the upcoming school (2003-04) year by grade level (Place the number of positions eliminated by the grade level):

K \_\_\_\_, 1 \_\_\_\_, 2 \_\_\_\_, 3 \_\_\_\_, 4 \_\_\_\_,  
5 \_\_\_\_, 6 \_\_\_\_, 7 \_\_\_\_, 8 \_\_\_\_, 9 \_\_\_\_,  
10 \_\_\_\_, 11 \_\_\_\_, 12 \_\_\_\_

7. Indicate the specific languages *eliminated* for the upcoming school year (2003-04) (Mark with an "X" all that apply):

Spanish\_\_\_\_ French\_\_\_\_ Italian\_\_\_\_  
German\_\_\_\_ Latin\_\_\_\_ Chinese\_\_\_\_  
Japanese\_\_\_\_ Russian\_\_\_\_  
Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. What do you believe was the impetus for the elimination or scaling back of your district's foreign language program?

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## Appendix B. Letter that Accompanied the NECTFL Survey.

May 2003

TO: Presidents of State Language Associations in Northeast Conference States

FROM: Rebecca Kline, Executive Director  
The Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

SUBJECT: Survey on the Status of Foreign Language Programs in NECTFL Region

As most of you are aware, the current economic and political climate in the states has influenced the development of state and national education policies that are beginning to have an adverse impact on the continued implementation of K-12 foreign language programs. Although we at the Northeast Conference receive a great deal of anecdotal information on foreign language programs in our conference states, we are unable to provide statistics to policy makers to show that foreign language programs are being eliminated or scaled back.

As a result of the *Day with the States* at this year's Northeast Conference, representatives of state language associations and state supervisors of foreign languages strongly recommended that a survey should be undertaken to provide these statistics to policy makers. The survey will provide much needed data to the field as well, and can also be used as an advocacy tool to demonstrate the need for the creation of state and national policies that encourage, rather than discourage, second language learning.

TO THAT END, I RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THAT YOU FORWARD THIS SURVEY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO ALL OF YOUR MEMBERS URGING THEM TO TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TO ANSWER THE EIGHT QUESTIONS. IT IS A SMALL GESTURE THAT COULD HAVE AN ENORMOUS IMPACT!

We ask that all surveys be submitted to NECTFL at the following e-mail address: [nectfl@dickinson.edu](mailto:nectfl@dickinson.edu). The surveys may also be faxed to Rebecca Kline's attention at 717-245-1976. The deadline for submission of the surveys is JUNE 30, 2003.

Our profession is indeed in a time of potential crisis. The response of your members is critical for the success of future state and national advocacy initiatives.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in disseminating this survey to your membership. Should you have any questions on this matter, please feel free to e-mail me at:

[nectfl@dickinson.edu](mailto:nectfl@dickinson.edu) or call 717-245-1977. If you are not the person to whom this letter should be sent, please reply to me so that we can put it in the right hands. Thank you!

