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# Creating a new normal: Language education for all

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## Creating a new normal: Language education for all

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**Abstract:** How close are we to the reality of all students having the opportunity to learn another language and gaining support for these efforts from the general public? The answer has a long history, which we point out by referencing articles that span the 50-year history of *Foreign Language Annals*. From the 1979 President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies report under President Jimmy Carter to the recent article by Kroll and Dussias (2017) on the benefits of multilingualism, this article tracks ACTFL's advocacy efforts over the years. Most recently, the 2017 launch of the *Lead with Languages* public awareness campaign and other initiatives such as the *Seal of Biliteracy* that are rapidly propelling our field closer to a "new normal" in the United States where language education is accessible to all and is viewed as essential to the well-being of all Americans.

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**Keywords:** historical perspective on language teaching, language advocacy, multilingualism

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**Challenges:** Language educators play a significant role as agents of change both within our classrooms and beyond. How can we position languages and help policy-makers and administrators at the local, state, and national levels to value multilingualism and multiculturalism as an integral and essential part of every learner's education? What will that "new normal" look like?

## 1 | Introduction

*We are profoundly alarmed by what we have found: a serious deterioration in this country's language and research capacity, at a time when an increasingly hazardous international military, political, and economic environment is making unprecedented demands on America's resources, intellectual capacity, and public sensitivity. [. . .] Nothing less is at issue than the nation's security. At a time when the resurgent forces of nationalism and of ethnic and linguistic consciousness so directly affect global realities, the United States requires far more reliable capacities to communicate with its allies, analyze the behavior of potential*

*adversaries, and earn the trust and sympathies of the uncommitted. Yet, there is a widening gap between these needs and the American competence to understand and deal successfully with other peoples in a world of flux. (Perkins, 1979: 11)*

While this statement eerily applies to the current situation in the United States, it was actually written as part of a 1979 President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies report under President Jimmy Carter, *Strength through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability* (see Perkins, 1979). Although language educators have made some significant strides in the last few decades, there is no dispute that there is a long road ahead in making multilingualism and multiculturalism the "new normal" by expanding language learning opportunities for all students. Looking to the future, this article redefines the term language advocacy in a much broader manner that encompasses various approaches to promoting language learning.

Since its founding in 1966, ACTFL has used the term advocacy to largely refer to two general areas: first, building awareness about the benefits and advantages to language learning among the public at large, which includes policy makers, school and university administrators, and other educational personnel, parents, and students; and second, effecting change or influencing policies surrounding language education. ACTFL has been a strong and consistent voice for both types of advocacy efforts over the years; however, the context in which we find ourselves as a country in 2018 makes these efforts all the more important and timely. While as a nation we increasingly value linguistic and cultural competence, much work remains to be done to establish language learning not only at the core of the curriculum in America's schools but in the mindset of the average American.

## **2 | Creating a voice**

As early as 1972, ACTFL leadership collaborated with other organizations to create a voice in Washington, DC. The Joint National Committee for Languages/National Council for Languages and International Studies was established to promote the "implementation of continuing movement in favor of learning foreign languages in the United States, as well as sponsorship of special projects to improve and enhance the teaching of these languages" (Scebold, 1973: 292–293). By 1979, the above-mentioned President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies issued a lengthy series of recommendations with a clarion call for building our linguistic and cultural capacity.

While there was a resulting uptick in federal funding for Title VI programs and Fulbright-Hays scholarships, many of the sweeping suggestions remained unfulfilled and similar calls for action were issued throughout the next decade. For example, in his keynote address, later published in *Foreign Language Annals*, Lambert (1984) cited a 1983 report, "Critical Needs in International Education: Recommendation for Action" (National Advisory Board, 1983), which emphasized building capacity at the K–12 level and called for higher levels of language proficiency in students and language teachers. Lambert (1984: 3) challenged the profession to "get its collective act together" and

ACTFL responded with efforts to build public awareness for foreign languages and international studies.

We also lobbied for foreign languages to be included as a core subject under the Goals 2000 legislation (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994), and collaborated with other national language organizations to create student standards as well as program standards for teacher education. This led eventually to current requirements that teacher candidates achieve Advanced Low or Intermediate High levels of proficiency, depending on the language. Although enrollments in language courses rebounded in the 1980s after the decline of the 1960s and 1970s, major challenges persisted. Lambert focused on the lack of articulation across levels, a critical flaw that inadvertently left students, parents, and administrators believing that language learning really began with high school courses. Further, Lambert (1984:3) lamented that “we have almost no mechanism for putting the whole student together by attending carefully to what he or she needs at each stage of learning.”

During this period in language education history, we needed new, age-appropriate, and well-articulated programs as well as much stronger advocacy efforts.

Former Senator Paul Simon (a Democrat from the State of Illinois) emerged as an incredible advocate for language learning when he published his book *The Tongue-Tied American: Confronting the Foreign Language Crisis* in 1980; and in the 1990s our champions on Capitol Hill continued to encourage the members of the language profession to make their voices heard. Simon (1991) continued the rallying cry in his *Foreign Language Annals* article “A Decade of Change to a Decade of Challenge. He affirmed what we knew to be true:

*[...] in order to effect change, advocates themselves must make themselves heard (Simon, 1991:13).*

Fortunately, the members of the language field did view and for the most part include language advocacy as part of their responsibility as language educators. This positive act on the part of language professionals continues today: In a 2013 national poll conducted by the National Research Center for College and University Admissions in collaboration with ACTFL, fully 98% of respondents agreed that advocacy was part of their professional role. In the teacher program standards developed by ACTFL for the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), formerly the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, Standard 6 requires evidence that teacher candidates can articulate the important benefits of language education (ACTFL, 2015). Likewise, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has a specific advocacy strand for which accomplished teachers must provide evidence in order to receive national board certification. What is more, in a 2014 poll of ACTFL members, 52% agreed that a critical role of ACTFL as an organization is to support advocacy efforts (ACTFL, 2014).

### 3 | Shaping the message

ACTFL launched its first formal public awareness campaign as *2005: The Year of Languages*<sup>1</sup>. The campaign included a series of national events focused around a monthly theme, and many in our field took the opportunity to garner support in their local communities, including proclamations from local school boards and state governors, as well as holding informational meetings with senators and representatives at the federal level. This campaign segued into another advocacy effort coordinated by ACTFL and members of the language community, the *Discover Languages . . . Discover the World!* Campaign, ran from 2006 to 2013.

Despite these advocacy efforts, it was clear that further efforts were needed. Fundamental changes in the world, including access to information as well as economic, social, climate, and health challenges, can only be solved on a global level and thus have caused many to assert that the United States must build its linguistic and cultural capacity. In the words of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, “we live in a global world” and

*We have to understand that world if we [...] are going to be able to not only defend this country, but to extend our relationships to others so that we can work together to defend the world that we live in (Miles, 2011: online).*

One reality is that the federal government has recognized the linguistic gap we are experiencing and has funded programs at the postsecondary level, such as the U.S. Department of Defense’s Flagship and Boren programs, and has continued support for the U.S. Department of Education’s Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs, although with some funding cuts in recent years.

However, given that the latest enrollment survey at the postsecondary level by the Modern Language Association indicated that approximately 8.1% of students were enrolled in language courses, investing in awareness-raising and funding well-articulated programs remains critical (Goldberg et al, 2015: 3). At the PK–12 level<sup>2</sup>, funding has largely been left to the states and decisions are often made at the local level with little if any funding dedicated to seeding programs, particularly in the very important early grades. The explosion of dual-language immersion programs has largely been funded by state initiatives, such as in Utah<sup>3</sup>, Delaware, and Indiana, or local initiatives such as in New York City and Los Angeles. With only 20% of students at the K–12<sup>2</sup> level enrolled in language courses, however, there is much awareness building to do at all levels (American Councils for International Education, 2017: 5).

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: There was an equivalent drive in European Union countries during the European Year of Languages 2001.

<sup>2</sup> PK-12 (Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12) and K-12 (Kindergarten to Grade 12) are terms commonly used in education in the United States and Canada as a short form for the publicly supported years in early years education and in school prior to college.

<sup>3</sup> Editor’s note: For more details on the Utah dual language immersion programme, see the article by [Watzinger-Tharp & Leite](#) in Issue 32.

Adding to this new narrative concerning the importance of languages in the United States is the recognition that heritage speakers bring added value. Unlike previous generations of immigrants who came to this country and were encouraged to, and did indeed, lose their native language ability in successive generations, today's immigrants and heritage speakers are beginning to realize the potential, in an increasingly multilingual country, of becoming fully bicultural and biliterate in both English and another language. The New American Economy's latest study "Not Lost in Translation" (2017) pointed out that the number of job advertisements for bilingual employees doubled between 2010 and 2015. Thus, helping immigrant and heritage speakers to continue to develop what in many cases are considerable linguistic and literacy skills helps meet the language demands by business employers and federal government.

The demand for languages in this changing world was reinforced by two recent national initiatives. First, in February 2017, a national report released by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences (AAAS) and commissioned by the U.S. Congress, *America's Languages: Investing in Language Education in the 21st Century*, posited five broad recommendations, outlined in Rivers and Brecht (2018), for solving the language gap in which we find ourselves. Second, in collaboration with the AAAS report, ACTFL renewed its support for building awareness nationwide with the launch of the **Lead with Languages** public awareness campaign (<http://www.leadwithlanguages.org>). The goals of Lead with Languages are to:

- expand opportunities for all students to learn a second or third language and build the pool of qualified PK–12 language teachers;
- strengthen language programs by encouraging early starts and well-sequenced programs with clear performance outcomes;
- engage leaders from business, education, government, and other stakeholders regarding the vital role of language education in our economic competitiveness and national security, through collaboration, research, and policy-making; and
- build awareness among heritage populations of the benefits of developing and retaining proficiency in their heritage language while learning English in order to increase academic and career success.

While the AAAS report's call to action by various facets of American society and increasing federal and state government support of language programs indicate positive progress, and while we are experiencing slow but fairly steady growth not only in interest but also in enrollments in language programs, there are definitely ways that ACTFL and the language profession can influence the vision of language opportunities for all American students so as to create the "new normal" in the United States.

#### 4 | Spreading the message

In addition to building support outside of the profession, the language field recognizes too the responsibility it has in shaping the message. As Rivers, Robinson, Harwood, and Brecht (2013) asserted, "First and foremost, support for language learning is built through the excellence of programs, as motivated learners will communicate that

excitement to what may be a more receptive parental audience than in previous generations” (p. 336). The issue of problematic pedagogy, pointed out by Lambert (1984), is now central to effective advocacy and one that ACTFL takes very seriously. One only needs to peruse the ACTFL Web site to see the resources available *gratis* for developing effective communicative language programs. In particular, one reality that the language profession must face is that language learning is already taking place outside the formal classroom setting and will continue to expand in this area. With the current severe shortage of language teachers at the K–12 level, the field must investigate and support highly effective learning contexts and practices beyond the classroom. What are the key strategic elements of language learning that must involve a language professional? How can we leverage learner ownership of the language learning process so that we can maximize the intervention of the teacher?

In addition to ensuring that students’ learning opportunities are standards and proficiency based, we need to share the message with stakeholders. ACTFL national opinion polling with parents and students at the middle school, high school, and postsecondary levels prior to the launch of the ***Lead with Languages*** campaign found that parents and students were significantly unaware of the expanded career opportunities available for those with bilingual capabilities. Furthermore, ACTFL polling indicated that students were heavily influenced by guidance counsellors at the K–12 level and college advisors at the postsecondary level (ACTFL, 2016, unpublished national opinion poll). Thus, we must ask ourselves how best to approach these key influencers with the information they need to advise students about the personal and professional value of proficiency in English and another language. To what extent do our traditional ways of delivering language instruction and/or the way these advisors and counsellors experienced language learning themselves impact their recommendations to students?

One of the most dramatic and positive phenomena that is currently shaping the message at the K–12 level is the issuance of the [Seal of Biliteracy](#). Begun in California in 2012, this initiative has seen rapid expansion, with 30 out of 50 states now offering some kind of option that allows students to document their competence in two languages. While the implementation is playing out, not surprisingly, in different ways in each state, the Seal serves nonetheless as a recognition that multilingual competence is important, that it adds value to one’s personal accomplishments, and that it is increasingly rewarded in both postsecondary institutions and the professions.

Resonating on both sides of the political aisle, the Seal is now fueling a campaign to move language learning to a more central position in the curriculum in America’s schools, thus positioning all learners with the skills that they will need to carry out basic interactions in more than one language and ensuring that a large number of learners develop the increasingly sophisticated levels of proficiency that are needed in health care, social services, international business, and other professions. While some groups may support this from the viewpoint of ensuring that immigrant students learn English, the Seal is also a powerful recognition of the heritage language in which many learners are proficient. The World-Readiness Standards (National Standards Collaborative Board,

2015) attest to the critical connection between language and identity, and what better way to normalize multilingualism than to promote the development of the language of heritage learners? Future research needs to focus on the best ways to help all learners, including heritage learners, in all their diversity of language backgrounds to continue to develop their languages.

- How can language educators leverage the thousands of heritage schools across the country to assist in promoting the Seal of Biliteracy?
- How can we leverage the languages that native and heritage speakers bring to the classroom so that all children in that classroom become comfortably multilingual?
- What additional research can we conduct to advance the notion that learning a third or fourth language is facilitated after the second language?
- How can we encourage heritage language families to see the value in developing the heritage language and English?

## **5 | Myths and realities: Personal, economic, intercultural and social benefits**

The greatest challenges to multilingualism in the United States have been the myths and attitudes that have been perpetuated about the learning of a second or a third language. Learning another language has been seen as a difficult, if not an impossible, task that requires years of study; this myth has discouraged academic advisors, parents, and potential learners from advocating for or pursuing language study. Other arguments (Bugos, 1980) against requiring foreign languages in the liberal arts curriculum have included the belief that “it is just not useful in the ‘everyday world’” (Bugos: 302) and that learners cannot develop the levels of language proficiency that are needed to fully communicate in the target language. Another prevailing myth has been that acquiring a second language too early could damage a child’s language and cognitive development and that language learning in adulthood is an impossible task that can be “accomplished successfully only by the few who possess a special talent for language learning” (Kroll & Dussias, 2017: 249).

However, research in the past two decades of empirical studies has not only debunked these myths but has also revealed the multitude of benefits and added value to individuals at all points along the lifespan (Kroll & Dussias, 2017). For example, non-invasive brain imaging techniques used to study the language processing of infants and toddlers have allowed researchers to better understand how the human brain processes language and how specific experiences with more than one language influence and change brain functioning (Conboy, 2013). Researchers have documented that preschool bilingual children are able to interpret contextual cues to respond in the appropriate language to the appropriate person (Byers-Heinlein et al 2010; Kuhl et al, 2006) and have concluded that even fetuses can actively process the particular components of different languages and begin to discern differences (Conboy, 2013). Petitto et al (2011) revealed that bilingual infants (10–12 months) demonstrated greater brain plasticity and

increased language processing skills no matter how short the exposure to language learning was and regardless of the language pairs involved.

The population of children growing up in homes where a language other than English is spoken has exponentially grown, resulting in increased attention by researchers to determine the specific developmental characteristics of dual-language learners. Scientific inquiry has revealed that children who are exposed to dual-language input have significantly improved executive function (Kovacs & Mehler, 2009; Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008); that is, they possess improved problem-solving skills and planning skills, are more goal oriented, and can monitor their own performance. A particularly significant finding concerning the domains of executive control revealed that these benefits were found across levels of socioeconomic status (Engel de Abreu et al, 2012), indicating that bilingual language skills improve academic success in children from dual language backgrounds (Bialystok & Barac, 2012; Costa et al, 2009). Bialystok & Barac (2012) found that bilingual children from low-income families outperformed monolinguals on a number of verbal and nonverbal tasks, indicating that

*[...] the development of bilingual language acquisition in children from language minority homes seems to provide a way to mitigate the academic risks that are associated with low socioeconomic status and to maximize school readiness (quoted in Kroll & Dussias, 2017: 252).*

These findings provide an empirical base for determining instructional and program designs, academic expectations, and assessment procedures that support the continuous development of dual-language learners. This growing body of evidence supports maintaining home languages while also extending the benefits of multilingualism to all learners.

A most exciting research discovery in the area of health science has been the discovery that bilingualism delays the onset of Alzheimer's by 4 to 5 years compared to matched monolingualism (Bialystok et al, 2007; Perani et al, 2017). Bilingualism is seen as a sort of protection to the cognitive resources, much like physical exercise may assist someone who sustains an injury (Kroll & Dussias, 2017). A recent study (Alladi et al, 2013: 1939) confirmed a 4.5-year delay in the onset of dementia symptoms for bilinguals relative to monolinguals, but most compelling was that the observed delay was independent of education, literacy, and other socioeconomic factors. As Kroll & Dussias (2017: 252) posited, "No known pharmaceutical agent has any effect that comes close to bilingualism."

Beyond these significant cognitive and health benefits, possessing two or more languages enhances opportunities for economic gains and supports an increasing intercultural understanding. The U.S. Department of Education defined global competence as "the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance" (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011: xiii); it is notable that language proficiency was not a focus in this definition. However, a more recent document from the U.S. Department of Education, the Framework for Developing Global and Cultural Competencies to Advance Equity, Excellence and Economic Competitiveness (2017), placed world and heritage-language learning front and

center among four major competencies: collaboration and communication, world and heritage languages, diverse perspectives, as well as civic and global engagements.

Similar changes in emphasis have been documented in the business world. Twenty years ago, D'Agruma & Hardy (1997) found that only a small minority of the 170 companies surveyed indicated that hiring employees with foreign languages and cross-cultural knowledge was important, although almost all agreed that language and cross-cultural training increased productivity and generated greater success. The companies surveyed noted that if colleges and universities offered short-term training courses, then they would enroll their employees. Thus, while multilingualism was regarded as a significant economic asset for the workforce, it has historically been regarded as a "complicating factor rather than a benefit" (Kroll & Dussias, 2017: 248). Twenty years later the world has changed, and the attitudes of businesses toward multilingualism have changed with it: Globalization has resulted in an explosion of transnational businesses as well as institutions and organizations that rely on an ever-increasing number of employees who possess global competence and thus can work with people from a wide range of cultures. Damari et al (2017:4) found that

- 93% of the respondents to a survey of 2,100 U.S. employers indicated that they valued employees who could work effectively with clients from other countries and cultures;
- during the hiring process, 60% identified whether a prospective employee possessed foreign language skills
- and 41% advantaged multilingual applicants - although only 10% indicated that new employees needed to speak another language beyond English<sup>4</sup>

While U.S. government agencies and offices have built their own capacity and supply system, businesses lack

*clearly stated strategies for defining and meeting the actual demand for employees across a range of positions and levels of responsibility who are equipped with high levels of proficiency in another language in addition to English" (Damari et al, 2017: 32).*

While the need and demand among global and transnational companies, institutions, and organizations for employees who possess "global competencies" has grown exponentially (Brown, 2014; Grandin & Berka, 2014), researchers have determined a disconnect between the demand for and availability of individuals who have the required levels of language proficiency in addition to their academic major (D'Agruma & Hardy, 1997; Damari et al, 2017). These researchers have recommended sustained collaboration with the business community to develop a strategic language plan that prepares graduates optimally for the business enterprise. As part of this plan, it will be important for universities and language educators to examine

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<sup>4</sup> Editor's note: For the UK, there are equivalent findings from annual surveys conducted by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) – see the ['Business' tab on the SCILT website](#) for more details.

*[...] the broad range of majors for whom language competence would be a distinct asset" (Damari et al, 2017: 30)*

- and to make adjustments in the curriculum and course offerings so as to develop more relevant professional content for multilingual, skilled professionals, particularly in the areas of greatest need such as health care, engineering, and business. In sum, the demand from the business and professional communities has now become a driving force in forming language education policy and practice. To remain relevant, language programs must move beyond the traditional language and literature tracks and reach out to other departments and programs of study whose students do, or should, demonstrate a high level of language proficiency in addition to another academic major (Damari et al, 2017: 32), thereby optimizing their job potential in the global marketplace.

However, the benefits of language learning are not limited to the cognitive (physiological) and professional (pragmatic) domains. For many years, scholarly inquiry has emphasized that cultural learning as an instructional goal is equally as important as communication and thus has an essential place in the language classroom (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993, 2004; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015; Schulz, 2007; Sercu, 2006). With increased globalization, migration, and immigration, the need for an intercultural focus in language curricula continues to grow (Kramsch, 2004; Sinecrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007; Stewart, 2007): Simply put, language learning promotes social and intercultural skills that allow individuals to view the world through at least one new lens. Learners in multilingual environments have social experiences that provide routine practice in considering the perspectives of others. They have to think not only about the message they are conveying, but also how that message is being received. Interpreting an individual's utterance requires attending not just to its content, but also to the specific context in which individuals find themselves (Kinzler, 2016).

These social and intercultural skills, which are honed through the learning of another language, include collaborating, negotiating meaning, and mediating misunderstandings, all skills sorely needed in a diverse, multilingual world where worldviews and cultural customs and traditions often clash. It is thus in world language classes that students access the manifestations of another culture, develop the ability to use language appropriately in social situations, and gain insights into others' perspectives and worldview.

Rather than teaching about culture, language educators are responsible for helping students to learn to behave appropriately in the culture, build relationships with others, and "know[ing] how, when, and why to say what to whom" (National Standards, 2006: 33). This evolution parallels the development of language teaching approaches, from learning about language to using language to communicate and as a tool to access content. In sum, K–12 and post-secondary language programs are the primary producers of linguistically and interculturally competent citizens and employees (Damari et al, 2017).

Finally, in addition to promoting cross-cultural and social skills, another paradigm shift in language teaching and learning—from teacher-directed to self-regulated learning—also

represents a significant benefit. ACTFL has collaborated with the National Council of State Supervisors for Foreign Languages in developing learning targets in the form of “Can-do Statements” for both language and interculturality. By thinking about what they already know; connecting it to what they are learning; setting small, achievable goals; monitoring their own learning; and determining which activities help them learn most effectively, learners themselves can tailor their learning, judge their performance, and select learning tasks and self-adjustments that will support them in meeting the learning goals. Empirical studies (Moeller et al, 2012) have shown significant improvement in language skills (reading, speaking, writing) when learners become skilled in goalsetting and are directly involved in the learning process. In this way, shifting the locus of responsibility from the teacher to the student and focusing learning activity on clear classroom learning targets promotes reflective and autonomous learning, both of which are skills that all learners must demonstrate in the 21st century.

## **6 | Creating the “new normal”**

To make the “new normal” a reality, research will be needed. To that end, ACTFL established the Center for Assessment, Research and Development (CARD) in 2016 to support PK–12 schools and institutions of higher education and to promote research in the areas of high-quality language teaching and learning. Research priority grants aimed at critical research areas are distributed annually. In addition, CARD develops and maintains high-quality language proficiency assessments; trains, certifies, and maintains highly reliable testers and raters; and conducts research on proficiency and performance outcomes. While such efforts have initiated collaborations between schools and institutions of higher education as they seek to define proficiency standards for teachers and learners, more efforts aimed at building a seamless transition from Pre-Kindergarten through high school and on to post-secondary or specialized language training are sorely needed.

- How do we inform and gain support from administrators, parents, and policy makers about the need for common assessments that make language learners’ progress transparent to all stakeholders?
- How can assessments be used to motivate learners to gain the necessary level of proficiency that they will need to succeed in 21st-century neighborhoods, communities, and the workforce?

In addition, our success in achieving the new normal depends on the extent to which individuals become agents for change. ACTFL’s Leadership Initiative for Language Learning, a collaborative effort with other regional and national professional education organizations, is designed to empower professionals, foster a growth mindset, and nurture leadership skills and has resulted in building a critical mass of language leaders across the nation.

- How do we activate all language educators to become advocates to reach stakeholders at the local and state level?
- How do we communicate to parents, administrators, and the public of the benefits and impact of multilingualism gained through alternative schooling systems such as dual-language and immersion learning environments?
- How do we showcase the skills gained by language learners to make visible the personal, societal, and economic contributions of multilingualism to our stakeholders?

Since it is easier to advocate for a truly effective cause, achieving the new normal depends on an abundant and highly skilled teacher corps. ACTFL's annual convention and online professional development modules, videos, and publications offer a first and second step in heightening awareness of the importance of language skills and providing venues for improving language learning and teaching. However, while ongoing research will certainly add to our knowledge base, the new normal cannot be achieved until researchers and practitioners collaborate on consistently and universally putting best practices into practice. For example, schools and universities must set proficiency expectations and establish criteria by which to determine how well specific language programs, even teachers, are helping learners to succeed in the 21st century.

## 7 | Conclusion

As noted at the onset of this article, while some progress has been made in the value placed on multilingualism by stakeholders, there is a steep uphill journey yet to be navigated. Empirical evidence has validated the enormous personal, professional, and societal benefits of multilingualism. What is less clear is how to communicate these rich and significant benefits to those who are in decision-making capacities.

- How exactly does one go about making the vision of languages as a core subject for all learners a reality?
- What approaches best support the nation's growing understanding that 21st-century learners can expand their opportunities to live, work, and thrive in a diverse world only when they are equipped with at least a modest level of language proficiency coupled with a sufficient intercultural competency that equips them to serve as cultural mediators in their neighborhoods, communities, and places of employment at home and around the world?

Through advocating for the implementation of the recommendations of the report *America's Languages* (AAAS, 2017) and by educating the public through the ***Lead with Languages*** campaign, we can in fact harness the power of parents in impacting school policies across the country. We can build awareness about the benefits and advantages of language learning among the public at large; we can effect change and influence policies surrounding language education in the United States. Through these efforts, we will build a "new normal" in the United States where languages are valued as an integral part of education and are viewed as necessary to the well-being of all Americans.

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