

Taking a Closer Look at High Schools that Don't Offer World Languages

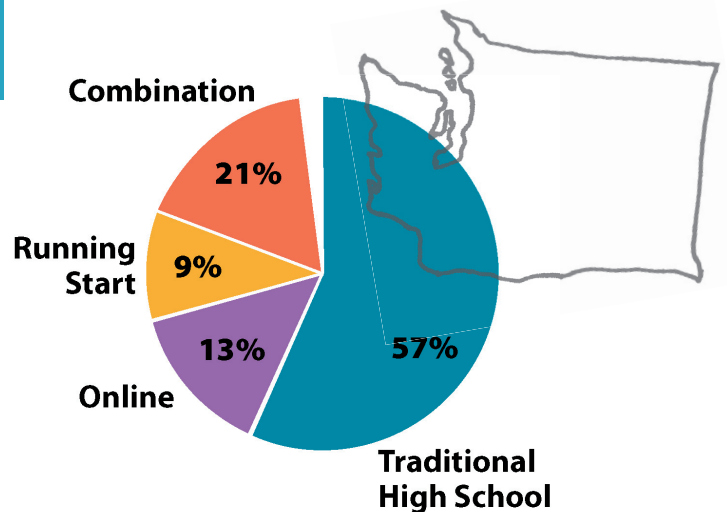
Background

In 2007 the Mapping and Enhancing Language Learning (MELL) project surveyed schools online and by phone on whether or not they offered world languages and if so, which languages were offered. We were surprised to discover that 19% of the high schools completing the survey reported not offering any world languages at their schools. This could present an equity issue if students in some schools do not have the opportunity to earn world language credits, which are required for admission to a 4-year college in Washington, while students in other schools do. We decided to follow up on this question in spring, 2008, by conducting an informal telephone survey of high schools in this sample.

Of the 71 schools that reported not offering languages, we were able to reach 62 by phone. Of these, 5 reported that the data were incorrect and they did, in fact, offer world languages. Of those 57 schools who reported that they did not offer world languages, the following questions were asked:

- 1) How are students able to earn the two credits of world languages necessary to attend a four year college or university in Washington state?
- 2) Is there a demand among your students for world language classes?
- 3) Do you have plans to offer world language courses in the near future? If not, what barriers keep you from offering world language courses?

It is important to note that all of these 57 schools reported being alternative high schools. This helps to explain their responses to the questions since alternative schools are generally smaller and often designed to meet specific student needs or interests.



Results

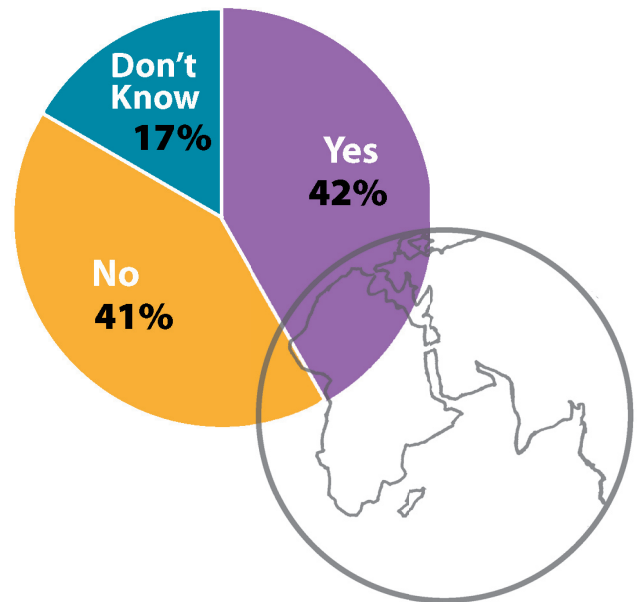
How are students able to earn the two credits of world languages necessary to attend a four year college or university in Washington state?

The three responses schools gave to this question in varying combinations were: at the local traditional high school, online, and through Running Start at the local community college. Of the 57 schools only one responded that they did not know how students could take world language classes. An overwhelming majority of the schools (57%) reported that students are able to take world language courses at the nearest traditional high school. For some schools, the traditional high school was literally in the same building, while for other schools, the students were required to provide their own transportation, possibly complicating their ability to take languages if they desired to do so. Other options were to offer world languages through online programs such as Apex or Red Comet (13% of schools) or via Running Start, where students leave the high school campus to attend classes at the local community college (9% of schools). About 21% of schools answered that students were able to take world language through some combination of these options.

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Is there a demand among your students for world language classes?

Of the 57 schools surveyed, equal numbers reported that there either was or was not demand among their students for world language courses. Of those who reported that there was demand, they also reported that students took advantage of the opportunities available to them. Of those schools reporting little demand, they acknowledged that students did not take advantage of opportunities to take world language courses. A common response in this category was that their students were not college bound and were only trying to earn the credits necessary to graduate. Finally, 17% of those surveyed responded that they did not know whether or not their students were taking world language classes.



Do you have plans to offer world language courses in the near future? If not, what barriers keep you from offering world language courses?

When asked if they planned on offering world language courses in the near future, an overwhelming majority said no. Of the three schools that said yes, two were planning on adding Spanish and one reported hoping to add Spanish, French, and native language courses. When asked what barriers were keeping these schools from offering world languages, most responded that their school was too small or lacked the funding to hire a language teacher. Many indicated that their focus was on basic skills and dropout prevention rather than on college preparation. Some responded that there was no need to offer world language classes, because they were connected so closely to a traditional high school where students could take these. Finally, a few schools indicated that their students were taking English as a Second Language and their top priority was that their students become fluent in English.

