



Trends in High School Language Offerings 2004–2007–2009

Overview

In 2004, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the Washington Association for Language Teaching (WAFLT), and the Washington State Coalition for International Education conducted the first World Languages and Technology Survey, receiving information from 160 high schools. In 2007, the Mapping and Enhancing Language Learning (MELL) project did a second survey and received data from 367 high schools. In their 2009 survey, MELL collected surveys from 396 high schools. With this information we can get a snapshot of the languages taught in Washington state and also observe some trends in languages offered over a 5-year period.

Many High Schools Continue Not to Offer World Languages

In 2007, MELL learned that 19 percent of the high schools that responded to the survey that year reported not offering a world language. A follow-up study, reported in MELL Policy Brief #2, contacted most of these high schools and found that they were all alternative high schools, which are generally smaller and often designed to meet specific student needs and interests. The follow-up study revealed that many of these schools did offer

supplementary opportunities to their students to take world languages through traditional high school (near the alternative high school), online courses, Running Start (courses at a community college), or some combination of these 3 options.

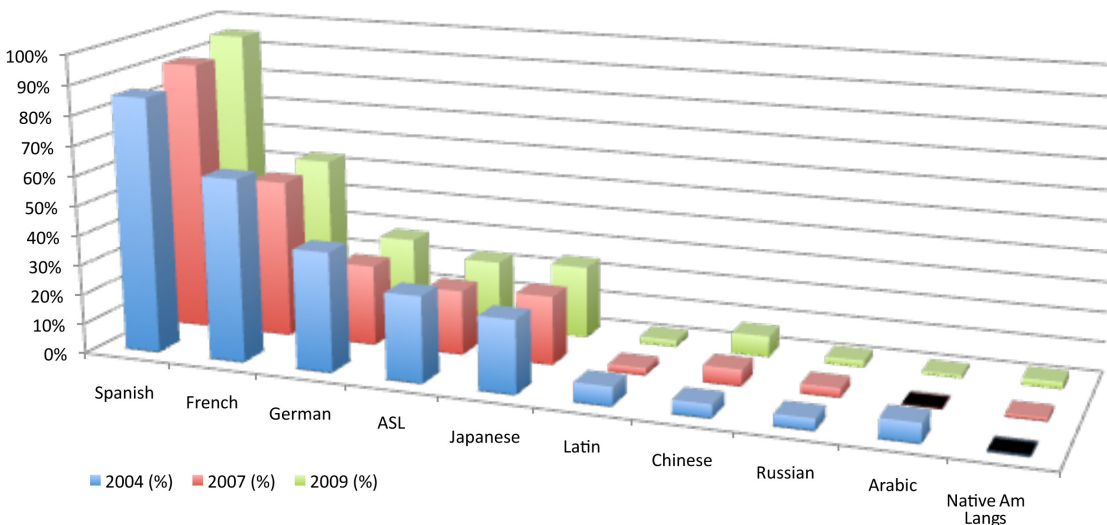
In the 2009 MELL Survey, 20 percent of the high schools responded that they did not offer world languages, indicating that as a general trend, schools were not adding language programs. Of these high schools, 75 percent were coded as alternative high schools and 25 percent were coded as traditional high schools in a list provided by OSPI.

Trends in Languages Offered

Schools (Number & Percentage) that Reported Offering World Languages in 2004, 2007, and 2009 Surveys

	2004	2004 (%)	2007	2007 (%)	2009	2009 (%)
Spanish	137	85.63%	269	90.88%	302	95.57%
French	98	61.25%	157	53.04%	169	53.48%
German	64	40.00%	80	27.03%	89	28.16%
ASL	46	28.75%	64	21.62%	73	23.10%
Japanese	39	24.38%	68	22.97%	77	24.37%
Latin	10	6.25%	7	2.36%	7	2.22%
Chinese	7	4.38%	17	5.47%	22	6.96%
Russian	6	3.75%	9	3.04%	7	2.22%
Arabic	1	6.30%	0	0.00%	3	0.95%
Native Am Langs	0	0.00%	3	1.01%	7	2.22%

Languages (Percentage) Offered at Schools Surveyed in 2004, 2007, and 2009



Note: Percentages are calculated based on the total number of schools that reported offering world languages (not the total number of schools that submitted a MELL survey). In addition, the specific schools that responded to the MELL survey were not necessarily the same in 2004, 2007, and 2009.

With the addition of the 2009 data, indicated in the table and graph above, we can see that the strongest trend is the expansion of Spanish from about 85.63 percent in 2004 to 90.88 percent in 2007, and 95.57 percent in 2009.

The second most notable trend is the expansion of Chinese in our state. Although Chinese is offered in less than 7 percent of the schools overall, across the state, the number of schools at which it is offered has increased. In 2004, 7 high schools reported offering Chinese, in 2007, 18 schools reported offering it, and in 2009, 22 schools reported offering it. Though there is some consistency between 2004, 2007, and 2009 as to specific schools that report offering Chinese, 3 of the schools that reported in 2007 did not report offering it in 2009. In addition, about 9 schools were new on the list of those offering Chinese, with 2 of these schools being on the outskirts of our state, one in Vancouver and one in Oakesdale.

After a noticeable drop between 2004 and 2007 in the percentage of schools reporting that they offer French and German, these 2 languages seem to be stabilizing at about 53.48 percent and 28.16 percent, respectively. American Sign Language (ASL) and Japanese have maintained their presence over 5 years, and are in 23.10 and 24.37 percent of the high schools, respectively.

Latin is represented in 2.22 percent of high schools that report offering languages. While the number and percentage remain about the same between 2007 and 2009, the actual schools reporting offering Latin have changed. In 2009, 3 new schools reported offering Latin, while 3 schools that reported offering it in 2007 did not report offering it in 2009.

In 2007, 9 schools reported offering Russian and in 2009, 7 schools. Of these schools 3 are the same between 2007 and 2009, with 4 new additions in 2009: 2 in Seattle, 1 in Spokane Valley, and 1 in Bellevue.

Unfortunately our data on Native American languages are incomplete. We hope to offer more revealing statistics in the future.

Conclusion

As our data analysis begins to reveal trends in languages offered, we can examine the implications of these trends and formulate policies that will allow us as a state, and as businesses and citizens, to keep pace with the needs of our interdependent, global economy.

Spanish is solid in our state. This is good news, after all, Spanish is the most frequent language spoken by our English Language Learners. With the new Digital Learning Department (DLD) <http://www.digitallearning.k12.wa.us/> under the purview of OSPI, might we expect that 100 percent of our schools will begin reporting offering Spanish and other world languages?

And while Chinese language offerings are growing in our state, are our schools getting enough support to sustain their programs?

Russian is the second most frequent language of the English Language Learners in this state, but it is taught in only a handful of schools across our state. What is lost for all students when these heritage language speakers are not provided opportunities to retain their language? Can we do anything to maintain its presence across our state?

Though the Japanese language has maintained a consistent presence in our schools, given the national trend

of decreasing Japanese enrollment, what might we do to keep Japanese strong in this state? (According to the Consul General of Japan, Washington State is #2 after Hawaii in the teaching of Japanese.)

And Arabic, one of the languages that has been identified as a critical language for our country, is reported to be offered in only 3 high schools. Furthermore, these classes are offered in an after school program (OneWorld Now!), not as part of the regular school curriculum.

Languages have not typically been deemed a high priority in our education system, and in times of deep budget cuts, their status is in even greater jeopardy. Yet, as we look at our state's dependence on the cultures and languages of the world, can we afford not to support the growth of languages, especially the ones we have made strides in over the years?

The strongest trend is the expansion of Spanish to 95.57 percent in 2009.

The Mapping and Enhancing Language Learning (MELL) project was initiated in 2006 by four National Resource Centers at the University of Washington's Jackson School of International Studies, which received funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI program to launch a four-year project to collect data on world language learning and teaching in Washington K-12 schools. The Center for Global Studies (CGS), Center for West European Studies (CWES), East Asia Center (EAC), and the Ellison Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies (REECAS) are working with the UW Language Learning Center, Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Washington State Coalition for International Education, and Washington Association for Language Teaching (WAFLT) to establish an understanding of world language teaching trends in Washington state. With funding from the Title VI program grants and a State Innovations grant from Longview Foundation, the MELL project is creating a series of policy briefs based on the data collected through the MELL surveys of schools. **For further information, call the Language Learning Center at 206.543.0563 or email mellwa@u.washington.edu. Web: depts.washington.edu/mellwa.**