

MARYLAND VOLUNTARY STATE CURRICULUM
WORLD LANGUAGES
Introduction

As a nation we are increasingly aware of our interdependence with diverse cultures and of our need to participate in the global community. Closer to home, the growing diversity of Maryland’s population requires the preparation of a citizenry that is sensitive to other languages and cultures.

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* includes world languages as one of the core academic subject areas, requiring states to develop standards and implement challenging academic content. In addition, *Achievement Matters Most*, the final report of the Visionary Panel for Better Schools, recommended that the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) develop a state curriculum in all content areas that would be voluntary for local school systems. Thus, in response to the federal and state requirements and to the need to prepare internationally literate graduates, MSDE staff and representatives from local school systems and higher education drafted and revised the World Language Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC). The development team drew upon the latest research and expertise in the field by aligning Maryland’s VSC to the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* developed by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project in collaboration with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

The Maryland World Language VSC assists Maryland teachers and administrators in planning, developing, and implementing world language curricula. This document provides a broad framework from which local systems may construct comprehensive world language programs for all students. The VSC shares the same format as all content areas and comprises the following components: content **standards**, **indicator** statements, and **objective** statements.

Because Maryland schools provide a variety of language program models with various entry points across elementary, middle, and high school, the standards are not tied to specific grade levels. Rather, the four levels of language learning: **beginning**, **emerging**, **developing**, and **advancing**, characterize stages of language and culture acquisition and provide a common vision for determining student ability to make the transition from high school to postsecondary instruction. The four levels of language learning are aligned to the proficiency levels developed by the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (*ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners*) as follows:

BEGINNING	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	ADVANCING
(Receptive-Imitative)	(Imitative-Interactive)	(Interactive-Reflective)	(Reflective-Refining)
Novice Low – Novice Mid	Novice Mid – Novice High	Novice High – Intermediate Low	Intermediate Low-Mid-High

The **standards** remain consistent across the four levels of language learning. The focus of the standards is student learning: They tell us what students should know and be able to do. This document describes the target performance for students, not what

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the teacher does to create that performance. **Indicator** statements break the standard statements into teachable component parts and more specifically describe what students should know and be able to do at a particular level. **Objective** statements are written with a further level of specificity and describe individual student knowledge and skills. Objectives are intended to guide teachers in daily unit and lesson planning.

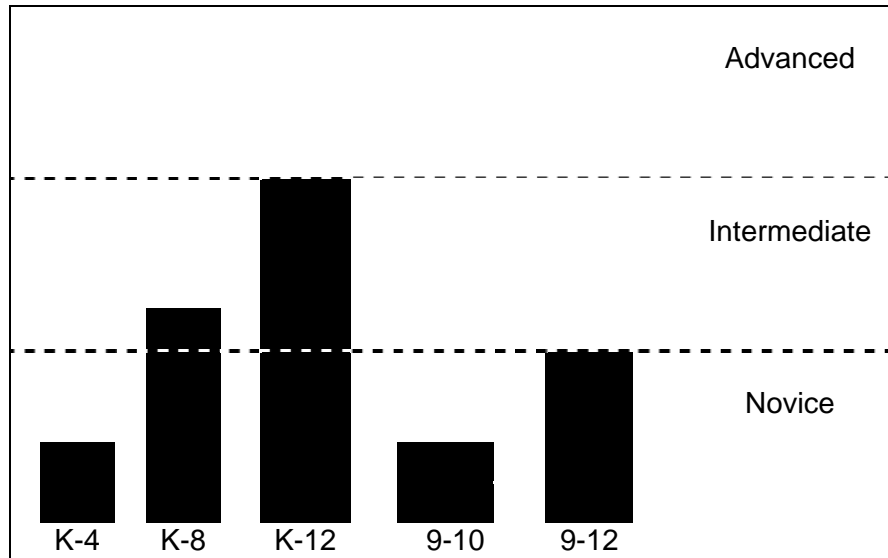
Maryland schools offer a variety of languages with unique vocabulary, sound and writing systems, structures, and cultures. For example, the focus of Latin and Ancient Greek study is reading comprehension rather than oral competence. American Sign Language (ASL) does not have an oral or written component. Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic offer a different set of challenges to English-speaking students than Western languages, such as French, German, and Spanish. Heritage language programs focus on enhancing the language skills that students already have. The standards included in the World Language VSC were developed to accommodate all of Maryland's world language programs. They are not language-specific; therefore, modifications are necessary to make them applicable to a specific language.

Regardless of these differences, communication (oral/written/signed) and culture are the organizing principles of language learning. The national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* summarize the "key to successful communication: knowing *how*, *when*, and *why* to say *what* to *whom*." The ability to communicate in another language enables one to access a world not previously known: new people, new ideas, new cultures, and new experiences. We use language to describe the surrounding environment, to share thoughts and feelings with others, and to understand another culture and the roots of civilization.

As Maryland and the United States become more culturally diverse and their participation in the world community grows, effective cross-cultural communication is an essential component of good citizenship. The skills developed in the world language classroom are of great value in interpersonal relationships, education, business, world trade, travel, scientific research, national security, and diplomacy. World language study is one means of developing cultural sensitivity and an understanding of the changing cultural dynamics of local, state, national, and international communities.

Beginning as early as possible, all Maryland students should have the opportunity to learn languages in extended, uninterrupted sequences. Many experts agree that the ideal time to begin studying a foreign language is in elementary school; children in that age group who study a language have been shown to have greater mental flexibility, creativity, divergent thinking skills, and higher-order thinking skills, as well as improved listening skills and memories. Longer sequences of instruction result in higher proficiency levels; the table below illustrates the influence of time on language performance ability.

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ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners, "Anticipated Performance Outcomes" based on information gathered from foreign language professionals representing a variety of program models and articulation sequences.

The notion that instruction in world languages should be reserved for advanced or college-bound students is not supported by research. In fact, the research shows that virtually all students – students with different learning needs and styles – can learn a second or third language in today’s interactive world language classroom. The research also shows that world language programs benefit all students: Across student subgroups, language learning correlates with higher standardized test scores.

The Maryland World Language VSC guides the development of curriculum at the local school system level. It identifies, for a variety of audiences, what to learn, what progress to make, what skill levels to achieve, and what to measure. The VSC establishes:

- For students: a real-world context for learning a new language
- For classroom teachers: guidelines for vertical teaming and lesson planning that focus on broad goals which allow teachers to make choices to meet student needs and interests
- For administrators: criteria for classroom observations
- For teachers, administrators, parents and the community: a basis for accountability.

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The fundamental purpose of world language instruction is to enable students to communicate in a world language in a culturally appropriate way. The VSC integrates the five C's of the national standards at all levels: **Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.**

COMMUNICATION: The Communication standard is the heart of the world language classroom. Central to world language learning is *using* the second language to communicate, to learn, and to become part of another culture, rather than talking *about* the second language or another culture in English. Communication comprises three modes that represent different purposes of language:

- to engage in conversation, exchange ideas, or negotiate meaning with another person (interpersonal mode).
- to understand information received through reading, listening, or viewing (interpretive mode), and
- to express ideas or deliver information through speaking, writing, or showing (presentational mode).

CULTURES: The Cultures standard stresses the awareness of differing perspectives behind the products and practices of the target cultures. The goal is to consider why the similarities or differences exist and how they help students understand another culture's perspective or view of the world.

CONNECTIONS: The Connections standard links world language study with other disciplines to create interesting, meaningful and authentic contexts for communication in the classroom. As a result, the pool of potential content in a language classroom is virtually limitless, allowing students to use language as a tool for learning in a more natural context.

COMPARISONS: The Comparisons standard helps students recognize that language and culture interrelate and evolve to meet the dynamic needs of people and society. As a result, students encounter not only cultural and linguistic differences, but also similarities between the language and culture studied and their own.

COMMUNITIES: The Communities standard reminds teachers to look beyond the four walls of the classroom to ensure that students learn how to apply the skills and knowledge gained in the classroom. This may take the form of actual or virtual field trips locally and abroad, student or teacher exchanges, authentic materials used for specific purposes, or written or verbal communication with people from another culture. The teacher designs lessons that help students use their new language in purposeful and meaningful ways to provide personal enrichment and lifelong learning.