Executive Summary with Recommendations

For decades, English-speaking countries have wrestled with the question of whether one language, English, is enough for their citizens. For its part, the United States has not made learning a second language a critical part of its education system despite the demands of government and industry as well as the expectations of the overwhelming majority of parents across the country.

Accordingly, this white paper is intended to answer the following questions:

- Should the education system in the United States provide all children access to the interpersonal, developmental, and economic benefits of a second language?
- Are our schools, colleges, and universities capable and willing to make language education universally available? If so, how? If not, why not?

This paper provides evidence that:

- The demand for languages other than English has dramatically increased over the past decade to the extent that the current education system can now be seen as failing to provide a critical skill to the majority of this country’s youth.
- Advances in science, technology, and best practice can make universal access to second languages feasible, but only if:
  - scientific breakthroughs are exploited effectively by the formal education system and by the growing language services industry,
  - access to the Internet is universally available, and
  - research-based best practices in language education are identified and promulgated throughout the PK-16 system.
Recommendations

In light of this evidence, this document puts forward the following recommendations, which combine top-down federal interventions and a bottom-up activism on the part of the “Language Enterprise,” a convergence of government, education, private industry, and heritage communities:

- Create a public awareness campaign on the personal and societal benefits, including national security and economic competitiveness, of language education.
- Document, across the “Language Enterprise,” what language learning resources exist, where they are, and how they can be accessed, together with standards and assessments that guarantee efficiency and effectiveness for program outcomes.
- Investigate the barriers at every level of the education system that are inhibiting the spread of language learning and teaching.
- Develop a research agenda that fills the gaps in evidence regarding universal access to language education.
- Initiate a national program of dual language immersions among other program models demonstrating that learning languages can be effectively and efficiently integrated into a major part of the PK-12 system.

Conclusion

The sad state of current language education in Anglophone countries is well understood:

A deep and persistent malaise afflicts language education in Australia, regrettably shared with other English-speaking nations, and the expressions of concern, even frustration, at the fragility of languages suggests a public refusal to accept this state of affairs. —Joseph Lo Bianco

These recommendations, supported by a broad national and international effort, may indeed hold the key to stemming, if not ending, this frustration and begin to provide effective means for all students in English-speaking countries to gain competence in a second language.