



Dear Representatives Holt and Tonko:

As representatives from leading national education and language organizations, we fully support your efforts through H.R. 6036, the “Excellence and Innovation in Language Learning Act,” to help American students become globally competitive by providing them with access to high-quality world language instruction starting in the early grades. We believe that every student should have access to language learning opportunities in grades K-12 that enable them to develop proficiency in another language and understand other cultures. We believe that as they study in college and participate in international studies, including study abroad, they will be prepared to succeed in the global workforce of the 21st Century.

Today, we are falling far short of this goal. According to the National Academy of Sciences, “the pervasive lack of knowledge about foreign cultures and languages threatens the security of the United States as well as its ability to compete in the global marketplace and produce an informed citizenry.” Increasing the capacity of our citizens to be proficient in world languages and cultures must be a priority in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

While Americans compete on an increasingly level playing field with their counterparts around the world, our students’ chances to become globally competent are decreasing. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics, K-12 language instruction has declined significantly in the past decade. There are also significant inequities in the opportunities to learn other languages; language courses are far less available in urban and rural schools than in suburban or private schools. Our language offerings have not kept pace with less commonly-taught world languages which are newly important to our national security, global leadership, and economic competitiveness. Finally, while U.S. language learning remains weak, other countries have been increasing their investments in a range of world languages. A clear gap has emerged between the language skills of Americans and those of graduates of other industrial countries.

Now is the time to address this challenge by incorporating a specific world language and international education initiative in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Reauthorization of ESEA provides an immediate, game-changing opportunity. We must ensure that *every* student is *globally competent* and prepared to participate in the globalized workforce America needs in the 21st century. *All* students need a deeper knowledge of other cultures, expert thinking skills for a knowledge-driven global economy, the ability to interact with individuals from varied backgrounds, and sophisticated communication skills including proficiency in at least one language in addition to English. Because these skills and knowledge are the foundations of work and citizenship in the 21st century, they must also be the foundations of meaningful education reform.

Higher standards and better outcomes in world language, in addition to reading and math, are essential to our nation’s future. Language skills coupled with understanding of other cultures and nations will ensure that our students are globally competent. Graduates must know how to communicate and function in a global marketplace, as well as collaborate with people from cultures very different than their own to help solve the world’s political, economic, social, health and environmental challenges. The “Excellence and Innovation in Language Learning Act” contains key incentives to: establish high quality language programs, beginning in elementary school; recruit and train language teachers; and provide the support structure at the national and state level to build effective national language capability.



Specifically we are very supportive of your bill that includes the following provisions:

- Coordinate activities at the national level between different agencies and departments to ensure that evolving national security and economic needs are met.
- Provide incentives for states and localities to establish and fund language programs, starting in the elementary grades and continuing through high school.
- Establish state language and international education councils to assess states’ needs, develop teacher capacity, and create “language pathways” within each state.
- Provide incentives among and between local education agencies and institutions of higher education to stimulate systemic reforms in world language policy, teacher preparation, and instruction through articulated and sequential programs for language and cultural learning, focused on achieving high levels of proficiency.
- Design programs, curriculum and teaching strategies that provide for maximum exposure to languages and cultures inside and outside the classroom.
- Provide assistance in the recruitment, education, certification and continuing professional development of language teachers.
- Provide scholarships for language study abroad for teachers and students.
- Conduct research and evaluation of programs and disseminate best practices.

We must fashion a more creative and visionary educational response to globalization, starting now. We urge Congress to pass H.R. 6036 and give our children the language skills they need to succeed in a global environment.

Signatories:

ASIA SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP FOR GLOBAL LEARNING
JNCL-NCLIS
ACTFL
NEA
COALITION FOR INERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Other Signatories:

Linguistic Society of America