



News

Public Relations Department
725 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10021-5088

www.asiasociety.org

Phone 212.327.9271

Fax 212.794.1332

E-mail pr@asiasoc.org

Contact:

Michael Levine, 212-327-9216, mlevine@AsiaSoc.org

Thomas Phillips, 212-935-4655, comptwp@aol.com

AMID GROWING INTEREST U.S. SCHOOLS UNPREPARED TO MEET NATIONAL DEMAND FOR CHINESE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

New Asia Society Study Highlights Best Practices To Expand Chinese Language Capacity

NEW YORK, NY, July 12, 2005 – The rise of China, dramatically documented in recent months as its impact is felt economically and culturally, is driving new demand for Chinese language speakers across business and social sectors. Yet schools throughout the United States are largely unprepared to meet this need, lacking qualified teachers, programs or creative uses of modern educational technologies, according to a new study released today by Asia Society.

The new report, entitled **Expanding Chinese Language Capacity in the United States**, calls for a national commitment to new investments in teaching Chinese language and culture. Created by Asia Society's education division, the preeminent international education leader in the K-12 field, the report documents a growing consensus among national security and business leaders, educators and foreign language experts. Its analysis of the current status of Chinese language instruction concludes that the current infrastructure to support recruitment of students and teachers as well as the growth of high quality programs is woefully inadequate. The study suggests short- and long-range strategies to address the question: *What would it take to have five percent of American high school students learning Chinese by 2015?*

The release of the report comes at a time when leaders from across public and private sectors are recognizing the growing importance of Asia as one of the central facts of the 21st Century. China, with its tremendous economic growth—total trade with China exceeded \$230 billion in 2004, second only to trade with Canada and Mexico—and emergence as a social and political leader in the region, is fundamental to this shift.

As China rushes toward superpower status, American's schools and government officials are growing increasingly concerned by the lack of expertise in a language considered critical to national prosperity and security. The most recent data show only 24,000 students in grades 7-12 study Chinese, a language spoken by 1.3 billion people worldwide. In contrast, more than one million students learn French, a language spoken by only 80 million people. "Our nation's schools are locked in a time warp. By ignoring critical languages such as Chinese and the essential cultural knowledge needed to succeed, our school systems are out of step with new global realities. This report urgently highlights the need for an expanded national commitment to

world languages and international studies,” said Charles Kolb, President of the Committee for Economic Development.

The U.S. State Department has designated Chinese a critical language and in late May, U. S. Senators Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) introduced the United States-China Cultural Engagement Act, proposing \$1.3 billion in federal funds to provide for Chinese language and culture instruction in America schools.

“Interest in learning Chinese among American youth and their parents has grown dramatically in the past five years,” said Vivien Stewart, Vice President for Education at Asia Society. “But schools don’t know how to start and sustain a Chinese language program and there is an acute shortage of certified teachers,”

Between 1998 and 2002, the number of college students studying Chinese rose 20 percent to just over 34,000. And in a fall 2004 College Board survey of high schools, 2,400 schools expressed interest in offering the advanced placement courses in Chinese language (Mandarin) and culture when it becomes available in 2006. “We expected a few hundred schools to express interest in offering the Chinese AP, so these results were eye-opening,” said College Board President Gaston Caperton. “ Americans have been the world’s most successful students and entrepreneurs for the past century. We have to envision a new set of global skills that include understanding world languages and cultures to retain our edge in an increasingly interconnected economy.”

Besides the new AP course, other new developments include the model Chinese K-16 Pipeline Project of the National Security Education Program and CHENGO, an online games-based program for beginning Chinese, developed by the U.S. Department of Education and the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and available free of charge to pilot schools.

But these alone will not address the critical capacity issue. Among the recommendations made in the report to expand Chinese:

- Lack of qualified teachers is the key bottleneck in building capacity. Higher education institution should create fast-track or alternate route certification programs for U.S. Chinese speakers. States should expand visiting faculty programs for teachers from China, similar to those in other languages, and should create certification procedures to make it possible for U.S. teachers to become certified teachers of Chinese.
- In order to translate the current interest into high-quality school programs, schools will need technical assistance in learning from the best practices of current programs. We need to start earlier, use more intensive research-based approaches, and include the communities of heritage language learners. Beyond this, public education campaigns to raise awareness among educators, students and parents of the growing importance of Chinese will be needed and competitive seed funds to make programs available in less affluent school districts.

- Innovative ways of using media and technology, such as distance education, online courses, and connections to students in China should be given high priority to complement classroom programs and broaden access.

Ultimately, the creation of significant capacity in Chinese will require innovation and investments similar to those in other fields deemed important to the nation. In 1958, the National Language Defense Education Act, passed after the launch of Sputnik, supported a range of strategies to meet the science and foreign-language needs of the day. Today's realities will require proficient speakers of a wider range of world languages, including Chinese, a language we as a nation can no longer ignore.

About Asia Society

The Asia Society is America's leading institution dedicated to fostering understanding of Asia and communication between Americans and the peoples of Asia and the Pacific. A national nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization, the Asia Society develops cultural, policy, business and education programs about Asia for the public and influential leaders.