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Information

Professional Services Committee

Issues in Determining Language Proficiency for Languages Other than English

Executive Summary: This report identifies issues in determining content knowledge and language proficiency for less frequently taught languages other than English.

Staff Direction: Commission staff is seeking direction from the Commission regarding the potential development of alternative routes to determining language proficiency in less frequently taught languages other than English.

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Strategic Plan Goal: 1

Promote educational excellence through the preparation and certification of professional educators.

- ◆ Sustain high quality standards for the preparation of professional educators.
- ◆ Sustain high quality standards for the performance of credential candidates.

Issues in Determining Language Proficiency for Languages Other than English

Background

The Commission presently offers single subject matter teaching credentials in languages other than English to meet the instructional and staffing needs of K-12 public schools. Credentials are available in ten different language areas including American Sign Language, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. In accordance with existing law, teachers must demonstrate the adequacy of their subject matter knowledge as part of the requirements for a credential, as well as to meet the Highly Qualified Teacher requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. Current law allows candidates to satisfy this requirement either by passage of a Commission-adopted subject matter exam in the content area or completion of a Commission-approved undergraduate subject matter program. Approximately 33% of credential candidates pursuing a single subject credential in a language other than English satisfy the requirement by passing a Commission-approved subject matter examination. On occasion, public schools offer courses in less commonly taught languages for which there is no Commission-adopted subject matter examination or approved program available. For less commonly taught languages, where no Commission-approved subject matter examination exists or is otherwise commercially available, the Commission is authorized to establish guidelines for accepting alternative language proficiency assessments. This agenda item provides an overview of the current Commission requirements for single subject matter competency in Languages Other than English (LOTE) and presents some policy issues for the Commission's consideration in determining alternative routes to language proficiency in additional languages other than English.

Current Commission Requirements for Single Subject Matter Competency and Preparation in Languages Other than English

The Commission's approved subject matter requirements for Languages other than English compass the following candidate competencies which are included in both the subject matter examinations and in subject matter programs:

- (I) General Linguistics
 - Linguistics of the Target Language
- (II) Literary and Cultural Texts and Traditions
 - Cultural Analysis and Comparison
- (III) Language and Communication: Listening Comprehension

Language and Communication: Reading Comprehension
Language and Communication: Written Expression
Language and Communication: Oral Expression

The California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) is a series of subject matter examinations for prospective teachers who choose to meet the subject matter competence requirement by taking examinations. Currently, CSET single subject matter examinations are currently available in multiple languages other than English. These languages are: American Sign Language, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Demonstrating Subject Matter Competency for Languages not covered by CSET

Recent legislation addressed the policy question of how teachers of Filipino can demonstrate subject matter knowledge. Assembly Bill 420 (Horton, Statutes of 2005, Chapter 390) requires the Commission to develop a Filipino subject matter examination by September 1, 2008, and to submit an expenditure plan for the development of this examination by January 8, 2006. An expenditure plan for the development of the Filipino single subject matter examination as required by AB 420 was approved by the Commission at the November 30-December 1, 2005.

The passage of AB 420 raised the question of how teachers of languages not covered by CSET can demonstrate subject matter knowledge. In addition to Filipino, there are other language groups that may be interested in the availability of a route to subject matter competency in additional languages other than English. Education Code §44280 states that the Commission “may establish guidelines for accepting alternative assessments performed by organizations that are expert in the language and culture assessed.” To date, the Commission has not established such guidelines.

Issues for the Commission’s Consideration in Determining Language Proficiency for Languages Other than English.

Need for Additional Languages Other than English Credential Authorizations

The Commission currently has examination routes for ten languages other than English, with Filipino to be added by 2008. Other language groups may be interested in having a credential route available for additional languages other than English. The degree to which additional credentials in languages other than English are needed in schools is uncertain and may vary considerably over time. Further, because schools offering courses in such language areas may not have sufficient demand for full-time credentialed teachers, positions may be limited. Advisement of candidates interested in an initial single subject teaching credential in additional languages other than English would be critical to ensure that these candidates understood the potentially limited nature of the job market available to them.

Guidelines for Alternative Assessments in Additional Languages Other than English

While it would be possible for prospective teachers to complete a Commission –approved subject matter program in a specific language area in lieu of the CSET, most universities do not offer undergraduate majors in less common language areas. Thus, individuals who wish to teach a language other than those covered by CSET, may not have the means of meeting the subject matter requirement for a LOTE credential through coursework. Developing new LOTE examinations within the CSET examination program could be costly since anticipated registration for these exams would be very low. Because the Commission’s examinations must be self-sustaining, fees for these exams could be prohibitive for candidates.

To enable opportunities for the instruction of more languages, the Commission may want to establish alternative routes to additional LOTE credentials. If the Commission were to establish alternative examination routes for additional languages other than English, such routes would need to be equivalent in scope and rigor to the Commission’s current examinations. There are currently no “off-the-shelf” assessments available for most, if not all, of the potential additional languages. Further, what might be commercially available is limited in terms of the alignment with California’s K-12 student academic content standards for languages other than English and with the required candidate knowledge and competencies as outlined above.

There are, however, several existing language organizations that have various language competency tests, but no single one covers all of the required subject matter competencies outlined above. Guidelines would need to be established concerning areas such as:

- the qualifications of the organization, or of a consortium of organizations, to offer one or more alternative assessment(s) in languages other than English
- the rigor of the proposed alternative assessment(s)
- the alignment of the proposed alternative assessment(s) to California’s K-12 student academic content standards and to the required candidate competencies
- the qualifications and training of the proposed assessors
- the psychometric properties of the proposed assessment(s) (e.g., validity, reliability, etc.)
- conditions and procedures for assessment administration
- methods of reporting candidate scores

Further Direction

Given the rich linguistic diversity of California’s population, it is likely that requests for new language authorizations will continue over time. The Commission may decide to pursue the topic of establishing guidelines for alternative assessment routes for determining language proficiency in order to add additional single subject teaching credentials in languages other than English. How might the demand for new language credentials be handled in the future? For low-incidence languages, what alternative

routes can be established for determining language proficiency? Should the Commission determine the need to establish guidelines for alternative assessments, what would criteria would be applied to ensure the adequacy of the assessment?

If the Commission wants to pursue issues in determining language proficiency for languages other than English, what additional information might be needed to inform the discussion, and/or what direction might the Commission want to give staff? If the Commission does not want to pursue the topic further at this time, work will continue on the development of the Filipino subject matter examination as required by AB 420.