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## Information/Action

### *Professional Services Committee*

#### **Subject Matter Assessment for Less Commonly Taught Languages Other Than English**

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**Executive Summary:** This report identifies issues and approaches in determining content knowledge and language proficiency for less commonly taught languages other than English, describes three potential options for subject matter assessment for less commonly taught languages other than English, and recommends one option for adoption by the Commission.

**Recommended Action:** That the Commission adopt Option C as described in this agenda item for the development of an alternative route to determining subject matter competency for less commonly 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.



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# **Subject Matter Assessment for Less Commonly Taught Languages Other Than English**

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## **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 federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. Current law allows single subject 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), discusses options for several potential alternative routes to assessing subject matter competence in less commonly taught languages other than English, and recommends one of these options for consideration for adoption by the Commission.

## **Definition of Subject Matter Proficiency for Single Subject Credentials**

A candidate wanting to obtain a credential as a single subject teacher in California needs to meet both subject matter preparation requirements and pedagogical preparation requirements. Candidates typically do their subject matter preparation as undergraduates before receiving a bachelor's degree, and their pedagogical preparation after they have obtained a bachelor's degree. (Note: Within a blended program option, candidates may work simultaneously on subject matter preparation and pedagogical preparation.)

Subject matter requirements cover a wide range of knowledge about the subject area to be taught, including but not limited to the K-12 student academic content standards in that subject area. The scope of the subject matter requirements are defined by the

Commission's adopted Subject Matter Requirements (SMRs) for each subject area. Single subject credential candidates must either pass the Commission's approved subject matter examination or successfully complete a Commission-approved college or university single subject matter preparation program.

It is important to note that subject matter proficiency pertains only to mastery of the content of the particular subject area. Subject matter proficiency does not include pedagogical proficiency. Pedagogical proficiency pertains to learning how to teach, and includes areas such as methods of teaching the particular subject area content, learning to plan for and deliver classroom instruction to K-12 students in that subject area, and preparation to teach all learners. Pedagogical proficiency is demonstrated by successfully completing a Commission-approved single subject professional teacher preparation program, typically after the candidate has successfully met the subject matter requirement and obtained a bachelor's degree.

Within the context of Languages Other than English (LOTE), candidates for the single subject credential who are working on subject matter proficiency are preparing to demonstrate their mastery of the subject matter requirements adopted by the Commission. These candidates are preparing to teach the target language as a foreign or world language at the secondary school level; they earn a single subject foreign language credential, not an elementary or secondary level bilingual credential.

### **Current Commission Requirements for Single Subject Matter Competency 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 the 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 Commission-approved 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 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 submit an expenditure plan for the development a Filipino subject matter examination by January 8, 2006, and subject to an appropriation in the Budget Act of 2006 for this purpose, to contract with another entity to develop the examination by September 1, 2008. 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 meeting. The Commission is awaiting a decision regarding the funding of this examination in the May Revise.

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.”

### **Need for Additional Subject Matter Assessments for Languages Other Than English**

The degree to which additional credentials in languages other than English are needed in schools is uncertain. These needs may vary considerably over time and may also be highly localized. Further, because schools offering single subject foreign language courses in the less commonly taught language areas may not have sufficient demand for full-time credentialed teachers, available teaching positions may be limited. An indication of need on the part of local school districts for teachers of less commonly taught languages other than English would be an important component in establishing the need for additional LOTE subject matter assessments, and would be critical to making the decision to develop and offer a Commission-approved subject matter examination in that language. Advisement of candidates interested in an initial single subject teaching credential in additional less commonly taught languages other than English would be critical to ensure that these candidates understood the potentially limited nature of the job market available to them.

There are also cost implications for the potential development and administration of subject matter examinations in additional languages other than English, particularly those less commonly taught. For most, if not all, of the subject matter examinations in less commonly taught languages, the number of examinees per year would likely be very small, and thus the potential cost to each examinee could be prohibitive.

### **Suggested Policy Consideration**

In order to most effectively use the state's limited fiscal resources, the Commission might wish to establish threshold criteria for proceeding with the development of additional single subject matter LOTE examinations. These criteria might include at a minimum:

- a) an indication of need on the part of an employing school district for single subject credentialed teachers of that language at the secondary school level;
- b) an indication of the potential employment market within the state for single subject teachers of this language;
- c) a cost estimate for the development and implementation of that LOTE examination;
- d) a cost estimate of the examination fees that would need to be charged to each candidate for that LOTE examination;
- e) an indication of interest and/or capacity on the part of an approved single subject professional teacher preparation program to include that language in the professional preparation program sequence; and
- f) an advisement plan for potential candidates for that single subject LOTE area relative to the potential for employment in the state.

### **Potential Approaches to Determining Language Proficiency for Less Commonly Taught Languages Other than English**

**1. Coursework Option.** While it would be possible for prospective single subject teachers to complete a Commission-approved subject matter program in a specific language area in lieu of passing a CSET examination in that subject area, most colleges and universities do not offer undergraduate majors in less commonly taught language areas. Thus, individuals who wish to teach a language other than those currently covered by CSET may not have the means of meeting the subject matter requirement for a LOTE credential through coursework.

**2. Alternative Options.** The Commission is authorized by EC 44280 to establish alternative assessment options for less commonly taught languages. Each potential alternative approach, however, would need to cover the content of the Languages Other than English (LOTE) Subject Matter Requirements (SMRs) adopted by the Commission to a similar degree and with comparable rigor to the current array of CSET LOTE examinations. At the Commission meeting of February 1, 2006, staff presented some potential approaches to alternative assessments for Commission review and discussion. At that time, the Commission requested staff to develop proposals for alternative routes to LOTE subject matter assessment for the less commonly taught languages. Three potential options for alternative routes to LOTE subject matter assessment for less commonly taught languages will be discussed below, with one of these options suggested for adoption consideration by the Commission.

***Option A: Use of Assessments Offered by Other Organizations.*** If there were “off the shelf” assessments available from other organizations in less commonly taught languages other than English, the Commission could potentially adopt one or more of these

examinations to determine a candidate's subject matter competency. However, 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 full range of the subject matter knowledge required by the Commission's adopted LOTE SMRs as outlined above.

Several external language organizations offer various language competency tests, but no single one, alone or in combination with other such tests, covers all of the required LOTE subject matter competencies. For example, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) offers an oral proficiency test known as the "OPI" ("Oral Proficiency Interview"). As the title of this examination suggests, it covers the oral language skills of listening and speaking, but not the other LOTE subject matter requirements adopted by the Commission. The OPI is available for the following languages: Albanian, Arabic, Cambodian, Cantonese, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, Egyptian, English, Farsi, Flemish, French, German, Greek, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Hindi, Hmong, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Thai, Ukrainian, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

ACTFL also offers a writing proficiency test known as the "WPT." This examination covers the domain of writing proficiency only, and is offered in the following languages: Albanian, Arabic, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish.

The two ACTFL examinations, even if they were available in a language of interest in California, are insufficient in and of themselves to address even the single domain of language proficiency, and do not cover the remaining four SMR domains within the CSET Languages Other Than English area.

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has developed proficiency tests for speaking, listening, and reading in several languages. This test covers only these three language skills areas, and is available in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Hebrew, Hausa, Indonesian, Portuguese and Spanish. This examination is administered in a language laboratory setting using tape recordings. This examination is insufficient to address the LOTE SMRs.

Because Option A does not provide the range of examinations covering the required subject matter domains needed for California credential candidates in less frequently taught languages other than English, this option is not feasible for implementation.

***Option B: Repurposing the use of Current Commission Examinations.*** Staff explored with the Commission at its meeting of February 1, 2006 the possibility of "repurposing" sections of the Commission's CTEL and BCLAD examinations to cover the CSET LOTE subject matter competency domains for less commonly taught languages other than English. Under this plan, CTEL I (General Linguistics) and the BCLAD Tests 5 (Culture) and 6 (Language) examinations would be combined with two new subtests to be

developed in the areas of linguistics of the target language and literature of the target language. Taken as a whole, this combination of examinations could potentially cover the range of LOTE SMRs for those less commonly taught languages for which a BCLAD examination was available. BCLAD examinations are currently available in Armenian, Cantonese, Filipino, Hmong, Khmer, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese.

The advantages of this plan would be to use existing examinations approved by the Commission, with only minimal additional exam development needed. Because the additional two subtest areas that would need to be added are already identified in the LOTE SMRs, development work on test items could proceed fairly quickly if this option were to be selected, and an examination could potentially be in place within the year.

There are several caveats, however, to adopting this option. The BCLAD examinations were developed for a different population than undergraduate teacher candidates. BCLAD examinations are typically taken by teachers who already hold a credential and are adding an authorization to work with English learners. It is not clear that the use of the BCLAD examinations with a population of undergraduate potential teacher candidates would be valid and reliable for this group. In addition, the passing standards for the BCLAD examinations would need to be revisited for use with the population of undergraduate students who may intend in the future to obtain a single subject teaching credential in a language other than English. Further, the scope and content of the BCLAD examinations are currently under review by the Bilingual Advisory Work Group, and may not match sufficiently with the LOTE SMRs adopted by the Commission or be of equivalent scope and rigor. Finally, the content of the BCLAD examinations focuses on the use of the language within the classroom teaching context, rather than in the context of general undergraduate subject matter proficiency as described in the LOTE SMRs.

The option of exploring the repurposing of current Commission examinations to establish subject matter competency for candidates in less commonly taught languages was presented at the Commission's request to the Bilingual Advisory Work Group following the February 1, 2006 Commission meeting. The Bilingual Advisory Work Group recognized and discussed the caveats described above, but was nonetheless sufficiently interested in the potential of this option to pass a resolution encouraging proceeding with the idea as a pilot study. The group also requested that information concerning the validity and reliability of this approach with the undergraduate candidates be provided to them as it would become available in the future.

At the time this option was presented to the Bilingual Advisory Work Group, however, Option C as described below had not yet become available for consideration.

***Option C: Development of a New Examination Template for Less Commonly Taught Languages Other than English.*** Subsequent to the Commission meeting and to the meeting with the Bilingual Advisory Work Group, a third option was developed through conversations with National Evaluation Systems (NES), the Commission's contractor for

the CSET examinations. NES staff suggested that based on the LOTE SMRs, a template for an assessment consisting entirely of constructed-response items could be developed that could be adapted for use with multiple less commonly taught languages other than English. This examination would have 14% more constructed-response items than the current LOTE Language Group 2 examinations (Language Group 2 represents primarily languages that use a different alphabet such as Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian and Punjabi, among others, and/or that are comparatively more difficult for English speaking students to learn). The inclusion of the additional 14% more constructed-response items would add to the rigor and reliability of these assessments.

Under this option, a framework of constructed-response examination questions would be developed that would cover the range of the five LOTE SMR domains, and that could serve as a template for the development of multiple potential language exams. While some questions would be sufficiently general that they could be used with any less frequently taught language, other questions such as those pertaining to culture and cultural traditions of the target language group, and those pertaining to literature and literary traditions of the target language group, for example, would need to be redeveloped and/or adapted as appropriate for each language group.

Advantages of this option would be that the Commission would have a template that could be applied to facilitate the development of additional subject matter examinations in less commonly taught languages other than English, and that the examination would be based on the Commission-approved LOTE SMRs. The exam would be of comparable scope and rigor to the existing CSET LOTE exams. It is estimated by NES that an examination of this type could be developed in time for a potential first administration in 2007.

Some potential caveats related to this option are that the development of the examination questions for each language would take place using a relatively small group of “experts” in that language field, and that options for field testing examination items might be limited. As was the case with the American Sign Language CSET examination, potential examinees might be part of the group involved in either exam development or in field testing of items. These individuals, if they are interested in obtaining a teaching credential in the particular language, would be prohibited from taking the examination on which they worked for a period of three years.

### **Suggested Alternative Assessment Option for Adoption by the Commission**

Given the rich linguistic diversity of California’s population, it is likely that requests for new language teaching authorizations may continue over time. Option C is the most feasible and comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of subject matter assessments for less commonly taught languages other than English. This option would also provide a continuing template that could be used if needed in the future for additional LOTE subject matter examinations in less commonly taught languages other than English.