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# 6B

## Action

### *Professional Services Committee*

## **Proposed Single Subject Credential Authorization for Teachers of American Sign Language**

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**Executive Summary:** This item provides the background, reviews current data and discusses the work of the Languages Other Than English Panel and Commission staff to outline a request to add American Sign Language (ASL) to the list of approved Languages Other Than English for Single Subject authorization.

**Recommended Action:** Add American Sign Language (ASL) to the list of approved languages in the single subject area of languages other than English to align with California Curriculum Frameworks, with the California Education Code and with current practices in the field of education.

**Presenters:** Susan Porter, Consultant and Dr. Jan Jones Wadsworth, Consultant



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# Proposed Single Subject Credential Authorization for Teachers of American Sign Language

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## Introduction

This item provides the background, reviews current data and discusses the work of the Languages Other Than English (LOTE) Panel and California Commission on Teacher Credentialing staff to outline a request to add American Sign Language (ASL) to the list of approved Languages Other Than English for single subject authorization. It concludes with a recommendation that American Sign Language (ASL) be added to the list of approved languages in the single subject area of languages other than English to align with California Curriculum Frameworks, with the California Education Code and with current practices in the field of education.

## Background

Commission staff is currently facilitating the review and revision of subject matter requirements in all single subject areas, to align with the most current practices and policies at the state and national levels. This work is being done in collaboration with National Evaluation Systems (NES) and in consultation with expert panels in each of the subject areas. The review and revision of subject matter requirements will lead to the development of new examinations, California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET™), and new program standards for subject matter programs. New examinations and program standards have already been developed in four subject areas (English, social studies, sciences, and mathematics) in Phase I. The Phase II work is in progress for four additional subject areas: physical education, art, music, and languages other than English), with test development and program standards to be completed later in 2004.

Subject matter examinations (CSET) are currently being developed for nine of the 11 languages currently approved by the Commission for the single subject credential. The 11 languages currently approved for single subject credentials are: Spanish, German, French, Vietnamese, Russian, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Punjabi, Italian and Latin. The LOTE Panel was required to compare and align the revised subject matter requirements with the California Department of Education Foreign Language Curriculum Frameworks (2003) and with national standards for teachers of Languages other than English. In the process of this work, Commission staff noted a discrepancy between the California Curriculum Frameworks and current Commission approved programs in the area of LOTE single subject credentials. While the California Department of Education Frameworks specifically state that American Sign Language (ASL) is an accepted language other than English for study in K-12 schools, the Commission does not have approved coursework or examination routes for ASL as a single subject area.

## Rationale

According to Education Code §44257(b), “the commission shall issue the single subject credential in foreign language with an authorization to teach Chinese, French, German, Russian, Spanish, or any other language that the commission determines is appropriate.” In addition to the languages identified in the Education Code, the Commission has approved Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Latin and Italian.

ASL is a visual/gestural language, distinct from English and other spoken languages, from sign languages used in other countries, and from English-based sign systems used in the United States (such as manually coded English systems). Its grammar differs from that of English and other languages that developed as oral/aural languages. It has a more complex verb aspect and classifier system than English. It is suggested by linguists that ASL classes should be taught by teachers who have a formal background in second language pedagogy, experience in teaching ASL, and a verifiable proficiency in American Sign Language. Research supports the study of ASL as a language that is linguistically and etiologically distinct from American English. Student instructional models and teacher preparation practices have increasingly acknowledged ASL as the “native” language for many persons who are deaf.

ASL is specifically mentioned in Education Code [§51225.3(a)(1)(E)] as satisfying the high school graduation requirement for the study of a foreign language. This paragraph states that “For the purposes of satisfying the requirement specified in this subparagraph, a course in American Sign Language shall be deemed a course in foreign language.” ASL is also included as a language in the *California Department of Education Foreign Language Curriculum Frameworks*. Also, as a result of this option, both the University of California and the California State University systems accept courses in ASL as meeting their entrance requirements for foreign language studies.

The California Department of Education has maintained data on the numbers of courses offered and the numbers of students taking ASL in its data on foreign language studies. California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) data for 1999-2000 showed that over 3,600 students were enrolled in ASL classes in 55 California public schools.

The number of students enrolled in ASL classes has increased 204% since then; 2002-03 data shows that ASL is offered in 80 schools to over 7,500 students. This current enrollment figure represents over 9% of the total number of students taking foreign language classes in California. ASL ranks fifth in enrollment among languages taught in California secondary schools. While there are more classes offered in languages such as Spanish, German, French, and Japanese, there are more students enrolled in ASL classes than in Latin, Russian, Italian, Korean, and Vietnamese courses. There are subject matter examinations and/or programs available in these less-frequently taught languages, but not in ASL.

There are currently four routes in California for teachers to be assigned to teach American Sign Language classes. The first route authorizes a teacher to teach ASL by obtaining a supplementary authorization. A supplementary authorization requires a credentialed teacher to complete 20 semester units of course work or 10 semester units of upper division or graduate

course work in the subject to be taught. The second route allows a teacher to obtain an emergency permit in “Foreign Language: American Sign Language”. The Commission’s credential data indicates that few individuals (less than 20 per year) qualify through these two routes. Furthermore, the Commission has taken action to phase out emergency permits by July 1, 2006 and the issuance of supplementary authorizations is still under review.

The third route allows holders of Education Specialist Credentials in Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) to also teach ASL classes. The Commission issued over 200 credentials authorizing individuals to teach the deaf and hard-of-hearing in 2001-2002. The majority of these teachers are assigned to teach students who are deaf and hard-of hearing. It is unknown how many of these teachers are assigned to teach ASL as a language other than English.

The fourth route, outlined in various Education Code sections, allows a local employing agency to assign a teacher to teach outside of his or her credential authorization(s). This option requires a teacher to be fully credentialed in another subject area and meet local guidelines for competency in the subject area to be taught as specified in the Education Code. Teachers must consent to teach outside of the subject area of their credential and the assignment must be approved by the governing board. Data from the Commission’s Assignment Monitoring Data Base indicate that statewide, employing districts have assigned approximately 20 to 30 teachers to teach ASL using this option.

Knowing the Commission issues very few credentials or permits in ASL through approved routes, the content knowledge and level of professional expertise of the individuals who are currently teaching ASL to the 7,500 students are an area of concern to the Commission staff. There is a need for an authorization in ASL so that the students will be better served by a teacher who is trained to teach in the subject area.

The current options for ASL authorizations are not likely to meet the subject matter requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Approval of ASL as a single subject language in California would create a route for preparation that would be consistent with other languages approved for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

### **What Other States Do**

Commission staff surveyed all other 49 states and the District of Columbia to learn what their policies were pertaining to the recognition and teaching of ASL as a foreign language other than English. The staff received responses from 18 states. Data from those states that did not respond to the survey were collected from the “ASL Legislation Report” (ASTA, 1998). From these two sources, staff determined that 27 states recognize ASL for purposes of meeting the high school graduation requirements. The states of New York, Utah, Wisconsin, and Indiana have recently developed, or are in the process of developing, credential authorization requirements for teachers who will teach ASL as a language other than English.

At least 28 states have passed legislation recognizing American Sign Language as a unique language system, and have allowed high schools and universities to accept ASL in fulfillment of language requirements for graduation. Several community colleges and universities outside of

California (including Brown, Georgetown, Purdue and the University of Washington) accept ASL as a foreign language for academic or elective credit.

### **Process to Accomplish Work**

The Commission is in CSET Phase II of its contract with National Evaluation Systems to develop examinations for all single subject areas. In addition, this zero-cost contract covers the development of Subject Matter Program Standards. An expert panel is in the process of developing exams and program standards for the following languages: Spanish, French, German, Russian, Punjabi, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. The current no-cost contract also allows for examination development for “other language exams that are cost effective.” NES has agreed to add ASL to the list of languages for CSET Phase III test development at no additional cost, subject to Commission approval. Phase III work is scheduled to begin in May 2004 with NES, Commission staff and the expert panel.

### **Recommendation**

American Sign Language (ASL) should be added to the list of approved languages in the single subject area of Languages other than English to align with California Curriculum Frameworks, with the California Education Code and with current practices in the field of education.