

# MAKING the GRADE

winter 2002



## LANGUAGES:

The Key to Understanding Other Cultures



In the past, learning a new language was something that North Carolinians did to satisfy college entrance requirements or to use in travel abroad. Today, new language learners have many opportunities to practice their skills within their own communities. In North Carolina's public schools, there are over 170 different native languages spoken by students and their families, with Spanish being the most common non-English language. For children, studying a foreign language can help boost scores on standardized tests in reading, language arts and mathematics.

This tabloid provides information about language and demographic trends in North Carolina and tips on learning new languages and activities for children and young people to help them get a sense of the changing demographics of North Carolina.

# THE CHANGING FACE OF NORTH CAROLINA



From billboards to automated teller machines to local news media — Spanish is becoming the alternative language to English in North Carolina. North Carolina has one of the fastest growing Hispanic populations in the country. The influx of Spanish speaking immigrants from Mexico and Central and South America is behind this change, but Spanish is only one of the many languages spoken in North Carolina public schools.

## WHY STUDY A NEW LANGUAGE?

In a world made to seem ever smaller through air travel, electronic networking and other global technologies, the need to learn new languages is growing. Language learning is important for communication, but also for economic competitiveness, maintaining national security and teaching respect for other cultures within and outside of North Carolina and the United States. Second language instruction is provided in some North Carolina public schools from kindergarten through high school, but most students begin serious second language study in middle and high school — in part because of entrance requirements of universities and colleges. Ideally, studying a second language can begin sooner — in the elementary grades — to give students more opportunity and time to become proficient in their non-native language.

Children who study foreign languages in elementary school have higher scores on standardized tests in reading, language arts and mathematics and they are thought to improve their reading comprehension in their native language. Language study also has been shown to enhance listening skills and memory. Scores on the SAT, the primary college and university entrance exam required in North Carolina, also tend to be higher for students who have studied a foreign language for more than two years.

Early language learning may be easier than learning a language later in life. Research in brain mapping reveals that young children who learned another language in infancy use the same brain circuits for both their native and the second language whereas adult learners rely on special brain circuits to learn another language. Before age 10 or 12, students have a better “window of opportunity” for learning to reproduce exact sounds. Past that age, students can certainly still learn and become very proficient in a language, but it is unlikely that they will acquire native-like pronunciation. Language learning that begins early and continues uninterrupted yields greater levels of fluency and proficiency.

### 15 MOST COMMON HOME LANGUAGES OF NC STUDENTS

Spanish	60,536
Hmong	4,505
Vietnamese	2,330
Chinese	1,927
Arabic	1,568
Korean	1,440
Laotian	968
Hindi	943
Russian	893
Gujarati	858
Japanese	842
French	725
Cambodian	680
German	546
Cantonese	529

### Did You Know?

- There are 35.3 million Hispanics in the United States who speak Spanish. The U.S. is the third largest Spanish speaking country in the world.
- Hispanics are projected to be the largest minority group in the United States by the year 2010. In 20 years, one out of every six people living in the United States will be Hispanic.



### LEARNING LANGUAGES IN NC SCHOOLS

#### TOP 5 Foreign Languages Taught in NC Schools

1. Spanish
2. French
3. Latin
4. German
5. Japanese

### Facts about Diversity in the United States & North Carolina Language and Business

- In 1999, there were 800 international firms in North Carolina investing more than \$4.5 billion in the state in the previous five years.
- Japan is North Carolina's second largest trading partner, after Canada. There are more than 150 Japanese companies operating in NC.
- The majority of American employers, according to national surveys, consider the command of a foreign language a useful skill.
- One in 20 Americans worked at foreign-owned American companies in the late 1990s. Their paychecks averaged 20 percent more than that of the nation's overall private workforce.

## WAYS THAT LANGUAGES ARE TAUGHT TO NORTH CAROLINA STUDENTS

*Three major types of programs are available in elementary schools.*

**Immersion programs** allow children to spend part or all of the school day learning in a second language. In full or total immersion programs, available in a limited number of schools, children learn all of their subjects in the second language. Partial immersion programs operate similarly, but only a portion of the curriculum is presented in the second language.

**FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary Schools) programs** are more common than immersion programs. A second language is presented as a distinct subject, much as science or social studies. Typically, the course is taught three to five times a week. Most high school second language programs are taught as distinct subjects each day.

**FLEX (Foreign Language Exploratory) programs** introduce students to other cultures and to language as a general concept. Time is spent exploring one or more languages or learning about language itself. The emphasis is not on attaining proficiency. Although some proficiency may be attained with a once or twice weekly program, parents should not expect fluency.



## ACTIVITIES TO EXPLORE NEW LANGUAGES, NEW CULTURES

Don't know a second language, but want to encourage language learning and cultural learning? One great starting point is to check out online newspapers, especially those in other countries. Also, try these Web sites and activities with your children.

[www.naa.org](http://www.naa.org) (Newspaper Association of America)

[www.ncpress.com](http://www.ncpress.com) (NC Press Association for North Carolina newspapers)

[www.newseum.org](http://www.newseum.org) (Newseum) You can access a variety of newspaper front pages from around the world.



### Elementary

- Locate the different countries mentioned in your daily newspaper, then locate them on the globe or on a map. Identify surrounding countries.
- **Access the weather from another country of interest. Over a pre-determined period, chart the weather for that country and for the area in which you live using metric measurements. Compare the two. What clothes would you pack to travel to the other country? Why?**
- Sports are popular in many cultures. Choose a sport covered in your local newspaper and find out how many countries and languages are represented in that sport across the world.
- **Read about a special holiday or festival celebrated by people of other languages in your community. Attend the event and discuss what you experienced.**
- Go to your local grocery store and identify items with packaging in another language. Look for advertisements of grocery stores that cater to non-English speaking customers, such as Mexican, Vietnamese or Indian grocery stores and plan visits to them.
- **Examine newspapers from a variety of countries. Discuss similarities between alphabets and numbers.**
- Look for foreign buildings/locations in the newspaper. Make a poster with these locations and identify their respective countries.
- **Locate an article about a Latin American country. How could this article affect North Carolina?**

### Middle School

- **Underline all foreign words used in the newspaper. Compile a list of words over a week's time and look up their country of origin.**
- Look at four movie ads from a newspaper or magazine from a foreign country. (City newsstands frequently stock some editions.) What can you tell from the ads, even if you don't understand the language?
- **Look for foreign language newspapers on the Internet. Read the section dealing with the weather. What can you infer about their weather?**
- Write or perform a weather report for a country of your choice in the Southern Hemisphere. Include the temperature in Celsius.
- **Watch the newspaper restaurant reviews for a restaurant where foreign food is served. Visit the restaurant and order from the menu using the foreign terms. Write your own review of that restaurant and compare it to the original one.**
- Pay attention to newspaper articles about immigration to our state. Collect data that show population trends in North Carolina and in the United States. Discuss findings and predict future changes. (The US Census Web site can help at <http://www.census.gov>.)
- **Note newspaper articles addressing a concern affecting a special population (for example, lack of interpreters for Spanish speakers). Suggest solutions to this problem.**
- Check out a cookbook that features food from another culture and try some dishes.

### High School

- Look for library books in the second language you are studying and compare them to the English versions, if possible.
- **Using the newspaper, follow the value of the dollar as opposed to another currency (the euro, yen, etc). Chart the changes and discuss some of the possible reasons for changes.**
- Compare an advertisement from an American newspaper with an advertisement from a foreign newspaper. How are they similar or different? Devise an advertisement for a selected product using the second language you are studying.
- **Write a letter to the editor of a foreign newspaper on a topic of concern.**
- Read an account of an event from an English language newspaper and a similar account from a foreign newspaper or foreign news Web site. How is the coverage different or similar?
- **As a class or group project, create a newspaper to be shared with students in another country.**
- Engage in cross-cultural comparisons of such phenomena as dress, sports, games, religion and education as reported in the news media.
- **Research opportunities to interact with non-English speakers in the community and volunteer time and expertise.**
- Scan the want ads to identify all the jobs requiring knowledge of another language.

## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S SECOND LANGUAGE STUDY

- Encourage your child's interest in the language and in other cultures.
- Show that you value the ability to speak a second language.
- Attend cultural events that feature music, dance, arts or food from the country or countries where the language is spoken.
- If possible, read books and view videos or other materials in the second language.
- If you are familiar with the language, read to your child.
- Summer programs offering international exchange are suitable for older students and offer valuable opportunities to speak a second language and explore a different culture firsthand. Children normally live with a host family, which provides them with a safe and sheltered environment where they can practice their language skills.



## RESOURCES:

### SPECIFIC LANGUAGE HELP

<http://german.about.com/homework/>  
<http://french.about.com/homework/>  
<http://spanish.about.com/homework/>  
<http://latin.about.com/homework/>



### FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS

France: Le Figaro - <http://www.lefigaro.fr/>  
 Germany: Deutsche Welle - <http://www.dwelle.de/>  
 Japan: Asahi Shinbun - <http://www.asahi.com>  
 Spain: ABC - <http://www.abc.es>

### CNN IN SPANISH

<http://www.cnnenespanol.com>

### ALLIANCE FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

<http://www.alliance4languagelearning.org>

### ENCHANTED LEARNING (for elementary children)

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com>

### NC CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

<http://www.ga.unc.edu/NCCIU/>

### CURRENCY CONVERSION CHARTS

<http://www.xe.com/ucc/>

### INTERNATIONAL MUSIC TO BE DOWNLOADED

<http://www.kazaa.com>

### LANGUAGES ONLINE

<http://eleaston.com>

### NC SECOND LANGUAGE STUDIES WEB PAGE

<http://www.learnnc.org/dpi/instserv.nsf/category9>



## YOU SAY GOODBYE... I SAY

*Can you match the expressions with the languages?*

- |                            |               |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Au revoir               | A. PORTUGUESE |
| 2. Adíos                   | B. RUSSIAN    |
| 3. Auf Wiedersehen         | C. ARABIC     |
| 4. Sayonara                | D. MANDARIN   |
| 5. Arrivederci             | E. HMONG      |
| 6. Sat siri akal           | F. GUJARATI   |
| 7. Goodbye                 | G. FRENCH     |
| 8. Zai jian                | H. SPANISH    |
| 9. Pirmelenge              | I. ITALIAN    |
| 10. Até a vista            | J. JAPANESE   |
| 11. Caó mun' g chè         | K. KOREAN     |
| 12. Do svidanja            | L. PUNJABI    |
| 13. Awjo                   | M. ENGLISH    |
| 14. Annyong-hi kashipschio | N. HINDI      |
| 15. Ma as-salaamah         | O. GERMAN     |

ANSWERS: 1-G, 2-H, 3-O, 4-J, 5-I, 6-L, 7-M, 8-D, 9-N, 10-A, 11-E, 12-B, 13-F, 14-K, 15-C

## IN EFFECTIVE SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAMS...

*(Adapted from the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages, 1990-1993)*

- Students are encouraged to use the target language by the teacher, who also uses it extensively.
- Students have opportunities to communicate in the target language in activities that are meaningful and simulate real-life situations.
- Time devoted to listening, speaking, reading and writing is appropriate to course objectives and the language skills of students.
- Culture is incorporated into instruction.
- The teacher corrects errors in activities that focus on accuracy and emphasizes error correction less in activities that focus on practicing communication.
- Students are explicitly taught foreign language learning strategies and are encouraged to assess their own progress.
- Students feel comfortable taking risks with the language in a non-threatening environment.
- Skill-getting activities enable students to participate successfully in skill-using activities. Skill-using activities predominate.
- Students are exposed to a variety of print and non-print materials.

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**North Carolina Newspapers in Education**  
 NC Press Foundation  
 5171 Glenwood Ave., Ste. 364  
 Raleigh, NC 27612  
[www.ncpress.com](http://www.ncpress.com)



**PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA**  
 301 N. Wilmington Street  
 Raleigh, NC 27601-2825  
 phone: 919-807-3300  
[www.ncpublicschools.org](http://www.ncpublicschools.org)

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