

Considerations when Developing a Program to Teach a Foreign Language in a K-16 Setting

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The following questions were developed to assist educators in planning a sequential K-16 critical foreign language program in partnership with an institution of higher education. The questions address curriculum and instruction, standards and assessment, staff quality, professional development, program evaluation and collaboration with an institution of higher education partner. The document is intended to provide some of the questions educators might consider in planning a sequential critical language program.

Is the program, including its targets and goals, articulated clearly across grade levels and designed to ensure that students, when they graduate from high school, have the skills they need to achieve a superior level of foreign language proficiency by the end of an undergraduate program? Does the program establish a clear pathway comprised of thoughtfully scaffolded content-based curricula, with minimal content repetition, from elementary, through middle school, high school and through post-secondary school?

How is curriculum and instruction aligned with national and/or state standards for foreign language learning and performance guidelines for K-12 learners? For example, will the program use the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages proficiency guidelines in setting language learning goals, in planning learning activities and in evaluating student proficiency?

Does the program show evidence of using a backward design approach in the planning, development, and implementation of program targets and objectives. For example, has the grade 12 target of advanced level of proficiency been established with clearly-articulated curricular goals from elementary, middle and high school leading to that outcome?

Is the instructional model, including weekly instructional contact minutes and instructional approaches and methods, sufficient to produce high school graduates who will be able to achieve an advanced level of proficiency in the target language by grade 12?

Are student proficiency objectives feasible and challenging, yet realistic? Do they raise expectations for student achievement and provide ways for students to demonstrate progress? Do they include annual targets for proficiency benchmarks? Do they include realistic and viable measures for demonstrating progress in the target language and are these measures included in the program's research design?

Are program objectives aligned with measures to ensure that the program will be able to collect data on student achievement and other measures of program effectiveness?

How will the program encourage improved student proficiency through activities that extend beyond the traditional classroom instruction such as study abroad, the use of heritage language community speakers, and summer or after school intensive language experience?

What incentives will the partnership provide to ensure that high school graduates enroll in foreign language coursework in the partner institution of higher education?

How will the program differentiate instruction for learners such as heritage language learners, or late entry students who may enter the program with varying proficiency levels?

What special remediation will be provided for students who are not achieving expected proficiency levels? How will the effectiveness of this remediation be measured and documented?

Are selected instructional methods and approaches based on current research, professional literature findings? Have products and outcomes of other critical language programs in planning the program?

Will the program use multiple measures to determine the effectiveness of instruction? What measures, other than student proficiency measures, will be used to assess student achievement?

How will the program use student achievement data to inform needed improvements in curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development?

Are planned assessments best available and appropriate considering the planned model of instruction, target languages, grade levels and student proficiency levels? How will these be considered in view of ongoing program and teaching improvement?

In what ways will the program demonstrate commitment and capacity to sustain the program?

Is there evidence of strong parent and community support for the critical language program, as well as planned continued collaboration with parent and community groups?

What measures have been taken to involve the stakeholders from all levels of discussion in the program planning, for example, is there evidence that middle school and high school teachers and administrators are involved in the program from the outset? In what ways are the K-12 and IHE stakeholders involved in the vertical articulation of curriculum development, evaluation of learning and program impact, and teacher professional development?

Do program staff, including IHE partner representatives, have adequate experience in teaching, administering, foreign language programs in the language of instruction, the instructional methodology and grade levels addressed by the program?

How will the IHE partner representatives contribute to program activities through, for example, participating in the development of a seamless curriculum from elementary through post-secondary school; planning and conducting contextually viable professional development; teacher development and recruitment; providing foreign language courses to high school students; participating in the evaluation of the program; conducting research on the impact of the program on student achievement?

Do IHE partners demonstrate an understanding of K-12 curriculum design? What training and experience do they have that will enable them to be effective partners in the K-16 curriculum enterprise?

How will the IHE partner design new or modify existing placement criteria for foreign language course offerings at the institution? How will the K-12 and IHE partners collaborate to ensure congruent expectations for students transitioning from high school to college language programs?

How will the program ensure that professional development is meaningful, is based on teacher assessed needs for improvement in content and pedagogy, is geared toward positive student outcomes, reflects proficiency-oriented standards based instruction, is structured carefully to ensure meaningful learning, and is evaluated based on its impact on teaching practice and student achievement?

Will teacher professional development be designed to contribute to continuous inquiry and improvement, through teacher action research, for example?

How will teachers participate in planning and providing professional development? Is professional development aligned with professional literature on robust and meaningful professional development for in-service teachers?

Do teachers have sufficient experience and expertise in curriculum development to produce the documents the project plans to create? (In what ways will support be provided to ensure effective curriculum development designed to achieve the program's goals and objectives?)

Do teachers have adequate time to contribute to program development activities, such as curriculum and materials development, given their instructional responsibilities? How many hours per week will be allocated to support joint planning and collaboration for teachers?

Does the program design rely exclusively on international teachers for instructional delivery? How will the program provide professional development for teachers on the educational system and practices in the U.S? In order to provide greater program stability and build capacity in the district, how will the project recruit and develop more permanent teachers?

Is the staffing plan sufficient to support planned activities? If multiple schools will be served, and there are major tasks to be undertaken that require extensive time investment, is a full-time Director needed?

Does the selected evaluator have experience evaluating K-12 foreign language programs in the target language?

Does the project have a plan for dissemination of information and guidance for replication in other LEAs? How will the program maintain records on planning and implementation to ensure that products and processes can be shared? Will program information be prepared for publication in professional journals? Is there a plan to present at state, regional and national conferences? Will products be posted on the district website?

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