**Language Proficiency:
Envisioning the Win in the High School Spanish Classroom**

Linda Egnatz
Lincoln-Way North High School

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University of Florida

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Jamie Leite
Utah State Board of Education

Ofelia Wade
Utah State Board of Education

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Abstract: This current study suggests that future secondary Spanish language teachers must be more like athletic coaches to ensure student success and score a so-called win in the classroom. Teachers must retool and redesign outdated and ineffectual curricula and instructional strategies to improve student performance. Focusing on language proficiency, measurable performance, and the development of life skills, as ACTFL's Teacher of the Year in 2014, the author reflects on myriad changes in the educational landscape such as dual language immersion programs and the adoption of the State Seal of Biliteracy. Pressures to produce a multilingual workforce are causing secondary teachers to rethink their traditional classroom practices to motivate students to perform. The abandonment of the verb charts and stale grammar lessons for the inclusion of real-world tasks and intercultural experiences in and beyond the classroom produces a win for teachers and students.

Keywords: dual language immersion/inmersión en dos lenguajes, proficiency/proficiencia, Seal of Biliteracy, secondary education/educación secundaria

The education world is experiencing a paradigm shift in which schools, programs, and teachers are being evaluated based on performance rubrics. Since the State Seal of Biliteracy became effective in January of 2012, 26 US states and the District of Columbia have adopted a State Seal of Biliteracy, which recognized high school graduates with a high level of proficiency in English and another language. The *win* in today's language classroom is dependent upon what students *can do* in Spanish. Language learning is increasingly recognized as a skill, rather than a knowledge bank of vocabulary lists and verb charts. If we want to develop users of Spanish, our focus must be on increasing student proficiency and retention by embracing the strategies used by athletic coaches to strengthen and grow player performance.

Schools have long been judged and rated based on test scores in English, mathematics, social studies and science, but due to new metrics for teacher evaluations, student outcomes in the language classroom are, for the first time, also under scrutiny. Teachers in a growing number of states are tasked with demonstrating growth in student performance. Because this is a new territory for language professionals, we have the opportunity to establish the guidelines and principles by which we will be evaluated. I propose that we begin to measure our success the way coaches do: focusing on results. The skill acquisition theory distinguishes between declarative knowledge, knowledge that consists of facts or mental performance (think vocabulary lists and verb conjugation charts), and procedural knowledge, knowledge of how an activity is done (VanPatten and Benati 2010: 149). The theory is espoused by those who study second language acquisition (SLA) theory as well as theorists in the world of athletics studying how skilled behaviors become routine and automatic (Hodges 2012: 26), similar to memorized, highly practiced novice language. The shared goal is proficiency; creating an environment in which every student can achieve their personal best, envisioning our win as the learner who leaves our classroom as a user (or future user) of the language we teach.

Language proficiency is most essential outside of the academic environment. The twenty-first century offers our students a real world opportunity to use their language skills, but our traditional high school language sequence has failed to produce language users who can compete against their global counterparts. Consider these statistics from the US Department of Education (2010) and Eurostat (2012):

- 73% of Europeans claim to speak two or more languages well (*46% in Great Britain*), but only 25% of Americans speak a language other than English. (87% of those say they learned it in their childhood home—sadly only 7% cite school as setting.)
- In Europe, 90% of children begin language study at age 6 where elementary second language education is required by 20 countries. In contrast, only 15% of US public elementary schools offer language programs, even fewer are proficiency-based.
- 42% of Europeans begin learning a third language after age 12. In the United States, 91% of high schools offer world language courses, but only 44% of students enroll. Furthermore, only 50.7% of higher education institutions require foreign language study.

In spite of a growing demand for job candidates that speak one or more languages in addition to their native language, most states do not require language study at the high school level (NCSSFL 2016). The federal government has been outspoken—but neither funding nor national initiatives support their call for increased language study. Mohammed Abdel-Kader, former Deputy Assistant Secretary, US Department of Education, in his 2015 keynote speech to language advocates stated, "Language learning is not a nice to have, it's an essential." Abdel-Kader added that, "one in five jobs in the US is linked to international trade." He summed up the problem by stating that, "language learning is a civil rights narrative." In other words, when competing for jobs, students without an opportunity to learn a second or third language are now at a disadvantage.

The twenty-first century goal for all learners has changed from *what students know* to what *students can do* with that knowledge. In the past decade, educational theorists and innovators have brought us Common Core State Standards and P21.org—both are linked to preparedness for the workplace. Grant and Wiggins's (2011) Understanding by Design has become a widely-accepted approach to creating curricula and asks the teacher to first determine what students will be able to do at the end of a unit (assessment) and then design "backward" to determine the instruction and the activities leading up to the assessments.

Other student-centered methodologies have emerged such as Project-Based Learning (PBL), which focuses on student performances of real-world tasks rather than a traditional paper and pencil test. Markham (2011) writes, "PBL integrates knowing and doing" (39). Current assessment trends in language include Integrated Performance Assessments (IPA) that mesh individual activities in each of the three modes: interpretive, interpersonal and presentational. Students combine information and perspectives gleaned from reading and listening activities (interpretive) to interact with others (interpersonal) and/or synthesize in a cohesive speech or essay (presentational). This shift to performance has spread to other curricular areas through inquiry-based labs in science and evidence-based questions in social science and provide world language departments an opportunity to take the lead and showcase our exemplars.

For far too long I have hosted Parent-Teacher Conferences during which one or more parents say, "I took two (or more) years of language and can't say anything." We need to reframe our curricular area—not as knowledge (how much vocabulary I can list or how many verbs I can conjugate), but as a skill I can use for the world of work and real communication. Avant Assessment data from 2010 suggest that many students in a two- or three-year sequence are leaving our classrooms with only a novice level of proficiency. Sadly, until students reach the Intermediate Mid proficiency range or above, their language skill is insufficient for the workplace. Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, when interviewed after a defeat said, "We didn't lose the game. We just ran out of time." The same can be said for language acquisition.

Language educators at the lowest level need to help students understand their language acquisition journey and include students in the goal-setting process.

I have often confessed that I have coach envy. Our student athletes demonstrate both awe and unconditional respect for whatever "coach says." A coach can be demanding and still garner loyalty and passionate obedience. I began to consider how I could adapt coaching strategies to my Spanish classroom. After some investigation, I have learned that coaches:

- are positive.
- develop confidence in every player.
- set expectations early.
- minimize coaching during the game (i.e., assessment).
- aim for improvements they know they can achieve.
- watch game footage with the players.

Claire Tristam (1996) wrote in *Fast Company Magazine*, "All coaches have one thing in common, it's that they are ruthlessly results-oriented" (145). According to the previously cited US Education Department data, our results have been dismal. Yes, many of us can brag about those students who scored 5s on Advanced Placement exams or who have become language teachers. Unfortunately, those successes represent only a small portion of students who began language study. The US Department of Education study *The Condition of Education 2010* (Aud et al. 2010) reported that only 44% of high school students enroll in language classes and only half continue study past the second year, meaning that only 25% of our students have an opportunity to reach an Intermediate or higher level of language proficiency. We must ask ourselves why they leave before they have had enough practice to make their language skill useful. Amongst ourselves, we point to a number of reasons; the most common is that "students believe they only need 2 years of language for college entry." As high school teachers, our challenge is to make classroom learning relevant. It is time to see our students not as test-takers, but as language users; and to see ourselves as opportunity providers. We must help our students see language not as a "college entry requirement" but as a "life entry requirement." If they are to stay in our classrooms long enough to acquire language, they must be made aware of the possibilities. As educators, are we offering students rewards bigger than a transitory A on a report card?

Robert Frost said, "I am not a teacher, but an awakener" (Quotery). Our most important role is that of a visionary. We must help students envision themselves using the language with real speakers. When lesson planning, it is critical to ask: How, when, and in what real life situation will this vocabulary or structure be needed? To grow learner motivation and stamina when the task is difficult, teachers need to help students connect classroom learning to the world beyond. It is our task to help students visualize themselves using the language in the future. It takes creativity, but it is important to identify the real-world job tasks associated with your lessons to earn student buy-in. Casting a vision of *what can be* is what coaches do. At the beginning of the season, they plan and assess how to reach the playoffs. By setting expectations early, coaches create the notion of a team striving for the same goal.

The championship ring for a growing number of high school students across the country is the new State Seal of Biliteracy. First awarded in California, the Seal of Biliteracy is an award given by a state, district, or school to students who have demonstrated a high level of proficiency in two or more languages, one of which is English. It supports both English-language learners as well as those learning a language other than English, no matter how that language was acquired. As of January 2017, 26 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Seal of Biliteracy and several other states are in the process (see State Seal of Biliteracy). In other states, the Seal of Biliteracy is being developed at the district level and efforts have begun to support the Seal of Biliteracy movement at the national level. In March of 2015, four organizations (e.g., ACTFL, TESOL, NCSSFL, NABE) released their collaborative Seal of Biliteracy

Guidelines, which recommend that the threshold for the award be at the intermediate-mid level or above. Rules for implementation vary by state, but in most proficiency for languages other than English will be measured through Type 1 testing such as Advanced Placement Language Exams, ACTFL's Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) and STAMP (Avant Assessment), or their equivalents. Utah has chosen a two-tiered recognition that would recognize those with longer dual language or immersion sequences and those in a traditional four-year high school program. Washington awards Seal of Biliteracy recipients at Intermediate Mid (or higher) four semesters of college credit. By offering the Seal, students are made more aware of their journey toward proficiency and have increased motivation to grow their skills. Though just anecdotal at this time, after two years of adopting the Seal of Biliteracy, my school district has seen a measurable increase in upper level enrollment across all languages. Increasing retention past the second year of high school study is key to changing the monolingual paradigm and the Seal of Biliteracy can play an important role. In fact, the Illinois Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ICTFL) has created a hashtag to communicate the message: #2bilit2quit.

Because most students in the United States do not begin second language learning until middle or high school, their counterparts around the world have the advantage of beginning a third language when our students are finally learning their first foreign language (if it is offered). When it comes to the competitive global stage, they begin behind. Though their number is increasing, there are relatively few dual language and immersion programs. Dual language and immersion programs teach content, especially sciences and social studies, in the second language. These students come to high school with broad vocabularies and can use their higher cognitive abilities to do engaging tasks in the language. For example, Advanced Placement Spanish Language and Culture standard students may struggle with the interpretation of authentic texts on world challenges such as deforestation and the scarcity of water because, unlike the content-rich materials found in an elementary language program, they may have not yet learned the words for tree, forest, or recycling. Without the strong foundation of an elementary language program, students may be able to write an organized essay, complete with transitions, but are challenged by their lack of science and social studies vocabulary to discuss important topics such as ethics in science and technology or the political and economic challenges facing the world. And yet, for my students to achieve the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy, they must reach the intermediate-high proficiency level, which, by description, requires them to address world topics at the advanced level of proficiency at least 50% or more of the time. My hope is that states and districts adopting the Seal will expand their language programs and lengthen the learning sequences available to all students.

For those districts with dual language and immersion programs, curriculum at the high school level poses a different challenge. These students come to high school equipped with a breadth of content vocabulary (perhaps possessing more than a non-native high school language teacher), but have not had the traditional grammar sequence taught in a standard textbook curriculum. As a result, language teachers may find that the interpretive skills of these students are high, but that their presentational skills, especially with regards to accuracy, are low. For these incoming students, accustomed to content courses taught in the target language, a new four-year vertical language curriculum must be designed that includes the possibility of continuing content coursework in other curricular areas in the target language. In both scenarios, higher-level retention resulting from the Seal and an influx of Intermediate level ninth-graders, school districts may find it difficult to find staff prepared to teach advanced levels of language or qualified to teach other content and still address the students' language-acquisition needs. Envisioning the win for these language learners will require school districts to retool educators and redesign appropriate curriculum. The end result will be competent language users who will be able to use their second language alongside of whatever career path they choose to follow.

For our heritage Spanish students, the emerging need for bilingual content-area faculty may provide career opportunities.

So what about grammar? Coaching is all about personalized learning. A good coach does ongoing formative assessments to determine the skills needed, or that need to be improved, to win the game. Winning coaches plan strategically to develop athletes; preparing for future seasons. Likewise, we need to coach students as they spiral up the pathway towards language proficiency. When I asked my student athletes, "How are coaches different from teachers?" common responses included that coaches want the team to win and that coaches figure out what you need to do to improve. A lively discussion followed in which I was personally challenged to reevaluate how I differentiate instruction. Coaching manuals dictate that a coach determine the one thing can be improved that will impact the whole performance. On the other hand, like many of my peers, I have carefully graded student writing, clearly marking each error and now read that great coaches prefer to fix one "error" at a time. Metaphorically, personalized instruction means that we need to "watch the game tape" with the student and, through reflection, identify the one error that can most improve their performance. So, when it comes to grammar errors, try to focus on two aspects: 1) what Heilenman and Kaplan (1985) refer to as "conceptual control, partial control, and full control" (63); and 2) what the ACTFL performance descriptors say the student can do at their level.

Conceptual control means that a student can describe the rule, but only applies it in highly practiced, memorized contexts. A good example is adjective agreement. Students may describe themselves with regular adjectives accurately, but struggle to describe someone else—especially of the opposite gender. When describing anything other than a person, the student will demonstrate very little control. Partial control means that most of the time, regular adjectives agree, especially when describing people, but frequent errors occur when modifying gender irregular nouns and adjectives or plurals. With full control, occasional errors occur but without pattern. Language acquisition expert Steven Krashen (1982) supports the idea that in addition to knowledge of the rules, the student must have "sufficient time" in language study for the "monitor" to control output (23). This concept is supported by rubrics used to measure language performance:

- Oral Proficiency Interview: Accuracy column for Superior level performance has, "No pattern of errors in basic structures. Errors virtually never interfere with communication or distract the native speaker from the message." (See ACTFL 2012)
- ACTFL Performance Descriptors: Rubric states that the Intermediate Mid performance has "evidence of simple sentence syntax and basic present tense verb forms." The Advanced Mid performance has "frequent errors in complex sentences, spelling and punctuation." (See ACTFL 2012)
- College Board Advanced Placement Exam: A rubric score of 4 demonstrates "general control of grammar, syntax and usage; with some errors that do not impede comprehensibility." (See College Board AP Central 2016)

The hallmark of the novice language user is highly practiced, memorized language. A leading indicator that a student is moving from novice to intermediate is an increase in errors. Students begin to mix and match their acquired language chunks to "create with language." They feel enough competence to communicate their own original messages using whatever vocabulary and structures they have acquired. For students, that often means using infinitives rather than conjugated verbs during interpersonal speaking. After completing the oral proficiency interview workshop and follow-up rater training, I realized that I had often rewarded a highly memorized accurate novice performance and scored down an emerging Intermediate because of errors. I had not rewarded growth or risk-taking and may actually have inhibited it. Language educators must be more realistic when grading for accuracy or we risk sending the message to students that

they are "not good at language" and they will drop our classes before they've had enough time to acquire language. Think sports: the ball doesn't need to be dead center to score. Rather than grading for full control, look for evidence of growing control of linguistic structures. "Taught isn't caught." Caught or acquisition only comes with practice over time; do not assess for full control unless it is proficiency-level appropriate.

After much reflection on the coaching metaphor, I've changed my teaching practice to coach toward proficiency. Beginning with the premise that the teacher cannot control a student's grammar but can look to the performance descriptors to determine what is proficiency-level appropriate and what growth the teacher can foster in student language production. First, establish learning targets based on language functions and how they spiral up the proficiency ladder. Can students describe people? Places? Things? If so, they can ask and answer questions about them. They can compare and contrast. They can share a descriptive narrative. Second, expand vocabulary and the number of topics on which they can describe, ask and answer questions, compare and contrast, and narrate. Student growth can be demonstrated by the breadth of topics as well as the depth of functions and grammar. Third, seek to expand text-type to move students from the Novice word level, to the Intermediate sentence level, to the advanced paragraph-length level. Even with level one students, do not accept single word production. Gone are translations, fill-in-the-blanks, or simple identification assessments. Ask for sentences that answer multiple questions: why, where, when, how often, with whom, how well, etc. To support sentence-level production, teach simple connectors and transitions. Rather than ask level one students a variety of short answer personal questions, ask them to write a descriptive paragraph about themselves, putting the sentences in logical order. Increase how much students produce by doubling the blank lines or providing word count goals. This fostering of text-type creates a guided paragraph that builds student confidence in their growing language abilities. The same applies at upper levels. If the descriptor for an intermediate-high level and above is past narrative, begin early telling stories in the past with memorized language (e.g., "Yesterday, I went to. . . ." or "I saw . . .") Do not greet AP students with novice level questions like "Hi! How are you?" But rather, "Hi! Tell me about your weekend" to elicit past narrative. Endeavor to teach two proficiency sub-levels above students, giving them sufficient time to practice before assessment.

If I follow the coach's model, the assessment is "Game Day": an authentic situation that would happen outside of classroom walls. The practice leading up to the game would be similar, but not identical, to the assessment. Performance would be measured in all three modes: interpretive, interpersonal and presentational, ideally in an Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA). Most importantly, students would be able to see themselves doing the task in the future with a native speaker. For language educators, developing language users is the win!

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Response 1 to "Language Proficiency:
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High School Spanish Classroom"

Proficiency and Languages for
Specific Purposes in the K–12 Classroom

Mary E. Risner
University of Florida

Indeed, our students must graduate better prepared for the realities of the twenty-first-century workplace and our global society. Whether based in the United States or abroad, language and culture skills are crucial for individuals to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. In addition to the language-learning benefits of enriching the intellectual and personal components of student lives, it is paramount to emphasize real-world application of language use in everyday situations and across diverse workplace contexts. How do we collectively reach this goal as language educators?

While keeping in mind the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) frameworks and language acquisition principles, we need to introduce and model new ways of engaging our students within the classroom and beyond, showing them the relevance of language use in a myriad of personal and professional circumstances.

We must supplement curriculum with relevant, authentic resources and engage students in project-based learning. Technology is a user-friendly, interactive tool that we can use to synchronously or asynchronously collaborate on projects with classrooms anywhere in the world in the target language and culture (Redden 2014). Bringing in speakers from diverse fields, virtually or in person, who can share how they use language and cultural competence will help students reflect on future career possibilities. Interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly with individuals from career academies who regularly connect with outside professionals, also has the potential to mutually benefit all.

Whether organizing course activities with external organizations through service learning or encouraging students to get involved on their own, we should inform students of global opportunities such as participating in study abroad and volunteering with global organizations like Sister Cities, Rotary, Bi-National Chambers, and other global initiatives. Experiences like these make clear to students the relevance of language and culture in the real world.

There is a long history of the Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) approach at the post-secondary level (Lafford 2012: 3), which focuses on meeting the specific language needs with students' future goals. LSP at the K–12 level has been gaining ground, and there are now models to reference and integrate into schools as entire courses or through select lessons. Sample courses include Spanish for Healthcare, Spanish for Leadership, Spanish for the Workplace and the Community, and World Language and Business Leadership (Risner and Egúsquiza 2016: 26; Risner, Swarr, Bleess, and Graham 2017).

This process of integrating LSP concepts in mainstream courses may seem daunting and does require educators to collaborate with those in fields different from their own. However, just as we ask our students to take risks in learning, we, as educators, must be open to new challenges. Similar to scaffolding to guide students, support must be in place to guide the shift in world language educator mindset and practices. Support should be provided through renewed and relevant professional development at multiple levels—from schools to districts to professional associations. Some examples would be interactive events with dialogue resulting in action to improve teaching and learning, exposing educators to non-academic contexts through industry site visits, and demonstrating the use of technology to bring the world to the classroom through telecollaboration. These kinds of activities would model effective practices in the classroom, empowering educators to implement them. Through professional learning networks, we must also find effective methods for sharing and disseminating innovative materials that are meeting the demands of the future by collaborating and maximizing time and resources.

I invite teachers and administrators to accept this challenge as leaders in the advancement of the field of world language education to prepare our students for twenty-first-century realities. How will you become an agent of change by taking risks and innovating in your classroom; at your institution; or as a member of state, regional, and national professional associations?

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Response 2 to "Language Proficiency:
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Monolingualism is the Illiteracy of
the Twenty-First Century

Gregg Roberts
American Councils for International Education

Jamie Leite
Utah State Board of Education

Ofelia Wade
Utah State Board of Education

Monolingualism is the illiteracy of the twenty-first century. On today's world stage, multilingual skills and cultural competence have taken lead roles in building a future global workforce. In response, the state of Utah is implementing an ambitious and unprecedented initiative to ameliorate language skills that address the state's business, government, and education needs. In 2008, under the visionary leadership of former Governor Jon Huntsman and State Senator Howard Stephenson, the Utah Legislature passed Senate Bill 41 (2008), providing funding for Dual Language Immersion (DLI) and charging the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) with creating a world-class DLI program. Utah's quest is to provide all students with the opportunity to become linguistically proficient and culturally competent in multiple languages. This means mainstreaming DLI for students of diverse abilities across all socioeconomic, ethnic, rural, urban, large and small school communities throughout the state (Leite and Cook 2015). Legislators and business leaders believe this to be a critical long-term investment in the viability and vitality of Utah's future economic competitiveness.

In addition, Utah is committed to being responsive to the priorities of the native-speaking and heritage populations thriving in its communities (Eaton 2016). Utah is favored with the significant presence of a large Hispanic community and a fast growing Brazilian community, for whom the priority of preserving and passing on to future generations the rich tapestry of their language and culture parallels the state's goal of eradicating monolingualism. Therefore, both the Spanish and Portuguese DLI programs have intentionally grounded their respective literacy programs in the principles of responsive curriculum and instruction by 1) adopting authentic programs developed by and designed for native speakers, rich with cultural references; 2) embracing pedagogy that is highly student centered; 3) creating channels to facilitate meaningful interpersonal connections for the students through school partnerships with Brazil and Spanish speaking countries; 4) purposely hiring highly qualified international teachers from Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and Spain, who bring their native language and culture live to the classroom, validating the cultural and linguistic identity of our native-speaking and heritage students!

DLI in Utah enjoys broad-based, cross-sectional support from our state community. Currently, there are 87 Spanish (30 two-way, 29 one-way, 28 secondary) and 6 Portuguese DLI schools in the state. With a rich diversity of languages, Utah also has 47 Chinese (33 one-way, 14 secondary), 20 French (13 one-way, 7 secondary), and 2 German DLI schools, with plans to add Russian and Arabic in the future. Utah DLI will serve over 32,000 students for the 2016–17 school year across 22 school districts and four charters from every corner of Utah. Despite the rapid increase in the number of schools, the state still falls short of meeting the current demand, as seen by the long wait lists that are common throughout the state.

Utah educational leaders thoughtfully and intentionally selected a model that is not only rooted in research-based principles and practices of second language teaching, but is also responsive to the political landscape of the state and best meets its students' needs. Utah's DLI schools implement a fifty-fifty, two-teacher model for grades K–6, in which students spend half of their school day in the target language and the other half-day in English (Watzinger-Tharp, Swenson, and Mayne 2016). In grades seven and eight, the program offers a world language honors course and a culture, history and media course. In grade nine, participating students are expected to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) language coursework and complete the AP exam or its language specific equivalent.

Recently, Utah's K–12 program became a K–16 reality with the passage of Senate Bill 152 (2016), sponsored by State Senator Howard Stephenson. Utah students will continue accelerated learning with the opportunity for accelerated rewards through access to upper division, 3000 level university coursework. These courses will be available to students in grades ten, eleven, and twelve through a blended learning model offered by an alliance between public and higher education, including six state universities. This opportunity is available not only to DLI students, but to any student who passes the AP test, particularly thousands of native speakers of Spanish and Portuguese across Utah. Students will continue enhancing their language proficiency in high school while earning 9.0 university credits, nearly completing a minor in the language by the time they graduate and thus forging a bridge forward to their college education. The goal of this articulated K–12 curriculum is to see the state's students enter universities equipped with language skills at the advanced level of proficiency. To plan for this, specific proficiency goals for every DLI language program have been set at each grade level in all four language modes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

The DLI Initiative is a win-win undertaking for Utah because it builds capacity for economic prosperity, gives parents choice in education, better meets the instructional needs of EL students, honors the cultural and linguistic heritage of its native-speaking populations, and provides Utah's students with the skills they need to be competitive in twenty-first-century academia and the global marketplace. Our goal is to eradicate monolingualism, since it leaves our students under-skilled and unrehearsed to star on the stage of a global environment. Moreover, Utah has embraced the responsibility to make DLI a national priority by leading collaborative efforts, building language networks, and mentoring other states to make DLI programs equally accessible to students outside of Utah. In the pioneering spirit of its history, Utah is undaunted in its quest to mainstream DLI for all students everywhere.

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