

COALITION FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Promoting U.S. Global Competence

May 24, 2011

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Duncan Hunter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dale Kildee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear House Education and the Workforce Committee Leaders:

We write concerning the Committee's scheduled consideration this week of H.R. 1891, the Setting New Priorities in Education Spending Act. H.R. 1891 would eliminate the statutory authorities for 43 education programs, including the **Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP)**. The Committee has long supported this program as supporting the appropriate federal role to address a national need that historically has not been prioritized by state and local educational agencies. **We urge that the FLAP statutory authority not be eliminated.**

According to the National Research Council report, *International Education and Foreign Languages: Keys to Securing America's Future*, "a pervasive lack of knowledge about foreign cultures and foreign languages in this country threatens the security of the United States as well as its ability to compete in the global marketplace." Underscoring the need to expand support for international and foreign language education throughout the education system, the report concludes that **"early language learning in elementary and secondary school is key to establishing a pipeline of students who can eventually reach a high enough level of proficiency in foreign language and culture to meet national needs."**

Funded at \$26.928 million in the FY 2011 Continuing Resolution, the **Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP)** is the **only** Department of Education program supporting the development of foreign language programs at the K-12 levels. A portion of the funding (\$11.5 million) is set aside for 5-year grants to local educational agencies that work in partnership with one or more institutions of higher education to establish or expand articulated programs of study

in languages critical to U.S. national security. This K-12/higher education partnership feature of FLAP was incorporated in response to President George W. Bush's 2006 National Security Language Initiative, which stated,

“An essential component of U.S. national security in the post-9/11 world is the ability to engage foreign governments and peoples, especially in critical regions, to encourage reform, promote understanding, convey respect for other cultures and provide an opportunity to learn more about our country and its citizens. To do this, we must be able to communicate in other languages, a challenge for which we are unprepared.

“Deficits in foreign language learning and teaching negatively affect our national security, diplomacy, law enforcement, intelligence communities and cultural understanding. It prevents us from effectively communicating in foreign media environments, hurts counter-terrorism efforts, and hamstrings our capacity to work with people and governments in post-conflict zones and to promote mutual understanding. Our business competitiveness is hampered in making effective contacts and adding new markets overseas.” *The White House, January 5, 2006*

Learning a foreign language proficiently is best begun at an early age. At a time of severe and growing shortages of Americans with foreign language skills in government, healthcare, law enforcement, business and many other professions, our K-12 educational system is not prepared to expand international and foreign language education for 21st century needs.

A recent survey by the Center for Applied Linguistics found that only 25 percent of American elementary schools even offer foreign languages. Moreover, fewer elementary and middle schools are teaching a foreign language compared to a decade ago, while the number of high schools has not increased. One-third of the public elementary and secondary schools with language programs said that **foreign language instruction has been affected by NCLB**. Schools cited mostly negative influences that affect the quantity and quality of language instruction: intense focus on tested subjects (mathematics and reading) to the detriment of other subjects, and shortage of highly qualified language teachers.

The United States has fallen behind other nations in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) indicators, but historically has never caught up with other nations in language and cultural skills. Less than 20% of Americans reported speaking a language other than English in census bureau surveys, as opposed to 53% of Europeans. While many other nations—such as the European Union, China, and India--require their students to learn two or more languages, the U.S. lags behind.

The federal role in stimulating K-12 foreign language education reform requires a dedicated funding stream. Now more than ever, Congress must maintain a strong and steady U.S. Department of Education leadership role in partnership with our educational institutions to ensure the nation's students have access to high-quality international and foreign language education to meet national needs.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Submitted by the following organizations:

African Studies Association
Alliance for International Educational & Cultural Exchange
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
American Political Science Association
Asia Society
Association of American Universities
Association of International Education Administrators
Association for Asian Studies
Council of Directors of National Foreign Language Resource Centers
Council of Directors of National Resource Centers
Council for Opportunity in Education
The Forum on Education Abroad
Joint National Committee for Languages
Middle East Studies Association
Modern Language Association
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Council of State Supervisors for Languages
National Humanities Alliance