

WORLD LANGAUGES

What the Michigan Merit Curriculum Law Says

Sec. 1278a(2) Beginning with pupils entering grade 3 in 2006, the board of a school district or board of directors of a public school academy shall not award a high school diploma to a pupil unless the pupil has successfully completed during grades 9 to 12 at least 2 credits, as determined by the Michigan Department of Education, in a language other than English, or the pupil has successfully completed at any time during grades K to 12 course work or other learning experiences that are substantially equivalent to 2 credits in a language other than English, based on guidelines developed by the department. Schools must consider American Sign Language (ASL) to be a language other than English. A student may meet all or part of

What Research Says

Students who learn a second language benefit in practical ways. They are better able to communicate with native speakers in this country and in other nations; they have a better understanding of other cultures; and they are better prepared for potential careers. Moreover, students' learning skills in general are enhanced through world language study. Students who study two years of a language other than English score significantly higher on the SAT verbal and math test than students who do not complete two years of a language. Higher wages are also linked to students who studying a language other than English for two years. In Michigan, 85% of school districts currently do not require a world language credit.

Questions & Answers

1. Q. Why wasn't the World Language Requirement implemented with the class of 2011 (9th graders in Fall 2007) along with the rest of the Michigan Merit Curriculum?

A. The World Language Requirement was delayed to allow districts time to prepare and if necessary, create and implement new programs, develop new curriculum, and hire qualified (HQ) faculty.

2. Q: How can students meet the World Language requirement?

A: Students can meet the requirement in one of three ways:

- by completing two credits at the high school level in the same world language
- by completing formal instruction in the same world language provided by their school district over the course of the K-8 experience or a combination of a K-8 experience and 9-12 experience.
- through learning beyond the K-12 classroom: formal study abroad, study abroad programs, college coursework, home or heritage languages, online courses, or other life experiences.

3. Q: What is an "equivalent learning experience in grades K-12"?

A: Students are required to complete two credits of the same world language prior to graduation or demonstrate a two-year equivalent proficiency; that is, Novice High proficiency on the ACTFL Proficiency Scale.

4. Q: What characterizes Novice High proficiency?

A: The Novice High proficiency level is characterized by the ability to function in highly predictable situations using words, phrases, and complete sentences. At the Novice High level, students can communicate with people who are accustomed to interacting with non-native speakers. Students can communicate in a variety of **contexts** relating primarily to oneself, family, friends, home, neighborhood, community, and country and carry out a variety of language **functions** including socializing, identifying and describing, exchanging information and exchanging opinions. For a more detailed list of contexts and functions appropriate to the Novice High level, see the *Michigan World Language Standards and Benchmarks*.

5. Q. How is Novice High equivalency demonstrated?

A: Students who fulfill the requirement by successfully completing two credits in the same world language at the high school level, do not need to demonstrate Novice High equivalency through any formal assessment.

Students who intend to fulfill the requirement by completing formal instruction in the same world language in a K-8 experience will need to be assessed prior to their entrance into high school. The assessment will need to determine a proficiency level.

- If a student demonstrates at least Novice High proficiency, he/she has completed the equivalent of the two credit requirement.
- If a student demonstrates Novice Mid proficiency (the equivalent of one credit), he/she will need to complete a second credit at the high school level.
- If a student does not demonstrate at least Novice Mid proficiency, he/she will need to complete two credits at the high school level.

Students who intend to fulfill the requirement through learning beyond the K-12 classroom (formal study abroad, study abroad programs, college coursework, home or heritage languages, online courses, or other life experiences) will need to provide formal documentation of equivalent proficiency in the language being used to fulfill the requirement.

6. Q: Will there be a state-wide test to assess student proficiency at the end of the two-credit sequence?

A: There are no plans to institute a state-wide test for students who have completed the two-credit sequence in a world language. Students who successfully complete the two-credit sequence in the same world language have fulfilled the requirement.

7. Q: Can students meet the requirement by completing the first credit in one language and then completing the second credit in a different world language (Example: Year 1 in Spanish and Year 2 in Chinese)?

A: No, the two credits must be in the **same** world language. Research indicates that students benefit from continuous and extended sequences of language study in the same world language.

8. Q: Are there state standards for World Languages that reflect the Novice High proficiency level?

A: Yes. Shortly after the Michigan Merit Curriculum was passed, new state standards and benchmarks were developed and are contained in the document *Michigan World Language Standards and Benchmarks*. The *Standards* parallel the national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. The *Benchmarks* are written for three proficiency levels: Novice High, Intermediate Low-Mid, and Pre-Advanced. The *Michigan World Language Standards and Benchmarks* are available at www.michigan.gov. Once you have reached the home page type the phrase "World Language

Standards and Benchmarks” into the search box at the top right of the page. You can then download and print out a copy for your use.

9. Q: Is there additional information available about how to implement the World Language requirement?

A: Yes. The *Michigan Merit Curriculum Credit/Experience Guidelines for World Languages* contains information about implementing the requirement and provides a glossary of terms and suggested curricular models. The *Guidelines* are available at www.michigan.gov. Once you have reached the home page type the phrase “World Language Guidelines” into the search box at the top right of the page. You can then download and print out a copy of the *Guidelines* for your use.