

October 25, 2021

House Education Committee  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Chair Hornberger and the Honorable Members of the House Education Committee,

On behalf of the more than 300 members of the Michigan World Language Association, I am writing to oppose HB 5190, which is scheduled to be heard in committee on October 26, 2021. I respectfully request that this letter be entered into the record of testimony of that hearing.

HB 5190 would reduce the number of world language credits students would be required to earn in the Michigan Merit Curriculum graduation requirements to one and one-half, and establish a one-half credit personal finance requirement. Given that the current MMC requirements allow one credit in other disciplines to replace one credit of world language, this change would in effect reduce the world language requirement to one-half credit.

While we do not question that personal finance is a useful content area, it is completely unrelated to world languages and should not be used as a substitute for them. We urge you to recognize that world languages are essential to our students' career-readiness and our state's economic prosperity, and that any weakening of the world language requirement will disadvantage Michigan and its students.

There is a wealth of data showing employers need workers with language skills, including employers here in Michigan. A 2017 report<sup>1</sup> found that the demand for bilingual workers in Michigan nearly tripled between 2010 and 2016, and an Indeed.com search for bilingual jobs in Michigan just today found over 3600 listings in a variety of sectors, including health care, sales, customer service, finance, criminal justice, and more.

Language needs in the workplace also exist beyond Michigan. In 2019, nine out of 10 employers surveyed by Ipsos<sup>2</sup> nationwide reported needing workers with foreign language skills. This need crosses all sectors of employment and all types of jobs, with some of the most intense demand for workers with foreign language skills in STEM fields like healthcare, and trades like construction. The languages that these employers reported needing are the ones being taught in Michigan schools: Spanish, French, German, Japanese, and Chinese top the list.

Language skills are not all that students gain when they study another language. They are also learning to communicate and interact in real time with real people, which are transferrable skills, and skills that are in the most demand by employers. Two separate recent surveys of U.S. employers<sup>3</sup> found that communication skills topped the list of the most sought-after skills by employers, with other so-called "soft skills" related to human interaction rounding out their lists. Additionally, nearly three-quarters of employers found it difficult to find employees that had the communication and soft skills they were looking for.

For many students, the primary benefit of taking the required language credits relates to culture. They develop an awareness and appreciation of not only the differences that make every culture unique, but also the similarities that unite us all. In fact, many MIWLA members report that as a result of the MMC graduation requirement, they had to change how they taught language, recognizing that they

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<sup>1</sup> [New American Economy, Demand for Bilingual Workers in Michigan](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Making Languages Our Business: Addressing Foreign Language Demand Among U.S. Employers](#)

<sup>3</sup> [NACE Job Outlook 2019; Morning Consult on behalf of Cengage](#)

must reach all students and not just those who are college-bound, or who plan to take more language classes. For many, this change has been to make culture the starting point and the center that language learning revolves around. Students leave K-12 language classrooms with an awareness that people who live where the language is spoken, including people right here in Michigan, have ways of existing in and understanding the world that don't always align with their own ways of existing in and understanding the world. Equally important is that in language classrooms, students begin to explore why these differences exist, so that they can better understand and interact with people in the interconnected world we already live in. This ability to think critically about their own and other cultures, and to understand the perspectives of people from other cultures, whether those are world cultures, workplace cultures, rural cultures, urban cultures, or any of the multitude of cultures that we find right here in Michigan, are also transferable and very important skills. Employers recognize this, too: more than nine out of 10 surveyed said it was important to hire workers with intercultural skills.<sup>4</sup>

I would further emphasize that language study benefits all students, including those who will work in skilled trades or technical fields, those who will not pursue a four-year college degree, those who will continue to live in Michigan or elsewhere in the United States, and those with special needs, evidenced by decades of research showing improved overall academic achievement and enhanced cognitive abilities of those who study a second language<sup>5</sup>.

We hope you will recognize that HB 5190 asks you to make a false choice between unrelated disciplines that would limit opportunities for Michigan's kids to develop skills and understanding they need more than ever in today's world and workplace. I respectfully ask that you reject HB 5190, and any others that would weaken the world language requirement in the Michigan Merit Curriculum.

Respectfully,



Julie Foss  
Public Affairs Liaison  
Michigan World Language Association

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<sup>4</sup> [\*It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success\*](#)

<sup>5</sup> [\*What Does the Research Show about the Benefits of Language Learning?\*](#)