



American Association of Teachers of French Rhode Island

President

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Dear Superintendent of Schools:

I would like to take this opportunity in writing to tell you about the invaluable advantages of a strong foreign language program in **French** for your students and the importance of **French studies** in the contemporary American classroom.

For the first time since the 1960's, American students are engaging themselves at universities at a significant rate to study languages coupled with other majors. More and more universities are requiring two, if not three or four years of foreign language study as prerequisites for admission. At our own **University of Rhode Island**, foreign language study is at a rate of 71% of the student population, far exceeding the national average of 41%, with French as the most popular choice among URI undergraduates. In fact, URI's program in French and francophone studies is rated number two in the country.

Achieve **better test scores** with the help of one subject — Français! One reason is the fact that learning French will help students better understand and speak our own English language. Approximately 50% of modern-day English words trace their origins to French, so students can quickly learn French and correlate the language's many similarities to excel on standardized tests like the **SAT**. This rapid progress boosts a student's confidence and improves his or her overall academic performance. French also enhances a **student's critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving skills**, which in turn sharpens their understanding of other subjects like math and science.◊

Recently, there has been a popular idea floating around school administrations that educators should discard traditional European languages like French for so-called "critical languages" like Mandarin. While Mandarin Chinese as a language has the most number of speakers and the Chinese economy is growing exponentially, French remains the second most influential language in the world after English, used and useful on all 5 continents. Less than 50 thousand Americans are learning Mandarin, making it more obvious that millions of Americans are interested in learning a second language other than Mandarin. In fact, the **American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages 2008 Student Survey** revealed French as the most popular choice as to what language an American student would be most interested to study.◊◊

There is a reason for studying European languages like French: European languages are easier for native speakers of English to learn than non-European languages. It takes a native speaker of English two to three years of additional study to become proficient in a non-European language like Mandarin. If we as educators are to encourage foreign language proficiency in a realistic way, then we should encourage students first to learn a European language like French for its **practical benefits**.◊◊

Even more important for the growth and development of our students, the French language is a vehicle of tremendous **history, culture, and commerce**, as it is spoken in over **40 countries** around the world. Let us give our students what can truly improve the quality of their life, so that they become both productive and cultured human beings.

It is understood that tomorrow's graduates must have the skills to function well in our **ever-interconnected world**. Learning French would be an obvious choice for graduates entering into the **world economy**.

If you would like to know more about the advantages of having students taking French as their foreign language elective, I would be happy to speak with you as well as to your school's teachers of French.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Hébert
President, AATFRI