



Credit for Proficiency

The Impact of the Road Map World Language Credit Program on Student Attitudes Toward Bilingualism and School

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About Education Northwest

Founded as a nonprofit corporation in 1966, Education Northwest builds capacity in schools, families, and communities through applied research and development.

This report evaluates the Road Map World Language Credit Program, a project that aims to recognize the asset of bilingualism by awarding students high school credit for their ability to speak, understand, read, and write a language other than English. The report, an assessment of student participants' perceptions, is submitted at the request of the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

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Executive Summary

How can we honor bilingualism and encourage students and educators to recognize bilingualism as an asset? The Road Map World Language Credit Program seeks to do this by awarding up to four high school credits—the equivalent of four years of classroom language study—to students who demonstrate, in a standardized test, their ability to speak, understand, read, and write a language other than English.

What effect did the World Language Credit Program have on students proficient in more than one language? Researchers from Education Northwest spoke to participants and found that the program created a positive recognition of the value of bilingualism, which increased students' pride and their appreciation of their own strengths. We offer four major findings:

Students recognized the personal, cultural, and social value of bilingualism. Students were proud of being bilingual. They told us that bilingualism was useful and that their ability to translate and interpret would help them in their careers, provide access to higher paying jobs, and allow them to help other people.

World language credits gave students choices and the chance to graduate on time. Students agreed that receiving world language credits without having to attend class gave them “a little wiggle room” to focus on what they needed to graduate. Due to this flexibility, some enrolled in advanced-level courses to improve their college eligibility, while others were able to retake courses they had failed, which allowed them to graduate on time.

Receiving credits made students confident about being bilingual. Most students agreed that receiving credits gave them confidence in their bilingual ability and made them feel like “the language is really useful.” The program motivated students to improve their language skills or to learn a new one, and for some students it created a stronger sense of connection to their previous life experiences and with their parents and family members.

Attitudes toward school did not change for most students. A small number of participants said that receiving credits helped them realize that their school valued their bilingualism and provided them with an opportunity to benefit from what they already knew. Others said that the program made up for the fact that their school did not support or teach their specific home language.

Researchers also found that more than three-quarters of the **students had formally studied their language** in school, at religious institutions, or during weekend heritage language programs. The **testing environment was a challenge** for some students who took the assessments in a school library where it was awkward to speak out loud.

The World Language Credit Program was proposed by the Road Map English Language Learner Work Group, funded and administered by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and is based on a policy for competency-based credits developed by OSPI, the State Board of Education, and the Washington State School Directors' Association.

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Introduction

How can we honor bilingualism and encourage students and educators to see it as a valuable asset? This report discusses and evaluates the Road Map World Language Credit Program, an innovative project that seeks to communicate to students and educators that being proficient in more than one language is a valuable skill that should be encouraged and appreciated.

The World Language Credit Program promotes students' pride in their proficiency in a language other than English by providing them the opportunity to earn the necessary credits for graduation and college eligibility. Through this program, students in the Road Map districts who speak, understand, read, and write languages other than English are able to receive up to four high school credits—the equivalent of four years of language study—by passing language assessments.

In spring and fall 2011 Highline and Seattle Public Schools offered students the opportunity to take language proficiency assessments so that they could receive credit and be recognized for their proficiency in a language other than English. When the Road Map English Language Learner Work Group (see sidebar) saw how successful the program was in these districts, it submitted a proposal to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to fund assessments in all seven Road Map districts. This grant was administered by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) from fall 2012 through fall 2014.

To evaluate whether the World Language Credit Program accomplished its goals, researchers from Education Northwest spoke with students who participated in the program, seeking to answer the following questions:

Do students perceive that obtaining the world language credit helped them academically?

Did obtaining world language credit affect students' attitudes toward the language?

Did obtaining world language credit affect students' attitudes toward school?

This report provides background on the region, discusses the project, and then presents the findings from our study.

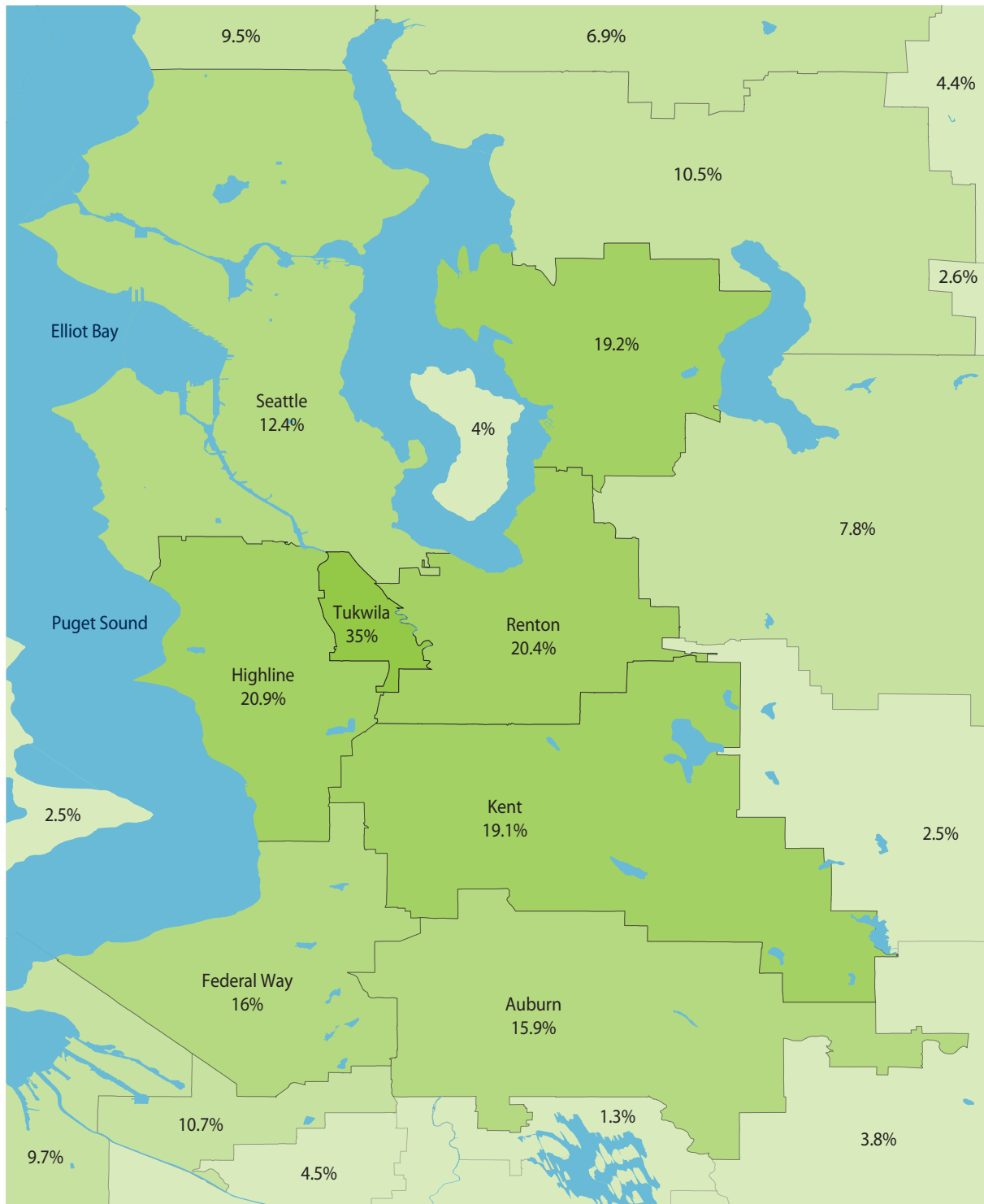
What is the Road Map Project?

The Road Map Project is a cradle-to-career collective action initiative of seven school districts in Washington (Auburn, Federal Way, Highline, Kent, Renton, Seattle, and Tukwila) that have the highest levels of poverty in the Seattle metropolitan area. These districts, the Community Center for Education Results, and other stakeholders are working to double the proportion of students who are college or career ready by 2020.

For the Road Map Project to achieve this goal, the needs of all students must be addressed. Current and former English language learners are less likely to graduate from high school than their peers (Callahan, 2013; Gwynne et al., 2012). The Road Map English Language Learner Work Group was established by the Road Map Project to improve outcomes for these students.

This work group—which includes federal program directors and English language learner program coordinators from the seven Road Map districts, as well as advocacy organizations, state and regional educational agencies, community-based organizations, foundations, and research organizations—envisioned the World Language Credit Program as a way to improve the likelihood of graduation for English language learners by providing them with competency-based credits and a way to encourage all students and educators to see bilingualism as a valuable asset.

Figure 1. The Road Map districts have a higher percent of students that speak a language other than English at home than other districts in the region



Percent of students with non-English home language



Source: OSPI K-12 Data and Reports, results from 2012/13.

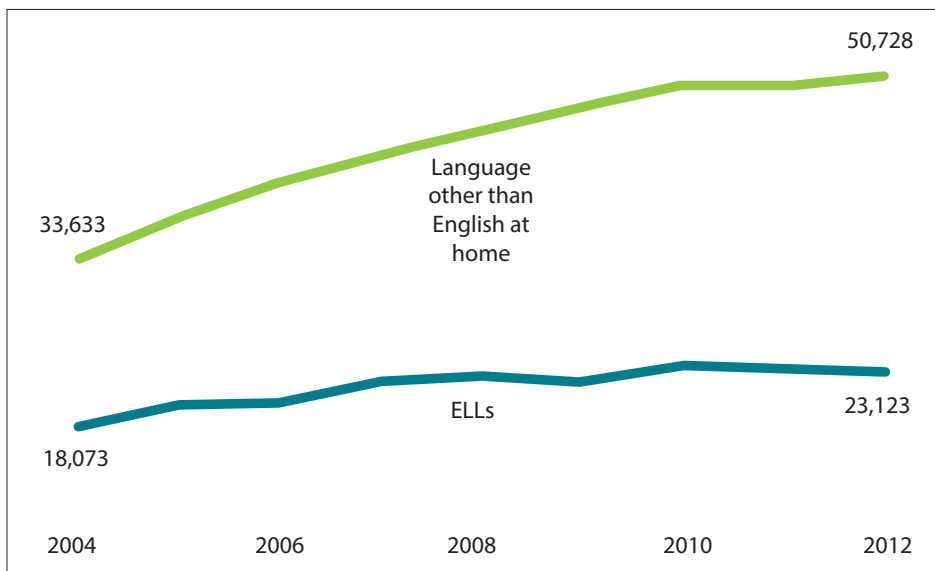
Demographics of bilingualism

Currently, nearly one in five students (17%) in the Road Map districts speaks a language other than English at home. This means that there are at least 50,000 students in the Road Map districts with some level of proficiency in two or more languages (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [OSPI], 2012/13).

The Road Map districts have more students who speak a language other than English at home than most other districts in the region (Figure 1, opposite page), and nearly a quarter (22%) of all Washington K–12 students who speak a language other than English at home attend schools in the Road Map districts (OSPI, 2012/13).

The number of students who speak a language other than English at home in the Road Map districts has grown substantially. In nine years (2004/05–2012/13), their number has increased by 50 percent. This growth is much faster than the number of students who qualify for English language learner (ELL) services in Road Map schools (Figure 2).

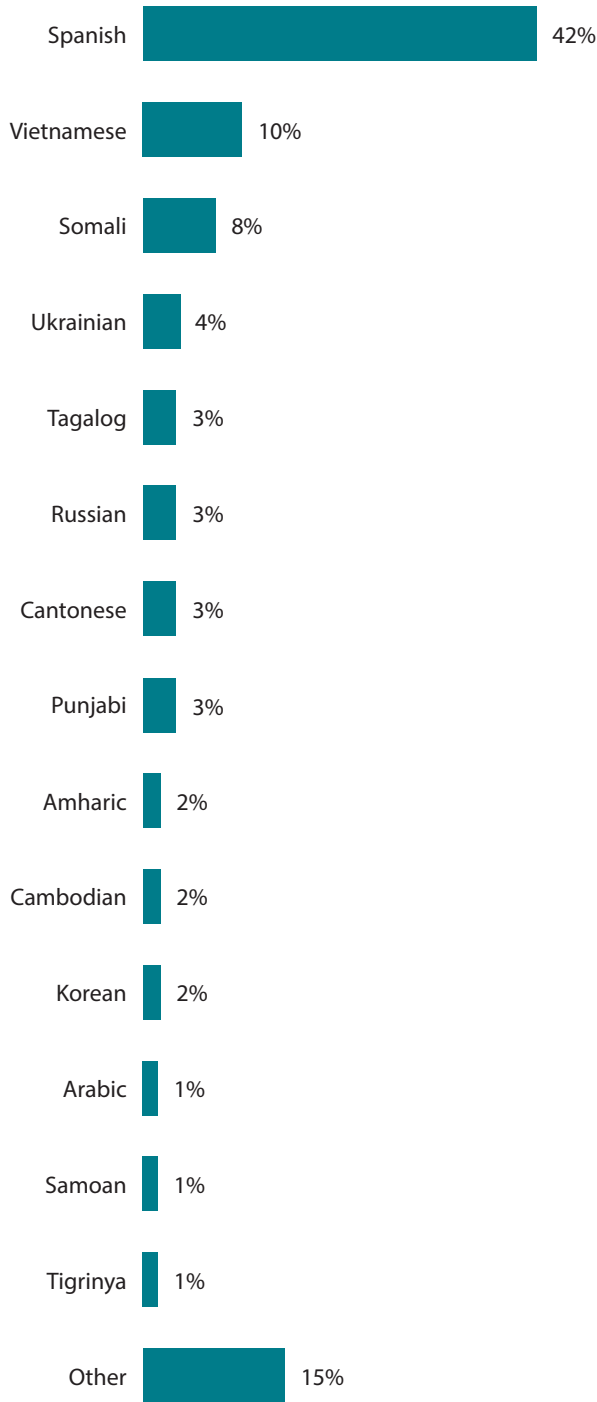
Figure 2. The number of students who speak a language other than English at home in Road Map schools is growing faster than the number of students who qualify for ELL services



Source: OSPI K–12 Data and Reports.

There are 171 languages other than English spoken by students in the Road Map districts. Of these languages, 14 have more than 500 speakers and together comprise 85 percent of Road Map students who speak a language other than English at home (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Fourteen languages are spoken by 85 percent of students who speak a language other than English at home in the Road Map region



Source: OSPI K-12 Data and Reports, results from 2012/13.

Studying the project goals

Education Northwest researchers conducted 17 focus groups with 108 students who had taken an assessment through the World Language Credit Program. We also spoke with 23 other students who were considering taking a World Language assessment, but had not yet done so.

In each of the seven districts, a program coordinator or ELL teacher identified and recruited students who participated in the program. Students under the age of 18 were required to have their parents sign a permission sheet. We spoke with students during their lunch period, so we didn't pull them out of class, and we brought fruit, cookies, and pizza with us.

In the focus groups, students reflected on how the world language credits they received had helped them academically and had affected their attitudes toward their home language and toward school. Students also completed a brief survey on their age, gender, grade level, credits received, and languages tested to ensure that the students we interviewed represented the diversity of the program and the region.

We recorded and then transcribed the focus group responses. We then conducted a thematic analysis, reading through the focus group transcriptions to identify recurring themes in the text, and then coding or labeling specific quotations. We identified the major findings from our analysis based on the frequency and strength of the evidence, including how often the theme was mentioned by the students and how strongly they supported it. We used quotations to provide examples that explain and support the themes.

Building bilingual pride

Developing proficiency in more than one language is an asset that is often overlooked and undervalued in schools, yet research has shown that a subset of students who speak two or more languages—ELLs who receive primary language instruction in dual language programs—have, on average, higher achievement in English reading than ELLs receiving instruction only in English.¹ These students also appear to have higher achievement in mathematics (Greene, 1997), better grades overall (Curiel, Rosenthal, & Richek, 1986), and higher school attendance (Thomas & Collier, 2002) than ELLs receiving instruction only in English.

Proficiency in two or more languages brings benefits that extend beyond academic outcomes. For example, individuals who speak more than one language have a better developed executive control—the ability to focus on relevant information and ignore distractions—than monolinguals (Bialystok, 2011). This seems to play a role in coping with Alzheimer’s disease and delaying the onset of dementia (Bialystok, 2011; Chertkow et al., 2010). Knowing more than one language also positively, although modestly, affects the future earnings of college graduates by 2 to 3 percent (Saiz & Zoido, 2005).

Yet despite these assets, schools and districts typically do little to support and acknowledge students’ proficiency in languages other than English. The World Language Credit Program was conceived and designed to counteract this by providing high school credits to support and encourage proficiency in more than one language and encouraging educators to demonstrate to students that they value bilingualism and students’ home languages.

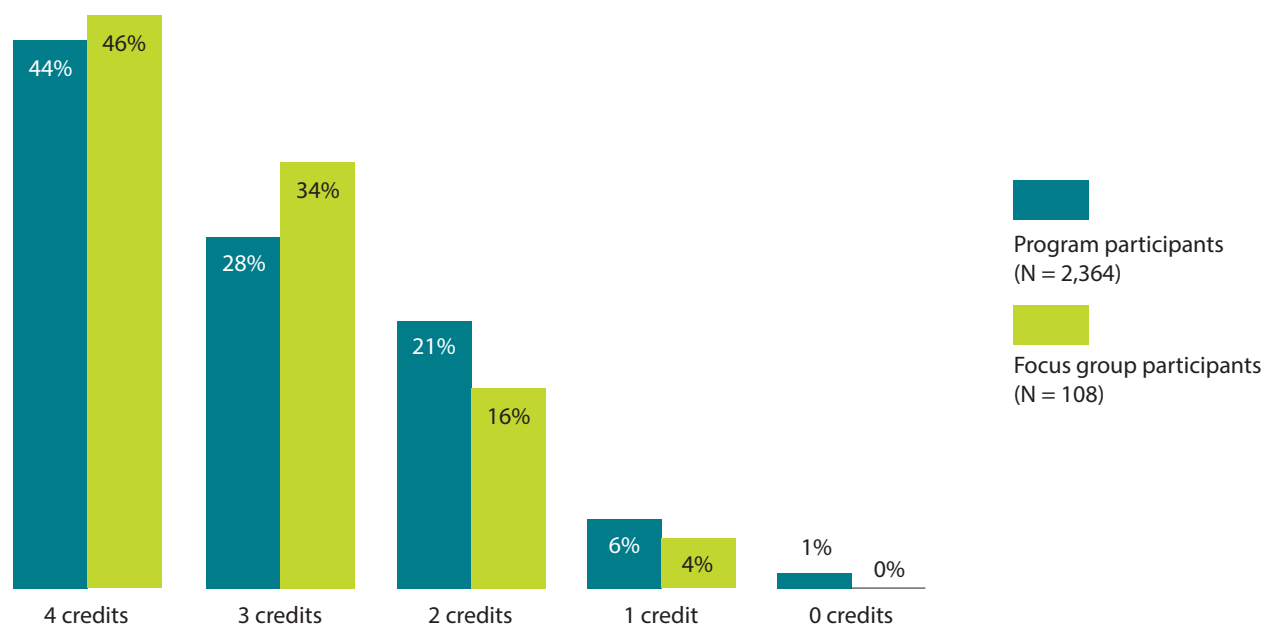
Who participated in the program?

In the 2012/13 and 2013/14 school years, a combined total of 2,364 students participated in the Road Map World Language Credit Program. All of these students had varying degrees of proficiency in least two languages. Some of the participants came from homes in which a language other than English is spoken, while others came from homes in which two or more languages are spoken. English was often one of these languages. Finally, a small number of participants spoke one language at home—usually English—and learned another language in school or elsewhere.

As a group, the students qualified for a total of 7,271 credits. On average, they qualified for 3.1 credits from the World Language Credit Program, and almost three-quarters of the students (72%) qualified for three or four out of a total of four possible credits (Figure 4, next page).

¹ August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Willig, 1985.

Figure 4. Most students qualified for three or more credits



Sources: OSPI World Language Credit Program data set and Education Northwest student surveys.

Students were tested in 47 languages; however, more than half (51%) of the assessments were in Spanish. This means that Spanish speakers were overrepresented because a higher percentage of Spanish speakers took the test compared to the percent that live in the Road Map region (42%). Other languages, notably Somali and Vietnamese, were underrepresented (Table A5 in Appendix A).

Who participated in the focus groups?

We spoke with 5 percent of the students—108 in total—who had taken world language assessments and asked them what they gained from the program and what they thought about bilingualism. We also spoke with 23 students who were considering taking a world language assessment but had not yet done so.

The students who participated in the focus groups were, for the most part, representative of the students who participated in the program as a whole. Slightly more focus group participants (80%) than program participants (72%) told us that they qualified for three or four credits (Figure 4).

The students we spoke with took the exams in 22 languages. Spanish speakers were well represented in focus groups, but students who spoke Chinese languages were overrepresented, comprising 17 percent of focus group participants while representing only 4 percent of both program participants and the Road Map students whose families speak a language other than English at home. In contrast Vietnamese speakers were underrepresented in the focus groups, with only one student (1%) participating, although Vietnamese speakers comprise 7 percent of program participants and 10 percent of the Road Map students who speak another language at home (Table A5 in Appendix A).

How did students earn credits?

The Road Map World Language Credit Program is based on the policy and procedure to assess world language proficiency established in 2010 by the Washington State Board of Education, Washington State School Directors' Association, OSPI, and the work of an advisory group of world language teachers in 2009.

To demonstrate their proficiency, students take a language proficiency assessment. The World Language Credit Program used several assessments, including STAMP (Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency) in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish. For other languages the program used the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' Oral Proficiency Interview (conducted by telephone or computer) and Writing Proficiency Test. OSPI and the Center for Applied Second Language Studies at the University of Oregon developed proctored writing and oral language tests for languages that did not have them. Districts also piloted assessments from Brigham Young University and ALTA Testing.

After receiving results from the testing agency, OSPI sent notification letters and certificates to participants and school counselors from all Road Map districts except Highline, which handled its own testing. Students could qualify for up to four credits through this program—the maximum number of competency-based credits for one language a high school student can apply to his or her transcript in Washington state.

We do not know how many of the students received or will receive proficiency credits on their transcripts. Some (16%) of the students who were tested were in middle school and will have to wait until they enter high school to apply the credits. Other students may have already earned language credits through coursework, and those classroom credits will take precedence over the assessment credits and will be applied to their transcripts.

Findings

What did participants tell us? We spoke with students for 20 to 30 minutes in small groups and asked them a set of questions organized under four broad topics:

What does being bilingual mean to you?

Did earning world language credits help you academically?

Did obtaining these credits affect your attitude toward the language?

Did obtaining these credits affect your attitude toward school?

We asked students to answer the questions individually, which ensured that all students had a chance to answer and provided them time to reflect on what others had said.

Students recognized the personal, cultural, and social value of bilingualism

What did students think about their bilingualism? Nearly all students were very positive about being bilingual. They told us that speaking two or more languages allows them to help others, gives them an advantage in the workplace, and provides them with a broader cultural awareness than those who speak only one language. A large majority of students were proud to be bicultural. As one student said, “I feel like we have an advantage of understanding both sides of different cultures and different languages.”

Bilingual students spoke about how they had access to English while others, especially new immigrants, may not. Some of these bilingual students had assumed increased responsibilities as translators or interpreters for others. Some expressed their desire to return to their birth or heritage countries to help. Others spoke about helping their family members or newcomer students or said that they had helped their younger siblings learn their home language.

In Spanish we say that a person who speaks more than one language counts for more than one person. I feel like knowing Spanish, it makes you count as another person. It makes you valuable in the workforce.

Most students told us that they were **proud of being bilingual** and that it made them feel “confident” and sometimes even “powerful.”

I feel pretty confident in knowing English and Spanish. I feel like those two languages are more known than any other languages so I can travel the world just knowing those two languages.

Students were also proud to be bicultural.

I personally feel that I have a better understanding of many things than if I only spoke one language. For example, you express yourself in different ways in different languages, and I think about that all the time.

A few students said that their bilingualism felt “natural” and that they were neither proud of nor embarrassed by it. As one student put it, “I always thought it was normal to know a second language.”

A small number reported that speaking another language made them uncomfortable or made them feel different than their peers. A few reported that teachers had told them to speak only English in the classroom.

Our teacher came up and said 'you guys cannot talk in Spanish in here.' I said that we were talking about the work in another language, but it made me feel bad.

A few others said that they were uncomfortable speaking English because of their accents.

Nearly all of the students agreed that **bilingualism was useful** and that they could use their bilingualism to help others by translating and interpreting for their families and peers. Many students said that their parents or family members did not speak English and were not literate in any language and that they were able to help them.

If someone comes from my country and they do not know how to speak English I can help them, just like I help my family. Other people in my family cannot read or speak English, but I know both languages, and I can help them.

You know that your language is going to be useful to you in the future, you can communicate with your grandparents and you can actually use it in the world. I am proud of my Spanish.

They also spoke about the importance of bilingual communication, particularly between generations.

Finally, students also told us about how they had helped others in the school, translating classroom content for other students.

When I was in second grade, we had a new student and she did not speak English at all, so I had to pretty much teach her the whole class, while I was still going through school.

Students also believed that **bilingualism would help their careers** and provide access to higher paying jobs because they had the ability to translate and interpret for others.

It is better speaking two or more languages than one. If you are applying for a job, they might prefer someone who knows more languages so that they can speak to more people. So, they are going to hire the guy who speaks two languages and can communicate with more people.

While students currently were using their bilingualism to help their families, others said they planned to use translation and interpretation skills in a job setting, and they felt that their bilingualism would secure better opportunities for jobs in the future. One student said,

The reason my mom told me to take this test was because I speak another language. I could benefit in a job because I could interpret for other people and that could also definitely get you higher pay.

Another student said that she really wanted to get the credits so that she could officially show that she had background in her language, which would help her in nursing, her profession of choice. A small group of students pointed out independently that **bilingualism would help them be accepted to college.**

World language credits gave students choices and the chance to graduate on time

How did the World Language Credit Program help students academically? All the students we spoke with received at least one credit and were certain that the credits would help them in school. World language credits are elective credits that are not required for graduation. However, students do need elective credits to graduate and world language credits are necessary for students to be eligible for a four-year college in Washington.

Receiving the world language credits meant that students did not have to take world language or other elective classes to fulfill that requirement and gave students more choices about classes they could take. Their choices ranged from advanced courses in science and math to classes in other world languages and other electives that were, as students said, more “enjoyable, interesting, and fun” than the core courses they were required to take for graduation.

While many of the students who took the assessments and received world language credits told us that they were already on a path to graduation, others were worried that they would not graduate on time because of a credit deficit. These students regarded the extra world language credits as instrumental to on-time graduation.

Students all agreed that **receiving world language credits freed up time in their schedules** to “focus on what you needed.” Many of these students were able to take classes other than language electives.

It was a short cut. Language classes take people years, and we took the test in two hours and got full credit for it. We have the opportunity to take another class that we need instead of taking a language. Most people are busy taking Spanish or French classes and don't have the time or space to take history class.

Earning the credits gave students “a little wiggle room” to take other classes, and they were happy to take classes that they were interested in or classes that were instrumental to their career goals.

I am a senior, and I was pretty stressed out that I needed all my credits. The tests gave me that extra wiggle room to not stress so much, and I was able to just focus on chemistry and math—the classes I really wanted to take.

When I saw the two credits of foreign language requirement for college eligibility I panicked. The counselor told me I cannot take Amharic, there is no one to teach me, so I have to learn Spanish. I do not know even a word in Spanish and it was going to be super hard for me. So these credits really saved me.

Newcomer ELLs (students who had recently immigrated to the United States and were enrolled in English language development classes) and especially those who did not have access to classes in their home language were relieved that they did not have to learn a third language.

A few students also reported that receiving **world language credits allowed them to retake courses they had failed** and that the credits gave them “time to get those credits back and not fall behind on other credits I need.” In some cases, students were able to retake classes that were required, while others were able to replace the credits they had lost with those from the World Language Credit Program.

For a handful of students the **world language credits helped them graduate on time**, without the stress of attending summer school classes or taking an additional year of high school.

I was supposed to have seven credits of electives and I got four credits just by taking the language test. So I do not have to take summer school or have a super senior year.

A few students also told us that the credits allowed them to take more of the required courses, which they needed to graduate.

The three credits I received allowed me to take three more math and science classes, and I need those to graduate.

Finally, a few students took advanced-level courses with their available hours, which **improved their college eligibility**. For example, one student said

To go to a good college you have to take AP and higher level classes. If I didn't take the test, then I would be taking French or Spanish rather than these higher level classes.

The credits gave students “a higher chance of getting into a university” because they didn’t have to think about the college language requirement.

You have to think about both the requirements that college wants and for your high school diploma. These credits give you more time and more room in your schedule.

I n my freshman and sophomore year I really messed up, I failed a few classes and taking this test gave me credits so I can retake some classes and help me catch up. It gave me hope to keep on trying and striving in school. I always knew I would be able to graduate and this just gave me a little bit more motivation.

Receiving credits made students confident about being bilingual

How did obtaining world language credit affect students’ attitudes toward their non-English language and their bilingualism? Most students told us that after receiving credits they felt proud and confident in their ability to communicate in their non-English language. Students said that taking the world language assessments increased their awareness of, or interest in, learning more about their non-English language or other languages.

Most students agreed that receiving credits gave them **confidence in their ability to communicate in multiple languages**.

I did not have confidence in Arabic before I took this test, so I was scared; but I decided to see how I do, because I know I can speak and write. Well, I made it, and when I got four credits, then I knew I was doing well and I feel confident.

They told us that receiving credit made them “proud,” and helped them “appreciate” their home language. One student said, “It makes you feel like the language is really useful,” and another added that it “Changed the way I thought about the language.”

About half the students were **surprised that they received credits**. These students did not realize that their non-English language skills were as good as they were, and they received more credits than they expected.

I was actually surprised, I thought maybe I would get two credits, but I got all four credits and I was like, Oh yes! It was all that hard work that I have done to really know my language. I think the more languages you know the better, so that is why I am still taking Spanish, even after getting all my credits.

The other half of students realized that their **language skills were not as good as they thought**. Students told us, for example, that the language on the assessments was more formal than they were used to, and they realized that they knew less than they thought they did. Many of the Spanish speakers pointed out that the written Spanish exam required the use of accent marks, which some students had not expected. Consequently, they realized that they did not speak or write in the academic or formal version of their languages.

I thought that Spanish test would be easy because I really know that language. I speak it every day at home. So I was surprised when I started the test because it was not like my home language, and the test was really hard. They were using my language, but I did not understand it [because] they speak it very different than I do.

Now that I have passed I am more confident that I can speak well, and I want to learn how to speak formally. So now I try to speak with my parents more in Ukrainian rather than English.

Regardless, most students also told us that because of their participation they wanted to **improve their language** through formal study or practice. In some cases, students were inspired to learn more about their language and improve their skills. Most often, they planned to do so by making a concerted effort to speak with their parents.

Others told us that since participating in the World Language Credit Program, they had been reading in their non-English language more.

A small number of students, primarily Spanish-speakers, said that they were taking heritage or advanced language classes at their school to improve their skills and learn the standard dialect.

I am taking more classes in Spanish because the test put me in a position where I want to learn the formal side of Spanish, not how my parents speak and what I have learned from other people that I hung around with, but rather how to speak to someone in an office.

A smaller group of students, about 1 in 10, reported that after receiving world language credits they were motivated to **learn another language**, and some showed interest in Spanish, Japanese, and French as their third language.

I got four credits in Spanish, but I am taking Japanese because it is helpful and I just really like languages. It is cool that you can communicate with different people in a different language. At first I started teaching myself and I really liked the language and the sounds; they really convey more to me now after finishing Spanish.

Students also said that they had learned a third language to increase their attractiveness in the job market.

I would think that employers would rather hire employees that are multilingual rather than just speak one language. So that is why I want to learn Spanish in addition to Chinese.

A few students who took the assessments told us that the process **connected them with their past** and “helped us not to forget our language.” A student who recently immigrated to the United States told us, with passion, that passing the test with four credits confirmed that he still remembered his language and previous schooling.

Other students said that the test reminded them of their past.

I felt like when I was in class in Kenya, my teacher was trying to tell us about composition in English language and how to do it. I feel like I am in Africa, just taking the test.

It is like you put all the knowledge you have into the test, all that you learned back in your home country, and it makes me feel good, like I still remember my language. I did not forget it.

And while about 1 in 10 students also said that the credits had no effect on how they thought about their language, they were happy to have received the credits regardless.

It didn't affect how I feel about French, but I got down my credits, and it is going to look good on my résumé.

Finally, one unanticipated benefit of the program was that some **parents supported their children** preparing for the exams. One student told us that she spent time with her father preparing for the test.

I had studied Spanish in Mexico. When I was taking the Spanish test, I was like OMG, how do you write? Where do the accents go? I told my dad about it and my dad helped me to remember where the accents go. I got some bonding with my dad, and that was nice.

Students provided mixed responses about their parents' level of interest in the credits they had earned. Some students reported that their parents were supportive, happy, and proud. A few mentioned that their parents had advocated for them to participate in the program and had encouraged or guided them through their test preparation. Others reported that they didn't tell their parents about participating in the program, and their parents did not even know that they had taken the test and received credits for it.

Attitudes toward school did not change for most students

Only a small number of students said that the World Language Credit Program changed their attitudes toward school in any significant way. A handful of students said that taking the test made them realize that their **school valued their bilingualism**.

I feel like school cares more for our language. If we speak another language, I feel that school is like taking care of those people that speak different languages.

A slightly larger number of students, about 1 in 10, recognized that the school was providing them with a new **opportunity to benefit** from what they already know.

I like how they are giving us an opportunity to get credits through something we know and something we always had. I really like that ... it changed how I felt about the school. Who would have thought that you would get credits for your language?

Students also praised the program for allowing them to choose other classes.

I like that they are actually letting people take the test. They are giving people the opportunity to take it. You can use it to your advantage and get the credits so that you can focus more on other things. These credits are taking [care of] my elective credits so that I can focus more on my core classes.

These students said that they felt valued and that this in turn increased how they valued their school experience.

When I first took the language test it changed [how I thought] about school and how I look at school, and I thought that it is pretty good to have a school that gives you the opportunity to earn credits for what you know.

Finally, a few students said that **some languages are not supported** or taught in the schools. So, while schools may say they value linguistic diversity, students were neither encouraged nor assisted by the school to improve their language skills. However, they felt that the World Language Credit Program was one step toward improving this situation.

Lots of the students in the school speak languages that the school doesn't teach, and it doesn't make sense. There are six people who speak Somali in this room. They should teach more languages, but the test helps.

Serendipitous findings

We had two other major findings from this research. First, most students who participated in the World Language Credit Program had formally studied their language in school rather than learning at home. Second, the testing environment was a challenge for some students because it was noisy or they felt uncomfortable speaking out loud. These findings were serendipitous in that we did not specifically set out to determine how the students learned their languages nor did we originally plan on asking questions about the testing procedures. In both cases, students felt the information was important to understanding the World Language Credit Program and they offered the information unprompted.

Most students formally studied their language.

The World Language Credit Program awards credits to students who can speak, understand, read, and write a language other than English. Speaking a language at home does not mean that students are literate or that they speak a standard dialect of a given language. So how did students learn their languages?

More than three-quarters of the students in the focus groups had formally studied the language. For some born outside of the United States this meant that they learned in schools in their countries of origin or in refugee camps. Others were born and raised in the United States to one or both parents who spoke the language.

In most instances, Spanish speakers born in the United States had taken classes in school. Nearly all spoke Spanish at home to varying degrees, and at least half had taken several years of Spanish classes or had participated in a dual language program. Others, especially speakers of Eastern European languages, said that they had learned the language formally at religious institutions. Similarly, Vietnamese speakers and a few Chinese speakers told us that they learned their language at Saturday or Sunday schools.

A quarter of the students we spoke with had never formally studied their language. A small group of Spanish speakers told us that they “just got it from home” and were somehow able to learn to read and write in Spanish. However, for several of these students the language skills they had learned at home were not enough to help them pass the test. We spoke with a number of Somali speakers who wanted to take the test but were unable to do so since they had never learned to read or write in Somali. Their ELL teacher, whom we spoke with later, said that most of the students we spoke with could really benefit from the world language credits, as they were all struggling to gather the necessary credits to graduate, and all had to take a language to be college eligible.

The testing environment was a challenge for some students.

Students reported difficulties with the testing environment. Nearly all students felt that the location of the assessment was very important. Some students told us that they took the assessments in a school library, where normally they would be expected to study silently. They mentioned that it was awkward to speak into a microphone and that they were distracted by others doing the same thing.

Taking the test was nerve wracking, because the space was really small. There were people next to you and people all over you and when you speak they stare at you and that makes you feel like, 'I'm not going to get the credits I deserve because of the environment.'

Students also had difficulty with the written part of the assessment because they did not have appropriate keyboards. Students taking the test in Arabic found this particularly difficult and said that they had to use a software keyboard on the screen.

Conclusions

The Road Map World Language Credit Program was created with three main goals: (1) to provide credits to students that might make a difference in their ability to graduate and be college eligible, (2) to recognize and value proficiency in a language other than English, and (3) to improve students' feelings about school. This evaluation was asked to focus on the second and third purpose, and specifically to explore how the program affected how students felt about their language and school.

We spoke with students across the seven Road Map districts, from a wide range of backgrounds, and consistently found that students felt a sense of pride in their bilingualism and more confident that they had real, meaningful skills. Specifically, we found that:

- **Students recognized the personal, cultural, and social value of bilingualism.** Most students were proud of being bilingual and told us that it made them feel confident. They also felt that bilingualism was useful, that they could use their bilingualism to help others by translating and interpreting, and that bilingualism would help their careers and provide access to higher paying jobs. Finally, a smaller group said that they thought that bilingualism would help them get accepted to college.
- **Receiving credits made students confident of their bilingualism.** Most students agreed that receiving credits gave them confidence in their bilingualism and made them aware of how useful it was. Students also told us that the program motivated them to improve their language through formal study or practice, and a small group of these students had chose to learn a third language. The process also connected some students with their past, and some parents supported their children preparing for the exams.

Based on these findings, the program appears to have achieved its second purpose: recognizing and valuing proficiency in a language other than English.

Students' attitudes toward school did not appear to change as result of the program, although the type of student who chose to participate in the program may have already had a positive view of school.

- **Attitudes toward school did not change for most students.** Only a small number of students said that the World Language Credit Program changed their attitude toward school in a significant way. Some acknowledged that in offering the test, their school showed it valued their ability to communicate in more than one language and provided them with an opportunity to benefit from what they already knew. On the other hand, a few students said that the program made up for the fact that their schools did not support or teach their languages.

Finally, students told us that receiving credits helped them graduate on time by opening up space in their schedules to take other classes.

- **World language credits gave students choices and the chance to graduate on time.** Students all agreed that receiving world language credits freed up their schedules and provided them with the opportunity to take other classes and to focus on what was needed. Many of these students took classes other than language electives, and a few took advanced-level courses that improved their college eligibility. A few students said that receiving world language credits allowed them to retake courses they had failed, which would help them graduate on time.

This suggests that the program achieved its first purpose: making a difference in students' ability to graduate and be college eligible. However, objective data on this goal cannot be obtained until the

participants have graduated. Once those data are ready we plan to follow up on this report with an analysis of how credits affected graduation and college eligibility based on students' transcripts.

Overall, we found that the Road Map World Language Credit Program provided positive recognition of the value of bilingualism and increased students' pride in and appreciation for their own strengths. It may also help them meet graduation requirements.

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Appendix A: Methods and Data

Education Northwest conducted 17 focus groups in nine Road Map district schools (Table A1).

Table A1. Location and number of focus groups conducted by Education Northwest

District	Date	Location	Number of focus groups	Number of students
Auburn School District	December 16, 2013	Auburn High School	2	16
Federal Way Public Schools	November 22, 2013	Thomas Jefferson High School	1	4
	November 22, 2013	Decatur High School	1	5
	November 22, 2013	Todd Beamer High School	1	3
Highline Public Schools	January 30, 2014	Global Connections High School	2	15
Kent School District	May 6, 2014	Kentwood High School	3	18
Renton School District	February 11, 2014	Lindbergh High School	2	5
Seattle Public Schools	March 11, 2014	Garfield High School	3	21
Tukwila School District	June 7, 2013	Foster High School	2	21
Total			17	108

Source: Education Northwest student surveys.

Participant demographics

A combined total of 2,364 students from the seven Road Map districts participated in the program in the 2012/13 and 2013/14 school years. We spoke with 108 high school students who had taken world language assessments through the program. We also included 23 additional students who were considering taking a World Language assessment but had not yet done so. These students did not complete surveys, so their data are not reflected in the tables.

A small number of students we spoke with (13%) had not received their assessment results and did not know the number of credits they had received. All other students had qualified for at least one credit, and most had qualified for three or more credits (Table A2).

Table A2. A majority of students in the focus groups had qualified for three or more credits

Qualified credits	Focus group participants (N = 108)		All program participants (N = 2,364)	
	Percent of students	Total credits	Percent of students	Total credits
0 Credits	0%	0	1%	0
1 Credit	4%	4	6%	131
2 Credits	14%	30	21%	1,008
3 Credits	29%	96	28%	1,992
4 Credits	40%	172	44%	4,140
Unknown	13%			
Total		302		7,271

Sources: OSPI World Language Credit Program data and Education Northwest student surveys.

On average, students who participated in focus groups told us they had qualified for 3.2 credits from the World Language Credit Program. This was slightly higher than the average for all program participants (3.1 credits). There were differences in average credits by district, but these were not statistically significant, which means that they may have occurred by chance and do not necessarily reflect a difference between groups of students (Table A3).

Table A3. On average, students qualified for three credits from the World Language Credit Program

	Focus group participants (N = 108)			All program participants (N = 2,364)		
	Percent of students	Total credits	Average credits	Percent of students	Total credits	Average credits
Auburn School District	15%	21	3.0	17%	1,120	2.8
Federal Way Public Schools	11%	40	3.3	10%	671	2.9
Highline Public Schools	14%	48	3.4	19%	1,477	3.2
Kent School District	17%	44	2.9	14%	1,100	3.2
Renton School District	5%	17	3.4	15%	1,129	3.2
Seattle Public Schools	19%	64	3.2	18%	1,243	3.0
Tukwila School District	19%	68	3.2	7%	531	3.1
Total		302	3.2		7,271	3.1

Sources: OSPI World Language Credit Program data and Education Northwest student surveys.

We spoke with more girls (58%) than boys during the focus groups. On average, girls qualified for more credits than boys (3.3 for girls, 3.1 for boys). Gender and other participant demographics were not collected by OSPI.

Students in higher grades participated in the program in greater numbers and qualified for more credits, on average, than those in lower grades. This difference is statistically significant, suggesting that the difference is not due to chance, and that there is a relationship between grade level and performance on the assessments. This was not true for students who participated in the focus groups, who were all high school students (Table A4).

Table A4. Students in higher grades participated in the program in greater numbers and qualified for more credits, on average, than those in lower grades

	Focus group participants (N = 108)			All program participants (N = 2,364)		
	Number of students	Percent of students	Average credits	Number of students	Percent of students	Average credits ²
6th grade				98	4%	2.2 ³
7th grade				42	2%	2.6 ³
8th grade				220	10%	2.6
9th grade	17	16%	3.4	372	17%	2.9
10th grade	34	31%	3.3	476	21%	3.2
11th grade	38	35%	2.9	555	25%	3.3
12th grade	19	18%	3.0	486	22%	3.3
Total	108		3.2	2,249 ⁴		3.1

2 Differences in average credits earned between grades were statistically significant, $F(6, 2240) = 37.56, p = .000$.

3 Sixth- and seventh-grade students were participants in a dual language program for heritage Spanish speakers. They did not earn high school credits from this program but were tested to help determine what additional support they might need for developing literacy skills in Spanish.

4 115 students (5% of total) were missing grade-level data and are not included in this table.

Sources: OSPI World Language Credit Program data and Education Northwest student surveys.

Students who participated in the Road Map World Language Credit Program took assessments in 47 languages. Of these, 22 languages were spoken by students who participated in focus groups. Among participants, Spanish speakers were overrepresented, meaning a higher percentage of Spanish speakers took the assessment (59%) than live in the community (42%). Somali and Vietnamese speakers were underrepresented (Table A5).

Table A5. Students took the assessments in 47 languages

	Focus group participants		All program participants		Percent of Road Map students with a home language other than English
	Number of students	Percent of students	Number of students	Percent of students	
Spanish	53	49.1%	1397	59.1%	41.8%
Chinese ⁵	18	16.7%	85	3.6%	3.7%
Somali	6	5.6%	88	3.7%	7.7%
Amharic	6	5.6%	50	2.1%	1.8%
Arabic ⁶	3	2.8%	68	2.9%	1.5%
Ukrainian	3	2.8%	55	2.3%	3.9%
Punjabi	3	2.8%	52	2.2%	2.7%
Marshallese	3	2.8%	17	0.7%	0.8%
Tigrinya	2	1.9%	12	0.5%	1.0%
Vietnamese	1	0.9%	153	6.5%	10.4%
Russian	1	0.9%	68	2.9%	3.2%
Tagalog	1	0.9%	47	2.0%	3.3%
French	1	0.9%	35	1.5%	0.4%

	Focus group participants		All program participants		Percent of Road Map students with a home language other than English
	Number of students	Percent of students	Number of students	Percent of students	
Japanese	1	0.9%	29	1.2%	0.4%
Korean	1	0.9%	28	1.2%	1.7%
Swahili	1	0.9%	21	0.9%	0.5%
Bengali	1	0.9%	5	0.2%	0.1%
Oromo	1	0.9%	5	0.2%	0.8%
Thai	1	0.9%	3	0.1%	0.2%
Kinyarwanda	1	0.9%	2	0.1%	<0.1%
Nepali			39	1.6%	0.8%
Burmese			18	0.8%	0.4%
Turkish			14	0.6%	0.5%
German			12	0.5%	0.1%
Samoan			11	0.5%	1.3%
Bosnian			8	0.3%	0.3%
Hindi			6	0.3%	0.6%
Farsi			4	0.2%	0.3%
Romanian			4	0.2%	0.4%
Chin Tedim			3	0.1%	0.1%
Portuguese			3	0.1%	0.1%
Armenian			2	0.1%	<0.1%
Cambodian			2	0.1%	1.7%
Hakka Chin			2	0.1%	0.1%
Khmer			2	0.1%	0.1%
Tongan			2	0.1%	0.2%
Twi			2	0.1%	<0.1%
Croatian			1	0.0%	<0.1%
Hmong			1	0.0%	0.1%
Hungarian			1	0.0%	<0.1%
Italian			1	0.0%	0.0%
Karen			1	0.1%	0.1%
Karenni			1	0.1%	0.1%
Kirundi			1	0.0%	<0.1%
Kosraean			1	0.0%	0.2%
Polish			1	0.0%	0.1%
Urdu			1	0.0%	0.3%
Total	108		2,364		

5 Combined Cantonese, Mandarin with traditional characters, and Mandarin with simplified characters.

6 Combined Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, Iraqi, and standard Arabic.

Sources: OSPI World Language Credit Program data, Education Northwest student surveys, and OSPI K-12 Data and Reports.

Finally, there were significant differences between languages. For example, speakers of Amharic, Burmese, Tagalog, and Turkish received more credits, on average, than speakers of other languages (Table A6).

Table A6. There were differences between the average number of credits earned for each language

	All program participants (N = 2,364)		
	Number of students	Percent of students	Average credits earned ⁷
Amharic	50	2%	3.9
Burmese	18	1%	3.9
Tagalog	47	2%	3.9
Turkish	14	1%	3.9
Vietnamese	153	7%	3.8
Korean	28	1%	3.8
Marshallese	17	1%	3.6
Ukrainian	55	2%	3.4
Punjabi	52	2%	3.4
Nepali	39	2%	3.4
Chinese ⁵	85	4%	3.3
Russian	68	3%	3.3
Somali	88	4%	3.0
Arabic ⁶	68	3%	3.0
Spanish	1,397	59%	2.9
Tigrinya	12	1%	2.8
Samoan	11	1%	2.8
Swahili	20	1%	2.4
Japanese	29	1%	2.3
German	12	1%	2.3
French	35	2%	2.1
Other	66	3%	3.4
Total	2,364	3%	3.1

5 Combined Cantonese, Mandarin with traditional characters, and Mandarin with simplified characters.

6 Combined Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, Iraqi, and standard Arabic.

7 Differences in average credits earned between languages were statistically significant, $F(21, 2340) = 19.68$. $p = .000$.

Note: To ensure anonymity, this table combines results from languages with fewer than 10 participants into “other.”

Sources: OSPI World Language Credit Program data and Education Northwest student surveys.

Appendix B: Protocols

Focus group protocol

Thank you all for agreeing to participate. We are going to ask you a set of questions about how the World Language Credit Program has affected you. Before we start, I would like to say that your participation is purely voluntary. You may also choose not to answer some or all of the questions and can stop participating at any time. We will ask you to answer questions about the ways the World Language Credit Program affected you academically and how it affected your feelings towards school and your language. This should take about 30–45 minutes.

Does everyone agree to participate?

We will keep the information you tell us confidential. Your name will not be put on any papers written about this project. The audio recording of the interview will be erased after the study is completed.

Does everyone agree to be audio recorded?

We will not report what you say to anyone, including your parents, families, counselors, and teachers. We ask that you do the same thing, and not share what other students say here. You are welcome to share what I say, or ask, with others.

Does everyone agree not to share what other students have said?

Let me take a minute and describe how the focus group works. I am going to ask you, as a group, a few questions about the World Language Credit Program, and I would like you all to be able to answer. You don't have to answer any of the questions, but I would love to hear what you have to say. There are no correct answers here; this is about your experience, so only you know the correct answer, and your experience is likely to be different from your neighbors.

If you hear something that someone says that you agree with, please let me know. You can nod or say “yes,” or something like that. If your experience is different, don't interrupt, but let me know that you have something to say. Any questions?

Question 1: *Tell me a little about what it means to you to speak another language, in addition to English?*

Prompts: *Have you always felt this way, or has that changed over time?*
Did the World Language Credit program affect this? How so?

Question 2: *In general, would you say that you have mostly positive feelings about school?*

Prompts: *Why or why not? Has that changed over time?*
Did the World Language Credit program affect this? How so?

Question 3: *What do you see yourself doing after high school? What role, if any, do you see your language ability playing in your future plans?*

Prompts: *Has that changed over time? Did the World Language Credit program affect this? How so?*

Question 4: *What were some of the effects of getting these credits?*

Prompts: *Will it help you graduate? If so, how will earning elective credits help you graduate?
What additional courses were you able to take because of earning these credits?*

Question 5: *What would you advise for other students considering taking the assessments?*

Prompts: *Why would students want to take the assessments?
What should other schools consider when offering world language credit programs?*

Question 6: *How did you find out about the program?*

Question 7: *Is there anything else you would like to say about the World Languages Credit Program?*

Student survey

Please take a moment to answer the questions below to help us learn more about how the World Language Credit Program has affected students like you. Your answers will be confidential, and will never be linked to your name. We will not report your information to anyone, including your parents, families, and teachers.

1. Which language test(s) did you take?

a. Did you get credits?

yes no

b. If yes, how many?

1 credit 2 credits 3 credits 4 credits

2. I am a ...

girl boy

3. Age _____

4. I am in ...

9th grade 10th grade 11th grade 12th grade Super Senior