Why is language education critical to America?

Language is the key to cultural understanding. While proficiency in English is essential in many facets of life in the 21st century, at home and abroad, knowledge of English alone is insufficient to meet the nation’s needs in a global society—as noted in America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century, a report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. American industry participates in more foreign markets than ever before and the nation is engaged, diplomatically or militarily, in every corner of the globe. Challenges in scientific research and technological innovation all require greater international collaboration. And we have a social obligation, established in law, to offer critical social services in languages other than English.

As the Academy report states, “[B]y several measures, the United States has neglected languages in its educational curricula, its international strategies, and its domestic policies.” This oversight has had “adverse and often unforeseen consequences at home and abroad—in business and diplomacy, in civic life, and in the exchange of ideas.” A more forward-thinking strategy for meeting future needs would advance policies and investments that promote language education for all Americans.

We have a responsibility to ourselves and to future generations—as parents, educators, policymakers, and leaders in business and government—to support language learning in the United States to achieve the following results:

- **Provide Access to Languages for all Age Groups** and every level of the education continuum, from early childhood through retirement;
- **Prepare More Language Teachers**, without whom we cannot advance language education;
- **Promote Public-Private Partnerships** in language education to amplify the work begun in our schools;
- **Support Heritage and Indigenous Language** communities in their traditions and birthrights, and as an important and distinctive national resource; and
- **Encourage International Learning Experiences** for students, teachers, and workers through educational and professional programs, as a critical aspect of advanced language learning.
We, the signatories, attest that the public and private sectors require greater capacity in languages in addition to English, and we urge greater support for languages in order to maintain and enhance American global leadership. We stand ready to do our part.

Nancy C. Andrews  
Chair of the Board, American Academy of Arts and Sciences;  
Former Dean, Duke University School of Medicine

Norman R. Augustine  
Retired Chairman and CEO, Lockheed Martin Corporation;  
Former Under Secretary of the Army

Melody C. Barnes  
Co-Founder and Principal, MB2 Solutions LLC;  
Senior Fellow and Compton Visiting Professor in World Politics, Miller Center, University of Virginia; Former Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council (2009–2012)

Sayu Bhojwani  
President, The New American Leaders Project;  
Former New York City Commissioner of Immigrant Affairs

Bill Bradley  
Former United States Senator, New Jersey

Philip Bredesen  
Former Governor of Tennessee

Louise H. Bryson  
Chair Emerita, Board of Trustees, The J. Paul Getty Trust

Ken Burns  
Filmmaker, Florentine Films

Gerald L. Chan  
Co-Founder and Director, Morningside Group

James Cuno  
President and CEO, The J. Paul Getty Trust

Alan Dachs  
President, The Fremont Group

Ruth A. Davis  
Former Director General of the United States Foreign Service;  
Former Director of the Foreign Service Institute

Karl W. Eikenberry  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan;  
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army, ret.;  
Oksenberg-Rohlen Fellow and Director, U.S.-Asia Security Initiative, Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University

Sam Farr  
Former Member of the United States House of Representatives, California’s 17th and 20th Congressional Districts

Ann Friedman  
Founder and Chair, Planet Word

Libia S. Gil  
Chief Education Officer, Illinois State Board of Education

Arthur L. Goldstein  
Chairman, President, and CEO Emeritus, Ironics, Inc.

Robert D. Haas  
Chairman Emeritus, Levi Strauss & Co.

Antonia Hernández  
President and CEO, California Community Foundation

Rush Holt  
CEO, American Association for the Advancement of Science

Alberto Ibargüen  
President and CEO, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

David Karnes  
President and CEO, Fairmont Group;  
Former United States Senator, Nebraska

Steven S. Kohl  
President, retired, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

Paul Le Clerc  
Chair, Commission on Language Learning, American Academy of Arts and Sciences;  
Director, Columbia Global Center-Paris;  
Former President and CEO, New York Public Library;  
Former President, Hunter College

Steve Leveen  
Host, America the Bilingual;  
Co-Founder and retired CEO, Leverage

Gail H. McGinn  
Former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Plans;  
Former Senior Language Authority, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Richard A. Meserve  
President Emeritus, Carnegie Institution for Science;  
Former Chairman, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

David Oxtoby  
President Emeritus, Pomona College

Leon E. Panetta  
Former Secretary of Defense (2011–2013);  
Former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (2009–2011)

Anne L. Poulet  
Emeritus Director, Frick Collection

Kenneth Pugh  
President and Director of Research, Haskins Laboratories

Geraldine Richmond  
Secretary, American Academy of Arts and Sciences;  
Presidential Chair in Science and Professor of Chemistry, University of Oregon

Jerry I. Speyer  
Chairman, Tishman Speyer

Natasha Trethewey  
Board of Trustees Professor of English, Northwestern University;  
19th United States Poet Laureate

Victoria Vasques  
President and CEO, Tribal Tech, LLC

Kenneth L. Wallach  
Executive Chairman, Central National Gottesman Inc.

Craig Wilson  
Former Director, Intelligence Policy, Office of the Secretary of Defense