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# **Bigger Ed. Dept. Role Seen in Bush Foreign-Language Plan**

By Mary Ann Zehr

Foreign-language experts are praising the Department of Education for taking a larger role in promoting the teaching of other languages as part of a proposed Bush administration initiative to bolster national security and the economy.

The departments of Defense and State have headed up efforts to increase the teaching of much-needed foreign languages, focusing on the university level, while the Education Department has done little to promote language development at the K-12 level, the experts say. The federal government's list of critical-need languages includes Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Russian.

For at least a decade, the Education Department has supported the teaching of foreign languages, primarily through the Foreign Language Assistance Program. That small grant program gave out \$18 million in fiscal 2005 and is budgeted at \$22 million in fiscal 2006, with far less than half the money going to the teaching of critical-need languages.

## **Funding Boost**

President Bush announced earlier this month that he would seek \$114 million in the fiscal 2007 budget for a new National Security Language Initiative. Half of that total, \$57 million, would be administered by the Education Department to step up the teaching of much-needed languages in elementary and secondary schools. That would mean a \$35 million boost in funding by the department for foreign languages.

"Is it enough? No. Is it a start? Yes," Robert Slater, the director of the National Security Education Program, said of the \$114 million proposal.

"Of equal significance, it gets the Department of Education more involved in asserting the importance of language learning at the K-12 level," said Mr. Slater, whose Department of Defense-run program gives scholarships to university students to study languages.

Marty Abbott, the director of education for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, in Alexandria, Va., said that \$114 million is a "significant amount when you consider what was there prior to this for K-12 education."

## **Long-Term Planning**

Asked if the Education Department has been slow to recognize the nation's need for speakers of foreign languages, Holly Kuzmich, the agency's deputy assistant secretary for policy, said: "It's not like the rest of the country is ahead and we're behind. We as a country have been behind."

With adoption of the president's initiative, the Foreign Language Assistance Program would be able to increase its incentives for schools to start programs that teach critical languages, she said. Under the initiative, the grant program would give out \$24 million in fiscal 2007, which begins next October.

In addition, the Education Department would give \$24 million to 24 school districts to form partnerships with colleges and universities to establish programs for critical languages.

The department is also proposing three smaller programs to support language teaching. For example, it wants to use \$5 million to generate a corps of 1,000 new foreign-language teachers in public schools by the end of the decade.

Dora E. Johnson, the project director of the K-12 Arabic Teachers Network for the Washington-based Center for Applied Linguistics, said Mr. Bush's initiative doesn't take into account some of the challenges of teaching critical languages at the precollegiate level.

"There needs to be a plan put into place, but not overnight," Ms. Johnson said. "The plan must have the components of not only making programs available, but also the materials, the curriculum, the standards, and accreditation."

The teaching of critical languages "cannot happen by saying, 'We will do this in the next five years,' " she added. "It has to be a 10- to 12-year plan, because that's how long it takes to get the students through school."

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