

Dear

On behalf of the Foreign Language Association of Virginia (FLAVA), I am writing to express our overwhelming opposition to HB2341. This bill seeks to *“establish a pathway to the advanced studies high school diploma, and an associated diploma seal for students who successfully follow and demonstrate excellence on such pathway, that requires advanced coursework in a career and technical education field but does not require coursework in world language. The Board shall establish an additional pathway to the advanced studies high school diploma, and an associated diploma seal for students who successfully follow and demonstrate excellence on such pathway, that requires advanced coursework in world language but does not require coursework in a career and technical education field.”*

While the intent of this bill is to elevate the prestige of career and technical education, Virginia's students need both career readiness and global readiness skills to succeed after high school. It is imperative that we not diminish the important role of world languages in our students' development. If anything, we need more world language study for both advanced and standard diploma students coupled with career and technical courses. HB2341 in its current status, requires one curriculum to rival another. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, we should continue to encourage the study of world languages in support of Virginia's Profile of a Graduate and as a work-readiness skill.

In 2017, after years of data collection and evaluation of employees, Google found among the most important qualities of their top employees were all soft skills. These skills include, but are not limited to: communicating and listening well, possessing insights in others (including others' different values and points of view), having empathy toward and being supportive of colleagues, and being able to make connections across complex ideas. Google goes on to report that good team members demonstrate generosity, empathy, emotional intelligence, emotional safety (meaning each team member can feel confident in speaking up and in making mistakes), and can exhibit a curiosity toward the ideas of their teammates.

Each of these soft skills are practiced and are an integral part of the world language curriculum, classroom, and community, so much so they have been identified by ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) in their World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages.

In 2022, The Center for Global Education Asia Society pondered in their article “Global Competence Through Career and Technical Education” how to ensure students are prepared with skills to connect, to compete, and to collaborate in a global economy. And as the world becomes more interconnected with 1 in 5 jobs tied to international trade, how do we prepare students for work and civic roles in an environment where success increasingly requires the ability to work with others from diverse backgrounds in a global market? The Association for Career and Technical Education concluded that critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, along with creativity and innovation were imperative for work readiness standards. It takes only a glance at Virginia's Standards of Learning for World Languages to conclude that world language courses are instrumental in supporting students in these areas.

Furthermore, in 2019, ACTFL published *Making Languages Our Business: Addressing Foreign Language Demand Among U.S. Employers*. According to the report, “9 out of 10 U.S. employers rely on employees with language skills other than English” and that “56% say their language demand will increase in the next 5 years”. These numbers indicate the urgent and growing demand for language skills across all sectors. If we want to continue to be successful in creating a thriving global economy in Virginia, we must work hard to foster a robust future multilingual workforce by including World Language courses as an essential component for all Virginia high school students who are completing the advanced studies diploma, and even for those taking the standard diploma.

In addition to eliminating an opportunity for students to develop soft skills that are important to ensuring our students are equipped to be successful in the workforce, HB2341 would do students a second grave disservice. Most four-year universities in Virginia require 2-3 years of world language studies to apply for admission. Top-tier schools across the nation require 3-4 years of world language studies for admission. Language study is valued because it develops both global competency and literacy and contributes to soft skills that successful businesses seek in their employees.

Not only would this bill prevent many of our students from gaining admission to the four-year universities of their choice, but it would hamper their economic futures. Currently there is a critical need for speakers of world languages in Virginia. A quick search of indeed.com reveals that there are over 6400 open positions for proficient world language speakers of American Sign Language, French, German, and Spanish, which are taught throughout Virginia's public schools.

As President of FLAVA, I join my voice with the administrators and employers who understand the economic value and the cognitive benefits of world language study and in **opposition to HB2341**. I hope that you consider our reasoned opposition as you discuss the bill. Let's set our students up for success in a globally competitive economy by ensuring they possess the linguistic skills and global competence to succeed.

Sincerely,

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