Massachusetts World Language Standards Focus Group and Implementation Services

Round 1 Focus Group Report

2021

# MA World Language Standards Focus Group and Implementation Services: Round 1 Focus Group Report

# Introduction

To ensure that the forthcoming *Massachusetts World Languages Framework* is actionable, inclusive, and relevant to all educators, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contracted the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) to conduct research on the needs of various less commonly taught courses and programs. The *MA World Language Standards Focus Group and Implementation Services* project includes three major activities: (1) facilitating two rounds of six virtual focus groups; (2) conducting a literature review of best practices for eight areas of focus; and (3) developing Quick Reference Guides (QRGs) to support teachers’ use and implementation of the framework.

In this report we summarize findings from the first round of focus group sessions. The purpose of these focus groups was to gather feedback on a draft of the framework, predict difficulties in implementing the new standards in less commonly taught courses and programs, and identify recommendations for resource development, including the QRGs. The six courses and programs represented in the focus groups were identified by DESE as having special considerations related to world language education, and these include: (1) languages with diverse written representations (LDWRs); (2) classical languages; (3) American Sign Language; (4) world language courses for heritage speakers/signers; (5) elementary world language programs; and (6) world language courses for students with disabilities.

Following an overview of the methodology, we present key findings for each focus group, and the report concludes with overall recommendations for meeting the needs of world language educators in the focal areas. Three appendices are included with this report: (1) Appendix A: Participant Contact Information; (2) Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol; and (3) Appendix C: Focus Group Procedures.

# Methodology

Focus group participants included world language educators and program administrators in Massachusetts who worked in one of the six focal areas and who indicated a willingness to serve as a content advisor for the project. Participants were primarily recruited by DESE through targeted outreach to world language educators, coordinators, and administrators within the community. Prior to the focus groups, individuals who expressed an interest in serving as content advisors were contacted by members of the CAL research team to confirm their participation and determine their availability for scheduling the sessions.

Two weeks prior to the first session, we sent all confirmed participants a copy of the draft *Massachusetts World Languages Framework* (henceforth *MA WL Framework*) and asked them to spend 1-2 hours reviewing the document while thinking about the actionability of the standards for their teaching context; the relevance of the language used in the framework for their teaching context; and any terms that should be defined in the glossary. Following the focus group sessions, participants received professional development points (PDPs) to recognize their participation in this project.

A total of 27 participants were a part of the six virtual focus groups, and each group included between three and six participants. Participants completed a short demographic survey, and Table 1 summarizes the demographic information reported by 24 of the 27 total participants across all six groups.

Table 1. Round 1 focus group participant demographic information

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Demographic category** | ***n*** |
| Current role |  |
| Administrator | 1 |
| Coordinator | 5 |
| Teacher | 21 |
| Other | 3 |
| Years of language teaching experience |  |
| 1-5 years | 7 |
| 6-10 years | 4 |
| 11-15 years | 3 |
| 16-20 years | 3 |
| More than 20 years | 7 |
| World languages taught\* |  |
| ASL | 3 |
| Arabic | 1 |
| Farsi | 1 |
| French | 4 |
| German | 2 |
| Greek | 1 |
| Italian | 1 |
| Latin | 5 |
| Mandarin | 3 |
| Portuguese | 3 |
| Spanish | 10 |
| Russian | 1 |
| Gender |  |
| Female | 22 |
| Male | 1 |
| No response | 1 |
| Race |  |
| Asian | 3 |
| White | 17 |
| Other | 4 |
| Ethnicity |  |
| Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin | 4 |
| Not Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin | 20 |
| Location |  |
| Central Massachusetts | 1 |
| Eastern Massachusetts | 22 |
| Western Massachusetts | 1 |
| District type |  |
| Suburban | 12 |
| Rural | 2 |
| Urban | 10 |

\*Participants could select more than one role and more than one language

As Table 1 shows, most participants were experienced world language teachers working in suburban or urban districts in Eastern Massachusetts. Nearly all participants identified as female, and most participants described themselves as white individuals who are not Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin. While a variety of world languages were represented in groups, Spanish is the language that participants most frequently reported working with, followed by Latin and French. Additional information about the participants in each group is included in relevant sections of the findings, and Appendix A provides contact information for all focus group participants.

Virtual focus group sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes and were conducted between Monday, June 29and Wednesday, July 8, 2020. All focus groups were facilitated using the online meeting platform Zoom, and participants were asked to use both audio and video capabilities for the duration of the session. Each session was led by one CAL facilitator, and an additional CAL staff member served as a notetaker to document participants’ responses. A PowerPoint discussion guide was developed and provided via screenshare to support both facilitators and participants throughout the sessions. Each focus group was organized into the following sections: introductions; overview; background; procedures and guidelines; discussion; and summary and conclusion.

In the introduction, facilitators noted that feedback about the standards may not result in direct changes to the framework document, and that their comments would be used to inform the QRGs and other supplementary materials. The discussion portion of the session asked about four major topic areas, including participants’ familiarity with and use of the *ACTFL Standards*, impressions of the *MA WL Framework*, feedback about the actionability of the *MA WL Framework*, and feedback about the relevance of the *MA WL Framework*. Participants were encouraged to provide responses through the lens of their experience working with the less common course or program being discussed, and a series of general and specific questions for each topic area (see Appendix B) were presented to elicit these responses.

During the focus group, the notetaker captured comments and discussion from the group, and the facilitator confirmed key points with the group. Focus group sessions were not audio or video recorded. Immediately after each group, the facilitator and notetaker met to synthesize the discussion, review notes, and write a brief memo summarizing important aspects of the group’s discussion. The research team reviewed notes and synthesis memos to determine key takeaways from each group. Appendix B p and Appendix C provide an overview of the protocols and procedures followed before, during, and after each focus group session.

# Findings

Overall, participants across all focus groups responded positively to the framework’s vision and guiding principles for world language education. Many participants praised the framework’s emphasis on the importance of world languages for all learners and appreciated efforts to use inclusive language throughout the document. Participants also described the framework as user-friendly and accessible to world language educators working in a variety of teaching contexts with different student populations.

The following section of the report presents key findings from the focus groups. Findings are organized into the following sections: (1) languages with diverse written representations (LDWRs); (2) classical languages; (3) American Sign Language; (4) world language courses for heritage speakers/signers; (5) elementary world language programs; and (6) world language courses for students with disabilities. Each section provides a description of the participants, a short summary of the findings, five key takeaways, and implications and recommendations for educator resources, tools, and professional development. We use the term “framework” to refer to the *MA WL Framework*, and we use the term “framework materials” to capture recommendations that may apply to either the framework document or supporting materials (including the QRGs). In some cases, we report recommended changes to the framework with the understanding that the underlying concerns from the focus groups may apply to the QRGs and not to the framework itself.

## 1. Languages with Diverse Written Representations (LDWRs) Group

### Focus Group Profile

Five educators participated in the focus group on world language content standards for LDWRs (i.e., languages that do not use the Latin alphabet). The group included two middle school teachers, two middle and high school teachers, and one elementary school teacher who previously taught high school and college. In addition, one educator described working with LDWRs in an administrative role. Two participants reported working with Mandarin, while Russian, Arabic, and Farsi were each represented by one participant in the group.

## Summary

Overall, the group had a favorable impression of the framework, specifically praising its clarity and emphasis on the value of learning world languages. In the discussion, participants underscored the special considerations of teaching and learning LDWRs and provided several recommendations for effectively implementing the framework in these contexts. The following section highlights key findings from the group.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1.1 To be more inclusive of this population, differences in expected student outcomes related to reading and writing should be acknowledged in the framework or related resources.

The group was quick to point out that students of LDWRs are simultaneously learning a new writing system, and this often leads to the faster development of speaking and listening skills relative to reading and writing skills. Participants explained that although students at lower proficiency levels can meet some of the communicative expectations described in the standards, it is important for teachers of LDWRs to understand the pace at which students typically acquire proficiency in these different skills. While participants did not believe that the framework should change, they agreed that these differences in language development and proficiency across domains should be explicitly highlighted in related resources.

#### 1.2 Although understanding culture is an important component of learning LDWRs, educators are concerned about how to make cultural information comprehensible for beginning learners.

Participants noted that in addition to the differences between cultures associated with English and those associated with LDWRs, there are cultural differences within and among communities in which LDWRs are spoken. Given the complexities of teaching about culture in this context, the group raised concerns about the framework’s expectations that cultural input be provided almost exclusively in the target language. They felt that the cultures associated with LDWRs may be unfamiliar to students, and if there are limited connections to students’ prior knowledge, it can be exceedingly difficult to provide comprehensible input in the target language. While participants expressed generally feeling comfortable implementing the framework, they reported a desire for flexibility around the target language expectation for teaching Cultures and related concepts within the Communities standard. One participant also pointed out that reflecting on language is referenced throughout the framework, and while ACTFL says that it is appropriate to use English for this process, this is not included in the *MA WL Framework*. The group expressed a desire for concrete examples of comprehensible target language input at varying proficiency levels, and many participants also requested more guidance on how students can show understanding nonverbally, particularly at lower proficiency levels.

#### 1.3. LDWRs may have widely different words, expressions, and grammatical structures when compared to English, and these complexities should be reflected in the expectations and topics outlined in the framework.

The group emphasized that many LDWRs are not closely related to English, making some of the framework’s practices related to identifying and discussing cognates inapplicable to these languages. Participants recommended that these sections be revised to reflect the fact that not all languages will have cognates to best include LDWRs within the overall framework. In addition, the group reported that some grammatical structures that are considered simple in alphabetic languages may be more complex in LDWRs and vice versa, resulting in a need for flexible implementation guidance that teachers can use based on the appropriate learning progressions for different languages.

#### 1.4. There is need for greater recognition of the language varieties and dialects associated with LDWRs, and additional supports are needed to guide educators in teaching about these linguistic differences in the classroom.

Several participants noted that the languages they teach have multiple variations, such as “standard” and “dialect” versions or “formal” and “informal” registers to language use. The group recommended that framework materials explicitly recognize these different varieties and provide guidance about which varieties and registers should be taught in the classroom. Participants also called attention to the growing number of heritage speakers enrolled in LDWR courses, as these learners may only know an informal version of the language. The group agreed that more guidance around how to approach these linguistic differences would be helpful, particularly given the need to reinforce that while informal language acquired in the home may be appropriate for some circumstances, academic language must also be learned. As there are different communicative needs based on the audience to whom one is speaking, educators would benefit from understanding which type of language should be emphasized while creating an environment inclusive of all types of learners.

#### 1.5 Because many teachers of LDWRs design their own curricula and instructional materials, they need practical implementation guidance and tools.

The group reported primarily using teacher-designed curricula due to the limited amount of resources, materials, and tools available for these less commonly taught languages. Given this approach to instruction, participants described needing a deep understanding of the standards and expected student outcomes to best develop appropriate classroom materials. Many agreed that a table comparing language use at different proficiency levels would help both teachers and students of LDWRs in understanding the expectations across levels. In addition, participants requested a number of supplementary materials, including flexible rubrics, sample assessments, and examples of effective classroom practices (e.g., look-fors at different proficiency levels; suggested topics at different proficiency levels; and realistic expectations for implementing all standards within a single lesson, unit, and/or course).

### Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the LDWRs focus group, we have identified the following issues and topics to address in the LDWRs QRG: (1) guidance about the development of different communicative skills; (2) effective practices for comprehensible cultural input at different proficiency levels; (3) guidance regarding the use and recognition of different language varieties; and (4) support for instructor-developed classroom materials. We recommend that DESE further explore the educator needs described in this section for future resources and professional development activities related to supporting teachers of LDWRs.

## 2. Classical Language Group

### Focus Group Profile

Four educators participated in the focus group on world language content standards for classical languages, and the group consisted of three high school teachers and one middle school teacher. While all participants reported teaching Latin, one of the high school teachers reported working with both Latin and Greek. Participants had experience working with classical languages in a variety of contexts, including traditional world language programs, Advanced Placement (AP) programs, and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. The group raised the issue of the lack of racial or ethnic diversity among focus group participants and noted that this also reflects the overall demographics of teachers of classical languages. Participants recommended that recruitment for the second round of focus groups include targeted outreach to a more diverse pool of educators.

### Summary

Overall, the framework was positively received by classical language educators. The group saw the new framework as an improvement from the 1999 Massachusetts framework, which most participants did not seem to be actively using. While the group found the new framework more user-friendly and accessible, the group underscored the need for supplementary materials that account for the interests and needs of classical language teachers. In the discussion, participants highlighted how classical languages are often isolated or separated from other world languages, and some suggestions were provided on how to better include classical languages in the framework materials and the larger field of world language education. The following section highlights key findings from the group.

### Key Takeaways

#### 2.1 Different approaches to classical language education will affect the actionability and relevance of the framework, and these varying pedagogical practices should be addressed within the framework materials.

Participants described two primary approaches to teaching classical languages, including a communicative (or active) approach and a reading-oriented (or traditional) approach. The group commented that both approaches are represented in programs across the state, and that many programs fall somewhere on a spectrum in which one or multiple aspects of these different approaches are included in the classroom. These differences will directly impact framework implementation, as certain standards may or may not be viewed as important or relevant for some educators of classical languages based on their instructional practices. Participants argued that the new framework will push the field into a more active (i.e., communicative) approach and may change expectations around certain classroom activities and student outcomes related to speaking and listening.

#### 2.2 To be more inclusive of this population, different expected student outcomes, language functions, and contexts that reflect the realities of teaching classical languages should be included in framework materials.

When discussing language use described at various proficiency levels, participants agreed that students learning classical languages will likely have differentiated development across language domains, and this should be explicitly mentioned in framework materials. Given that reading is often a major component of instruction, this skill will typically develop at a quicker pace than other communicative skills, making it challenging to determine a student’s overall proficiency level based on those outlined in the framework. Participants described needing to adapt language progressions to their contexts and requested additional support and guidance for this process. In addition, there are some language functions across standards that do not apply to classical languages, including persuasion and argumentation oral communication skills at higher proficiency levels. The group agreed that this type of language use is not often taught in classical language courses and should therefore be modified or described as appropriate for some languages and/or circumstances. Participants also mentioned that the early and central use of the third person in classical language settings is not reflected in the standards, and the group agreed that this is an important distinction that should be made. Additional recommendations focused on the addition of “core” or “foundational” topics to all mentions of “everyday” topics to better include the context of classical languages across all standards.

#### 2.3 Educators need supports and guidance for implementing Cultures, Communities, and Social Justice standards in classical language education as these areas often require a different interpretation than in modern languages.

The overall feeling of the group was that the framework or related resources should include specific and realistic examples of cultural topics that reflect the realities of teaching classical languages. As the Cultures standards are not relevant to classical languages in the same way that they are for modern languages, the group found it challenging to understand best practices for incorporating culture into instruction. In addition, many participants noted that the concept of teaching “beyond the classroom” is exceedingly difficult in this context, as authentic community language use is not possible for students enrolled in classical language courses. Anything in the framework based on the assumption that there is a community of native speakers is not applicable for teaching classical languages, and additional guidance is needed to support educators in incorporating the Communities standards into their classroom practices. The group also highlighted expected difficulties in teaching social justice through classical languages due to the lack of diversity represented in ancient texts. Requests were made for more guidance on how to approach this type of teaching while continuing to use authentic instructional materials and resources.

#### 2.4 As the interpretive mode of communication is the primary focus of classical language education, supplementary materials should emphasize best practices for teaching this skill across various proficiency levels.

Despite the differences in pedagogical approaches, the group agreed that the overall goal of learning classical languages is to be able to read, understand, and process authentic ancient texts (i.e., to access complex meaning through reading and interpretation). The group agreed that world language content standards are most useful for classical language teachers when developing proficiency goals related to this communicative mode, and the importance of understanding, interpreting, and analyzing what is read should be further underscored for classical language teachers. Participants also expressed a growing focus on comprehensible input when teaching reading, and this seemed linked to those who were aligned with a more active or communicative approach to instruction.

#### 2.5 Appropriate expectations for target language use in classical language courses must be defined, as effective implementation of some standards requires the use of English beyond what is currently described in the framework.

The group expressed the desire for target language expectations that reflect the complexities of teaching and learning classical languages. Classical language educators often complement language instruction with an emphasis on understanding relevant historical events and concepts, and participants described typically teaching about these topics using English, especially when working with students at lower proficiency levels. We recommend that further guidance be provided on the expectations of the extent to which classical languages should be exclusively used for these purposes, and additional supports may be needed to meet the expectations outlined in the framework if modifications are not made.

### Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the classical languages focus group, we have identified the following issues and topics to address in the classical languages QRG: (1) defining the role of classical languages within the world language education community so that materials recognize the unique issues of classical language education while still recognizing shared goals and approaches with other world languages; (2) guidance for incorporating Cultures, Communities, and Social Justice standards in classical language courses; (3) recommendations for teaching different communicative modes. We recommend that DESE further explore the educator needs described in this section for future resources and professional development activities related to supporting teachers of classical languages.

## 3. American Sign Language Group

### Focus Group Profile

Three educators participated in the focus group on world language content standards for American Sign Language (ASL). Two participants reported teaching ASL at a K-12 dual language school for deaf and hard of hearing children, and one participant reported teaching students ASL as an additional language in traditional high school language classes. Two interpreters also attended the focus group and provided simultaneous interpretation of the discussion.

### Summary

Overall, the framework was positively received by the group, and participants expressed an appreciation for the Cultures, Social Justice, and Social and Emotional Learning components of the standards. Although participants described some familiarity with and use of a variety of sets of standards (e.g., K-12 ASL Content Standards, WIDA Standards, Common Core State Standards, etc.), the *ACTFL Standards* were not well known or used by the three participants. This may reflect approaches to teaching ASL across the state, or it may be attributed to the demographics of the group, as two of the three participants reported teaching ASL as a first language rather than a world language.

Given these varying perspectives and complexities in student background and teaching contexts, it is important to determine the extent to which the framework will be used in both schools for the deaf and for students taking ASL as a world language. In the discussion, participants focused on recommendations for supporting all types of ASL instruction, as well as ways to improve the inclusiveness of the framework for this population. Appropriate terminology was discussed, and the group noted that “signer” is the preferred term over “user” or “speaker”, and the group viewed “speaker” as inappropriate for the Deaf community. In this report, “Deaf” is capitalized when describing cultures and communities to indicate the difference between the physical aspects of deafness and cultural affiliations. Participants suggested several additional terms for describing language use in this context, and the following section highlights key findings from the group.

### Key Takeaways

#### 3.1 As ASL-specific state and national standards are useful for educators across a variety of contexts, these documents should be reviewed and taken into consideration for future resource development.

All participants reported aligning their teaching objectives with the [*K-12 ASL Content Standards*](https://www.gallaudet.edu/k-12-asl-content-standards), which consist of five anchor standards: viewing standards, published signing standards, discourse and presentation standards, language standards, and fingerspelling and fingerreading standards. The group described the standards as particularly useful for planning lessons and developing ASL-specific, grade-level appropriate classroom activities. Participants also described these standards as a great resource for understanding how to use terminology and language that is inclusive of this population. In addition, some participants reported using other state standards (e.g., the *California ASL Development Scale*) for screening, assessment, and creating additional learning objectives, and one participant referenced the *WIDA Standards* as a helpful resource for students with needs that are more closely aligned with English learners than world language learners. The group recommended that these various sets of standards be reviewed when developing supplementary materials for effective implementation of the *MA WL Framework* for ASL educators.

#### 3.2 Various language functions that may be appropriate for other world languages are not applicable to or relevant for ASL teaching and learning, and these differences should be acknowledged in framework materials.

The group was quick to point out that a number of terms and concepts currently outlined in the standards are not applicable or relevant to ASL education, including “author”, “paragraph,” and other descriptors used to describe language use related to reading and writing. Participants requested ASL-specific alternatives when referencing these skills, and the terms glossing, watching, creating, receptive skills, expressive skills, viewing, ASL texts (videos), publishing, fingerspelling, and fingerreading were recommended. The group also suggested that these terms be defined in the glossary and checked by ASL educators to ensure that they are appropriate across various contexts. In addition, participants reported that additional foundational language or pre-language skills are essential components of ASL education, and the group specifically highlighted the importance of including communication norms and digital literacy skills in framework materials.

#### 3.3 Culture is an essential component of ASL education, and framework materials should address the differences in how it is taught in this context compared to other world language classrooms.

While participants described the concept of culture as foundational for teaching and learning ASL, they argued that the way in which it is taught is vastly different from other world languages. The group noted that teaching about the concept of bias should be recognized as a practice that happens early on with students, and participants underscored the importance of considering both global issues facing the Deaf community and self-reflecting on students’ own personal biases. Participants also described addressing questions of identity when teaching about ASL culture, as this is essential for students’ overall understanding and positively contributes to the learning process. These ASL-specific considerations should be addressed in framework materials to best support educators in teaching Cultures standards.

#### 3.4 There is a need for greater recognition of the language varieties and dialects associated with ASL, as these linguistic differences are connected to the social justice component of the standards.

The group requested that framework materials address how ASL is not a unitary concept, and participants argued that various dialects and regional variations of the language should be explicitly acknowledged. Participants described a need for this explanation due to misconceptions about the difference between ASL and signed exact English, as well as a general lack of knowledge about many different signed languages. The group also noted that the history of ASL is directly connected to teaching about social justice, as understanding racism and discrimination within the Deaf community (particularly related to Black ASL and Black Sign Language) are important components of ASL education. In addition to highlighting the different language varieties associated with ASL, the group felt that framework materials should encourage educators to explore these differences in their classrooms.

#### 3.5 Appropriate expectations for target language use in ASL courses must be defined, and the use of printed English and multimodal practices must be recognized as authentic practices for this context.

Although participants reported meeting 100% target language use during instruction, they described frequently using printed English materials as additional learning supports for various classroom activities. Video captioning, video editing, and gestural communication were also mentioned as common instructional tools, as multimodal communication is particularly useful for teaching and learning ASL and reflects real-world ASL practices. Participants recommended that framework materials further define the expectations for target language use in this context while acknowledging the prominence and legitimacy of these various practices in the Deaf community and ASL classrooms.

### Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the ASL focus group, we have identified the following issues and topics to address in the ASL QRG: (1) guidance for teaching history, bias, and identity in the ASL classroom; (2) definitions of the types of learners, language functions, and instructional supports associated with ASL; and (3) recommendations for appropriate classroom practices, such as the use of English text and multimodal tools. Additionally, we recommend that framework materials use the term “ASL signer” and that all framework materials for ASL be carefully reviewed by ASL educators to ensure that technical terms are used correctly. Finally, we recommend that DESE further explore educator needs described in this section for future resources and professional development activities related to supporting ASL educators.

## 4. Heritage Language Group

### Focus Group Profile

Five educators participated in the focus group on world language content standards for heritage speakers/signers, and the group consisted of three teachers, one world language coordinator, and one world language district supervisor. Three participants reported working in high schools and two participants reported working across all grade levels. Participants had experience working with heritage speakers in a variety of contexts, including traditional world language programs, immersion programs, and programs specifically designed for heritage language learning. While all participants reported working with Spanish as a heritage language, two participants had additional experience working with Italian as a heritage language and self-identified as heritage speakers of Italian.

### Summary

Overall, heritage educators positively responded to the draft of the forthcoming *MA WL Framework* and particularly praised the addition of social emotional learning and social justice relative to the needs of heritage speakers/signers. In the discussion, participants primarily focused on suggestions for improving the framework’s actionability and inclusiveness for educators working with this population of learners, and the following section highlights key findings from the group.

### Key Takeaways

#### 4.1 The learner diversity inherent in working with heritage speakers/signers should be addressed across all standards, and additional supports are needed to effectively modify and individualize the standards as needed.

In addition to the range of proficiency levels among heritage speakers/signers, the group highlighted further considerations that should be made in the framework materials related to learner diversity. Participants described the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds that heritage speakers/signers bring to the classroom, including different language varieties, dialects, generational perspectives, and community experiences. The group consensus was that these differences are not addressed in the content or expected student outcomes currently outlined in the standards, and there is a need for specific guidance on how to approach these differences when working with this population. As the standards are not explicitly designed for heritage speakers/signers, educators must understand how to adapt and personalize them to best meet students’ needs.

#### 4.2 Given the growth of heritage speakers/signers across a variety of program models and teaching contexts, it is important to define the term “heritage speaker/signer” to promote a deeper understanding of this population among all educators.

Participants agreed that all educators need to recognize what it means to be a heritage speaker/signer, and many suggested that this term be defined within the framework’s glossary. Comments indicated that many conceptualizations of the term exist, and educators would benefit from having a shared understanding of this population for the purposes of identification, instruction, and assessment. To further support this understanding, the group recommended that several additional types of speakers and signers be defined, including native speaker/signer, proficient speaker/signer, and bilingual speaker/signer.

#### 4.3 To be more inclusive of this population, different expected student outcomes for the communicative modes should be included in the framework or supplementary materials.

While discussing the appropriateness of the framework for this population, participants were quick to mention the need for different proficiency benchmarks across the communication standards that reflect the advanced oral/aural skills of heritage speakers of aural languages. There was a consensus that framework materials should reference the complexities of heritage language proficiency across different domains, and more advanced grammatical structures and academic language use beyond what is currently described at each proficiency level would be helpful. According to one participant, educators often need support in defending the expectations they set for their heritage students, and the inclusion of heritage-specific expectations is essential to both understanding proficiency for different skills and discussing student progress with various stakeholders.

#### 4.4 Social emotional learning and social justice are essential components of heritage language education, and an emphasis on understanding and constructing identity is recommended.

The group responded positively to the social emotional learning and social justice practices in the framework, and the use of cultural appropriateness and awareness throughout the document were particularly praised when considering the diverse cultural backgrounds represented by heritage speakers/signers. Despite appreciating this enhancement to the standards, the group expressed a need for a deeper focus on exploring, developing, and validating one’s identity, as this is a core issue in heritage language education. Identity was described as a major factor in students’ motivations for language learning, and many participants argued that without greater attention to identity, heritage speakers/signers cannot make the cultural connections described throughout the framework. Participants also emphasized ties between identity and culture, and many expressed the need to guide educators in understanding that there is not a single, majority culture associated with a target language. By affirming a variety of identities and backgrounds, teachers can empower heritage speakers/signers to serve as cultural ambassadors, which ultimately creates a more meaningful and impactful learning experience.

#### 4.5 Placement testing and assessment are at the forefront of educators’ needs when working with heritage speakers/signers, and supplementary materials should address these challenges.

When asked about their familiarity with and experience using the *ACTFL Standards*, the group described primarily using the ACTFL proficiency levels for placement and assessment purposes. Participants agreed that efforts to appropriately place students into different levels can be problematic given the range of abilities demonstrated by heritage speakers/signers, many of which do not directly correspond with the proficiency levels and expected student outcomes as described in both the *ACTFL Standards* and *MA WL Framework*. Additional resources are needed to support testing for heritage speakers/signers, and the group expressed the desire for a standardized assessment or process to guide the identification, placement, and progress monitoring of this population.

### Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the heritage focus group, we have identified the following issues and topics to address in the heritage QRG: (1) definitions of different types of world language learners, including heritage speakers/signers; (2) recommended strategies for constructing and supporting heritage speaker/signer identities; (3) effective identification, placement, and assessment practices for heritage speakers/signers across a variety of contexts, including support for differentiating learning outcomes; and (4) guidance for supporting heritage speakers/signers of various proficiency levels, developmental levels, and linguistic/cultural backgrounds. We recommend that DESE further explore the educator needs described in this section for future resources and professional development activities related to supporting teachers of heritage speakers and signers.

## 5. Elementary Group

### Focus Group Profile

Six educators participated in the focus group on world language content standards for elementary learners, and the group consisted of five teachers and one world language coordinator. Three participants reporting working in lower elementary school classes (PreK-K, K-2, and 1-2) and three participants reported working across upper and lower grade levels (K-5, 1-5, and K-8). Four participants reported working in traditional world language programs (i.e., Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES)) and two participants reported working in dual language immersion programs. The group included two Spanish teachers (one of whom previously taught German), two Portuguese teachers, one Mandarin teacher, and one coordinator overseeing French, Spanish, and Mandarin programs.

### Summary

Elementary world language educators had a generally positive first impression of the draft of the forthcoming framework, and many participants praised the framework’s guiding principles for demonstrating the importance of world language education. Some participants described elementary world language programs as being considered “expendable” and therefore appreciated this framing of world language courses as critical components of students’ education from an early age. In the discussion, the group focused on considerations for using the framework in the elementary context, and the following section highlights key findings from the group.

### Key Takeaways

#### 5.1 Approaches to world language education vary greatly at the elementary level, and framework materials should address the needs and expected outcomes associated with different program models used across the state.

The group was quick to point out that different program models for elementary world language education require recognition in framework materials, particularly due to the differences in instructional time, program structure, and learning objectives associated with these varying approaches. Participants expressed a need for more information about expected student outcomes associated with the most frequently implemented program models in Massachusetts, including FLES and dual language immersion programs. The group agreed that educators require additional guidance on how to realistically set goals and achieve them based on the type of instruction provided, especially given that many educators find difficulty covering all of the standards within the limited time students spend in world language classrooms.

#### 5.2 Given that the framework focuses on language use in secondary contexts, educators would benefit from exemplars demonstrating what different standards realistically look like for younger students in various grade levels.

When discussing the actionability and relevance of the framework, participants noted that many of the practices outlined in the framework seem more appropriate for higher grade levels, therefore requiring elementary educators to adapt or modify them for this population. The group expressed a desire for specific exemplars of grade level-appropriate activities, materials, visuals, and supports, as these are not currently defined in the framework and are required for effective framework implementation. In addition, participants requested additional support for teaching less commonly taught standards (i.e., Comparisons, Connections, and Communities) to elementary world language students, as these standards are difficult to incorporate due to limited time, a lack of resources, and/or a lack of guidance on how to make them appropriate for young learners.

#### 5.3 Social emotional learning and social justice are viewed as important components of elementary world language education, and concrete examples of how to incorporate these concepts into instruction are needed.

The group immediately praised the inclusion of social emotional learning and social justice in the framework, and many participants emphasized the importance of learning these concepts at an early age. Participants described these skills as essential for the world in which we are currently living, and many saw these additions as a positive way to expose young learners to cultural differences, equity, and global issues while simultaneously demonstrating the interdisciplinary role of world language education. The group raised some concerns about how these concepts can be effectively incorporated in this context, particularly those related to recognizing injustice and taking action in the community. Participants agreed that some of these skills require higher-level thinking that may not be cognitively or developmentally appropriate for young learners, and additional guidance is needed on how to approach these concepts at the elementary level.

#### 5.4 To support effective framework implementation in elementary world language courses, teachers need instructional resources that are appropriate for this population of learners.

Overall, participants reported a need for sample materials to support framework use for elementary world language learners, including lesson planning guides, rubrics to determine students’ proficiency levels, and sample formative and/or summative assessments that can be used across grade levels and languages. In addition, one participant expressed a desire for more specific and explicit guidance for teaching grammatical structures at various proficiency levels, and another participant requested strategies for maintaining a fun, positive learning environment while still assessing student progress and adhering to the standards. As many participants include young learners in setting goals and reflecting on their individual language skills, student-friendly materials or versions of the standards were also mentioned as a helpful resource for this context.

#### 5.5 Additional training opportunities related to the framework are recommended for elementary world language teachers, as many of these programs are new and educators may thus be inexperienced in using standards-based instructional practices.

The group agreed that professional development for understanding the framework is an essential step, given that many elementary world language teachers are not currently familiar with the expectations associated with using world language content standards to inform instruction and assessment. Participants requested that training be provided to both teachers and administrators, as the collaboration between these individuals is an important component of effective world language education programs at the elementary level. One participant mentioned that a series of videos introducing the framework would be particularly helpful, and professional learning communities were also discussed as a possible source of continued training.

### Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the elementary focus group, we have identified the following issues and topics to address in the elementary QRG: (1) strategies for setting learning objectives for different program models, grade levels, and/or proficiency levels; (2) examples of appropriate instructional and assessment practices for young learners; and (3) guidance for incorporating less commonly taught standards in the elementary world language classroom. We recommend that DESE further explore the educator needs described in this section for future resources and professional development activities related to supporting teachers of elementary world language learners.

## 6. Students with Disabilities Group

### Focus Group Profile

The focus group on world language education for students with disabilities consisted of four participants: one special education teacher, one world language curriculum coordinator, one program director, and one world language department chair. All participants reported working with students with disabilities as special education teachers and/or world language teachers at the middle or high school level. While three participants reported working with Spanish, one participant reported working with Latin. This participant also attended the classical languages focus group.

### Summary

Overall, the group appreciated the framework’s emphasis on language learning for all students and sought ways to make this principle actionable in the world language classroom. In the discussion, participants focused on the challenges of connecting special education teachers with world language educators and vice versa, and suggestions were provided for both the framework and further resources that will support the collaboration, inclusion, and advocacy needed for effective world language education for students with disabilities.

### Key Takeaways

#### 6.1 To improve the framework’s actionability for students with disabilities, the value of world language education for this population must be promoted among educators, schools, and districts.

Although the group agreed that educational systems in general are shifting to more inclusive classrooms for special education students, participants argued that the field of world language education remains behind in both theory and practice due to a lack of understanding that students with disabilities can and should have access to language learning. Participants were quick to point out that despite world language requirements at the school or district level, world language courses continue to be viewed as non-core subjects, leading districts to deprioritize these classes for students with disabilities while focusing on core courses that are considered more essential to their overall education. The group praised the *MA WL Framework*’s guiding principles related to language learning for all students, and participants noted that this framing of world language education will represent a significant shift in the mindsets of many educators, administrators, parents, students, and various stakeholders. Further emphasis on and professional development about the value of world language courses for students with disabilities are needed to effectively support the shift to a more inclusive, accessible world language education for all.

#### 6.2 Practical implementation resources are needed to effectively use this framework with students with disabilities and supports should be designed for both special education teachers and world language teachers.

There was a consensus that the needs of students with disabilities are often overlooked or neglected in world language courses, and participants agreed that world language educators require additional supports for effectively implementing the *MA WL Framework* for this population. Given the need to develop individualized, personalized approaches to instruction for students with disabilities, participants recommended providing various models and tools that teachers could adapt to their teaching context and students’ needs. The group underscored the importance of differentiation for students with disabilities and requested concrete examples of differentiated tasks for students at different proficiency levels with various disabilities and/or needs. Participants also suggested that learning progressions specific to students with disabilities would be helpful for understanding and determining proficiency, as the overall trajectory of learning will occur at a different rate with this population.

#### 6.3 While a proficiency-based approach to world language education is valuable for students with disabilities, educators may require additional guidance for incorporating this approach into their teaching practice.

Participants described the benefits of a proficiency-based approach to world language education for students with disabilities, particularly when considering the can-do, assets-based perspective of the standards. The group mentioned that students with disabilities can become discouraged by the many things they are asked to do in a new language, and a focus on what students can do rather than what they cannot helps create a positive, engaging, and inclusive learning environment for this population. Despite the favorable aspects of this approach, the group highlighted how it represents a significant shift from the content- and grammar-based approach currently used by many educators, and it may also be a challenge for those who are concerned about the feasibility of addressing the individual needs of students at a variety of proficiency levels. Participants also recommended additional guidance to support grading in proficiency-based world language classrooms serving students with disabilities, especially if there is extensive differentiation and scaffolding based on students’ needs.

#### 6.4 Special education teachers and world language teachers would benefit from further professional development opportunities related to the framework and best practices in language learning for students with disabilities.

Participants argued that the biggest challenge in providing world language instruction for students with disabilities is that most world language teachers do not have special education training and most special education teachers do not have a world language background. The group explained that this disconnect can make it difficult for both types of educators to fully serve students with disabilities, and participants recommended further professional development be provided for all educators working with this population in the world language context. In addition, the group described a need for greater collaboration between world language and special education teachers, which is particularly useful for creating learning objectives, developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and ensuring students are receiving the learning supports needed to be successful in the world language classroom.

#### 6.5 Programmatic policies and practices may exclude students with disabilities from accessing and participating in world language education.

While all participants reported that their schools include world language requirements for all students, some participants said that waivers that exempt students with disabilities from these requirements are allowable and frequently granted. The group agreed that waivers should generally not be provided, and that teachers and programs should support students better to ensure access and equity to world language education for all. This inconsistency across programs could be addressed explicitly in future resource development, and the importance of including students with disabilities in world language education should be further underscored for programmatic and administrative purposes. Participants also mentioned that district policies around the inclusion of world languages in students’ IEPs have changed in recent years, and they suggested that supplementary materials for implementation of the framework should reiterate the extent to which students’ IEPs should address world language learning.

### Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the focus group on world language education for students with disabilities, we have identified the following issues and topics to address in the students with disabilities QRG: (1) effective grading practices for proficiency-based classrooms using differentiated instruction; (2) guidance for developing learning goals and incorporating language-related supports in the world language classroom; and (3) strategies for collaboration between special education teachers and world language teachers working with this population. We recommend that DESE further explore educator needs described in this section for future resources and professional development activities related to supporting educators of students with disabilities.

# Recommendations

While focal area-specific implications and recommendations are highlighted in the findings section of this report, we identified several global issues across all focus groups related to the framework’s actionability for and relevance to less common courses and programs. The following CAL recommendations are based on overall findings from the focus group sessions.

## Define different types of world language learners

To best meet the needs of all world language educators, we recommend that DESE provide state-wide definitions and descriptions of different types of world language learners, including heritage speakers/signers, ASL signers, and students with various disabilities. Appropriate terminology should be approved by content advisors in the relevant focal area, and learner descriptions should reflect a variety of developmental, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Although some educators may not be working in less common courses and programs, a shared understanding of different types of learners is needed for all world language classrooms, and these definitions could be provided in the framework’s glossary.

## Develop practical resources to support effective framework implementation

We recommend that DESE consider developing practical framework implementation resources, including examples of classroom activities, instructional topics, learning supports, rubrics, and assessment tools that are applicable to a variety of grade levels, teaching contexts, and student populations. Lesson and unit planning guides are also recommended, and these resources should reflect the different types of world language program models offered in the state. Resources related to Culture, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities are particularly important for less common courses and programs, and focal area-specific guidance is needed to effectively address these standards in this context.

## Consider professional development opportunities

To support educators’ understanding and use of the framework, we recommend that DESE consider providing a series of professional development offerings on a variety of topics, including (1) best practices for world language content standards use; (2) instructional approaches for supporting students with different proficiency levels; and (3) guidance for recognizing and addressing different language varieties, dialects, and registers in the classroom. Training should be provided for teachers, coordinators, and administrators to support a shared understanding of the framework and to ensure statewide consistency for instruction and assessment in all world language courses and programs.

# Appendix A: Participant Contact Information

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| --- | --- | --- |
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# Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Note: The language in this protocol was used by facilitators as a guide but was not read verbatim.

### Introductions

* Introduce CAL Facilitator and CAL Notetaker
* Overview of CAL’s mission
* Participant introductions (Name, role, location)

### Overview

The Center of Applied Linguistics (CAL) was contracted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to: (1) facilitate two rounds of focus groups with content advisors from six focus areas; (2) conduct a literature review of best practices in eight focus areas; and (3) develop quick reference guides to support standards use in eight focus areas. The purpose of this study is to provide accessible and comprehensible guides for educators of less common courses and programs to effectively implement the forthcoming Massachusetts World Languages Framework. Feedback gathered from the focus group sessions will inform the development of these guides, and we thank you for supporting these efforts to improve world language education for ALL learners!

### Background

The framework was developed in response to CAL’s recommendations to update the 1999 Massachusetts World Languages Framework. It provides the vision, guiding principles, and standards for the state-wide implementation of world language education, and it is based upon and inclusive of the 2015 American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) World-Readiness Standards. Reorganized in alignment with other Massachusetts frameworks by grouping standards into three domains and ten practices, it is enhanced with a focus on social/emotional well-being and social justice and will be supplemented by appendices, QRGs, PD opportunities, and various other supporting documents.

### Procedures and Guidelines

Before we begin, we would like to set some ground rules to ensure that you all have a positive experience participating in this discussion. Please remember that there are no wrong answers. We expect to hear a variety of points of view, and we are interested in hearing from all of you. We want to make sure all of you have a chance to share your ideas and that everyone feels heard! We ask that you keep your audio and video turned on for the duration of today’s meeting, and there is also a chat box available if you would like to ask additional questions outside of our discussion.

While we will collect your name as part of the process, your personal information will be kept confidential and secure. Your personal information will never be associated with your individual responses. Your demographic information and responses will be reported in aggregate across all focus groups and will never be attributed using personally identifiable information. Data from the study will be stored on a password-protected computer on a secure network, and there are no anticipated risks for participating in this project.

### Discussion

We will be discussing four major topic areas today: (1) familiarity with and use of the ACTFL Standards; (2) impressions of the MA WL Framework; (3) actionability of the MA WL Framework; and (4) relevance/inclusiveness of the MA WL Framework. We ask that you think about these topics through the lens of your focus area and teaching context, as we hope to gather specific, actionable feedback that will inform the development of supplementary materials for educators working with this population.

**Note:** The questions in this protocol were provided to guide discussions but not all questions were used in each group depending on the time and flow of the discussion.

#### Discussion: ACTFL Standards

* How familiar are you with the *ACTFL Standards*?
* How are you currently using the *ACTFL Standards* in your teaching context?
* What feels like it is missing for your context?

#### Discussion: Impressions

* What are your first impressions of the framework?
* What do you like about the framework?
* What do you dislike about the framework?
* How do you think this framework addresses the needs of your teaching context?

#### Discussion: Actionability

* Which aspects of the framework are most applicable to your teaching context?
* Which aspects of the framework are least applicable to your teaching context? How could these be improved?
* What barriers and challenges do you foresee in standards implementation for your teaching context?
* What supports would you need to overcome these difficulties?

#### Discussion: Relevance

* How relevant is the language of the framework for your teaching context? How inclusive is this language?
* What terms should be defined in the glossary to address the needs of your teaching context?
* How relevant are the standards outlined in the framework for your teaching context?
* How appropriate are they for your teaching context? How could they be improved?

### Summary

* Brief overview of responses
* Themes and major takeaways
* Additional comments

### Conclusion

* Next steps for the project
* Second round of focus groups
* Thank you!

### Contact Information

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Research Assistants: Leslie Fink (lfink@cal.org) and Mathilda Reckford (mreckford@cal.org)

## Appendix C: Focus Group Procedures

### Facilitators

The day before the scheduled session, facilitators will send all participants: (1) a reminder of their scheduled focus group time; (2) a Zoom meeting link and guidance for joining the meeting. Before the focus group session, facilitators will make sure that all materials are ready, and technology was functioning properly. Facilitators will also enter the Zoom meeting 10-15 minutes prior to the start of the session to monitor the waiting room and welcome participants as they arrive. During the focus group session, facilitators will lead the focus group using the focus group PPT guide (via screenshare) and any additional area-specific questions that emerge from the discussion. Facilitators will identify and make note of major themes throughout the discussion, as these will be summarized at the end of the session. Facilitators will also make sure that the discussion is moving at an appropriate pace and that all participants have an opportunity to share their thoughts. Immediately following the focus group session, you will debrief with the notetaker to synthesize notes and themes from the discussion.

### Notetakers

The day before the scheduled session, notetakers will confirm that all participants’ consent forms are completed and saved in the project folder. Notetakers will also make a copy of the notetaking and synthesis templates for your session. Before the focus group session, notetakers will make sure that all materials are ready and technology is functioning properly. Notetakers will also enter the Zoom meeting 10-15 minutes prior to the start of the session to mark down participants’ attendance as they arrive. During the focus group session, notetakers will take detailed notes capturing all comments, reactions, and feedback from the group. All notes will be taken electronically and saved in the notetaking document, and participant names will be included when capturing comments and quotations during the session. Immediately following the focus group session, notetakers will debrief with the facilitator to synthesize notes and themes from the discussion. Once this step is complete, notetakers will de-identify the notes, replace all participant names with ID numbers, and remove any other information that could identify participants, including program names and location information.

Immediately following each session, the facilitator and notetaker will meet to review notes, synthesize key findings, and document their impressions of the group.