CCFLT

Colorado Congress of Foreign Language Teachers

February 12, 2018

Governor John Hickenlooper

Subject: Maintaining the study of World Languages as separate and distinct from Computer Languages

Hello! Bonjour, hola, Guten Tag, 您好, nín hǎo! My name is Connie Navarro and I am the current president of the Colorado Congress of Foreign Language Teachers, (CCFLT), the official state organization for world language teachers in Colorado whose purpose is the advancement of the study and teaching and learning of world languages in the schools, colleges and universities of the state of Colorado. CCFLT supports educators and provide proficiency pathways for language learners to become linguistically and culturally competent in order to succeed in the global economy and develop the ability to interact respectfully with others both here in the U.S. and around the world.

We believe that world language education is a core part of any globally minded, 21st century curriculum. However, several state legislatures are spearheading a movement that would allow students to meet foreign language course requirements by taking computer programming courses instead. In fact, while C++ and Python may lack the 100,000+ word vocabulary that Spanish boasts, states like Texas and Oklahoma already count coding as a "foreign language." **CCFLT encourages the State of Colorado to take action against such a misguided conflation of two separate and distinct areas of study.**

National advocacy group Code.org has taken a strong position against counting computer sciences as a foreign language program, and CCFLT has released a statement Supporting the Study of World Languages and Computer Science – see attached.

Learning a world language is an inherently human-to-human event that engenders unique cognitive benefits over a lifetime, whereas an excessive

focus on coding ignores the rapid pace of the tech revolution itself. Every year, new coding languages fall in and out of favor, urging us to question: Which ones should students learn? Unfortunately, we may never know. None of the current proposals in other states promise to put qualified computer teachers or more computers in the classroom. Those who wish to see coding replace world language promote additional funding for neither subject. And even worse, some proposals require the state university system to accept coding credits as foreign language credits—leading some to ask if such measures would be in defiance of state constitutions.

Languages are important to Colorado jobs and economy:
- International trade supports an estimated 680,000 jobs in Colorado and generated $8.8 billion in goods exports. http://businessroundtable.org
- 95% of the world's consumers live outside the US, and 75% of those people do not understand English. www.LeadwithLanguages.org
- Trade creates jobs for Colorado. Educating Coloradans to be culturally and linguistically competent opens markets for trade to Colorado.

Please see the attached CCFLT Position Statement on Supporting the Study of World Languages and Computer Science. We urge you to support Colorado in maintaining that these two fields of study as distinct, separate and vital disciplines with value to the future of Colorado each in their own right.

Respectfully,

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CCFLT advocates the study of both world languages and computer science. Both are essential skills in a world that is connected across borders and through technology. Both provide specific skills and a way of thinking; **however, the perspectives and skills gained are not equivalent.**

A computer coding course is not equivalent to a world language course for the following reasons:

- The study of computer coding does not allow students to gain the intercultural skills, insight, and perspectives to know how, when, and why to express what to whom. In other words, computer coding **does not meet the standards** outlined in the newly revised Colorado Academic Standards for World Languages (2018)
- Computer coding cannot be used **by people to interact and negotiate meaning** with other people.
- Computer coding cannot be used to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products, practices, and perspectives of a particular **culture through the language**. Languages provide an historical connection to society and culture and have been around for centuries, gathering the elements of culture, preserving stories, and being used for human communication.
- In comparison to most world languages with about 10,000 vocabulary words and grammatical structures, computer coding does not utilize large numbers of words, nor does it use them in the same ways. A "typical computing language has a **vocabulary of about 100 words**, and the real work is learning how to put these words together." (Hirotaka, 2014)
- Merriam-Webster provides the following "simple" definition of language: *the system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other.* Computer coding **does not express thoughts or feelings**.
- **Colleges and universities vary in their policies for accepting computer coding** as fulfilling students' foreign language entry requirements.
- Computer coding is part of the larger field of **computer science**, which is a critical 21st century subject and **deserves its own graduation requirement**. Computer science is much more related to mathematics and science than to languages.

Additional statements in support of computer coding and world languages as separate credits:

"***Code.org formally opposes the idea of classifying computer science as a foreign language.***
First off, 'computer coding' isn't what we should teach students. 'Computer science' is what we should teach. Just like in English class we don't teach just handwriting and grammar, we teach English literature and composition. Learning 'coding' is just one part of computer science. Learning algorithm design, computational thinking, how the Internet works, data analysis, cybersecurity, these are equally important aspects of computer science, and none of it, not even the coding, has anything

to do with learning a foreign language. The only people who would suggest that computer science is akin to learning a foreign language have never coded before."
Hadi Partovi, CEO, Code.org

"*While computer coding is a vital skill for modern times, it should never be at the expense of foreign languages. I had the opportunity to study in Switzerland for a year on a Fulbright Scholarship at the Université de Neuchâtel and became fluent in French. I couldn't agree more with you about the critical thinking skills inherent in learning a foreign language and the necessity of doing so in our increasingly connected linguistically diverse global community. We need computer skills **and** foreign-language skills. Both are critical to our modern world.*"
Delegate Mark Levine, Virginia House of Delegates, serving Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax

"*Coding is an incredibly important 21st century skill for our kids to learn, and that is why we spend so much time trying to teach it. But I don't believe it is the same or even really comparable to learning a foreign language. It would be a shame to lose something so important for the sake of adding something else, even something as important as coding. Clearly, education leaders must figure out a way to teach both.*"
Srini Mandyam, CTO and co-founder of instructional coding company Tynker

"*Code.org, Computing in the Core, Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Facebook, the College Board, and the Computer Science Teachers Association and numerous other organizations, support a policy allowing computer science to count toward mathematics or science graduation requirements.*"
Amy Hirotaka, Director of State Government Affairs, Code.org

For the criteria of what would be considered a world language, see "What is a World Language?".
https://www.actfl.org/news/position-statements/what-world-language

RESOURCES

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages position statement
https://www.actfl.org/news/position-statements/supporting-the-study-world-languages-and-computer-science

"Definition of 'language'" *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 03 Aug. 2016. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/language

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The National Standards Collaborative Board. (2015). *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*. Alexandria, VA: Author.