



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENDAN HOFFMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A second-grade class at the Yu Ying charter school in Washington, where instruction in all subjects alternates daily between English and Chinese.

Foreign Languages Fade In Class — Except Chinese

Beijing Helps Spur a Contrary Trend

By SAM DILLON

WASHINGTON — Thousands of public schools stopped teaching foreign languages in the last decade, according to a government-financed survey — dismal news for a nation that needs more linguists to conduct its global business and diplomacy.

But another contrary trend has educators and policy makers abuzz: a rush by schools in all parts of America to offer instruction in Chinese.

Some schools are paying for Chinese classes on their own, but hundreds are getting some help. The Chinese government is sending teachers from China to schools all over the world — and paying part of their salaries.

At a time of tight budgets, many American schools are finding that offer too good to refuse.

In Massillon, Ohio, south of Cleveland, Jackson High School started its Chinese program in the fall of 2007 with 20 students and now has 80, said Parthena Draggett, who directs Jackson's world languages department.

"We were able to get a free Chinese teacher," she said. "I'd like to start a Spanish program for elementary children, but we can't get a free Spanish teacher."

(Jackson's Chinese teacher is not free; the Chinese government pays part of his compensation, with the district paying the rest.)

No one keeps an exact count, but rough calculations based on the government's survey suggest that perhaps 1,600 American public and private schools are teaching Chinese, up from 300 or so a decade ago. And the numbers are growing exponentially.

Among America's approximately 27,500 middle and high schools offering at least one foreign language, the proportion offering Chinese rose to 4 percent, from 1 percent, from 1997 to 2008, according to the survey, which was done by the Center for Applied Linguistics, a research group in Washington, and paid for by the federal Education Department.

"It's really changing the language education landscape of this country," said Nancy C.

Rhodes, a director at the center and co-author of the survey.

Other indicators point to the same trend. The number of students taking the Advanced Placement test in Chinese, introduced in 2007, has grown so fast that it will likely pass German this year as the third most-tested A.P. language, after Spanish and French, said Trevor Packer, a vice president at the College Board.

"We've all been surprised that in such a short time Chinese would grow to surpass A.P. German," Mr. Packer said.

A decade ago, most of the schools with Chinese programs were on the East and West Coasts. But in recent years, many schools have started Chinese pro-

The results, released last year, confirmed that Spanish was taught almost universally. The survey found that 88 percent of elementary schools and 93 percent of middle and high schools with language programs offered Spanish in 2008.

The overall decline in language instruction was mostly due to its abrupt decline in public elementary and middle schools; the number of private schools and public high schools offering at least one language remained stable from 1997 to 2008.

The survey said that a third of schools reported that the federal No Child Left Behind law, which since 2001 has required public schools to test students in math and English, had drawn resources from foreign languages.

Experts said several factors were fueling the surge in Chinese. Parents, students and educators recognize China's emergence as an important country and believe that fluency in its language can open opportunities.

Also stoking the interest has been a joint program by the College Board and Hanban, a language council affiliated with the Chinese Education Ministry, that since 1986 has sent hundreds of American school superintendents and other educators to visit schools in China, with travel costs subsidized by Hanban. Many have started Chinese programs upon their return.

Since 2006, Hanban and the College Board have also sent more than 325 volunteer Chinese "guest teachers" to work in American schools with fledgling programs and paying \$13,000 to subsidize each teacher's salary for a year. Teachers can then renew for up to three more years.

The State Department has paid for a smaller program to bring Chinese teachers to schools here, with each staying for a year.

In the first two years of its Chinese program, the Jackson District in Ohio said it had provided its guest teacher housing, a car and gasoline, health insurance and other support worth about \$26,000. This year, the district is paying a more experienced Chi-

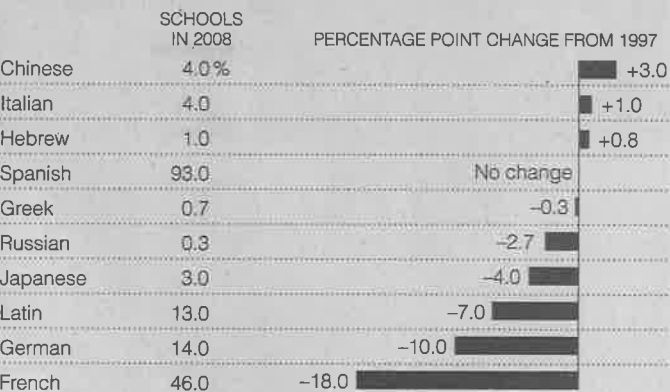


Experts attribute the surge in Chinese language classes to parents' belief that fluency can open opportunities down the road.

Growth in Chinese Language Courses

Despite an overall decrease in foreign language instruction in American schools, more middle and high schools are offering classes in Chinese, according to a national survey.

Change in foreign languages offered in middle and high schools



Source: Center for Applied Linguistics

THE NEW YORK TIMES

nese guest teacher \$49,910 in salary and other support, in addition to the \$13,000 in travel expenses he receives from Hanban, bringing his compensation into rough parity with Ohio teachers.

Ms. Draggett visited China recently with a Hanban-financed delegation of 400 American educators from 39 states, and she came back energized about Jackson's Chinese program, she said.

"Chinese is really taking root," she said. Starting this fall, Jackson High will begin phasing out its German program, she said.

Founders of the Yu Ying charter school in Washington, where all classes for 200 students in pre-kindergarten through second

grade are taught in Chinese and English on alternate days, did not start with a guest teacher when it opened in the fall of 2008.

"That's great for many schools, but we want our teachers to stay," said Mary Shaffner, the school's executive director.

Instead, Yu Ying recruited five native Chinese speakers living in the United States by advertising on the Internet. One is Wang Jue, who immigrated to the United States in 2001 and graduated from the University of Maryland.

After just four months, her pre-kindergarten students can already say phrases like "I want lunch" and "I'm angry" in Chinese, Ms. Wang said.

Big Benefits Are Seen From Eating Less Salt

By PAM BELLUCK

In a report that may bolster public policy efforts to get Americans to reduce the amount of salt in their diets, scientists writing in The New England Journal of Medicine conclude that lowering the amount of salt people eat by even a small amount could reduce cases of heart disease, stroke and heart attacks as much as reductions in smoking, obesity and cholesterol levels.

If everyone consumed half a teaspoon less salt per day, there would be between 54,000 and 99,000 fewer heart attacks each year and between 44,000 and 92,000 fewer deaths, according to the study, which was conducted by scientists at University of California San Francisco, Stanford University Medical Center and Columbia University Medical Center.

The report comes as health authorities at federal, state and municipal levels are considering policies that would have the effect of pressuring food companies to reduce salt in processed foods, which are considered to be the source of much of the salt Americans eat.

Last week, New York City announced an initiative to urge food manufacturers and restaurant chains to reduce salt in their products nationwide by 25 percent over the next five years. California, according to an author of the study, Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, an associate professor of medicine and epidemiology at University of California, San

Eating even slightly less could have major effects on health.

Francisco, is considering setting salt limits on food the state purchase for schools, prisons and other public institutions.

A panel appointed by the Institute of Medicine, the widely respected independent research arm of the National Academies of Science, is close to issuing a report that will make recommendations about reducing salt intake, including actions government and manufacturers can take.

Dr. Bibbins-Domingo also said the Food and Drug Administration was considering whether to change the designation of salt from a food additive that is generally considered safe to a category that would require companies to give consumers more information alerting them to high levels of salt in food. An F.D.A. spokesman was unable to say Wednesday whether such discussions were taking place. "We are actively looking at how to improve the nutrition content of the American content," he said.

"For 40 years in this country we've been trying to get individuals to reduce amount of sodium we consume and it hasn't worked," said Cheryl A. M. Anderson, an assistant professor of epidemiology and international health at Johns Hopkins University and a member of the Institute of Medicine panel.

"We need to collectively come together and approach the problem with a combination of efforts, including changing the food supply," said Dr. Anderson, who also is a co-author of an editorial about the study in The New England Journal of Medicine. "This type of evidence really helps us support that movement toward not just relying on the individual to do something that is really dif-

Continued on Page A22