

helping schools excel | helping children learn

BCIU Leads Creation of Asian Studies Collaborative: Knowledge of Chinese language and culture seen as critical for Americans

China exported more than \$243.5 billion worth of goods to the U.S. in 2005. By contrast, the U.S. exported about one-fourth of that amount to China that year: \$41.8 billion.

More than 1.3 billion people worldwide speak Chinese. Yet, in America, only 2.3 million speak the language – and about 85 percent of those individuals are of Chinese descent.

Educators and business leaders across the country believe that this lack of Chinese expertise needs to change. As China continues its phenomenal growth and emerges as a cultural and political leader, the need to educate America's students in Chinese language and culture becomes crucial.

In an effort to strengthen East Asian language and culture education in grades K-12, the BCIU is spearheading the creation of an Asian Studies Collaborative to assist Pennsylvania school districts that offer, or are considering offering, Chinese studies.

The hope is the ASC will become a model for the creation of Chinese language and cultural studies programs and resources at school districts around the country.

“Why Asian studies? There are innumerable reasons why American children should be exposed to Asian studies,” said Dr. Kevin Andreyo, program administrator, Educational Technical Services (ETS). “For example, although Asia is home to more than one-third of the world's population, most Americans have very little understanding of the people, languages, cultures, and histories of the region.”

“Americans' familiarity with Asian culture is severely lacking in comparison with Asians' familiarity with American culture,” said Sue Calvin, ETS project administrator. “American businesses are deeply involved in Asia, but there are not enough American professionals who are knowledgeable about the countries in the region.”



Dr. Bonnie Troxell, division administrator, CSDRS; Sue Calvin, project administrator, ETS; and Bill Miller, division administrator, IT; look over some Chinese language curricula as they spearhead a new Asian Studies Collaborative.

The Collaborative Includes Several Off-Line Programs

The ASC has partnered with the Freeman Foundation, the Chinese Flagship Program at Ohio State University, and the Confucius Institute at the University of Pittsburgh, three organizations specializing in Asian studies and Asian collaborations. The ASC's partnership with them will provide expertise, professional development opportunities, additional resources, and guidance in the ASC's development.

For example, in January 2009, the Freeman Foundation will offer an East Asian Culture course at the BCIU for teachers in Berks County. Dr. David Kenley, an associate professor of history specializing in Chinese and East Asian culture at Elizabethtown College, will lead the multi-week seminar. Participating teachers will receive a stipend and curriculum resources for their school district.

Four Berks County school districts will be offering some Mandarin Chinese language instruction by

January. Three already do. Twin Valley has offered Chinese for three years. Wilson High School began an on-campus course this year, and Tulpehocken began offering Mandarin language instruction via videoconference. Oley Valley will pilot an online Chinese course in January.

In addition, students at schools within the consortium will be able to study advanced placement coursework in Mandarin Chinese language and culture. The goal is to have the students achieve intermediate language proficiency, which will allow them to continue their language studies at an advanced level in college.

Yet the ASC is about more than just learning how to speak and read Chinese. Students within the ASC consortium will participate in collaborative activities with “sister” schools in Asian countries. Students also will take virtual field trips to Asian libraries, museums, and historical sites.

on the technical side of the Asian Studies Collaborative

- The ASC will provide professional development using videoconferencing equipment and take advantage of the high-speed Berks County WAN and statewide PAUNET.
- Placing a streaming media server containing ASC support materials, including multimedia files, on the Berks County WAN will allow participating school districts in the Berks and Schuylkill county regions to use the connectivity of the Berks County WAN and PAUNET to enrich their curriculum.
- The BCIU now has a partnership with the Schuylkill County IU to provide educational media services through IMS mandated services. The ASC is a natural extension of those services and it will extend to Schuylkill districts the valuable resources and opportunities provided by this grant.
- The BCIU also has an agreement with the Lincoln County IU to provide distance learning expertise and project management in exchange for use of the Lincoln IU’s video conference bridging service, which allows for multiple, simultaneous connections.

Technology Enables the Instruction

The BCIU, partnering with the Lincoln, Schuylkill, and Lancaster/Lebanon intermediate units, recently submitted an Act 183 E-Fund application to the Pennsylvania Department of Education to acquire funding for expanded Wide Area Network (WAN) connectivity and for the development of the collaborative.

“To receive the grant, we must have a program application to go along with the technology we hope to install,” Calvin said. “So the Asian studies component is the ‘content’ that can be implemented with the WAN.”

Signed by Governor Rendell in 2004, Act 183 established the E-Fund to help school entities promote and accelerate broadband deployment. E-Fund grants help schools acquire telecommunications services, hardware, and technical assistance. The grants also can provide distance education.

That is where the need for the WAN and the goals of the ASC interconnect.

Five Berks County school districts still don’t have access to the countywide WAN. The E-Fund grant will enable the BCIU to connect those districts to the WAN. It also will provide building-to-building connectivity in several districts.

In addition, the grant will allow the ASC to provide distance-learning tools and K-12 learning resources, as well as disseminate Asian language and culture instruction best practices.

“We must give our students the tools to thrive in an increasingly global economy,” Calvin said. “As we develop the ASC, we’ll be building a sound structure for quality language and culture instruction, a structure we’ll be able to apply anywhere for any language.”

For more information on the Asian Studies Collaborative, contact Sue Calvin at suecal@berksiu.org or at 610-987-8639.

Chinese language statistics

1.3 billion: the number of people worldwide who speak Chinese.

2.3 million: the number of Americans who spoke Chinese in 2005.

200 million: the number of Chinese who study English in China.

50,000: the estimated number of America’s 49.5 million students in grades K-12 who were taking Chinese language lessons in 2007.