Michigan’s Oral Proficiency Requirement for Teachers of World Languages

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) requires that all teacher candidates pass the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC) for each subject area in which they wish to become certified (e.g., their teaching majors and minors). In addition to passing the MTTC, candidates who wish to be certified to teach world languages are now required to meet oral proficiency standards. As of May 1, 2010, candidates can no longer be recommended for certification in a world language unless they have met the oral proficiency standard established by the MDE for that language.

The requirement also has implications for the internship. Secondary education students with world language majors must meet the standard as a condition for progressing to the internship. Secondary education students with world language minors and elementary education students with world language majors or minors are not eligible for internship placements in world languages unless they have met the standard.

At MSU, oral proficiency tests in each language are administered by the Center for the Support of Language Teaching. Students will find information about testing on the Center’s website (celta.msu.edu). Questions and requests for appointments should be addressed to Alicia Rice at (517) 432-6770 or riceal@cal.msu.edu.

The scale used to measure oral proficiency is taken from the “ACTFL” test administered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. There are ten levels on the scale; please see www.languagetesting.com/scale.htm for a description of each. The Michigan Department of Education requires students who wish to teach French, German, Italian, Latin or Spanish to demonstrate an “Advanced-Low” level of proficiency. Students who wish to teach Arabic, Chinese, Japanese or Russian must demonstrate an “Intermediate-High” level of proficiency to become certified.

Oral proficiency can be demonstrated by meeting the required standard on several tests, including one developed at MSU called the “Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview” or SOPI. It is important to note that there is a short version and a long version of the SOPI. Individuals seeking teacher certification must demonstrate proficiency on the long version. Proficiency demonstrated on the short version is not acceptable for certification.

All of proficiency measures approved by the MDE are variations on – or simulations of – the more widely recognized ACTFL test. For students who plan to teach in other states or to do something other than teach their language, the ACTFL might be a better choice. For more information about the ACTFL test, visit www.actfl.org, www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3348, and www.languagetesting.com/academic.cfm.

Language Proficiency: Tips and Resources for Teacher Candidates