

# REF

# PENNSYLVANIA LANGUAGE FORUM



Pennsylvania State Modern  
Language Association

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Pennsylvania State Modern  
Language Association

*INSPIRING MULTILINGUAL  
COMMUNICATION AND  
INTERCULTURAL  
UNDERSTANDING*

**The mission of the Pennsylvania  
State Modern Language Association  
(PSMLA) is to enhance world  
language education throughout  
Pennsylvania by:**



Promoting the teaching  
and learning of world  
languages and culture at  
all levels (Pre-K through  
university)

Providing  
opportunities for  
professional growth  
and networking



Recognizing excellence  
in the field

Collaborating  
with local, state,  
and national  
organizations



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## ABOUT

*Pennsylvania Language Forum (PLF)* is the semiannual online publication of the Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association. It features articles on teaching strategies, lesson plans, project ideas, and research by and for world language teachers in Pennsylvania.

PSMLA Members will receive an invitation to view the journal online through the publications section of our website. A digital archive of previous issues is also available online. Visit <https://psmla.org/pennsylvania-language-forum> to access *PLF* online.

## SUBMISSIONS

Article submissions are accepted on a rolling basis but must be received by February 15 to be considered for publication in the Spring issue of *PLF* or by August 15 for the Fall issue.

Contributors have the option of submitting their article for peer review. To learn more about that process, please see back pages for further details. All other submissions should follow the guidelines outlined below.

### Submission Guidelines

- PSMLA members may submit titled articles related to teaching and language education.
- All submissions must be written in English, though examples of lessons or student work may be in the target language.
- All articles must be submitted as a Microsoft Word document or a Google Doc, formatted using Times New Roman 12-point font and be double-spaced. PDF article submissions will not be considered for publication.
- Scanned documents and photographs that accompany the article submission must be clearly identified and labeled. They must be submitted as a JPG or PNG.
- All documents of the submission must include the following information:
  - Name(s) of author(s)
  - Affiliation(s)
  - Language(s) taught
  - Intended levels, when relevant
  - Release Form(s) for any photographs (available at [online](#))

Submissions must be submitted online using the submission link on the [PSMLA website](#).

All authors and any co-authors must be current PSMLA members or a member of a NECTFL reciprocal state organization at the time of publication. PSMLA members whose work is chosen for publication will be notified via email. All formatting and final edits are at the discretion of the editors.

## Contact PLF

PSMLA and the *Pennsylvania Language Forum* invite vendors and organizations to submit advertisements that share our mission. Vendors wishing to advertise should consult the Ads & Exhibits page on the PSMLA website ([www.psmla.org](http://www.psmla.org)). All other questions may be directed to Christina Huhn or Nathan Campbell, Co-Editors of *PLF*, at [PALanguageForum@psmla.org](mailto:PALanguageForum@psmla.org).

Attention: University World Language Educators

# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!

**DEADLINE: AUGUST 1**

The Pennsylvania Language Forum welcomes submissions of scholarly research for our next issue!

Articles should be original, scholarly, research-based articles that address issues directly related to world language teachers in Pennsylvania and our region. Peer-reviewed articles should maintain clear classroom relevance for world language educators at all levels.

Dissertations should be refined and re-focused, as full dissertations are too long and detailed for publication. Research conducted in K–12 classrooms is especially encouraged.

All submissions should follow the general constructs of academic writing and contribute meaningfully to the professional dialogue shaping world language education in our state

## Potential topics include:

- ***Empirical research studies*** and applications of high-leverage practices in the World language classroom.
- ***Literature reviews*** of published scholarship on technology in world language education—including AI, classroom applications, and related innovations. Reviews should emphasize classroom-focused research completed within the last 10 years.
- Scholarly research on ***language proficiency development***.
- Scholarly articles on ***literary, cultural, or interdisciplinary topics***, provided the work clearly connects to classroom application.
- Literature reviews or scholarship on ***world language advocacy***.
- ***Research on unique learning contexts***, such as content-based instruction, heritage language learners, special needs, or social-emotional learning—again with a direct connection to the Pennsylvania world language classroom.

# Editors' Corner



## **Nathan Campbell & Christina Huhn**

*Editors*

*Pennsylvania Language Forum*

Educators across the great state of Pennsylvania have been doing amazing things in their classrooms and in the field of World Language education. Our 2025 Fall Conference in Bethlehem was an invigorating time to learn from our colleagues and celebrate the accomplishments of many. This year, we celebrated Charlene Bigelow as our 2025 PSMLA Pennsylvania Language Teacher of the Year and honored PSMLA past president Isabel Espino de Valdivia as the Frank Mulhern Leadership Award recipient. Their leadership has been instrumental in advancing language education in Pennsylvania.

We saw Charlene move forward to the national stage after winning the NECTFL 2026 Teacher of the Year in New York City in February. PSMLA has now won this prestigious award two years in a row, after our own Nathan Campbell was named last year and then went on to become the first Pennsylvania teacher to be named ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year this past fall. The two Teachers of the Year took time to have a conversation that you can find on p. 19 of this issue.

Advocacy has become a major theme in the World Language community. As our PSMLA leaders continue to promote and enact the [PA Roadmap for World Language education](#), we appreciate how teachers are finding ways to promote language learning in their classrooms and districts. Learn about the creative efforts of Christine Yardley to showcase diverse cultures in her school on p. 22, or how Nicholas Frank brought travel to life in his unique Flight Simulation lesson on p. 26.

We know that each day, each one of you is working tirelessly to provide your students with the opportunity to learn languages and better understand the diverse perspectives of the cultures that we teach. PSMLA's Advocacy team, led by Cherie Garret, has organized a new [World Languages Resource Hub](#). After reading this spring edition, be sure to visit our website and take advantage of all the ways that PSMLA can support you and your students.

We hope that you enjoy this edition of the Pennsylvania Language Forum!

# President's Corner



**Michael Bogdan**  
*President*  
**PSMLA**

Greetings! I'm honored to begin my two-year term as PSMLA President. I have been involved with PSMLA in several capacities over the past ten years, and it truly has been a rewarding experience in which I have grown both personally and professionally. Our goal is that our members feel the same.

The PSMLA Executive Council has been very busy during the first few months of 2026, as you may have noticed from the many new items in our weekly emails and on our website. Work on the PA Language Roadmap—a strategic plan for world language education—is in its final stages under the leadership of First Vice President Cherie Garrett. One goal of the Roadmap is to provide resources to our members on programs and initiatives that support the recruitment and retention of teachers and students.

In February, we debuted the [PSMLA World Language Resource Hub](#). There you will find continually updated lists ranging from PA universities that offer world language teacher preparation, to partnerships with higher education, to cultural events across the state, and examples of unique world language programming. Please bookmark

the Hub—we are confident it offers new ideas for all language teachers.

In addition, we have added resource pages for [Aspiring & Early Career Educators](#), providing ideas, funding opportunities, and resources for high school and college students, new teachers, and those considering a career change. Finally, we added a resource page on [National Board Certification](#). While only a small percentage of PA teachers hold this highly regarded credential, many schools offer financial incentives for those who earn it. It is a demanding process, but one with proven results in the classroom.

PSMLA now features both fall and spring webinar series, offering professional learning opportunities to members throughout the year from the comfort of home. This spring, Executive Council Member Kaytlyn Byers offered a session titled *Save Your Sanity*, with techniques and strategies to streamline lesson planning. We also hosted a well-attended session on the changes to the AP World Language Exams. A [follow-up webinar](#) will be held on April 30, 2026.

In March 2026, we announced that the [PSMLA Annual Conference](#) will be held November 6–7, 2026 in State College. Following the theme of our strategic plan, the conference will feature strands based on “The Roadmap Forward: Advancing Proficiency, Programs, and the Profession.” This statewide gathering of PK–12 and postsecondary educators, future teachers, and others engaged in world language education provides an opportunity to learn, share, and be inspired—and to return to the classroom with innovative strategies and renewed enthusiasm. Reservations at the Wyndham Garden State College are now open, and session proposals are due April 30, 2026. Please reserve November 6–7, 2026 on your calendar and visit our [conference page](#) throughout the spring and summer as more details are posted.

Remember that membership now runs on a 12-month cycle from the date you renew, with many memberships expiring at the end of the school year. Be sure to [renew your membership online](#) when you receive notification. We also offer a new discount for those who sign up for auto-renewal with a credit card. Member benefits include reduced fees on the conference and workshops, uploading of Act 48 hours for professional learning participation, and consideration for awards. Your membership sustains the work of our organization, and we appreciate all our members.

I wish you a great final stretch of the academic year and look forward to seeing you at State College in November.




*Attendees gather during the 2025 PSMLA Fall Conference in Bethlehem, Pa.*


# PSMLA 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE:

## THE ROADMAP FORWARD: ADVANCING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, PROGRAMS, AND THE PROFESSION



 Mark your calendars for **November 6-7** at Wyndham Garden State College.

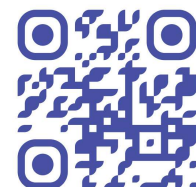
 Join world language educators for two days of engaging sessions, innovative strategies, and inspiring ideas you can bring back to your classroom.

 Connect with leading vendors, celebrate outstanding awardees, and build meaningful professional relationships from across the state.

 Book your hotel and plan to join us for this can't-miss event for world language educators!



Visit [psmla.org](https://psmla.org) for details.



# “What are they going to tell me, no?”: A Rural Student’s Journey with Arabic and Expanded Access Through Virtual Learning



**Courtney Bonino**

**World of Learning Institute, IU08**

“What are they going to tell me? No?” This was the question former Huntingdon Area School District (HASD) student, Ali Hemcher, asked herself as she approached her school counselor’s office. In her sophomore year at Huntingdon Area High School (HAHS), in 2019, Ali’s only option for a world language class

taught by a teacher in her school building was Spanish. Of course, in this way, HASD was much like any other school district in rural Pennsylvania.

HAHS did offer three other language classes through the World of Learning Institute (WOL), out of a neighboring Intermediate Unit:

Japanese, German, and French, but Ali still wasn't intrigued. Attempting to learn Russian and Arabic on her own, without a teacher, she struggled to progress much farther than the alphabet. But Ali wasn't going to let that stop her from learning a language in which she was interested.

When the time came for her annual course selection, Ali took a leap of faith.

At the bottom of the HAHS course selection guide there was a footnote that indicated if students were interested in other languages, they could talk to their counselor. Ali was the only student to notice this small note and take action.

Rather than simply register for Spanish, as almost every other classmate, Ali asked her counselor if she could take an Arabic class offered by WOL. HAHS and WOL had been partnering for a number of years to provide live, synchronous world language classes as a solution to teacher shortages and budget restrictions.

"Honestly I think my school counselors were surprised - they originally advertised WOL as an alternative to our Spanish classes and I'm sure they didn't expect me to go research the



*Ali Hemcher, graduated from Huntingdon Area Senior High School in 2022 and is currently a student at Georgetown University. She will graduate from Georgetown in May 2026 with a Bachelors in International Politics and a Master of Arts in Security Studies in May 2027.*

program and find out what other languages WOL offered," said Ali.

Ali's self-advocacy paid off. Her counselor was able to offer Arabic to HAHS students through the WOL.

HAHS's Online Learning Director, Anita Young, said, "Mrs. Snare and the team at HAHS are very committed to helping students find courses that mean something to them and could help them pursue their careers beyond high school. We gather student input yearly to hear what courses they want and if they mention something we

don't currently offer, we don't think twice about looking into it and adding it."

And even without a teacher in the classroom, Ali's high school Arabic classes left a lasting impact.

"A typical Arabic class with WOL felt pretty similar to my in-person classes besides the fact that I was looking at a computer - the teachers allowed me to practice all of the four core skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing). For listening, the teachers tried to speak in Arabic for the majority of the class. For cultural understanding, I still have such vivid memories of two classes, one my junior year and the other my senior year, of doing Natakallam which is a program where Arab refugees are brought into classes to tell their story and help students practice speaking Arabic," said Ali.

HAHS has continued partnering with WOL to offer more language options for their students. Young said, "When WOL first started with Huntingdon, the offerings were limited and there were 5-10 students taking courses online. This has grown over the years! Our students love their ASL courses with World of Learning. Ali was

one of the first HAHS students that took more than 2 years of a language with WOL, until now. We currently have 3 students in ASL who have taken all 3 years with WOL."

Ali is now studying Arabic at Georgetown University. "If I hadn't had a background in the language coming into Georgetown, the sheer speed of the introductory class probably would have scared me off from the language entirely. Since I had a foundation from WOL, however, I had the confidence to stay enrolled in the class which eventually led to me completing my required foreign language proficiency in Arabic and declaring a minor in the language."

Ali will graduate from Georgetown University in May 2026 with her bachelor's degree in International Politics and a minor in Arabic. In 2027, she will graduate with her Masters of Arts in Security Studies.

A simple request, a virtual partnership, and expanded access to world languages forged the path for student success.

What if your students asked the same question that Ali asked? Would you say no?



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Master in Public Health  
Master in Healthcare Administration  
M.Ed. in Educational Leadership  
M.Ed. in Instructional Design  
Educational Technology  
M.Ed. in STEM Education

M.S. in Organizational Leadership  
B.A. in Education Studies  
B.S. in Applied Management  
B.S. in Healthcare Administration

For a full list of programs, visit [ace.edu/programs](http://ace.edu/programs)

#### UPCOMING WEBINAR

Join American College of Education to learn more about benefits for **PA educators**. Information presented includes: tuition grant opportunities, program information, a question and answer session. For more information, scan the QR code or click the link to attend the informational webinar. If you cannot attend live, a recording will be sent to you.



**April 16 | 7 pm ET**

Register here

For additional questions, contact Morgan Meadows at [morgan.meadows@ace.edu](mailto:morgan.meadows@ace.edu).

# Representing the Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association: Nathan Campbell: ACTFL Teacher of the Year

In November of 2025, we had a seat in the front of the house as we watched them name our own PMSLA and NECTFL Teacher of the year as ACTFL's teacher of the year: Nathan Campbell!



*A shocked Campbell is announced the winner*

From the ACTFL Press release

**“Nathan Campbell** teaches Advanced Placement Spanish at Manheim Central High School in Manheim, PA. He is the 2025 Northeast Conference (NECTFL) Teacher of the Year, and the 2024 Pennsylvania State Modern Languages Association (PMSLA) Teacher of the Year. In addition to teaching, Nathan is the World Languages Department Lead Facilitator; Spanish Club Advisor; Capítulo de la Sabiduría and Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica Co-Advisor; and World Cultures Day Event Organizer.” (actfl.org)

*“His patient guidance, dedication to his students, and his energetic spirit make him somebody that lifts people up and inspires them to do better. Above all, having had the experience of seeing him as my teacher and father has shown me that it is possible to be passionate and devoted to both one’s family and career — something that I aspire to do one day.”*  
~Lucas C.

Sr. Campbell, as his students call him, represents everything that a strong Spanish teacher should: a focus on not just language, but belonging, culture, and a celebration of diversity and connections. His students engage with the local community through projects and assignments that take them far beyond a textbook or classwork.

During his reign as Teacher of the Year, Nathan will serve as a national spokesperson for the language profession; attend all five regional conferences (NECTFL SCOLT, SWCOLT, PNCFL, and CSCTFL), alongside collaborating with JNCL-NCLIS in Washington, DC. Each ACTFL TOY develops a platform to promote throughout their year. His platform is the dire teacher shortage we face here in Pennsylvania and to advocate for more language programs overall. At a time when the need for language skills is in high demand – and yet we have the fewest world language teachers in our state that we have ever had, having one of our veteran teachers representing our profession – and our state – is a powerful opportunity.

As he travels to the various regional conferences throughout the year, he will present sessions at each and will serve as a keynote speaker for some, primarily speaking



*Campbell addresses the ACTFL crowd*

on community engagement and language advocacy. Read more about Nate's experiences in our fall issue!

**Read more about the impact Nate will have as the ACTFL TOY:**

<https://townlively.com/from-classroom-to-national-stage/>

ACTFL Hall of Fame: <https://www.actfl.org/career-development/actfl-awards/teacher-of-the-year-program/hall-of-fame-2026>

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/local-teacher-awarded-national-language-145747025.html>



*Nathan poses with 2023 ACTFL TOY, William Lee (right) and 2024 ACTFL TOY Kei Tsukamaki (left)*

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## Pennsylvania Language Educators Advocate in Washington, D.C. at the annual JNCL-NCLIS Language Advocacy Days: Reflections from the 2026 ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year, Nathan Campbell



Each year, the leaders of JNCL-NCLIS invite world language educators and other partners in language education to convene in Washington, D.C. for the Language Advocacy Days. This year's event was held March 8–10, 2026, at American University. As the 2026 ACTFL Teacher of the Year, I was invited to represent not only the state of Pennsylvania (or as I prefer to call it, the Keystone to Democracy) but also world language educators from across the nation.

Advocates spent the first full day of the event learning about the issues and spending time discussing the challenges currently facing world language education. According to executive director Amanda Seewald, the theme for this year's conference, **From Every State, For Every Student**, "...is a call to ensure that every learner has the opportunity to expand their world. To be heard. To be understood. To find their own voice." The keynote speaker, Carla Dirlikov Canales, launched the event with an

inspiring story of her work, not just as a world-renowned opera singer, but as an advocate for multilingualism and education. Carla's own diverse background has influenced her career and led her to be part of the "Arts Envoy" program by the U.S. Department of State. Carla challenged advocates to consider who our zhiyin is, or the person who understands us so deeply that they can hear our inner voice even amidst the silence. Carla pointed out that "the real gift of language... the real gift of music... [is that] they do not simply teach us how to speak. They teach us how to listen." Her message was a strong reminder to advocates that it is easy to be the one who wants to do all the talking, but that as advocates we need to also remember to listen: listen to those we represent, listen to our communities, and listen to those for whom we are advocating.

After learning from the talented staff of JNCL-NCLIS and receiving the legislative update, advocates from all 50 states separated into their state groups to spend time planning for the legislative meetings that were scheduled for Tuesday. One of the highlights this year was the number of student advocates who participated.

Making up our Pennsylvania delegation were Junko Yamamoto (Slippery Rock), Michael Shaughnessy (AATG), Lucas Campbell (senior at Manheim Central HS), and myself, representing ACTFL and PSMLA.

Our day on the Hill was a busy one, full of important and meaningful conversations with the legislative staff of Senators McCormick and Fetterman, and later Representative Lloyd Smucker. We lobbied for continued support and funding for several important world language programs ([click here](#) to view a list of legislative one-pagers), each of us taking the time to share our own stories of the importance of multilingualism.

ACTFL executive director Larry Paska arranged a meeting with the Assistant Secretary of K–12 Education, Kirsten Baesler, and her counterpart at the State Department. Larry, Lucas, and I had an encouraging conversation about the need for a diverse workforce and the role that language education has in not just preparing well-qualified workers, but workers who can communicate and understand each other



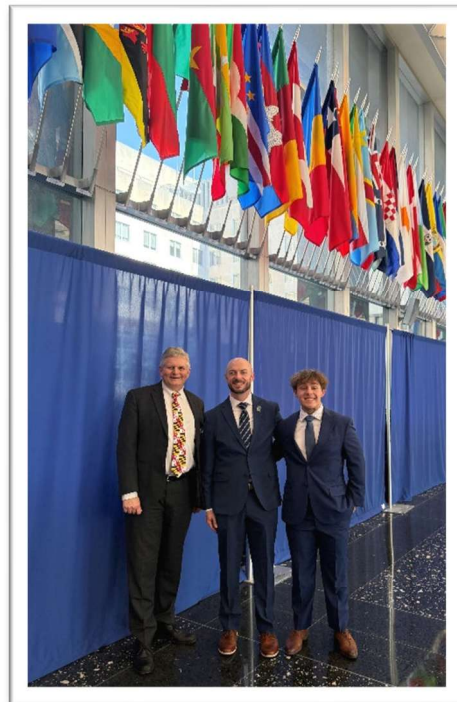
*Our Pennsylvania delegation poses with Senator McCormick outside his office.*

beyond language—that cultural understanding comes from an appreciation of different perspectives.

JNCL-NCLIS hosts both in-person and online Language Advocacy Days. Learn more about how you can be a part of the essential work of advocating for our programs at [JNCL-NCLIS.org](http://JNCL-NCLIS.org).



*Lucas and Nathan Campbell (center) pose with Kirsten Baesler (right) & a senior State Official*



*Larry, Nathan, & Lucas pose in the Hall of Flags at the Department of State.*



## **2025 PSMLA Frank Mulhern Leadership Award: Isabel Espino de Valdivia**

PSMLA proudly honors Isabel Espino de Valdivia as the recipient of the [Frank Mulhern Leadership Award](#), an honor that recognizes exemplary leadership, sustained service, and significant impact on world language education at the state, regional, and national levels. This award is presented to individuals who not only demonstrate outstanding leadership within the profession but also contribute meaningfully to the work of PSMLA and advance the field through service, scholarship, and innovation.

A dedicated PSMLA member for more than 25 years, Isabel exemplifies the spirit and criteria of this award through her longstanding commitment and active engagement. She has served on the Executive Council, chaired both the Nominations and Elections Committee and the Membership Committee, and co-chaired the 2018 PSMLA Fall Conference in Pittsburgh. Her sustained involvement reflects the award’s expectation that recipients maintain active and impactful participation in the organization over time.

Isabel’s professional contributions extend well beyond the state level, aligning with the award’s emphasis on regional and national impact. A native of Trujillo, Peru, she brings 28 years of international teaching experience across Peru, Japan, and the United States. She holds a doctorate from Kobe University in Japan and is a National Board Certified teacher. Her career spans middle school, high school, and college instruction, and she has played a key role in curriculum and assessment development for Japanese and Spanish programs in Pittsburgh Public Schools—work that reflects the kind of leadership and program development the award seeks to recognize.

A multilingual educator fluent in Spanish, Japanese, and Portuguese, Isabel currently teaches Japanese and Spanish at Allderdice High School. She has secured numerous grants to support her programs and has presented frequently at local, state, and national conferences, contributing to professional dialogue and growth in the field. Through her service on professional boards, her conference presentations, and her leadership in curriculum development, she embodies the broad-based contributions and professional excellence that define the Frank Mulhern Leadership Award.

In every aspect of her career, Isabel Espino de Valdivia meets and exceeds the criteria for this distinction, representing the very best of leadership, dedication, and impact in world language education.



Nathan Campbell, PLF Co-editor, (left) and Charlene Bigelow 2025 PSMLA Teacher of the Year (right)

## A conversation with 2025 PSMLA Teacher Of the Year & NECTFL 2026 Teacher of the Year Charlene Bigelow

Educators across Pennsylvania and the United States have been facing some major challenges in recent years, and world language educators have not been exempted. Many districts and universities continue to tackle how to manage reduced funding, budget cuts, and program elimination. PLF Co-editor, Nathan Campbell, caught up with French teacher Charlene Bigelow, our 2025 PSMLA Teacher of the Year, and recently named 2026 NECTFL Teacher of the Year to get her insights on the trends that she is seeing in world language education and how she sees the future of the important work that we do.

**Nathan:** Before we begin, congratulations on your awards –*Félicitations!* You have had one amazing year! First, the 2025 PSMLA Teacher of the Year, now you have been named the 2026 NECTFL Teacher of the Year, and soon you will head to San Antonio as a finalist for the 2027 ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year! I personally know how much work you have invested in your students and classroom to make it to this level. I am excited to work with you and the other finalists as we head to Texas this fall. Now that you have a platform, we'd like to know how you view and take on the many challenges that teachers face. ***It is unfortunately well established that there are a lot of challenges facing educators today. What do you see as the most pressing opportunities or challenges facing World Language education today?***

**Charlene:** First, thank you for this interview and for your support. This has been such an incredible experience so far. And yes, there are a number of challenges but I think that our biggest challenges also happen to be our biggest opportunities. While the numbers of world language teachers and teacher training programs in Pennsylvania have decreased, the need for them has not. In fact, the need for multilingual workers is greater than ever, in more fields than even those of us in the profession may not have considered; those future workers need access to language instruction. That's where I believe our opportunities lie; if we want more investment in world language education, we need to be able to show that there will be a return on that investment! We can connect our languages to various career opportunities for students, whether they pursue post-secondary education or go straight to the workplace.

**Nathan:** That is a great point! Our advocacy needs to showcase how language education adds value. As we consider our classrooms, we know that multilingualism is a superpower. ***In what ways does multilingualism empower students—academically, socially, and beyond the classroom?***

**Charlene:** Multilingualism is a true superpower! Studies show that multilingualism enhances cognitive skills—bilingual brains actually have denser gray matter. For our students, that means better executive functioning, attention spans, and memory. That, of course, leads to higher academic

achievement! Learning another language makes students more aware of the structures of their first language, improving their performance on reading and writing assessments. The cultural competency they gain in our classrooms makes our students more empathetic, flexible, and understanding. It gives them the ability to interact with others around the world socially and professionally—these soft skills are needed in the workplace! No matter what career path they choose, proficiency in another language will open so many doors. And at the other end of the spectrum, multilingual people have less cognitive decline and better memory as they age. So, we are empowering our students for life!

**Nathan:** Absolutely true. And thank goodness for that improved cognition! You have already mentioned the need for more language educators, which is something that we at PSMLA continue to help our members advocate for. ***What does effective professional advocacy look like for World Languages today?***

**Charlene:** I think it begins in the classroom—sharing our personal language journeys with our students and making them aware of the opportunities that proficiency in another language makes available to them. Then we need to share the wonderful things happening in our classes with our administrators, school boards, and communities. Schools and school districts are always looking for positive examples of the work their teachers and students are doing and sharing them with their respective communities. Advocacy also needs to involve reaching out to and partnering with leaders in the fields where our students will find opportunities to use their language skills—business, healthcare, agriculture, etc. Of course, we need to make our voices heard by local, state, and federal government leaders—but the reality is that, frankly, money talks. If we get employers to join us in demonstrating the need for multilingual workers, our message will be amplified. Finally, a big part of professional advocacy is being part of organizations like PSMLA, NECTFL, and ACTFL, and contributing to their advocacy efforts—there is strength in numbers! They also provide resources to help us in our locally based advocacy efforts, so with our membership, we also get a valuable partnership.

**Nathan:** Viewing advocacy as a partnership is a powerful way for our members to not feel that they are alone, great point! We took time to talk about challenges, and we know that education can be a challenging career, ***as a language educator and as a leader, what is one thing that continues to energize you?***

**Charlene:** Hands down, I would have to say professional learning! I absolutely love going to conferences (like PSMLA in November 2026!), listening to podcasts, and reading blogs. Even though I have been in this profession for 3 decades, every year I find new strategies and resources to help level up my teaching practice. I make professional learning time a regular part of my weekly schedule and try to incorporate at least one new idea into my lesson plans each week. We have such amazing colleagues across the state, region, and country who are incredibly generous with their creativity, and I'm grateful that they are willing to share!



Charlene receives her 2026 NECTFL Award in NYC.

**Nathan:** Lifelong learning – I love that response! Not only to we improve our practice by continuing to reflect and improve our practice, but we demonstrate to our own students that learning never ends!  
**Finally, what final message or encouragement would you like to leave with the PSMLA community?**

**Charlene:** First of all, I'd like to say how proud and grateful I am to be part of this community! We have some of the most creative and dedicated educators in the state, in any content area. Being a PSMLA member has given me the opportunity to learn from my world language colleagues, and that has made me a better teacher and world language advocate. I know that many of us face challenging circumstances in our careers, from enrollment to budget, and it is sometimes difficult to find support within our own schools. But there are so many fellow WL educators across the state who are in the same boat. Making connections with them reminds us that we are not alone and gives us the opportunity to share ideas and team up to build a future for our profession together.

**Nathan:** Thank you for that reminder, Charlene! And thank you again for taking the time to sit down with us for this interview. We wish you all the best of luck as you head to Texas this fall. We know that everyone at PSMLA will be cheering you on!

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*Charlene was one of several award recipients to be honored at the 2025 PSMLA Fall Conference. Learn more about PSMLA Teacher and Student Awards programs on the [awards section of the PSMLA website](#).*

## The Roadmap Forward: Advancing Language Proficiency, Programs, and the Profession



**PSMLA Annual Conference**  
**Wyndham Garden State College**  
**November 6-7, 2026**



# Celebrating Culture: International Culture Fest

**Christine Yardley**

**Souderton Area High School**

Born from a vision of two teachers and shaped by the passion of the students, Souderton Area High School held its first International Culture Fest in November 2025. The festival was a celebration of the school's diverse cultures and a learning opportunity for over 300 students.

The International Culture Fest had two parts: short presentations by a panel of students who have lived in other countries and an interactive exposition showcasing 20 different countries and cultures. The event took place during the first 84-minute block of the school day, and the program repeated during the second block. The International Culture Fest offered a unique opportunity for the students to proudly share their culture and teach their peers. This article discusses its genesis, development, and its outsized impact on the school community.

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Business teacher Amanda Davoli and language teacher Christine Yardley developed a strong partnership to bring the International Culture Fest to life. Currently, Christine teaches three Spanish classes as well as three Global Studies courses in the Social Studies department. She has been the World Languages Coordinator since August 2024 and also teaches French when needed. This year Amanda teaches Personal Finance, Business Leadership, Career Exploration, and Essentials of Marketing in the Business department.

Both share a passion for learning about the world and sharing that passion with their students. In addition to incorporating global citizenship lessons into Christine's language and global studies classes, she has organized field trips to the United Nations and the Chinese

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Consulate in New York and has run an International Careers camp for the past four years as part of the school's mentorship program. Amanda serves as the advisor to the Asian Cultures Club as well as FBLA advisor and assistant coach for field hockey.

Over the last two years, each has organized a small international event outside of the school day. When they realized their shared goals, they teamed up to create an event during the school day that had a big impact. Amanda explained, "Christine and I wanted to create a student-led event where students could take pride in showcasing their unique heritages. Souderton is a surprisingly diverse place, and we share the belief that experiencing different cultures through food, art, music, storytelling, travel, language, etc. is powerful and sometimes life changing."

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**"...global competence is not learning about the world, rather it is learning with and from the world."**

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The idea for presentations by students who have lived in other countries came from Erin Austin's book *Going Global in the World Language Classroom: Ideas, Strategies, and Resources for Teaching and Learning With the World*. The foundational concept of Austin's book is that global competence is not learning *about* the

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world, rather it is learning *with* and *from* the world, and the book is a great resource for world language teachers to find ways to help students learn with and from the world. One chapter discusses international student panels and how there is much to learn from the students in schools.

Amanda and Christine met with two of the school's ESL teachers to identify students who had the English skills and the confidence to speak in front of more than 150 people at a time. In the end, five students volunteered to speak. They represented Nicaragua, Guatemala, Haiti, Egypt and South Korea. The students worked with an assigned teacher to develop their slides, and they rehearsed after school before the event. All the students displayed pride as they spoke about the country that they love. Following the presentations, the students received an outpouring of positive recognition from peers and faculty. Afterwards, one of the student presenters shared that she felt like a

superstar and that after presenting she felt that she could do anything.



*Students designed presentations to represent their country.*

The exposition part of the event was held in the library and was modeled after similar events in two high schools where Amanda used to teach as well as a nearby community international festival held each spring on a Saturday. "It was very important to us to have the event during the school day because we wanted to reach the students who would not choose to attend an international festival outside of school hours," said Yardley. Interested students volunteered to create a table about a country/culture that included a trifold with pictures and facts as well as artifacts from the country such as clothing, money, flags and household items. Most Spring 2026

students had a personal connection to the country they presented, but that was not a requirement. Cultural hosts also had to prepare an interactive activity for the students in attendance. Most tables had food for attendees to sample, and many had other activities like games, instruments or learning words in the country's language. Many students dressed in their country's colors, a national team jersey or traditional clothes. The event provided a platform for many of our English learners and heritage speakers a chance to shine and a platform to share their love of their culture. The joy and passion of these students was evident in the way they spoke and the booths that they prepared.

High school students attended the festival with teachers who signed up in advance. There was a lot of demand to attend, and unfortunately, not all classes could go to the event. Yardley and Davoli wanted to keep the festival small because it was the first time running it, and a small event has a better chance of success. During each block, approximately 160 students came to the International Culture Fest. A student moderator kept the audience engaged by asking a few questions after each speaker. Those who answered earned a globe stress ball, and that encouraged more students to participate. When the attendees moved to the library from the large group instruction room, each student

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received a beautiful passport designed by one of the student committees. As the participants traveled through the room, they collected a stamp from each table that they visited. At the end of the festival, students deposited their passports for a chance to win a prize.

Planning for the event began in August when Davoli and Yardley created an outline of what the International Culture Fest would include and a timeline for making it happen. Student meetings began in September, and students met every two weeks during Red Zone, Souderton's morning activity time before classes begin. The students were divided into committees and worked on various aspects to prepare for the event, and many in the leadership team also hosted a booth. A grant from the Indian Valley Education Foundation, the non-profit organization that supports public education in Souderton Area School District, provided \$1500 that allowed the group to purchase maps, flags, and supplies for the festival as well as provided money for students to buy ingredients to make food. The week leading up to the event was very busy with students gathering each morning to finish tri-folds and prepare for the event. The group set up the event during two afternoons after school.

The International Culture Fest generated excitement, enthusiasm, and positive energy  
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around the student leadership team, presenters, and cultural hosts. The high school principal remarked that it was one of the best curricular extension-learning events that he had seen at the high school.

Students were the creators and focus of the event, and each individual or group designed their own display. Even though they had set

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**"...it was one of the best curricular extension-learning events that he had seen at the high school."**

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deadlines for earlier in the week, some of the work happened in the final hours before the event. Relying entirely on students to make an event work requires a lot of coordination, communication and trust, and the outcome is very powerful. The event was a huge success because it was created by students for students. However, the event would not have been the same without a strong teacher partnership. Yardley reflected that, "When I looked outside of the box, I found someone who was not in the World Languages department yet whose passion and energy for an international learning event matched mine and whose skills complemented mine. Together we created the framework that allowed our students to thrive, teach others, and ultimately learn with the world."



# ¡Buen viaje!: Creating an Immersive Flight Simulation Lesson

Nicholas Frank

Hershey High School

I'm very lucky to work in a district that allows us to get creative with curriculum and where I have many colleagues who are willing to indulge my grandiose ideas. While there are trace remnants of a long-past textbook in the bones of our curriculum, we have been provided the freedom and opportunity to adapt and build the curriculum as we wish to try new things and better serve our students. I like to call our Spanish 3 curriculum *Survival Spanish*. We practice tasks that students are most likely to experience if they are to travel abroad.

This year, as we transitioned from one unit about hotels and airports into the next about navigating the city, namely Madrid, I wanted to

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try something different. Taking inspiration from fellow teachers that have done similar activities like [Señora Chase](#) (2018) and [Early Learning Ideas](#) (2025), I created a flight simulation!

To begin, I designated the hallway outside of my classroom as airport security, including a check-in desk, a baggage scanner, and a metal detector. Students had to navigate that step before going to their *gate* and boarding the *plane*, or rather, taking their pre-selected seats in the rearranged classroom. Desks were positioned around the perimeter of the seating area to establish the walls of the plane, and seats were arranged in trios on either side of an aisle to replicate a typical airplane seating

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arrangement. We provided in-flight snacks and entertainment, and at the conclusion of the flight, students were given a customs document to complete before disembarking to their destination, Madrid!



*Classroom setup simulating interior of plane.*

Collaboration from several staff and colleagues was essential to execute this activity effectively. The principal, the director of safe schools, fellow teachers in the hallway, and even the band director all assisted in carrying out my vision. To do this well, I spent several weeks planning and organizing exactly how everything would work and look; and, in the end, it was worth it for interpretive and interpersonal practice, and the application of real-life skills.

### **Preparation & Materials**

If you are interested in replicating this flight simulation experience with your students, the first step is to acquire any necessary permissions. Due to the physical scale of the project in the hallway and the security elements, Spring 2026

my first contact was with our director of safe schools. He gave me conditional permission if our building principal approved it. The other (perhaps greater) reason that I went to him first was to borrow his metal detector wand to amplify the security effect. Next, secure approval from your principal. Ours was quickly on board with the plan but requested that I make the purpose and goal of the activity very clear to students in advance. Understandably, she wanted to avoid any feeling that they were being targeted or searched for real. Knowing that I could not perform all the roles in the simulated airport myself, I requested from my colleagues who teach more advanced Spanish classes if they would permit some of their advanced students to assist me. I received such a positive response that I had over a dozen students across the three periods to help – excitingly, some of whom were previous students of mine. Having that extra support was essential. If you have colleagues available to assist you during the simulation, it may be even better and may even lead to cross-curricular collaboration. Lastly, I asked our band director to lend us stanchions (the standing pillars with built-in belts) to establish the formation of lines and fully create the space that would physically guide students through the simulation. While these pillars are not a necessity, they are one of the elements that really help to elevate the experience.

Next is the preparation of the students. In the lessons leading up to this simulation I recommend discussing personal topics like:

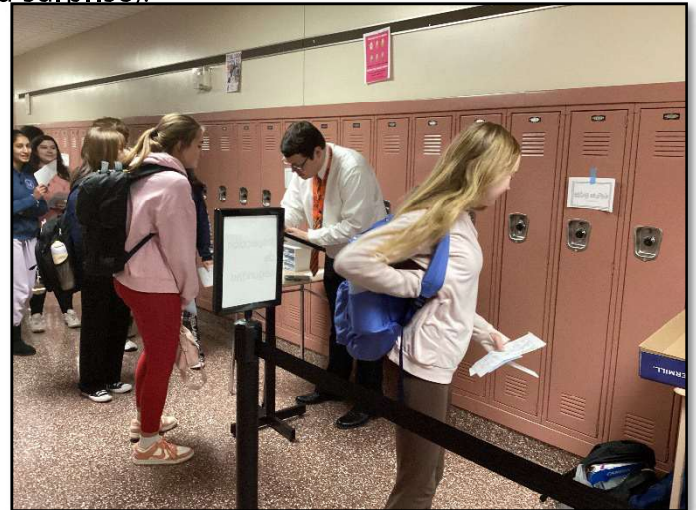
- What are ways that people get around? How do you get to school, work, church, a relative's house? Have you ever traveled long distance before? How?
- Have you ever flown before? What is the longest flight you've been on? Whether you have flown before or not, would you prefer the window, middle, or aisle seat? Would you rather sit next to a loud baby or a chatty stranger? Have you had any bad flight experiences?

These topics provide a great hook while also providing feedback about the extent of students' travel experiences. I work in a relatively affluent region where nearly all students have flown before, with many also having traveled outside of the country. It was helpful information to know who had never flown before. With this base knowledge, you can begin developing more technical conversation, such as:

- What are the steps to follow when going through the airport? What items do you need to fly (ticket, boarding pass, passport)? What items are permitted on a plane? What is banned? What do customs officials look for when you arrive in a new country? Students who have never flown before may not know. Others

may have flown domestically but have never flown internationally and may be less familiar with passing through passport control and customs.

The day before the experience, give students their flight [confirmation tickets](#). I displayed a seating chart of an empty plane and allowed students to select their own seats, and students filled in their tickets with their names and seats to keep until the following day. I gave them some background for what to expect in the experience and that it is solely for immersion and language practice, as per my principal's request (otherwise I usually love a surprise).



*Frank checks boarding passes.*

The aspect that may seem the most daunting is preparing the physical space. Here is what I gathered and set up the day prior and the morning of:

- Stanchions - Those standing belts that guide people through security (*Did you know the name for them? I definitely*

*didn't!*). I used the stanchions to establish the security perimeter in the hallway to my room. Check with your band director or auditorium manager, they may be able to provide them.

- Podium - This is for the ticket agent to check in students. They should come with their tickets ready, and they will receive their boarding passes.
- X-ray machine - For this I took 3 student desks and put them side-by-side to create a long *belt* and then stacked one more desk on top to create the baggage scanner machine. I enclosed it using cardboard and placed an iPad on top looping [this video](#) from Heathrow Airport for additional effect. *It was surprisingly hard to find a video that showed baggage x-rays!* I also used cardboard storage box lids as the bins for bags. You could maybe even borrow a few trays from the cafeteria.
- Security scanner – to replicate the body scanner, on a poster I drew a figure with arms up and legs spread similar to the design of the metal detector chambers, I even placed an X on the ground in tape to clarify where to stand.
- Classroom - The room was set up with desks outlining what would be the walls of the plane. An aisle space was established in the middle, and 4 rows of

3 seats were set up on each side to replicate the plane setup. I found a rolling cart in our planning room and used that to serve snacks during the flight.



*Students pass through security.*

Converting the physical space was key to making this an effective activity and increasing engagement in role-play flight. However, to make it even more immersive, there are other details you could incorporate. Other materials that you might consider are:

- [Confirmation tickets](#) with spaces for their names and seat numbers
- [Boarding passes](#) with spaces for their names and seat numbers (*or, if you are really on top of it, you can personalize them digitally in advance to make them seem even more real*)
- [Customs forms](#) for after the flight
- Lanyards for student helpers with [helpful phrases](#) on the back
- An in-flight entertainment video about Madrid and an activity to go with it.

- An in-flight snack (I bought pretzels from Sam's Club) with napkins. You could serve drinks too.
- Paper passports

### **Observations from the Experience**

When the day came and I facilitated the activity, it was very well received. I had one student assist me as a photographer to document the experience, and several images even ended up on our [district social media page](#). This was a great way to promote what we do in our programs and advocate for world language education.

We did have some challenges that I will consider for next time. Our school runs on a 10-period schedule, so each class is 42 minutes, but we did this activity on a day with a 2-hour delay schedule, which shortened that period even more to 30 minutes. I would have preferred to have more time for the activity because I ended up having to completely cut the customs document part at the end, which felt like a wasted opportunity for those that have never traveled abroad. I did at least stamp passports!

Additionally, I used a Rick Steves' video titled "Majesty of Madrid," available on YouTube. It is a great video but not acquisition driven as it is only available in English. I've been on the lookout for a different video for the future.

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Furthermore, I ran out of time to prepare a flight safety demonstration or find a video for it. It is a quintessential part of the flying experience, and some airlines out there have created fun videos that break from the dry presentation that you typically get.

The biggest area for improvement is the preparation of the student assistants for the activity. As much as I appreciated these helpers because I could NOT have handled it all myself, I wasn't able to give them enough explanation of my intentions and expectations for the task and they took things in their own direction, at times rushing students through security as fast as possible. I recognize that airports do feel that way sometimes, but it took away from the intended language exchange. Even though I gave them helpful phrases on their lanyards, many ended up defaulting to English in some of their communication too, which broke a dimension of the experience.

Overall, I was pleased with how it went and the positive feedback from students, colleagues, and community members strengthened my resolve to continue improving this activity. For future implementation I would develop clearer guidelines about what I want in the way of input for my students and what output I would expect from my assistants to create a realistic, communicative interaction. Also, I had a few first

time flyers this year and I would love to provide them with the special wing pins that are often gifted to children on their first flight.

My hope is that this activity becomes a new tradition in our curriculum because it contextualizes learning while keeping it meaningful, joyful, and maybe even a little silly. I hope that you consider trying something similar, and if you do, ¡buen viaje!



*Student helpers pose with their lanyards.*

## Checklist for Flight Simulation

### Beforehand:

- Discuss airports and related vocabulary or phrases.
- Discuss the steps of going through the airport.
- Prepare, print, and cut physical materials like the confirmation tickets, the boarding passes, the customs forms, etc.
- Communicate with admin about your plans.

- Collect materials for building out the experience, like cardboard, bins, etc.
- Pick up any in-flight snacks you plan to offer.

### Day Before:

- Send a courtesy email to colleagues in the same hallway anytime you do an activity that takes students outside the classroom.
- Hand out the confirmation tickets. Give students a chance to choose their seats and fill out their tickets. They should keep their tickets and bring them back the following day. If you use passports, you could also distribute those in advance.
- If available, collect the stanchions and have them near your room for ease the next day.
- Prepare any other materials or props, like a sign for the metal detector scanner, find a podium, a rolling cart for snacks, etc.
- If you decide to invite older students to help with the experience, prepare their lanyards and try to meet with them to explain their roles.

### Day of Activity:

- In the morning, set up your experience. I would start with the desks for the baggage scanner. From there you can determine how much space you need to

reserve with the stanchions. Be sure to leave enough room in the hall for other students to make their way through. Set up the metal detecting station right after the baggage scanner so they can grab their bags and go right in after they are done. Set up the podium at the start of the experience and keep your boarding passes with it.

- Inside the classroom, set up your desks and chairs. Prepare your videos for easy access.
- If using student helpers, give them their [lanyards with helpful phrases](#) and show them to their places. I recommend you be at the podium to maximize the questions you could ask students. Other roles, like security and flight attendants, tend to have a repetitive script.
- As students file in, ask questions about their destination, airline, seat number, or other flight information. Then exchange the [ticket confirmation](#) for a [boarding pass](#) and send them through.
- When everyone has passed through and been seated, start the flight with a video or presentation for safety protocols (bonus points for having props to go with it), and then start the in-flight entertainment. Pass out snacks while engaging in the target language.

- Near the end of the flight, provide the [customs forms](#) and provide guidance on how to complete it. Collect them, stamp passports, and send them on their way to their new destination!

#### Reference Resources:

- <https://spanishintheusa.wordpress.com/2014/01/27/entrar-como-turista-documentos-a-bordo/>
- <https://senorachase.com/2018/05/25/lets-fly-a-flight-simulation/#:~:text=Boarding:%20Right%20as%20the%20bell,phones%20are%20not%20permitted%2C%20etc.>
- <https://earlylearningideas.com/dramatic-play-airport/>

#### Activity Resources:

- Customs Document  
[https://www.canva.com/design/DAG68QxVRQk/f7hEoJ462j10EMub3pleZw/edit?utm\\_content=DAG68QxVRQk&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link2&utm\\_source=sharebutton](https://www.canva.com/design/DAG68QxVRQk/f7hEoJ462j10EMub3pleZw/edit?utm_content=DAG68QxVRQk&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton)
- Student Assistant Role Scripts  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LGiwsORgxrz00dgdFY6j-PXis61s0-uPIVzqyFh48I/edit?tab=t.0>
- Boarding Pass Template  
[https://www.canva.com/design/DAG5VJRpt\\_w/kZILeU8S8EP9QC2v6T\\_wpw/edit?utm\\_content=DAG5VJRpt\\_w&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link2&utm\\_source=sharebutton](https://www.canva.com/design/DAG5VJRpt_w/kZILeU8S8EP9QC2v6T_wpw/edit?utm_content=DAG5VJRpt_w&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton)
- Ticket Confirmation Template  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tJpswuv9f\\_fTdOjHgf4VyoVCjpF0LII-/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tJpswuv9f_fTdOjHgf4VyoVCjpF0LII-/edit)

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