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CHINESE AS "SPECIES" IN THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL: AN  
ORGANIZATIONAL CASE STUDY

A Dissertation in  
Educational Leadership

by

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## ABSTRACT

The importance of including Chinese language instruction in American schools has attracted much attention and discussion in recent years. Given the interest attached to Chinese learning, researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and parents have expressed concerns over its slow adoption. Drawing upon language planning, language ecology, and open systems theory, this study examines school district organizational and environmental factors that promote or impede the “migration” of a “species” (Chinese foreign language instruction) into a new “habitat” (the American high school curriculum).

After offering a tentative framework suggesting how the environment works to influence language planning in school organizations, a case study of one district’s efforts to implement a high school Chinese program is examined. The findings reveal a decision process more complex than the linear, rational process predicted by the tentative framework. To capture and describe its complexity, three analytic lenses were applied: structural, institutional, and political. While each lens contributed to understanding, political factors appeared to play the key role, in the form of conflict between two school board coalitions.

In terms of policy implication, the case study suggests that in the habitat of American high schools, Chinese is a fragile species outside of its primary range (i.e., large urban and west coast school districts). For this reason, the expansion of Chinese foreign language programs into the American high school “heartland” may require strong leadership and federal and state support.

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## **Chapter One: Warrant for the Study**

### **Orientation**

The idea for this study grew out of what might seem to be a simple question. Why is English language teaching and learning expanding rapidly in China while Mandarin Chinese learning and teaching appear to be languishing in the U.S.? Posing this question to a number of my fellow graduate students, several replied with words to the effect of, “It’s just common sense!” In talking further, it appeared that this remark meant a number of different things. Some suggested that Chinese was too difficult for most Americans or that there was much more payoff for a Chinese person to learn English than for an American to learn Mandarin. One friend commented that Americans, especially American high school students, have never been very interested in learning any foreign language, especially one outside the “big four” ( French, German, Latin, or Spanish) traditionally considered to be most useful for future success in school or work or at home or abroad.

Still, I wondered, Mandarin Chinese is offered in many American public high schools, and for those students who would study a foreign language, why would it not seem to be an attractive language to learn? Grappling with this question, I considered that Spanish is attractive because of the vast numbers of people who speak it in North and South America. Latin rests on its reputation as being the mother of western languages and the language of scholars. But French has lost much of its glimmer and usefulness as an “international language” and, along with German, seems mostly useful only to those who wish to someday travel to France or Germany or to read great works in these original

languages. Mandarin Chinese, on the other hand, is spoken by over one billion people worldwide and the cultural and economic links between China and America have grown to a point where Mandarin teaching and learning may represent a path to future occupational well-being, if not improved international understanding. These, of course, were just my own ideas, but they prompted me to study further the social and organizational factors that might either encourage or inhibit the expansion of Mandarin Language programs in American high schools. This study seemed even more relevant and interesting given the fact that a local school district had in the recent past started, but then failed to fund, a Mandarin foreign language program in its high school.

### **Background**

Though it may be unlikely to see “Chinese fever” spreading across the U.S. anytime in the near future, a current of interest does exist in America, as evidenced by the growth of Mandarin foreign language instruction in public high schools starting in the 1990s. After an early surge, however, the growth has slowed substantially or even stopped completely in some areas of the U.S. Interestingly, at the same time, the expansion of English in China shows no signs of letting up. Over the past twenty years, “English fever” has begun to flourish within the Peoples Republic of China. For example, as of 2008, approximately ten million Chinese citizens spoke English as a second language and, as reported in the British newsmagazine *The Economist* (2006), approximately nearly 300 million were studying it. Children in kindergarten and first grade in major cities of China are studying English, and alongside mathematics and Chinese is one of three core subjects anchoring the curriculum of 80 million secondary

school pupils. English language competence represents a means of access to higher education, and even in isolated rural communities parents understand its importance to their children's social mobility. In addition to public education, at the end of 2005, 15 million children between the ages of five and 14 (about 8% of the total number) were learning English in private schools (Straits Times 2007).

In contrast, while China emerges as an influential global actor and Mandarin emerges as a world language, efforts to introduce Mandarin as a foreign language option in American public schools have had only limited success. Though the U.K. Guardian (2006) reported that 2,400 surveyed U.S. high schools would consider offering Mandarin, few high schools were actually doing. The same Guardian article also reported that approximately 50,000 American schoolchildren were studying Mandarin in their public school, with the same number doing so via private means. Nevertheless, as of 2008, the percentage of American students studying Chinese was just 3% and 4% at the elementary and secondary level, respectively. Perhaps encouraging is the fact that this represents a 300 to 400 percent increase over ten years and that approximately five-percent of American high schools were offering Mandarin courses (Rhodes and Pufahl, 2009).

My own recent informal survey found that just twelve of 30 American school districts serving areas around major universities (districts that might be most influenced by demand for foreign language instruction) currently offered high school courses in Mandarin (see Table 1). The districts that did so tended to serve larger cities and/or be located in the west and southwest U.S. In particular, as previously mentioned, one local area school district attempted to offer high school Mandarin in the 2009 school year, but then dropped the program, ostensibly for fiscal reasons. Thus, despite some regional and

demographic variation, it would appear that French, German, Latin, and Spanish – “the big four” – tend to be the only foreign language options for most American high school students. For a range of reasons (to be explored in this study), while English instruction thrives in China’s schools, Mandarin faces great difficulty in penetrating American high school foreign language programs.

[Table 1 Here]

### **Purpose of the Study**

To summarize, Mandarin Chinese is increasingly viewed as the next global “lingua franca,” a “world language” highly useful in international economic, political, and cultural exchange (Ding, Sheng, & Saunders, 2006). A number of reasons exist for this including China’s increasing political openness and growth as a world economic and cultural power (Hu, 2010). The number of Chinese citizens visiting or emigrating to the United States and the number of American citizens traveling to China for work or pleasure has also increased in recent years. The extent of these exchanges between the U.S. and China may have had an impact on American educational systems, for in recent years, numerous school districts around the U.S. have implemented or considered the possibility of including foreign language instruction in Mandarin Chinese as a curricular option in their secondary schools.

At the same time, Mandarin Chinese foreign language programs have not spread throughout American high schools to the extent one would expect given the growth and emergence of China’s cultural, political, and economic influence on the world stage and given Mandarin’s potential as a tool for individual and national economic development. Offering more opportunity for American high school students to study Mandarin Chinese

would seem to be a good means of preparing them for future work, understanding, and social interaction in the global environment.

Yet, school district decisions regarding which classes can be offered and the allotment of resources to those classes are continually shaped and reshaped by many environmental factors; social, political, economic, structural-legal, pedagogical, and perhaps others. Moreover, whether or not a district “decides” to offer Mandarin is not likely simply the result of a single “decision” made by district officials, but also in part the result of a series of actions and decisions made by numerous individuals over a long period of time. For example, the establishment of a private Chinese “Saturday school” or “world language” public charter school may help create a friendly environment for further district level discussion or action. However, even after a school organization makes several decisions appearing to lead to the offering of Mandarin, ongoing and emerging environmental influences may prompt decisions and actions that inhibit its growth and success within the curriculum.

Attempting to shed light on this problem, the purpose of this dissertation study is to understand how characteristics of a school district’s organizational environment influence, promote, or impede decisions related to the offering of high school Mandarin Chinese courses. The study will have a theoretical and empirical purpose. First, based on a combination of open systems theory, language ecology theory (Haugen, 1972), and language planning theory (Cooper, 1996), the study will propose a framework to understand the puzzle of Mandarin language instruction in U.S. high schools. More specifically, the framework will assist in identifying ecological characteristics (i.e., the characteristics within and surrounding the organizational environments of school districts)

that work to either advance or inhibit the adoption of Mandarin programs. Second, this proposed model will be tested against a case study to understand and explain the adoption and later cancelation of a Mandarin language program in a high school serving students living in the vicinity of a major university.

As it turned out, based on the data gathered and analyzed, this initial model (to be presented in chapter two) required further revision. These revisions, along with their implications for policy and further research, will be discussed in chapter five. Overall, the importance of this study lies in providing school researchers, leaders, and policy makers with a framework for understanding the difficulties and opportunities associated with efforts to introduce foreign language instruction in U.S. high schools.

## **Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This section introduces the various theoretical components useful for understanding why some schools offer Mandarin as a foreign language option and why others do not. In particular, this section presents key theories for understanding the advancement of Mandarin within American high schools and the decision processes that promote or impede this advancement. In particular, the discussion focuses on the open systems, language ecology, and language planning perspectives.

Before moving to these concepts, however, I searched for literature or theory related to the problem of adopting entirely new types of courses into a school or district curriculum. Snyder, Bolin, and Zumwalt's (1992) review of curricular implementation theory, while not exactly on target, did provide a starting point. These researchers suggest that curricular change has been viewed across three different perspectives. The "fidelity" view assumes a "rational, systematic, linear change process" (p. 429) driven by formal goals, procedures, and evaluations of effectiveness. From a "mutual adaptation" perspective, however, the change process is viewed as more unpredictable and non-linear and driven more by the needs of "consumers," i.e. teachers and students. From the "enactment" perspective, change is "a process of growth for teachers and students—a change in thinking and practice—rather than an organizational procedure for design and implementation" (p. 429).

On first glance, in terms of whether or how schools and districts adopt a new foreign language program, such as Mandarin Chinese, the first and last of these perspectives seem particularly salient. Specifically, it is one thing to "decide" that

Mandarin shall be taught at certain grade levels, at certain times, and by certain teachers. But it is quite another to create what these authors call a “genuine reconstruction” of the way teachers, students, and other stakeholders think and feel about Mandarin. For example, does it become viewed as a natural part of the school curriculum? Would ending the program cause great concern in the hearts and minds of school members, the same way that might occur if Latin, French, or art were dropped? On second glance, however, the mutual adaptation view may be more salient in circumstances where curricular initiatives become contested among decision makers for various political, economic, or other reasons.

This suggests that in practical terms, a school or district’s decision to adopt a Mandarin program is typically not a “yes-no” proposition or one that necessarily starts or ends at the formal levels of the school organization. The process of “deciding” may start at the grass roots level and may continue at different levels for months or even years after the courses have actually been established. The theoretical perspectives presented in the following sections help us understand decision making processes that unfold as members or clients of an organization come to realize that a choice or a change is possible and begin taking steps toward action (Miller, Hickson, and Wilson, 1996).

### ***Open Systems Framework***

Though there are numerous descriptive and normative models of decision making, this study began with an assumption that decision processes regarding the addition of Mandarin to the high school curriculum are generally “coherent.” That is to say they tend to be linear, incremental, rational, and related to the overall goals of the organization



(Miller, Hickson, & Wilson, 1996; Cyert and March, 1963). At the same time, it is also assumed that such “rational” decision processes are influenced and often knocked off track by factors such as internal or external politics, social attitudes, the individual needs of organizational actors, or the scarcity of essential resources. The approach described here fits well with the open systems perspective of organizational behavior; that is, the idea that beyond being “goal oriented,” schools and school districts are at every vertical and horizontal level greatly influenced by environmental factors, many of which contrast or compete with one another and which may not always be in alignment with formal goals (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, & Usdan, 1990). Such environmental influence is not only expected to have significant impact on formal and informal decisions made at various locations within the organization, but may also work to substantially alter or redirect organizational policies and goals. As it turned out, this was certainly what occurred in the present case study.

In the case of Chinese foreign language programs, environmental characteristics might have different impact at different organizational levels. For example, school board members may see public demand for Chinese programs as a positive opportunity, while French, Latin, or German teachers may see it as a threat. Environmental factors may also influence a school directly or indirectly. The Chinese Language Council International (a government agency of the People’s Republic of China), for instance, has been very active in supporting Mandarin language programs in U.S. public schools and universities. Though such activity may directly and positively influence some school officials, it may create suspicion among community stakeholders over the use of “soft power” by the PRC and its Communist Party (Starr, 2009), thus creating an indirect negative effect on the

adoption of Chinese foreign language programs in schools. In the present case, it seems clear that a variety of opinions were in play. At the school board level, however, conflict gradually emerged (both related to and unrelated to Chinese) that significantly influenced decision making.

### ***Language Ecology***

Somewhat related to the open systems idea is the idea of language ecology. Several researchers over the years have used an ecological or “species” metaphor to help understand the spread of “foreign” languages within particular social or geographic domains (e.g., Haugen, 1972). Hornberger (2003), for example, noted how languages, “like living species, evolve, grow, change, live, and die in relation to other languages and...to their environment” (p. 320). Examples of the metaphor are found in the demographic, social-psychological, and political factors that work to favor one form of language or dialect over another. Demographic factors might include the common language or dialect being spoken across a geographic region and its competition with other languages and dialects spoken by immigrants or members of different socio-economic classes. Social-psychological factors might include the individuals’ positive or negative status perceptions of certain forms of speech and language and of those who use them. Politically, those in power help determine the use and growth of language in ways such as determining an “official” language for public interaction.

Though the metaphor is imperfect – “language is not organic” (Edwards, 2008) – it is useful for understanding, categorizing, overcoming, or utilizing characteristics that promote or inhibit language expansion within a given habitat. Typically, the language

ecology or “language as species” framework has been used to examine the use, spread, and acceptance of new languages across physical habitats such as societies and geographic regions. Although we can think of Mandarin Chinese as migrating across various locales within the United States (as it has for over 100 years, for example, in large cities and areas near the Pacific coast), the focus of this proposed study is to view the potential “habitat” for Mandarin as being the formally organized system of U.S. public schooling at the high school level; a habitat that includes structures, actors, and decisions at both the school and district level, and which ultimately results in the establishment of formal curricular policies – specifically, those related to foreign language education. And, along lines similar to open systems theory, the use, spread, and acceptance of Mandarin within this habitat is expected to be significantly influenced by “ecological” features within the school organizational environment.

While not wanting to push the species metaphor too far, we can think of Mandarin Chinese as a species that seeks to migrate across the public high school habitat. To be successful, it requires a “food supply” (people willing to speak it, learn it, and teach it to others; adequate fiscal resources to promote such activity), a sustainable “physical range” (locations, structures, and institutions where speaking, learning, and teaching can occur), and an absence of natural “enemies” or competitors (e.g., officials, individuals, or groups who perceive the language as unnecessary or objectionable; other languages using up scarce vital resources). Overall, the “needs” of the language must not be so complex so as to limit its appeal or adaptability within an expanding environment (e.g., is it practical, not too difficult to study and learn, etc.).

### *Language Planning Theory*

Language planning theory focuses on the formal processes and decisions related to the promotion and legitimization of a language within a society or nation, typically as carried out by formal officials. Though research applying this theory to organizations appears scarce, it seems reasonable to apply the theory to organizational processes and decisions; in this case, those occurring within school districts related to foreign language education programs. Cooper (1996), Wang (2007), and others have identified three key stages of the language planning process. Though the stages may in reality not be completely linear, Cooper and Wang refer to the process as consisting of “status,” “corpus,” and “acquisition” planning. Status planning issues concern how a language is initially viewed, encouraged, or restricted within an environment. In particular status planning concerns decisions as to whether or not a language will be “allowed”; that is, the conditions under which it shall be spoken, taught, or learned. In the case of public schools, status planning decisions would revolve around whether or not, or the conditions under which, a particular language program could or would be established within the curriculum.

Once status planning questions have been answered positively, corpus planning issues concern the form of the language to be taught. With Chinese, this is an important consideration. Even after a decision is made to teach Mandarin (as opposed to, for example, Cantonese), the question remains as to whether the school should teach traditional (Taiwan) or simplified (“Mainland”) Chinese characters, pronunciations, vocabulary, and systems of Romanization. On one hand, as will become evident in a later section, this decision is often complex and may actually act as an inhibitor of Mandarin

migration into American public high schools. On the other hand, however, schools may opt for one version or the other based on simple resource availability (e.g., the types of teachers and textbooks available; which country is willing to provide resources).

Acquisition planning issues concern maintaining a supportive infrastructure for the spread or “survival” of the new language: making the habitat more hospitable; expanding the institutions, resources, and customers the language needs to thrive and expand. For example, one of the problems facing potential Mandarin programs in American high schools is the relative lack of qualified (let alone certified) individuals willing to pursue a teaching career. Another might be the lack of Mandarin teacher training programs, suitable textbooks, or even a steady stream of students willing to study the language. Another important issue, however, concerns how decision makers perceive these factors. For example, are they knowledgeable regarding available resources or existing regulations that may facilitate the development of infrastructure? The present case raises some concerns in this area.

Thus, when we think of foreign language curricular expansion into the high school setting, we can envision how environmental factors might work to promote or inhibit this expansion. In other words, the establishment and survival of a foreign language, such as Mandarin Chinese, within a school’s curriculum is a function not only of a rational, goal-oriented decision making process, but also of various environmental influences, which may or may not be entirely “rational” and which may interact or conflict in complex ways. We shall return to this discussion in a later section.

## **Historic Context and Recent Trends in Foreign Language Education in American Schools**

Language educators tend to distinguish three types of “foreign” language learning and teaching. Perhaps the most frequent and widely distributed of these, both historically and geographically, is what’s known as “second language learning,” which is said to occur when learners “must reach a high degree of fluency in a second language in order to be able to live for an extended period of time and conduct business in a region where that language is spoken” (Shaver, 2009, p. 351). Examples of such learning abound, ranging from the early U.S. colonial period to modern day China, and numerous points around and in between (the Chinese migration to the U.S. in the late 1800s). Second language instruction may be informal (people learning the second language on their own via interaction with others who speak it) or formal (people enrolling in schools of various kinds for more regularized instruction). A second type of language learning, “bilingual education”, occurs primarily in elementary and secondary schools and is intended to either assist in a student’s acquisition of a second language or, typically, to help the student maintain competence in his or her native language.

The third type of language learning, and the one on which this study focuses, is referred to as “foreign language learning”. Its goal is to acquire skills needed for communicating with speakers (or writers) of a “target language” who typically reside outside the learner’s native region. Foreign language instruction is typically assumed to occur in formal classrooms (Shaver, 2009). As indicated earlier, the foreign languages typically taught in American schools are French, German, Latin, and Spanish, although other languages, both currently and historically, have been included in American high

schools. For example, Greek was often taught in American secondary schools prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time when very few young people went beyond the early primary grades. For those students attending secondary school or the academy in earlier centuries, languages like Greek or Latin were learned “for their own sake,” and assumed to constitute what it meant to be a well-educated person (Oliva, 1969). Gradually, such languages also became viewed as a means of further learning, a door to the great written works of earlier times. Only relatively recently (perhaps over the last 100 years), however, has foreign language learning become viewed in “practical terms,” either for individuals (who might travel abroad) or for nations (who might depend on foreign language speakers for purposes of diplomacy or defense) (Osborn, 2006).

Although high school attendance and graduation rates were relatively low in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (no more than 30 and 20 percent, respectively, by 1922 [Goldin, 1999]), 36 percent of American high school students were enrolled in foreign language courses in 1915 (Boyer, 1983). Since that time, the percentage of foreign language course taking fell to 21 percent in 1948, but then gradually rose to 44 percent in 2000 (NCES, 2009). A great drop in foreign language course taking occurred in the years after World War One. In terms of specific languages, for example, while 25 percent of high school students took German in 1915, the percentage dropped to less than one percent in 1922. Though this drop may have been related to Americans’ post-war distrust of “all things German,” Latin also suffered a 50 percent drop in enrollment from 1910 to 1922 (Angus & Mirel, 1999). In the years after World War One, in fact, Ohio, Nebraska, and Iowa passed laws prohibiting the teaching of languages other than English prior to the eighth grade (laws that were struck down in 1923 by the U.S. Supreme Court)

(Szecsy, 2008). By 1957, only 44 percent of all U.S. high schools offered foreign language courses. Triggered to some extent by “Sputnik,” and by various national reports and recommendations, this rose to 64 percent by 1965 (Oliva, 1969).

The up and down pattern of foreign language course taking in U.S. high schools thus suggests an enigma confronting advocates of foreign language teaching and learning. Though American citizens often have foreign roots and interests and tend to believe that foreign language learning is a good idea for their children (Eddy, 1979), a general malaise or even reluctance exists toward fully pursuing, emphasizing, or requiring foreign language learning in their schools. While the “big four” languages have become institutionalized in American high school curriculum over the past century, they’ve struggled to do so and a number of researchers have discussed the social and political factors associated with resistance to foreign language teaching in the U.S. (see, for example, Krug, 1969; Boyer, 1983; Angus and Mirel, 1999; and Szecsy, 2008).

An additional factor that may inhibit the maintenance or growth of high school foreign language programs is the recent tendency for schools to channel more of their fiscal resources on “mainstream” subjects like math, English, and science, the subjects in which students are most likely to be tested in state assessments. For instance, the percentage of American high schools offering foreign language courses dropped from 95 to 91 percent from 1997 to 2008 (Rhodes and Pufahl, 2009). Moreover, these seemingly high figures are partially driven by the great popularity of Spanish courses. For example, while 93 percent of U.S. secondary schools (including middle and junior high schools) offered Spanish in 2008, just 46 percent offered French (down from 64 percent in 1997),



14 percent offered German (down from 24 percent in 1997), and 13 percent offered Latin (down from 20 percent in 1997) (Rhodes and Pufahl, 2009).

It is against this difficult backdrop that Chinese foreign language education programs must work. Evidence suggests that it has done reasonably well, now being the fourth most studied language in U.S. high schools, having recently nudged out Japanese for that distinction (Mathews, 2009). The percentage of U.S. secondary schools offering Mandarin rose from one to four percent from 1987 to 2008.

### ***Chinese Language in the U.S.***

Scholars suggest that Chinese is a “heritage language” in the U.S., that is, a language widely used in contrast to the dominant language within a given social context. This largely results from the three waves of Chinese immigration to the U.S., the last of which continues today (Wang, 2007; Liu, Li & Teng, 2008). The first private Chinese “community schools” emerged in the 1920s in the San Francisco area, designed to help preserve language, customs, and traditions. Over time and in recent years, similar types of schools have become more formally organized. Wang (2007) reports the nationwide number of such schools and attending students to lie in the neighborhood of 900 and 150,000, respectively. It’s unclear as to when Mandarin first became a high school elective course, but a 1955 report (cited in Birkmaier, 1958) mentions the existence of two California high schools offering “Chinese.” The first five baccalaureate degrees in Chinese were awarded in 1960 and this number has gradually increased to 289 in 2008.

From the 1960s through the 1980s, the Carnegie and Dodge Foundations devoted considerable resources to Chinese language education. The Carnegie Foundation, for

instance, established seven university Mandarin centers and 200 high school Mandarin programs. Starting in 1982, the Dodge Foundation spent millions of dollars establishing high school Mandarin programs, a university training center, and an association for secondary Chinese language teachers. Neither the Carnegie nor the Dodge initiative, however, has had much lasting impact over time (Wang, 2007).

Wang (2007) highlights the emergence of various environmental incentives aimed at increasing Chinese learning in U.S. schools. In 2005, Chinese was officially recognized as a “critical” language in the U.S., prompting new federal dollars to flow to state and local education agencies. In 2004, the Chinese Language Council International (informally known as the “Hanban”) began establishing a network of Chinese language instructional centers around the world and at over 50 U.S. universities and major public school systems. Known as “Confucius Institutes,” these centers provide curricular and instructional support, along with general encouragement, for college and school district Mandarin foreign language programs (Wikipedia, 2010). In 2006, the Hanban collaborated with the College Board to establish Advanced Placement programs and exams for high school Mandarin study. As of 2008, 800 U.S. universities (about 25 percent of the total) offer Chinese language courses and the number of college students studying Chinese rose from 24,000 in 2002 to 35,000 in 2006.

Despite such incentives, Mandarin’s further expansion into U.S. public schools has been interrupted and diverted by a number of problematic environmental characteristics exerting influence at the status, corpus, and acquisition levels of the language planning process. In contrast to the vast success of English language courses in China, Mandarin Chinese still struggles to gain a foothold in most American schools.

Overall, despite various setbacks over time, English has enjoyed certain advantages in China that Chinese has not enjoyed in the U.S. For one thing, English has developed a worldwide reputation among both individuals and nations as a language of power and influence, especially within developing countries. In the same recent period, the centralized and authoritative nature of China's (and many other developing nations') institutional and governmental structures helped promote large scale acceptance of English language learning. In contrast, learning Mandarin is not yet widely viewed as offering special value to potential American users beyond what might be offered by learning a more accessible language. In addition, America's decentralized system of education has worked to isolate and disconnect Mandarin initiatives in the public schools.

In addition to the above factors, numerous social, economic, organizational, and political influences affect the likelihood that American citizens, schools, and students will pursue foreign language learning in general, and Mandarin learning in particular. For school districts, these influences create an environment within which they must cope when making decisions regarding foreign language curriculum. Likewise, for Mandarin programs, these influences represent characteristics of the habitat within which they will either thrive or fail. The following section presents a conceptual model for understanding how these forces influence Mandarin's "organizational habitat," the language planning process within U.S. school districts.

### **An Illustrative Conceptual Model**

Based on a sampling of existing literature on language planning, language ecology, and open systems theory, I attempted to design a "conceptual map" (Maxwell,

2005) to suggest the ways various environmental influences either promote or impede the ability of Chinese foreign language programs (or, perhaps, other foreign language programs) to become sustainable within an American high school. In other words, I sought to hypothetically “map out the organizational habitat” of Chinese foreign language programs. Shown in Figure 1, this model assumes that decisions or choices regarding language teaching or learning (i.e., course offering and course taking) are considered from individual, organizational, or national perspectives (that is, from micro to macro levels). Choices and decisions regarding foreign language teaching and learning “enter” the language planning process, represented here by a three-sectioned tube. The tube “exists” within the school organization, but is highly “permeable” in the sense that choices and decisions throughout the planning process are influenced by cultural/social, political, economic, and organizational/legal factors at work both within and outside the school organizational boundaries. These categories of factors presented in Figure 1 are perhaps not inclusive, but are based on influences mentioned in language policy literature or arrived at hypothetically. These categories may overlap and it’s possible that other categories might exist. For simplicity, we limited the number of categories to the four we considered most distinct from each other, yet inclusive of other influences (for example, “pedagogical” factors may be included under “organizational /legal.”)

[Figure 1 Here]

Larger arrows passing through the tube represent decisions that promote or sustain the language planning process. Smaller arrows are seen leaving the process, and these represent decisions made at each planning level that stop or delay the process. These “stop/delay” decisions are assumed to threaten the integration, survival, or

institutionalization of the foreign language program; for example, an early decision not to offer a high school Mandarin program. Note that the small arrows leaving the process early – and the large arrows leaving at the end of the language planning process – influence the habitat, thus influencing future decisions, not only for a single school system, but for others as well (for example, one district’s decisions may gradually influence another’s).

At the bottom of the figure is a line indicating language sustainability. The figure thus hypothesizes that as decisions reach the level of acquisition planning, and as acquisition planning becomes more fully realized, the language is more likely to survive and thrive within a particular school and, at an aggregate level, within the broader organizational habitat.

It should be pointed out that although the broad description illustrated in Figure 1, though perhaps “accurate” in a general way, turned out to be not entirely useful in helping to understand the events described in the case study presented here. This was probably due to the fact that I was dealing with a case where Chinese language courses were stopped before they could begin. In addition, as data were gathered, a picture emerged in which the “real action” occurred as the categories of factors began to interact with one another against a political backdrop.

### **Applying the Theoretical Model**

Despite the issue raised in the last paragraph, it is useful to flesh out the ways in which Figure 1 can be applied in a broad empirical sense. Table 2 offers a partial list of environmental factors that may influence the survival of Mandarin Chinese foreign

language teaching and learning in the U.S. For further illustration, it also lists factors that appear to influence English teaching and learning in the People's Republic of China. This is indeed a "rough cut" for at least three reasons. First, there may be many important influences of which we are presently unaware and are thus not included here. Second, some influences may fall within more than one category (for example, perceptions of learning difficulty may relate to social or economic considerations). Third, though the figure distinguishes between "macro" and "micro" influences, the distinction is relative and not always distinct. In the remainder of this section, we refer to Table 2 to discuss and speculate about the potential effects of various threats and facilitators related to the expansion of Chinese in the U.S., particularly within the habitat of public schools. In addition, we'll attempt to tie the discussion back to the language planning stages indicated in Figure 1.

[Table 2 Here]

### ***Economic Influences***

Economic influences are those relating to the way resources are used, distributed, or marketed. "Economics" involves the study of "human behavior as a relationship between given ends and scarce means which have alternative uses" (Robbins, 1932). It is also referred to as the "study of how societies use scarce resources to produce valuable commodities and distribute them among different people" (Samuelson, 1948). The two quotes suggest that economic influences may work at the individual or collective level. Recent publicity surrounding the growth of Chinese programs in various American public schools has likely caused some local communities, school districts, and school officials to

begin thinking about Chinese teaching and learning as a “scarce resource,” but one that may produce value for students and schools.

If this idea attracts sufficient attention, it may reach a relatively formal stage of status planning. Local school officials and stakeholders confront questions such as: Is there sufficient student interest? Is there sufficient fiscal capital for hiring a new teacher? Will there be sufficient and affordable human capital (e.g., available, certified teachers)? If positive decisions are made, they may also connect to and trigger further influences and choices at the corpus planning stage, which while partially economic, may also relate to social and structural elements of the environment. For example, districts serving a large Taiwanese community might be more supportive of a curriculum emphasizing traditional characters and Taiwanese dialect; districts able to garner resources from groups like the Confucius Institute may opt for a Beijing sponsored approach utilizing simplified characters. Such decisions will also be shaped by the availability and prior training of qualified and/or certified teachers

At the acquisition planning stage, changes in economic circumstances may threaten survival of Chinese language programs. A district that launches a Chinese program one year may be forced to cut it the next. This appeared to be situation in the case presented in this study, where an unanticipated budget deficit was the key reason cited by the majority of board of education members for their refusal to fund Mandarin classes that had been scheduled for the 2009-2010 school year. It is worth pointing out, however, that four members of the board did not view this deficit as sufficient reason to cancel the class, thus revealing the subjective, perhaps political, elements often involved in fiscal decision making. Also relative to “politics,” the decision to essentially “leave”

the language planning process at the acquisition stage may send waves of influence into the local community. For example, parents seeking Mandarin instruction for their children may increase pressure on the local board of education either by mobilizing, petitioning, or seeking alternatives in the form of local language-emphasis charter schools.

Students are also influenced by economic factors, and their decisions also contribute to the overall language planning process. Though “popular wisdom” may indicate that Chinese language ability can substantially boost one’s academic or professional potential, the “reality” for individual students may be somewhat different. An investigatory study of the 1982 Dodge Foundation Initiative to promote Chinese teaching in public schools (Moore, 1992) found, for instance, that most American high school students would not reach fluency in written Mandarin even if they continued to study the language through college. In addition, they found evidence suggesting that Mandarin expertise may actually sidetrack students into less professional or lucrative careers; e.g., qualify them to become “translators” rather than executives. Students may thus decide that their time and effort are better spent on a less difficult foreign language. Even students who initially decide to take Chinese may gradually decide that the difficult work of the first two years of coursework does not produce sufficient reward to justify their time and energy (Starr, 1978). At the status planning stage, therefore, even if school officials sense an initial demand for Chinese language programs, they must consider whether the demand will remain consistent over time. At the acquisition planning stage, schools may need to make their Mandarin programs more attractive (by improving resources, finding more effective or accessible curricular tools, etc.)



### ***Social Influences***

Social influences relate to culture, values, norms, and demographic features of the surrounding environment. For example, at both the macro and micro level, decisions about teaching or learning Chinese are greatly influenced by the degree to which the language – and the people, heritage, and culture it represents – permeate the social reality of a particular habitat. In simplest terms, for example, Chinese is more likely to be taught in areas home to significant numbers of Chinese people—hence the establishment of Chinese courses in San Francisco high schools in the early 1950s and the tendency for high school Chinese programs to better survive in large cities and the western U.S. (see Table 1). Such conditions are expected to facilitate the language planning process at each of its three stages.

In addition to this broad demographic influence, the prevalence of opportunities to interact with Chinese speakers, learners, and “things Chinese” should assist in weaving the possibility of learning Mandarin into the “social mindscapes” (Zerubavel, 1999) of individuals. As a comparative example, French and Spanish may be “foreign languages,” but they are not really “foreign” in the minds of many citizens and students. American students tend to know people – indeed, have friends and family members – who speak or have studied these languages, a condition that not only increases their social familiarity, but also increases the potential for language study related social capital. One would thus expect greater individual interest or participation in geographic or social regions where Chinese approaches or exceeds this level of familiarity, or even beyond these regions, as the Internet and other mass media begin to create a sense of expectation in people’s minds. Both hypothetically and in reality, individuals and communities may gradually

view the absence of a high school Chinese program similarly to one without a French program; that is, as rendering the school less socially valuable or legitimate.

At the same time, however, other social factors work to inhibit Mandarin acceptance. For example, compared to youth in many other areas of the world, particularly East Asia, American young people may be less “driven” toward school learning, especially in difficult subject areas (Lee and Shouse, 2007, 2008). In addition, as touched on earlier, the perceived level of difficulty associated with languages generally and with Chinese in particular may work to create a cloud of discouragement in the minds of students, parents, and even school officials (Starr, 1978).

### ***Organizational/Structural Influences.***

Such influences relate to formal rules, procedures, and patterns of authority within and surrounding the school organization. Even when Chinese learning is perceived as realistic and valuable, rules, procedures, and authority patterns may work to impede Chinese language program survival. At the district or school level, physical space constraints may prevent curricular expansion (note that this is also an economic consideration). Even if space is available, the inclusion of a new curricular subject may be perceived as threatening one that already exists. For example, teachers of French, German, or Latin may feel threatened by the addition of new language programs if they believe it would lead to a decrease in the number of students taking their classes.

At a more macro level, America’s decentralized system of education makes it more difficult for federally backed initiatives to become realized at the state or local level; at least requiring them to be backed with more federal “muscle,” as has been the case

with the so-called “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) act. Interestingly, although NCLB’s Foreign Language Assistance Program provides for grants to encourage innovative programs for establishing, improving, or expanding foreign language study (NCLB, 2001), the overall impact of NCLB on foreign language programs is viewed as quite negative due to its intense focus on test-based accountability in math and reading (Rosenbusch, 2005). Two distinct effects might thus result. For one thing, school districts may be less likely to adopt new foreign language programs. For another, foreign language teachers, perceiving their courses to be increasingly viewed as “frills” within the school (Glisan, 2005) may resist new language programs with greater fervor.

An additional macro-level structural barrier is found in the form of rigid state teacher certification laws. For example, though a district may have access to many experienced and potentially capable Mandarin teachers, such individuals may not be legally certified to teach the language at the secondary level. Barnes (2010) reports that although 47 states currently have some form of alternative certification, not all of these programs allow such certification in all subjects (for example, Pennsylvania allows alternative certification only in math and English [Pennsylvania State Board of Education, nd]). Illustrative of the overlap between structural and economic influences, even when certification is available, potential students may be unwilling to obtain it, especially when other more lucrative opportunities are available. To solve the problem of teacher scarcity, some districts have sought to use Internet based Chinese instruction; but in at least one case, struggles with state regulations and local teacher unions rendered it virtually impossible (Zhao, 2007).

Pedagogy, viewed as a formal procedure, also ties in to organizational and structural barriers. Students for example, fearful of dreary drill and memorization, may be more likely to enroll in Chinese courses when lively, accessible curriculum is used.

Also included under the umbrella of organizational influences is the issue of institutional legitimacy. As Selznick (1957) suggests, organizations seek to “institutionalize” themselves by becoming viewed as valuable beyond their rational or technical purpose. As an example, Latin remains an important course in many American schools not so much because it’s important to learn, but because of its use as a symbol of school quality and value. One of the rhetorical points often made by Mandarin advocates is that its inclusion in the curriculum demonstrates a commitment to “world class” education. This argument is advanced by various supportive structures within the environment; Chinese being declared a “critical language,” the development of Advanced Placement Tests, etc.

### ***Political Influences***

Political influences relate to the acquisition and maintenance of power and influence. Many of the factors discussed thus far have political dimensions; for example, the relaxation of teacher certification requirements faces considerable political opposition in many states (and perhaps even within many schools). In addition, however, other types of more direct, visceral, or ideologically driven political factors may arise and restrict the spread of Mandarin in public schools. For example, Mandarin advocates may at times struggle against prior decades of icy U.S. – P.R.C. relations coupled with images of Tiananmen Square and more recent ones of Tibetan strife, which may generate sour

feelings in the minds of school officials, parents, students, or other foreign language decision makers. On a larger scale, organizations linked to the Chinese government seeking to promote Mandarin learning in the U.S. (i.e., the “Hanban” or its various Confucius Institutes) may be perceived as having ulterior motives; as tools for the expansion of Chinese “soft power” (Ding, Sheng, & Saunders, 2006; Gill, 2008).

These types of ideological influences are expected to be of significance at both the status and corpus planning stages. In terms of corpus planning, for example, it was previously mentioned how districts would need to choose between a Taiwan-based and PRC-based language program. The choice is a substantial one because of the two different systems of written language, vocabulary, pronunciation, and Romanization. Rhodes (1998) reported, for instance, that opposing views on this question held up the implementation of Chinese foreign language programs in Australia for a decade.

In addition to these “direct” sources of political influence, there may be “indirect” political influence as well. Events seemingly unrelated to questions of language curriculum may emerge that change the balance of power within decision making bodies, thus affecting the likelihood of successful program implementation. In the case to be examined in this study, for example, political turbulence in the school district community apparently led to the decreasing influence of school board members considered most likely to promote the Chinese language curriculum.

## Chapter Three: Methods

### A Case Study Approach

To this point, the discussion has focused on describing environmental factors hypothetically linked to the consideration, establishment, and survival of Chinese foreign language programs in American high schools. A conceptual map was presented that attempted to organize these factors into four categories; economic, social, organizational/structural, and political. The next logical step would appear to be to identify a school district that had recently experienced a general choice process regarding the establishment of high school Chinese language courses, and then use this as a case to understand how factors within these categories contributed to that process.

Case study analysis would appear to be the most appropriate method for this study. As Yin (2009) indicates, the case study approach is useful in examining a “contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Yin goes on to suggest that case study analysis is appropriate to address “how” and “why” questions when there are “a series of organized events, decisions, and actions” (p. 29); multiple and emerging variables; multiple sources of evidence; and a reasoned theoretical framework to guide the inquiry.

However, one of the common concerns about case study is that it provide little basis for scientific generalization. "How can you generalize from a single case?" (Kennedy, 1976). The answer is provided by Yin (2008) who claims that case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. That is, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a "sample," and

in doing a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization) (p.15).

### ***“District X” and “District High”***

To address the questions of this study, I identified a “District X” that had in late 2008 established a Chinese I course in its high school world languages program for the 2009-2010 school year. Intriguingly, however, the course was eliminated in the spring of 2009, just a few months before it was to begin. Though the school board based its action on its suddenly facing a budgetary shortfall, it seems interesting and useful to employ a case study approach to investigate whether this single economic factor adequately explains the failure of Chinese language to gain a foothold in District X. Moreover, the case study approach will allow exploration into what actions or events led the district to consider and approve its original decision to establish Chinese I and to approve the hiring of a half-time teacher.

District X serves a university town. Its sole high school (referred to in this study as “District High”) offers a wide and diverse selection of electives and is known for academic, athletic, and musical prominence. District High serves 2,635 students in grades nine through twelve; 89 percent are white, five percent are Asian, and the remaining five percent are African American or represent other racial/ethnic groups. As discussed previously, District X’s board of education and District High’s curriculum council approved a course offering in Chinese I for the 2009-2010 school year. But the course was cut during budget negotiations that took place in spring of 2009. Since fall of 2009, District High has offered an informal, pass/fail Chinese course through its Learning

Enrichment Program (LEP). The course is taught by two volunteer high school students of Chinese heritage.

### ***Data Collection and Subject Sample***

In addition to examining relevant documents (e.g., school board minutes and video transcripts), my research incorporated interviews with salient actors involved with or having information about the birth and (apparent) eventual demise of the Chinese language program at District High. As part of my graduate coursework during spring 2009, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with some possible key actors in District X's Chinese foreign language development process. These included the LEP director, District High's World Language Program coordinator, the mother of one of the volunteer teachers (who assisted her daughter during the 2009-2010 school year), the director of the Chinese program at the local university, and a professor of foreign language curriculum and instruction.

In this study, the sample of interview subjects was expanded to include the following categories of informants:

1. Individuals at the school level; e.g., director(s) of the world language program, other foreign language teachers.
2. Individuals at the district level; e.g., the current and former superintendent of schools, current and former members of the board of education.
3. Individuals working within the local university; e.g., those working within the Confucius Institute, the Chinese foreign language program, and the foreign language teacher training programs.



4. Individuals active in the local Chinese community, including those associated with the Chinese language weekend school.

Starting with a modest-sized sample, my interviews included a “snowball question,” that is, one that asks subjects to nominate others who may have more information or a different opinion on the topic at hand. As it turned out, most responses to this question named people I had already planned to interview. Interviews were recorded and field notes were taken both during and after each interview. These notes guided me in gathering key data from the recorded interviews. The overall strategy of data analysis was to then hunt for important and recurring themes related to the main questions of this study.

### **Questions Guiding the Inquiry**

Flexible, semi-structured protocols were created to guide the interviews. Specific questions were designed so as to gather information and develop inferences about the various factors that promoted and inhibited the growth of the Chinese language program at District High. Beginning with the framework described previously in this proposal, the research goals were to

1. Understand the kinds of promoting and inhibiting factors at the status, corpus, and acquisition stages and how they fit within (or indicate the need to modify) the categories of environmental influences described in previous sections of this proposal.
2. Understand the overall decision making process surrounding the implementation of Chinese language study at District High.

As will be discussed at the end of chapter four and in chapter five, the data led me to redesign the theoretical framework presented in chapter two. In other words, the “realities” of this particular case did not exactly fit with the earlier predictions.

### **Issues of Validity**

Like their quantitative counterparts, qualitative researchers must grapple with issues of validity. Internal validity is concerned with whether the researcher has established study procedures that promote the gathering and presentation of accurate data and evidence. External validity concerns the extent to which findings may be generalized to some larger population. With regard to the first, although I am confident of the procedures used to gather, analyze, and present evidence in this case, it is possible that some interviewees were influenced by the fact that I am a Chinese. For example, they may have assumed that I support the expansion of Chinese learning in the United States (I do) and may have responded differently than if I were of a different ethnicity. Though I worked very hard to frame questions and follow up probes objectively, it is impossible for me to ascertain how much my ethnicity may have influenced the interview responses. With regard to external validity, it is difficult to generalize from one case. It seems reasonable, however, that the issues and influences in play in the present case are not unique and are in varying ways analogous to conditions in play in other school districts.

## **Chapter Four: Data Presentation**

This chapter systemically presents the data obtained from document analysis and interviews revealing and reflecting the actions and opinions of those who either participated in, influenced, or observed the events and issues surrounding the Chinese language curriculum decision making process. The chapter begins with a description of historic and recent background information needed to provide a context for the case. It then presents narratives describing the two school board meetings when Chinese initiative was introduced and voted upon. At the first of these, Chinese was approved to be included in District High's curriculum. At the second, a motion to fund and staff the Chinese program was defeated. I will then present narratives that attempt to capture the broad views of the superintendent, school board members, other administrators, high school teachers involved in the issue. Finally, the general emerging themes will be listed and discussed.

### **Background Introduction: History and Context**

Based on information obtained from interviews, news accounts, and other documents, this section provides the historical context for the events surrounding decisions regarding the establishment of Chinese language courses at District High. The district has traditionally had a vigorous environment of traditional foreign language programs, especially in Spanish, French, German, and Latin. Over the years, Spanish has become more popular while French became less popular. Enrollments in German have tended to remain steady over the years perhaps in part due to the district's location and

surrounding population of Dutch and German heritage. Russian was also taught for a number of years at District High in the 1950s and into the early 1960s, as Russians constituted the third largest ethnic population living in the area. However, the class was eventually dropped from the curriculum as enrollments tapered off.

Around the start of the 1980s, Japanese began to be seen as an important world language for high school students to learn. Given the growing importance and economic interaction the world had with Japan, District High began providing individual based language instruction through its learning enrichment program. Our informants and interviewees indicated that the district's learning enrichment program is largely a voluntary, no-credit program that is offered in lieu of any sort of formal gifted and talented program. The district has opted for this as an alternative to the somewhat bureaucratic demands of a gifted and talented program. At the time Japanese was offered on this non-credit basis, District High had no trouble finding native Japanese speakers in to teach these smaller-sized classes. This is likely due to the presence of the nearby state university. With its campus of over 40,000 students and over 3,000 faculty, the university's presence represents both a resource and an influence upon the local school district. In particular, it provides what could be called a "set of expectations" for high academic standards and a more future-focused and progressive learning environment.

Prompted in part by strategic planning processes taking place in 1996 and 2001, which emphasized the importance of strengthening the district's world language programs, school curriculum administrators began to think very favorably about the possibility of again offering "non-Western" language courses, possibly in Arabic and either in Chinese or Korean. The shift in this direction was also likely influenced by an

emerging national discourse and the initiatives and the growing interest of other districts around the state to offer Chinese language classes.

Early moves in this direction were limited, typically consisting of allowing certain students to take courses for credit at the local university. This was dependent upon whether or not the local university had classes during the time of day that high school students could take them, if there was space available after university students signed up, and if the students themselves could afford the tuition (higher than what university students themselves would have to pay). Online classes in Chinese may have been available too, but would also require students to pay for them and as one school administrator noted, learning a language as involved as Mandarin online would “be a lot harder than trying to learn, say, accounting.” Therefore, although such options may have existed, they were far from ideal and, at best, underutilized.

With these limitations in mind, sentiment grew among district administrators (in particular, the superintendent and curriculum director) that the establishment of Chinese and Arabic ought to be a district goal. By the time of the strategic planning process that ended in 2007, the district became much more pro-active about offering its own Chinese classes. The six-year strategic planning process included a comprehensive committee, which emphasized local input from students, student leadership groups, parents, community members, teachers, district representatives learning enrichment teachers, and curriculum administrators focusing exclusively on world languages. This was, in fact, a continuation of the district’s strategic planning process dating back to 1995, which also stressed the need for a more comprehensive and responsive world language program. This committee researched other similar schools to see what they offered and how they

had fared with the Chinese classes they had introduced. Moreover, the sense seemed to be growing that, considering current global trends, the district's language programs had become overly "Euro-centric." Like other schools in the state and across the nation, a portion of District High's community had an increasing realization of the importance of preparing students to function in a global setting where countries like China were seen as becoming politically and economically influential. In fact, the student leadership groups who took part in this committee's survey tended to indicate that they saw themselves as global citizens and realized that being multi-lingual could offer them a tremendous advantage in such a globalized economy.

Such changes in thinking may have been partially influenced by the fact that languages like Arabic and Mandarin had been identified as "critical languages" by the U.S. Department of Education. There was also a local charter school in which over 100 district students in grades K through eight (186 as of January, 2011) were receiving Chinese language instruction; students who would eventually be entering District High.

Given these influences and all the other input from the committee, District High added Arabic to its established world language courses in 2009. This was enabled by the presence of a native Arabic speaking French teacher already working at the high school, who had taught a non-credit "enrichment" version of the course for the previous five years. State certification law allows teachers certified in one language to teach another language in which they are qualified either by experience or education. However, the addition of Mandarin to the curriculum posed greater challenges.

One of the key challenges involved certification. Unlike the case with Arabic, there was no native-Chinese speaking world language faculty member at District High.

Moreover, there was no, and there currently is no, Chinese language certification program at the local university (though one or two other state universities do have such programs). Equally problematic, was a belief held by many district officials that no certification process existed within the state. In fact, the state did, and currently does, offer certification in Chinese and numerous other “less commonly-taught languages.” The difficulty, however, is that unlike the more commonly taught languages, the state does not publish standards or require testing to prospective teachers of these languages. In addition, the state provides temporary certification in shortage areas. Nevertheless, there was a consistent and predominant fear among district representatives (among those with whom I spoke) that finding certified Chinese teachers would not be easy. In fact, some officials noted that it was difficult to find teachers for any of the world languages, let alone Chinese. Concern also existed as to finding an instructor willing to start off with only a part time position, perhaps only teaching one class per day. Again, the presence of the local university and its highly diverse population offered a potential work-around but this was not certain.

Given the strong internal desire to teach Chinese coupled with the limitations to find consistent teachers, early discussions about how to best offer Chinese to students were conducted regarding whether to participate with key Taiwanese or Chinese language learning initiative programs being offered by both of these respective governments to help spread their respective languages and cultures. The state department of education had offered an opportunity for local schools to collaborate with Taiwan; that is, to travel to the island and identify teachers qualified to teach Mandarin, who would consider living in the U.S. for at least one year. In addition, other opportunities existed

for collaboration with Mainland China's Hanban agency or their sub-agency known as the Confucius Institute, which had recently opened up a branch through the University of Pittsburgh. Deciding which of these foreign sponsored initiatives to participate in would be an important decision, as these two largely Mandarin speaking nations maintain slight differences in vocabulary, but significant differences in the use of Chinese characters and the forms of Roman alphabet transliteration.

The potential to use native teachers and gain some initial funding to start a Mandarin program though these foreign initiatives still posed questions. Would the local district provide a share of the funding needed to support a foreign teacher? What would happen at the end of the initial one or two year program? Similar concerns about sustainability revolved around state grant money, for which District High typically would not be eligible due to its level of community affluence. At the time of this writing, these various issues remain largely unsettled—though the question of which version of Mandarin to teach has been partially settled with the recent (2010) emergence of a Confucius Institute affiliated with the local state university.

In June 2008, the district's superintendent and curriculum director (who were proactively involved in trying to bring Chinese to District High and who conducted several years of research on the matter), were invited by the Hanban to visit Chinese public schools in an effort to promote Chinese language teaching in American schools. In an interview, the superintendent who took part in the trip remarked that it was "serendipitous," having happened at the time when research was being conducted by the district. In their interviews, both school representatives remarked about how impressed



they were to see 16 and 17 year-old Chinese students speaking English so fluently, a factor that, for them, reinforced the importance of teaching Mandarin at District High.

The culmination of this trip on top of years of research and consideration prompted these two school administrators to develop and present a proposal to the board of education for the inclusion of Mandarin Chinese as part of the high school's world language program. In December 2008, a Chinese language course was unanimously approved as a course offering, which would allow it to be placed into the school curriculum and for students to enroll. The fact that during the spring of 2009 43 students registered to take the new Chinese course the following fall indicated that there was indeed a high degree of interest among the student population. Given this level of interest, the superintendent apparently felt confident about getting board approval for the funding of this cutting edge program.

### ***Financial Context***

At the board meeting in May 2009, however, things changed. The board voted five-to-four against funding the hiring of a new teacher for the Chinese I course. The arguments presented against hiring a new teacher circled around and centered on a looming fiscal crisis and a desire to avoid launching any new programs that would require new staffing and therefore become a permanent part of the budget. Foremost among these budgetary concerns was an upcoming and very serious shortfall in the state's educational employee retirement system (PSERS); one that school districts were expected to fill with their own local fiscal resources. This shortfall was expected to result in a seven-fold increase in employer contributions to a teacher's retirement fund. In turn,

this was expected to cause local property taxes for an average home to jump a staggering \$1,000 by around 2015.

In addition to this severe and looming retirement system shortfall and an upcoming across-the-board five-percent salary increase for district teachers, there were several other financial problems with which the board had to deal. Apart from a declining enrolment in the high school itself, the district's surrounding area had also become stagnant, adding fewer new residents than earlier predicted, thus laying a cap on top of expected tax revenues (which had averaged about a four-percent annual growth in recent years). The national and international economic recession that started in 2008 was an obvious source of much of these local and state problems, but other fiscal threats loomed as well. For example, the district currently perceives a need to renovate the high school football stadium at a cost ranging from seven to 15 million dollars. Worse than that is what at first seemed like a low-risk loan arrangement between the district and the Royal Bank of Canada (an arrangement referred to as the "swap").

Specifically, the school district is presently involved in litigating what had turned out to be a disastrous debt swap agreement that had been arranged in previous years as a way of funding a large-scale high school renovation project (at an estimated cost of over 100 million dollars). Though the project has since been cancelled due to strong public protest and the election of a new school board, the district (as of this writing) remains legally bound to make its share of the swap payments to the Royal Bank of Canada on the amount they would have borrowed to complete the renovation. While the economy was good, this swap deal meant that this Canadian bank would make slightly larger payments to the district than the district made to the bank due to the favorable interest rates at the

time. When the global economy shifted so drastically, however, these payments—required by both parties—shifted so that the district now acted as lender. At the present time, the amount in question that the district owes to the Royal Bank of Canada is roughly twelve million dollars and growing. The litigation involves the district’s effort to have the contract declared unlawful, null, and void as they now contend that they did not have state authorization to pursue such a contract in the first place.

### ***Contentions over the Renovation Project***

Further details on the canceled renovation project that initiated the swap agreement will help provide additional context for board decisions made with respect to the inclusion of Mandarin in the world language curriculum. In 2005 a major controversy began brewing over proposals for high school renovation. The board—at that time—proposed an approximately 107 million dollar initiative that would include demolishing the older of the two high school buildings (which stands across a busy street and houses the ninth and tenth grade classes), building a new modernized athletic field upon that site, and expanding the main high school building onto land that once served as the school athletic field. In addition, there would be a new swimming pool and numerous other physical upgrades. The school buildings were built in the 1950s and no doubt needed repairs and upgrading. But some community members balked at the idea of spending so much money, tearing down what to them was a perfectly good building, and creating a new single-building high school for nearly 3,500 students. One school official even referred to the project as the “Taj Mahal.” While the board of education pressed its case for spending and renovation despite estimates that were now 10 million over the

initially approved 107 million dollar allowances, dissenting members of the community (including some vocal members of the local university faculty) began forging themselves into a potent political force. Most notably among these was a group known as “District High Vision,” which would later offer a field of candidates for the spring primary and fall general school board election in 2007.

### ***Election Ramifications***

Aside from the involvement of some university faculty alarmed at the cost and at the massive size of the new school configuration, the community polarization tended to fall along somewhat complex lines. Many “locals” seemed to oppose the renovation because of the high cost, and many of those affiliated with the university opposed it because of their objection to the creation of a large “mega-school.” At the same time, some community members, both affiliated and not affiliated with the university, supported the project because of the advantages they believed would accrue from the various physical improvements. (It’s worthy to note that one of the school’s board members advocating the project was also a university faculty member). Eventually, the people opposed to the renovation became very upset by what they perceived to be the existing school board’s dismissal their concerns. Despite the apparent growing conflict, the school board voted to allocate funds for the full renovation.

During the next school board election in November, 2007, however, all existing board members up for re-election who had voted for this expensive proposal were voted out of office and replaced by a new slate of “Vision” candidates who had opposed it. This new slate joined the board in December 2007 with a new kind of outlook and a much

more conservative budget perspective toward raising taxes. The new board members may have won, but a good deal of political resentment remained.

### *The New Conservative Leadership*

The sweeping and significant changes of the election seemed to have caused some animosity between the remaining four school board members and the five newly-elected members. This tension between the two may have had some influence upon the superintendent's decision to announce her retirement in November 2008, to take effect the following July. In fact, during this general time frame, no fewer than seven of nine school board members and five other significant school district positions (including the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the principal, business manager, and the head of the world languages department) had changed hands. With such significant changes in leadership, existing teachers and staff found it hard to present any new ideas until everyone got to know each other again.

In December, 2008, one year after the new board was in place, the "lame duck" superintendent brought the Chinese proposal to the board. It seems reasonable to suspect that this new, more conservative board's perspective may have colored the discussion over whether or not to include any new class at all that would require an increase in staffing. Although each of the new board members later expressed personal interest to offer Chinese and seemed to firmly believe in the advantage that it would give to their students, they were very concerned about the hidden cost of follow-on years of Chinese language classes. At a time when 75% to 80% of the school's budget was dedicated to staffing alone, board members feared that five years from now what began as Chinese I

would turn into Chinese I-IV perhaps requiring up to two full-time staffing positions. According to one school administrator “it was just the tip of the iceberg” for them and “rightfully so” as it always was the intention of the school to offer a full Chinese offering, not just one class if enrollments warranted this.

### ***Recent Events***

Since the board’s vote to deny funding for Mandarin courses at District High, some key events have occurred that are relevant to the curricular initiative. Foremost among these was the creation of a non-credit Chinese language class within the high school’s “Learning Enrichment Program” intended for anyone interested in gaining some basic vocabulary and cross-cultural knowledge. This class was taught by a Chinese-American student. Whereas 43 District High students had enrolled in the originally scheduled for-credit course, just 14 participated in the enrichment course in fall, 2009. By fall, 2010, the number was down to three. The creation of this course may be seen as either a creative workaround, a disappointment, or perhaps both depending on one’s perspective. In addition to this enrichment course, District High is also now offering through its social studies department, a course incorporating internet-based communication between local students and their counterparts in China. The course relies mainly on back-and-forth blogging due to the 12-hour time difference with China. Twenty students enrolled in this class during the 2009-2010 school year. Mandarin language learning is recommended, but not required.

Changes in leadership have also occurred. Most importantly, perhaps, is the change in superintendence. The individual who replaced the superintendent who retired

in 2009 left the district suddenly in the fall of 2010. In addition, a Confucius Institute was established at the local university in fall, 2010. My informants indicated to me that the current acting superintendent expressed “more concerns than interest” about offering Chinese courses, even if they were completely supported fiscally by the Confucius Institute. Apparently, the acting superintendent dismissed the feasibility of “parachuting” a non-state certified Chinese teacher into the district.

The following sections of this chapter present data gathered during the 2008-2009 school year from various sources. The first section will cover pertinent school board meetings, for which video transcripts were available. Based on published board records, these were the only two meetings at which the Chinese language initiative was discussed. After presenting narratives summarizing these two meetings, I will present further data in the form of four sections of narratives based on interviews with key actors and other knowledgeable and relevant individuals. The first group consists of school board members, who also appeared in the video transcripts. The second group of narratives reflects the views of the former school superintendent and central office administrators, those who were most responsible for gathering data, generating ideas, and presenting to the board of education a proposal for teaching Mandarin at District High. The third set of narratives represents the views of teachers and administrators at District High who were involved in or had knowledge about the Mandarin proposal. The final set of narratives includes views gathered from relevant individuals at the local university. All of the interviewees were questioned and probed about their perception of key events and their views and insights about factors that either promoted or impeded the establishment of Mandarin Chinese into District High’s world language curriculum.

## **Narratives from School Board Meetings**

### ***School Board Meeting on Dec 15th, 2008***

This Board Meeting is dealing with approving Chinese language as part of district curriculum. On December 15, 2008, the board of education spent approximately 14 minutes discussing the superintendent's proposal to add a Mandarin Chinese I class to the high school curricular program. This section (1) paraphrases and summarizes the highlights of that discussion and (2) draws critical inferences based on this videotaped evidence. Among those participating at this meeting were some of the people interviewed for this study: current/former school board members Ms. West, Mr. Tom, Mr. Hart, Ms. Smith, the former superintendent Dr. Maxwell, and the district curriculum director, Ms. Layton.

The discussion begins with the board president introducing the motion to add Chinese I to the curriculum and opening up the discussion. Participating in the discussion are the board members, the superintendent, and the district curriculum supervisor. Overall from the video, it is apparent that the superintendent, the curriculum supervisor, and some of the board members are enthusiastically supportive of the proposal. Other board members appear somewhat supportive, but also somewhat skeptical.

At the start of the discussion, a board member asks the superintendent whether all issues of instructional and maintenance funding have been worked out and whether they are ready to be presented. The superintendent responds that they are working toward this, but that no complete or definite set of answers have been worked out. She comments that the proposal to add Chinese I is in line with previous district priorities, with current national priorities and trends, and she stresses the need to "move ahead" with establishing



a program. She states that she and her support staff believe they have a cost effective way to begin the program, but that some uncertainty remains due to possible declining enrollments. In response to a follow-up question from the board member, the superintendent suggests that despite the uncertainty, it would be a mistake to take Chinese “off the table.” She suggests further – actually emphasizes – that it seems important to get Chinese I into the curriculum, then see what happens in terms of student interest, enrollment, and funding.

At this point, the board president offers support for the superintendent, saying the introduction of Chinese “will be worth it”; that “Chinese is important,” and “progressive.” The district’s world language program, he suggests “needs to move ahead” and that there’s a need to get students “in on the ground floor.” He states that the idea is worth the amount of startup money it would require (approximately \$26,000 for a half-time teacher). The district curriculum supervisor follows up his remarks by stating that the local university is “rapidly moving” toward establishing a Chinese language major and teaching certification program. Another discussant at the table mentions that a local charter middle school focusing on world languages will likely be feeding students into the high school who have an interest in continuing their Chinese language skills. It seems clear, at this point, that the superintendent, her administrative staff, and at least one board member are strongly supportive of establishing what could be called an introductory or pilot program in Chinese at the high school.

A board member then asks whether the students who select the course will be doing so “instead of” or “in addition to” selecting other language courses like Spanish or French. The curriculum supervisor points to a poll suggesting that roughly 24% of

students interested in Chinese language would take the class instead of another language and 27% would take it in addition to another language. The board member follows up with some interesting words and a question,

I'm just looking at the motivation behind it. If we're offering it as a life enhancer, and it's going to make you a better citizen of the world, and it's going to give you a better career path, I would hope that they would be taking it as their number one course. I wonder if that's a realistic expectation....I wonder what the interest level will be.

The curriculum supervisor responds by saying that this is something "we just won't know until we go through the registration process." The superintendent replies that of the 50% of students who plan to take a foreign language, half of them expressed interest in taking Chinese, either as their first choice language or as an elective. The board member quoted above, based on data from the same survey, notes that among a small number of district high school students currently taking Chinese at the local university through a special program, a majority state that they would not wish to take their Chinese course at the high school. The superintendent repeats that "we really won't know" until the sections are actually added and the enrollment numbers can be seen. The curriculum supervisor echoes this thought, expressing her belief that enrollments will increase once the course is established.

As the board president is about to put the motion on the table, another board member, while expressing general support for improving the world language program makes two points. First, he states that if he votes in favor of the proposal today, he reserves his right to withhold funding later on, if it turns out that it simply isn't economically feasible to pay for it. Here he refers to the "multi-million dollar hit" that the district is expected to take due to the problem of the debt swap. "If [the superintendent]

wants to keep this on the table until the final deliberation, then I'm ok on that, but I want to be clear ... that I could vote against this later on [if the funding problem isn't cleared up]." Next, he argues that if Chinese is really important (and he suggests that he believes it may be), that some other language area may need to be cut. "If one language is becoming more relevant, then what language is becoming less relevant? This could be a zero-sum game."

The curriculum supervisor responds, stating that while these and other concerns are very real, the establishment of Chinese I represents an important "stepping stone," something to get the transformation process started. This ends the discussion on the Chinese language curricular proposal.

What inferences might be drawn here, beyond the surface opinions of the actors? From an organizational perspective, the discussion illustrates two contrasting ways of imagining the way a school district ought to function and adapt to change. On one hand, we see board members, perhaps the majority, who appear to be operating from a highly rationalistic view. While they concede that a Mandarin program might be a good thing, even something that is in line with local and national priorities, their primary attention appears focused on maintaining what the district already offers, staying within their budget, and avoiding risk. These goals appear to be rather concrete. On the other hand, the superintendent and her support staff reflect a view friendly toward expanding curricular options, responding to global pedagogical and social changes, and the acceptance of risk. They see a Chinese I pilot program as something that could develop into a larger component of the district's world language curriculum, perhaps reminiscent of the famous movie line, "Build it and they will come!" But most board members appear

to want more definite answers—where will the money come from? How will we afford to teach Chinese II or III? Where will teachers come from? How will we pay for all this? Essentially, the board members, perhaps for a variety of general and district-specific reasons, want to see what the finished product looks like before a single “shovel” is lifted.

### ***School Board Meeting on May 4th, 2009***

Participating in or attending this meeting were all board members present at the December 2008 meeting, as well as Dr. Maxwell and Ms. Layton. The segment begins with a discussion of new course projections for the coming fall and on how they might fit – or not fit – within the following year’s budget. Though it’s difficult to completely determine from the discussion, it appears that the courses in question (and their FTE percentages) are Chinese (.5), Latin (.33), Equine Science (.17), and Psychology (.17). From viewing and listening, one gathers that the ensuing discussion will focus on which, if any, of these courses could be eliminated in order to address severe upcoming budget restrictions. Among these courses, Chinese is the only new course (the others having been taught in prior years).

After a few brief words from the superintendent, the district’s budget director was invited to comment. He stated that, in his opinion, eliminating Chinese would cause “the least amount of collateral damage.” By this phrase, we infer that he means that it’s the most expensive proposed course, the only course that had not been previously been offered, and the one whose cancelation would cause the least disruption (i.e., no teacher would need to be let go and student course programs would be least affected).

The superintendent then points out that approximately a dozen courses will not be offered during the upcoming year because of declining enrollment. She states that such courses are said to be “postponed,” not cancelled. This would be the case if Chinese were not offered, she suggests, since Chinese had been approved at the December 2008 meeting.

At this point, board members take turns offering their opinions on the status of the courses in question. A male board member (Mr. Hart) states, somewhat stridently in tone, that the board is “not ready for preliminary adoption [of new courses]....The district needs our leadership....This is not the year for staffing of programs.” He further expresses the opinion that the board should “fund new positions only as required by state law or regulation...” and that the district should “cap program growth.”

This board member’s remarks are followed by those of a woman board member who expresses concerns about upcoming construction projects. She suggests requiring a student fee for drivers training courses and refraining from replacing a printing teacher. At the same time, she wants to support the staffing of the programs in question, especially Chinese. She states, “Chinese is important...if we want to look at 21st century skills, moving our curriculum forward, and serving our kids. [It’s] important to not let the curriculum stagnate... [this is an] important service to kids and the community.” The next board member to speak simply says, “I agree with everything [she] said.”

The next board member to speak stresses the problem of “slow growth in assessed value” of local real estate, and declining enrollment. Arguing for what he calls a “maintenance budget,” this board member stresses that positions should be driven by enrollment, “not by desires for new programs, as worthy as they may be.” He further

argues that “if we don’t start to make some hard decisions here, we’ll find ourselves against a hard wall in the coming years.”

The next board member to speak offers support for continued technology expenses, since this is part of the district’s strategic plan. He says that he is “on the fence” regarding Chinese, but notes that Chinese is also part of the strategic plan” as part of its emphasis on global learning. He further states that “students have requested [Chinese]...Certainly by next year we’ll have to implement it...” because of students feeding in from a local charter school where Chinese is taught.

Following these remarks, a male board member speaks briefly, simply stating that he’d like to keep some technology funding and would like driver’s education to remain free. Regarding staff changes – and Chinese in particular – he suggests that this is an area “where we have ‘wiggle room.’” (We infer that he means that this is an area that can be cut.)

The next board member to speak echoed a need for fiscal restraint due to flat and declining enrollment, lower real estate assessments, and general economic troubles. She also mentioned the upcoming retirement system costs. She stressed that she would not support any new programs other than those required by state law or driven by “student interest,” and that she would support ending classroom technology funding. The next board member to speak (Ms. West) also stressed the district’s economic problems and proposed having students and families pay for their own basic school supplies. She followed this by calling for student fees for driver’s education and an elimination of any new high school staffing (which we infer was a reference to the proposed Chinese class).

The final turn was taken by the board president who began by stating that “economic times are what they are....” His hope was to strictly limit tax increases, try to keep them under three-percent, which would include one-percent to help with down-the-road retirement expenses. With regard to Chinese (and staffing in general), it is interesting that the board member had spoken in strong support last December about the need for Chinese language courses. This time, however, instead of specifically mentioning Chinese, he suggested that the board should allow the superintendent and her staff to decide these matters; that is, allow them to determine staffing needs as long as they required no more than a two-percent tax increase.

All the board members having spoken, the president of the board then sought to obtain a show of hands on the staffing issue. He grouped together the following items: Chinese, Equine Science, Psychology, and a program referred to as RISE. The question at hand was whether these items should be funded. Five board member hands went up in favor of cutting these items. However, a point was raised by one of the fiscal conservative board members (who had earlier opposed any new staffing) that the issue was not really about eliminating programs, but instead about preventing any additional staffing—that is, keeping staffing “level.” Apparently concerned about “micro managing” the superintendent, the board president reiterated his belief that the superintendent be allowed to distribute “full-time equivalents” (FTEs; the salary of a full-time teacher) as long as overall FTEs stayed the same as the previous year.

Board member Hart objected at this point, suggesting that Chinese ought to be separated out from the list of items because “Chinese is half an FTE now, next year it will be full, then later on two [FTEs].” Again, the board president argued for letting the

superintendent decide on the distribution of FTE funding. Board member Hart, however, reiterated that because it was an entirely new course, “Chinese is a different animal...Chinese is a different animal.”

The board president then called for a vote on whether or not to eliminate Chinese from the 2010-2011 budget. On a 5-4 vote, the board eliminated Chinese; or in the earlier words of the superintendent, they voted to “postpone” it.

### ***Inferences from the Board Meetings***

The discussion indicates a real split in terms of philosophy and disposition. Some board members appear warm to the idea of Chinese, but are clearly worried about the district’s ability to pay for it during difficult economic times. But based solely on this video evidence, support for the idea of Chinese is not clearly apparent among all of the five board members who voted to drop it from the budget – none of the five were willing, at least at this point, to permit the superintendent to distribute funds in such a way that would avoid increasing staffing but still allow a pilot Chinese course. Thus, while money was obviously a concern, it seems possible that it was not the only concern. Moreover, among the four board members who voted to keep the Chinese course, other concerns were on par or nearly on par with fiscal issues; for example, the need to keep curriculum from “stagnating” and meeting students’ academic needs and interests.

### **Interview Data**

Given what would appear to be a fairly dramatic shift from the initial approval to offer Chinese I to the eventual decision not to fund it, this section attempts to bring light



to the different perceptions, values, and opinions offered to me by a sample of board members during one-on-one interviews.

### ***School Board Members***

#### *Interview with Former School Board Member Ms. Smith*

Ms. Smith was at the time of the interview a former board member who had served for 20 years up until her retirement in June 2009. For part of that time (until December 2007) she served as board president. At the start of the interview I sensed a bit of defensiveness on her part, and she seemed quite emotional throughout the interview. By the end of the interview, however, she seemed very open to sharing her thoughts in order to help me understand her view of the “big picture.”

The key theme that seemed to emerge from words was her sense of the political tensions that informed the Mandarin course decision making process. By “political,” she emphasized that she wasn’t referring to board member attitudes toward China, but rather to budget issues.

It is also a VERY [her emphasis] political environment. I don’t think the decision about Chinese was political because of “Chinese.” I think it was political because of how many courses are we going to offer and how much money are we going to spend. I don’t think it was political because anybody thought we don’t like China so we’re not going to teach Chinese! I don’t think it was political in that sense.

When asked further about the reasons behind the board’s eventual refusal to fund the Mandarin program, Ms. Smith mentioned the political conflicts that had taken place in prior years due to the high school renovation issue.

...you know, what happened was the election [of 2007]. There were five members up for election and they were all voted out. And these new people came in. They had their agenda and it was related to money.

She went further to describe, in somewhat caustic terms, her perceptions of the “hostile” environment surrounding the addition of the new board members in December 2007. She felt that the new members “resented the four of us that were left” and essentially refused to work cooperatively with the old board members, remarking, “whatever we suggested, they voted it down.” When asked if the addition of the new board members essentially put a halt to efforts to place Chinese into the curriculum, Ms. Smith responded,

It is complex. I think if we had the old board and old superintendent...a lot of things would be different.... Quite possibly we would have Chinese. I think there would be a lot more focus on education and less emphasis on money....I do think there was a broader vision at that time.

Though several of the school officials interviewed for this study mentioned budget issues, Ms. Smith put the greatest emphasis on the “political.” By “political,” it would appear that Ms. Smith is referring not just to clashes over how money should be spent, but also to a clash of visions over what a school ought to be.

I think if we continue to have people [on the school board] who are heavily focused on costs, the likelihood [of establishing Chinese into the curriculum] is less than if we have people who will take a broader look at what kind of education our students need to be successful as an adult. I think the key of the whole thing is who are the constituencies of the school district....The taxpayers are one of the constituencies, but for me it's always the students....and if you are looking at and serving your constituencies, primary constituencies, that's the students. It should be all of your students, and students should have Chinese, but I lost the vote.

Though Ms. Smith expressed understanding of a general desire to keep taxes low, she also expressed a belief that raising taxes is a normal activity in order to improve local education and that “taxes in this town are not high.” She mentioned her belief that as

candidates, each of the new board members had received approximately 20 thousand dollars from “people who have money....They had a very effective campaign....” Ms. Smith, it should be pointed out, had been a supporter of the high school renovation plan. Tying this issue to that of taxes, politics, and Chinese, she stated,

These people had real estate money and ... they didn't want the taxes go up. The real estate people came out with the property they wanted us to have our high school on, the property they owned and we were not going to do that. They were not happy....[I]f the taxes are highly raised, it costs them a lot of money and they try to keep the cost of education down so they keep the taxes down. I honestly don't think those people care or thought about whether or not we should have Chinese. I think they thought we shouldn't spend the money if we don't have to. Chinese just happened to be the victim of that.

Her words above suggest her belief that the new five board members had an agenda to keep taxes low and that this was supported by local business and real estate interests. In addition, she suggests that these interests—and the new board members—weren't really considering Chinese because they simply didn't care about anything other than keeping taxes low. A sense of bitterness seems apparent in her words as she states,

I was not in my time on the school board as opposed to raising taxes as some of my colleagues. And certainly the last couple of years, I felt that there was too much concern over it. You know when we raise somebody's taxes they have to pay about an extra three dollars a month, I don't think that's the end of the world. Yes, there are some people that cannot afford to pay. The other side of this though is that people don't want to raise taxes, but then there are members of the board who think there's nobody in [the district] who is poor. But there are a lot of people in [the district] who are poor, who couldn't afford to buy running shoes if they want to go out for track. So...almost 8 years ago now, and we established a fund...in the school district to pay for things for kids who could not afford [for example]a field trip, ... the heath physical they need to participate in a sport , [or] an advanced placement exam....[T]here are a lot of people who are poor, but they're not the people who are worried about the budget you know! So these people who are concerned about the budget are really, you know, the people who are living in their 600,000 dollar homes and up...

Ms. Smith appeared to be expressing some skepticism regarding the motivations and concerns expressed by the new board members. Turning her attention to the matter of sports in general and football in particular, she stated that

I think they're focused on the budget and haven't stopped to think about how important it is for the kids we're sending out into the world to have Chinese. I mean I think it's a lot more important for our kids to have Chinese than it is for them to travel all over the contiguous states to play football. None of our football games are around here, you know, so we are spending a lot of money to transport kids to play football. And yes it's important for kids to have.... I mean I'm a great believer in physical fitness...I go to the gym and I have daughters and a husband who are athletic but you know... where is the balance here?

Another issue that came up in some of the interviews concerned the fact that after the board voted not to fund a formal Chinese course, Chinese emerged within the high school enrichment program, taught by a tenth-grade student of Chinese extraction. The non-credit course attracted a small number of students who attended it during their lunch period. Ms. Smith was asked whether she believed this "enrichment course" might encourage the district and the board to eventually make Chinese a permanent part of the formal curriculum. Responding, "probably not," she suggested that the district's enrichment program was not of very high quality and that it was mainly used by the district as a way to avoid having to fund a formal Gifted and Talented program.

So I don't know what learning in the enrichment [program] is doing to help with Chinese, I think what's going to help Chinese is either having a change in the philosophy on the board, maybe what would happen in the next election, having educational leaders within the administration who feel it's important, or having the economy turn around.

Perhaps the overarching issue for Ms. Smith was her disappointment that the new board members failed to see what she considered to be the great importance in allowing the district's high school students to learn Chinese. Referring to me directly, she stated,

Because look at the world around us, Jinai. You know the Chinese ... are increasingly important to this country! I don't buy much that doesn't say "Made in China." China is a big player in the world right now and we need to be able to communicate. We need to be able to understand each other better, I think this afternoon has been great for me because of how you prepared for this, you know, how well you've thought these things through, and I'm really glad to have had the chance to talk with you. We need more of that. But you can speak my language; I can't speak yours and how sad is that?

*Interview with Current Board Member Ms. West*

Ms. West is the board member who voted no to funding Chinese language in May 2009. Interestingly, however, during our discussion she seemed enthusiastic about Chinese language and noted its value in terms of making students better prepared for the 21st century environment. She gave an example of her high school friend who learned Russian and benefited from it through her entire career. At the start of our interview, Ms. West also spoke enthusiastically about what she had learned at a recent conference session on foreign language teaching in public schools.

I was very impressed that there is a school district in Arizona that...surveyed the community to find out which languages were priorities...it was actually Japanese. Then they looked at the best way to teach languages and realized that [starting at a] younger age was certainly better. They started [Japanese and Spanish] in kindergarten and require them from K to fifth grade. They felt that by the time you got to middle school you should be proficient in one of those languages. In the middle school, language was an elective, and was not even a requirement in high school because they felt that by [then], you should have a strong foundation in language [and could] choose to expand your languages. In a lot of schools, we try to start them later and help them be proficient by the time they graduate. I don't think that's necessarily the best way to introduce languages. So I brought that information back to the board to show them that what we are doing is not the only way you can introduce language.

The above comments suggest two interesting implications. First, they suggest that language curriculum could be selected based on popular preference rather than on pedagogical considerations. Second, they suggest a need or desire for a redistribution or balancing of language teaching responsibility across the K-12 spectrum (and, apparently,

away from the high school). This latter implication seems to fit with the concerns of other board members that it might not be a good idea to simply add a new high school language program without first discussing the overall question of instructional delivery. This came through in Ms. West's further comments,

...the idea of adding Chinese to the curriculum came forward in 2008 or 2009, but all they gave the board was Chinese I, and [given the board's] budget problems, they didn't come through with a comprehensive [plan]. After Chinese I, then what? This is the cost for one year of Chinese I, but no one usually takes a language only one time. So there wasn't the financial follow-through of what it would mean to then have Chinese II the next year, and you still want to offer Chinese I for new students, and then have Chinese III? So financially to just throw money at Chinese I, we didn't feel was in the best interest of the students who want to take it, because we didn't have any money for Chinese II or Chinese III. It seems like it was not a really thoroughly thought-out program to add.

Embedded here is an even further implication, that although board member opposition to Chinese was about money, it was not solely about money, but also—at least on the surface—about the failure of administration to offer a fully articulated long-term cohesive plan. Whether this concern was sincere, or more of an excuse, is difficult to determine at this point. We do know that the board had little concern about the long-term sustainability of Arabic. For that language, it was simply enough that a teacher (the native Arabic speaking French teacher) was presently available at no additional cost to the district. In fairness, however, it's clear that the tradeoffs and balance between cost, need, and opportunity are often complex. Clearly, Ms. West had mixed feelings about the matter.

...do we have the money to offer the best program? If we don't have money to follow through and offer the best, it's not fair to start by throwing money at something and not having a follow through. So I felt badly about it, it's not like I don't support a variety of languages. I just felt like you are not doing the students' a favor if you have one, then you don't have the money to allow them to move forward in their study.

Like the other board member we interviewed who had voted against funding the Chinese class, Ms. West extolled the Chinese enrichment class, along with the students who were teaching it.

I'm so impressed with the girls, the students who taught it and the way it taught, because they did one part of the class on culture and teaching if you visit China and go to someone's home, what's rude and what's not [and] the nature of the culture. I thought the kids got a lot out of that. And the students were [diverse]. Two students, their dad is a business owner and does a lot of business in China. So their dad really pushed them to take the class. Some students they said they want to travel to China, so there was variety of reasons why the students were interested in this class. I thought it was great that there wasn't just one type of student, say a business student who felt they needed it for business. Some wanted just to open and expand their horizons by new languages. So it was a wide variety of students in the class. They touched on cultural things and they learned new words and symbols. They really organized the class to not just be about language per say but about Chinese culture, which I thought was really well done.

The contrast between Ms. West's and Ms. Smith view of the informal enrichment class is rather striking. While Ms. Smith views it in terms that suggest a reflection of defeat, Ms. West and Mr. Hart seem to view it as a big success. One wonders if this reflects a difference in the way the two sides view the high school as an institution. For one side, perhaps, activities like the enrichment class offer the appearance of diverse 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. But for the other side, the issue may be more of how the school can establish stronger and more formal world language education.

When asked more specifically about the barriers to having Chinese courses at District High (and what it would take to overcome these barriers), Ms. West went beyond the issue of budget problems to suggest what might be considered as structural problems. For example, she asserted that it would be currently impossible to obtain a "highly qualified teacher" because the state did not offer certification in Chinese. However, the state's education web site does list Chinese (along with many other languages) as a certifiable area. Though few state colleges or universities offer Chinese teacher

certification (including the local university), the state's education web site also describes a process for districts to obtain a waiver of certification (or a "temporary" certification) in areas where certified teachers cannot be found.

After mentioning the value of foreign language instruction in Chinese and other languages such as Russian, Ms. West raised other structural concerns.

I do think that the way to get it into more schools is to do a real evaluation what benefit the students most in the global community. If you think that Chinese language will better prepare these students for jobs in the 21st century, well then you've got to cut another language, because I don't think you can offer a smorgasbord of every language. There is not the money to do that. So instead of offering German, French, Spanish, and Latin, maybe you offer Spanish, French, and Chinese Mandarin and get rid of German.

Thus while Ms. West again raises the problem of money, she seems to suggest that schools can't simply offer every language that some share of the community might view as important; that there must be some evaluation as to which languages will be essential for students to learn and learn well. There can be no "smorgasbord," a term suggesting that one could take "a little of this" or "a little of that."

Although Ms. West mentioned the possibility of using technology or providing virtual classes, she downplayed the idea because "you really need to participate and hear the conversation in the classroom...it's best being there in person." In the final analysis, the question of establishing Chinese came down to fiscal issues.

So maybe the technology is the way to get more languages in the schools, because you are not paying the teacher, because starting a teacher costs 42,000 dollars for salary, plus benefits and health care—it's close to 65,000-70,000 dollars a year just for the teacher. That doesn't include curriculum and books. It's an expensive proposition to add something. To exchange German for Chinese is not nearly as expensive, or use technology that you might already have in your school district say like cameras or streaming or things like that. Those may also be the answer to giving more opportunities to students. But this year, we have even less. We have even a bigger budget problem and less money this year. We have already started the process of what are we going to cut, I don't think there is any way that we can get to



a balanced budget without actually cutting some programs in the district, so I cannot imagine that any administrator will come to the board and say we want to add something. If you want to add something, then show me what you will take away, because health care costs rise, and we don't have a tax increase to cover just the basic health care of current employees. Certainly you cannot add any new programs.

In a style that could be called adversarial at least, Ms. West laid some of the blame for the district's current fiscal situation at the feet of the old school board.

You know the sad reality is, this particular school district for years always thought they would always have money, and they made some poor decisions in the past always thinking that the money will be there. And now the economy collapsed. Our district owns ten million possibly to a swap [the debt swap arrangement described earlier] to build a high school which never built [referring here to the school renovation issue]. That's 10 million dollars we have to find somewhere—that is, for nothing—nothing—to pay the Royal Bank of Canada, because the interests rate went so low when we were introduced to this SWAP. That money has come due. Where would you get this ten million dollars? [Original emphasis]

Ms. West went on to note that under law, the district could only raise taxes 1.4% without resorting to a local referendum. Then, with similar intensity, Ms. West gave another example of what she appeared to perceive as the previous board's refusal to deal realistically with budget problems.

...our previous school board offered drivers education for free—for free! I went to high school in 80s and my high school had no driver education. You did that outside of school. So, [the previous board] offered a course that required four teachers' salaries—so that's a quarter million dollars in teachers' salaries for a class that really has no academic value. It's driver ed. You can get it privately. People from other states, schools, everywhere in the country, they don't have driver ed at school. And yet, we prioritized this at a quarter million dollars for that one class. It's not math, it's not science, it's not language, it's driving. So we [the new board] took away the behind the wheel instruction for free. We still offer it in school, but parents need to pay 50 dollars. But we still offer the classroom class for free, that's a quarter million dollars for classroom instruction on driving. Is that offered in China's high schools? No! [Original emphasis]

The issue of funded drivers education courses seemed to strike a raw nerve with Ms. West. She continued,

Oh, they [the old board members] think it's so important. What does the rest of the country does think? There are plenty of safe drivers that didn't have it as class in high school. And the history of driver ed is that a local professor ... in the 1950s wrote the driver ed curriculum. They feel like since we are the high school in the town where driver's ed was born, we should offer it. It's a graduation requirement! You cannot graduate from our high school without it. I personally think that's absurd. I think something like a language program is far more vital to a lot more kids than whether you get driver's ed at our school or you get drivers ed at a private driving school.... That's what I mean when I say the conversation about what we spend our money on. We need to have that conversation because what is more important? There might be the people in the community who think drivers' ed is ultimately the most important thing you could offer a student. There might be other people like me who think there are other ways to get your child prepared to drive than to have it offered at no charge, taxpayer funded at the high school! [Original emphasis]

Ms. West went on to discuss studies indicating that drivers education courses had no significant impact on driving safety among young drivers. She used that point to make another regarding data driven decision making:

So I think for critical languages the best bet is to have research driven data that says these are the students who seem to perform better and one of the things all have in common is they have a critical languages in their early age, or they had a comprehensive program at their public high school. That's the way to get things done!

Listening to Ms. West's views and apparent attitude toward the old board, I asked her to comment on the argument others had made, that if the old superintendent and the old board had still been in the majority, that the Chinese curricular initiative would have been approved. In what I perceived as a slightly arrogant tone, Ms. West essentially said

...yes...but we flipped the board...If she had the old board, I would say yes. The old board had already lost their majorities. There are still four members on the board from the old board, but we had the majority. We all knew she wanted it. We all said it would be great to have. No one on the board said there was not value to Chinese language. No one, even those who voted no. No one said it is not important. Even with [Dr. Maxwell] as superintendent, there was no way for her to get it. She had a board that wouldn't give her the money for it. It doesn't matter, even if [the old superintendent] was not retiring and was still here, the board will still be a majority of financially critical thinkers, so it would not matter.

Returning to the question of what it would take to get Chinese language in the high school in the future, Ms. West spoke of the importance of government grants in promoting desired policies.

NCLB, you know, if...say the state or federal level said we really think there should be more critical languages for all public students across the country, they could help make that happen. If they were to set aside block grants, the way we got technology in the classroom, that they would set aside block grants of \$200,000 to get Chinese language in public schools, it would happen.

Nevertheless, Ms. West argued that even in the unlikely event such grants would be offered,

I still think we still have to have the conversation; look at your entire high school curriculum and make priorities. It doesn't do any good, I don't think, to add a language without really evaluating what are the best languages to have. If you still say that it is good to have French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Arabic, and Latin [expressed as a question]...But something tells me that if you really take a closer look, something like German or French will go by the wayside. Realistically if you travel across United States, how many times do you need to know French or German? You don't! But if you travel across this country—Spanish—I lived in California and there were a lot of jobs I could have if I knew Spanish....So I feel like if you really look closely and globally, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, those will be languages that serve students best when they are looking at having 21st-century skills.

Ms. West thus returned the issue to that of pedagogical, and not simply fiscal, priorities. In that same vein, I asked Ms. West about the issue of improving District High's football facility. The purpose of the question was to gauge any differences in her attitudes toward sports and academics. Her response provided a broad view of the complex purposes of American schooling.

It is hard conversation to have to prioritize education and athletics, but the football field, 200 seats you cannot even sit in, because they are too dangerous. There are no bathrooms; there is no concession stand. It was built in the 1930s and it nothing has been done for 80 years. How do you justify having a school district in which you don't even have the adequate facilities. The soccer team plays there, lacrosse plays there, field hockey plays there, football plays there. They all use one facility. It should be a useable facility. And the goal is to do outside fund raising, so that people who really [value] the field to pay for it. And I think they will. There are

many in this community whose children play sports who go to the activities there and are very disappointed. Say you asked me for \$2,000, I would give it if I knew there would be bathrooms and a concession stand. It is not even handicap accessible. If you are handicapped, you cannot watch a game there. You can sit on the little platform by the park.

After outlining the need for improvements, Ms. West returned to the relative priority of sports and academics.

So to me it is not that one is more important than the other. They both are quite important to comprehensive public education.... I recognize in other countries, school is for school, it is academic, that's it. In America, school is about sports, clubs, theater, music, and academics. So it is harder for us to scramble that money across all the things that American education is supposed to provide. I think if we were more like some European countries and other countries which are focused solely on academics, it would be easier to make these decisions, but that is not the reality. The reality is kids go to high school in the United States, and they take cooking and they like football and they are in the theater and they are in choirs and they are in the band and all of that is paid for by the tax payer for a public education.

However, if Ms. West and others perceive American schooling as something like a big shopping mall, which appreciates diversity and in which academic, athletic, and artistic activity are equally important, then why did she vote no to staffing Chinese? If she is driven by the tight budget and emphasizes the need for priorities, is it reasonable to support a multi-million dollar stadium renovation program? Perhaps so, if indeed the funding could be obtained from private sources, though this may be unrealistic. It seems likely that the decision over football field renovation is toned with emotion and tradition, much more so than the decision of whether or not to support Chinese.

#### *Interview with Current Board Member Mr. Tom*

Mr. Tom has been serving on board since 2003, having served longer than any current member of the board, and having served during the tumultuous period of debate over school renovation. He was one of the four votes in favor of funding the Chinese program back in May 2009. One of the first questions I asked him was about how the

idea of teaching Chinese emerged within the school district. Suggesting that his memory might be a bit hazy on this, he pointed primarily to a strategic plan process that began in 2006 with a “committee of teachers, administrators, students, and community members.”

He went on to state that,

One of the things that we heard from the students was a real interest in having the opportunity to take foreign languages, especially Chinese, and have it introduced at an earlier level, maybe introduced in Elementary school where students really felt it would be easier to learn another language. And so the real interest in this came from students...it really became part of our strategic plan to look at ways that we could introduce other languages into our curriculum at an earlier stage. So, that was kind of the beginning of it.

Adding to this, Mr. Tom mentioned the influence of a local charter school focusing on global language.

Another piece of that is that one of the charter schools that’s here locally, the thing that they specialize in is international language instruction. They do that at the elementary school and I think it’s usually two other languages in addition to English, one of which I think has been Chinese, sometimes Chinese and Spanish.... But their school only goes up to eighth grade, so when they leave that school at eighth grade they come to the high school, so that created a demand for teaching Chinese at the high school. Because what would these students do when they got to high school, having had a number of years of instruction prior to that?

Mr. Tom thus speaks to two structural influences that would appear to support the establishment of Chinese within the district. First is the strategic plan, which according to Mr. Tom indicates “where we’d like to be 6 years from now...[the plan] says that it’s a goal we have that’s important...” The second structural influence comes from the local public charter school, which, as other data suggest, creates expectations among students and puts some pressure on the district to meet those expectations. In light of the board’s refusal to fund a formal Chinese program at the high school, Mr. Tom suggested that some less formal initiatives, such as the enrichment program Chinese class, might help in that regard.

One of the ideas that I'm sure we'll take a good look at is distance education. There's a pilot at the high school right now. It's a collaboration between a high school class here in [District X] and one in China. And they meet online, so that gives [students in China] an opportunity to learn English and our students an opportunity to learn Chinese, as well as some cultural things as well, to understand the differences in the cultures. So that's something that just started this Fall that might become a model...to pursue in the future. We'll see how that works. So, that's another thing that's going on.

Referring to the enrichment class, Mr. Tom stated,

...because of the interest that was at the high school, there are a couple of students who knew Chinese and offered to help teach a course last year. That was a non-credit course that was part of learning enrichment. So, that was another interesting attempt at trying to introduce Chinese.

When asked whether such factors as those described above might help establish Chinese into the formal curriculum, Mr. Tom stated,

I think it's inevitable. I think there's a demand for it. I think the students have recognized the importance of it. I think teachers recognize the importance of it. And it's really just a matter of trying to figure out the best way to do it. So we're trying some different things to see what works and what doesn't. Whether we go to a formal Chinese class – I don't know.

His words suggest uncertainty, expressing the importance of Chinese on one hand, but on the other revealing some lack of confidence that it can be established within the formal curriculum.

With regard to budget influences, Mr. Tom described in terms similar to those of other interviewees the pressures facing the board. But before focusing on matters of money, Mr. Tom spoke more generally of the problems involved in establishing district policies, especially in the context of this particular district.

There's a saying about school boards that says if one person gets replaced, it changes the whole board, because so much of what happens is [based on] interpersonal relationships, that just changing one person can really change the entire character of a board and how it interacts. You have to kind of start over and reestablish how people relate to one another whenever you have any kind of change in a board. So obviously, we've had quite a few changes in just the seven years I've been doing this.

It's seems likely that Mr. Tom is making direct reference to the change of five new board members, and one may wonder the extent to which his words reflect any of the frustration expressed previously by Ms. Smith. Beyond the changing face of the board, Mr. Tom discussed other problems peculiar to the district such as the school calendar (which must be suitable to the needs of both rural, town, and university-affiliated citizens), the closing of schools and the realignment of school boundaries, and the proper role of inter-school athletics.

Regarding matters of money, Mr. Tom pointed to issues of the declining U.S. economy as well as the feeling of the majority of board members that taxes should not be raised beyond the small percent necessary to maintain current programs. But Mr. Tom also suggested that the process was "political." When asked to explain, for example, why the five new members who voted for placing Chinese into the curriculum in December 2008 voted not to fund Chinese in May 2010, he replied,

It's hard to explain what happened. I mean, based on what was said in December, you would expect people to vote for it when it came back. But that's not what happened. Explain it? Well, I guess you would have to try to explain it as a political thing, that board members were feeling more pressure in terms of taxes in [May], than they felt in December. In December it was kind of theoretical; this is what we'd like to do. When they came back later, and we're farther down the budget process, well this is what we'd like to do, but we're concerned about raising taxes. So, they felt more pressure on the financial side farther into the budget process. So that may account for what appears to be a change in position. Money became more important.

When asked to elaborate on his use of the word, "political," Mr. Tom stated,

Local property taxes pay for 85% of the budget. So, if we approve the expenditure of money, that comes out of local taxpayers pockets. And they are also the voters. Generally speaking, people are not real happy about rising taxes. But, you know, on the other hand, people want to have good schools locally, they feel that's important. So there's that tension between yes we want to have good schools, but no we don't want you to raise our taxes. So, you're always [working to find] that balance.

Pressed to further elaborate, Mr. Tom brought up the problem of renovating the high school's football facility.

Well, for example, the football field downtown. People have a personal attachment to that. That is important to them. So, if you don't make decisions there that respect how they feel about it personally, that could be a political issue. On the other hand, it's also about the money. You know, we're talking about spending 12 million dollars [and] there will be people who don't want us to spend 12 million dollars on renovating the football field. But, on the other hand, there are people who have an emotional, personal attachment to the field, and want to see us improve it. Well, those things kind of bring a conflict...and the school board has to find a balance between those.

Put another way, perhaps, what Mr. Tom's words actually refer to are the deeper values that lie beneath particular views regarding particular policies and initiatives. In a dynamic and often volatile district like this one, the board of education's work is constantly "political," in the sense that it grapples with distributing resources across a broad array of public values and beliefs.

I asked Mr. Tom in various ways what it would take to get Chinese language established within the formal high school curriculum. Several times he responded that it would be a slow process, that it would take "time."

You have to do a little bit at a time and let people get comfortable with it so they can say, oh yeah, I can make this work for me. You have to give them examples. You have to show them it will work, that it's not just a passing idea, that this is useful to pursue. Then it gets to a point [where it] becomes something you expect everyone to do. You know, but that may take 5 or 10 years to get there. It just kind of evolves over time...so you have to be patient.

Referring back to the ongoing informal approaches to Chinese within the high school (i.e., virtual and enrichment opportunities for students), Mr. Tom expressed the hope that,

The school board will look to see how effective it was. Whether it was successful and so on. So, I would expect at some point, maybe at the end of the semester, there will be a presentation to the board that says this was something we did this year, this is what worked, and so on. And, over time you begin to convince the



school board members that this is a direction we want to begin to go in. So, you have to get everyone kind of on board, and it takes a little bit of time. Again, it's [similar to] technology. Board members are at different places in terms of how they see technology fitting into the curriculum. And, it takes time for everyone to see...this is how it could work, and therefore it's worth spending the money to do this. But, people don't necessarily see that right away. Or, they need to see good examples before they, you know, agree to it. So, you have to give them examples.

The implication seems to be that as board members see the results of virtual or enrichment Chinese classes that they will be persuaded to go further toward more formal arrangements. But besides emphasizing the importance of time and patience, Mr. Tom's words appear uncertain, even tenuous. In fact, based on my discussions with other school administrators, it was not clear that virtual or enrichment courses were being offered during the Spring semester of 2011.

As the discussion continued, despite Mr. Tom's words of support for the potential value of Chinese instruction, he spoke in ways that might lead one to doubt his confidence that it would eventually be included in the curriculum.

Well, like I said, I think it's inevitable. I would like to see us pursue it, but I think it's ok if we take our time trying to find the best way to do it...I don't mind if it takes a couple years to figure out the way that it's going to be most effective, that's ok. I don't mind waiting a couple of years to make it happen if that means we can get support for it, broadly speaking, I mean that's ok.

A moment later, however, he stated that,

It still comes down to the budget. I know next year's budget is going to be very interesting. Because of the economy, and we have a very little space to move. The budget cannot increase very much from this year to next year. It's a very tight cap. So, that's going to limit any new programs that we'll be able to introduce. So, Chinese will compete with other ideas. So, we'll have to make some judgment, somehow, over what are the most important things.

As discussed previously, of course, one of those "important things" would be the renovation of the football field, at a cost of upwards of 15 million dollars.

*Interview with Current Board Member Mr. Hart*

Mr. Hart is one of the five new board members who came into office in 2008 in the wake of the school renovation controversy. He is a science professor at the local university. I first asked him to try to recount the events leading up to the decisions made regarding Chinese back in 2008 and 2009. His first recollection was that the proposal to institute Chinese came from “faculty bringing forward ideas.” Because no other interviewee emphasized or even mentioned this aspect, it might be that Mr. Hart was using the term “faculty” to represent the collective group of administrators, department leaders, and teachers who may have participated in planning the proposal.

Mr. Hart described the planning and budgeting process as they related to the Chinese proposal.

Each year faculty brings forward suggestions for possible courses to be offered in future years, and the suggestions are essentially accepted by the school board. But then we enter into a budgeting process, so it’s not guaranteed that the courses are going to be offered. It typically happens in December. One of the courses that came forward was Chinese language. There had been some discussion on the board, even before my time here, about offering Chinese foreign language at District High. It seems a very reasonable thing to do. It’s a world language and certainly an important one spoken in the world today. The thing to understand is that when that list comes forward, it doesn’t guarantee we’ll offer the course. Currently, because of change in the economy [and] in the budget structure that all [state] school districts are facing, we are now limited in the amount we can increase our budgets. And there is also a very large increase coming in the contribution towards retirement. We have a lot of financial pressure on the district right now and have been very careful about how many additional things we can support financially.

Like other members of the board who voted against funding the Chinese class, Mr. Hart raised the issue of great costs coming down the road and a desire to avoid raising taxes beyond state limits.

Further describing the board’s dilemma, Mr. Hart stated,

We think that revamping the world language curriculum is a good idea. That was strategic goal. But really the issue there is if you are going to add something, what

would you be deleting from the curriculum in order to keep the finances reasonable and just focus on what's important?

Overall, Mr. Hart's words represent what appeared to be a sense of fiscal realism, if not conservatism, among the majority of board members. The belief seemed to be that budgets were very tight and new programs couldn't be approved without cutting back old ones.

We asked the superintendent to consider what was going to occur then to reduce language offerings in other areas that were unpopular. The superintendent didn't want to do that, so we ended up at that point saying we really couldn't afford to commit to hire an additional staff person for one section of high school Chinese.

Like Ms. West, he brought up the possibility of alternative and less formal ways of bringing Chinese language to District High. Referring to the ISBA conference attended by some board members, Mr. Hart brought up,

... a school district in Arizona where there was a need for greater Spanish education. [They brought in] community members, Spanish speakers to after-school programs in elementary schools [to teach] intensive Spanish language for an hour or two a couple of days a week. They ended up getting a better product in terms of language education and reached more children. We looked at it and said, you know, a lot of that is true for Chinese in our district. The important time in [foreign language] development is not the high school level; you are a little bit late at that point. It should be much earlier in a child's life to develop some fluency with the language. We have a pretty strong, diverse Chinese community here in our district, and we should be looking at this in a different way to encourage language education more at the primary than at the secondary level.

Mr. Hart's words suggest a general belief in the value of having Chinese language programs in the district. Moreover, they suggest his vision of an ideal Chinese language teaching situation that involves community members introducing Chinese language, writing, and culture to elementary and (possibly, we may infer) middle-school students. At the same time, his words suggest some doubt in the value or effectiveness of introducing Chinese at the high school level. Also to be noted is the implicit expectation

of receiving instructional assistance (perhaps voluntary instructional assistance) from members of the local Chinese community.

Mr. Hart's thinking on the merits of community involvement came through strongly in his supportive description of the informal Chinese enrichment classes that took place during the 2009-2010 year. After expressing a bit of disappointment at the superintendent's failure to consider community based elementary programs, he described the situation as follows,

What happened in the high school, instead, was that the students were so interested in Chinese language, that some Chinese students volunteered to teach a basic Chinese language course to their peers. Ultimately we ended up with a better product because suddenly you have the students who are taking strong ownership of education and wanting to teach their peers, and probably in a much more authentic way than if we had gone off and hired a certificated teacher. Did they make as much progress on Chinese language? That's an open question, and I don't know the answer. I don't think anybody does. But I think it made stronger roots within the high school as to how Chinese language might work. And we are disappointed that we still haven't picked up that part in the elementary level, because I think that still creates a great opportunity for community partnership, and even more growth in language opportunities for the kids' in this area.

Mr. Hart's words suggest a belief in the importance of less formal structures of learning, even so far as to tout their advantages over more formal structures. What seems to emerge here is a sense that the key goal, at least at this early phase, is to expose students to Chinese in somewhat informal ways (e.g., utilizing parent or student teachers in voluntary, non-credit classes) before making a commitment to more formal arrangements (such as a regular course of credited study). He spoke further, again expressing preference for less formal programs.

We do have a strong Chinese population. That's a part of our community. Why wouldn't we try to more closely associate with that part of the community in order to teach all children in the community? We don't see that happening. We just hire a teacher and offer one course; that is kind of a superficial approach. It is progress, but not very much progress. And the board thought we could make more progress

even without a professional teacher. You didn't have to have certifications in Chinese language. The members of our Chinese community are a very talented group of people in terms of providing ... a foundation and basic language skills. I think they could do that very well as non-professional educators.

In light of his opinion, stated subsequently, that the district "cannot afford to hire a professional certified Chinese language teacher...in every one of our elementary schools," one wonders if Mr. Hart's praise for informal, community based teaching stems from his perception of its benefits or of its cost. Also interesting here is his reference to the possibility of placing certified teachers in elementary schools. In fact, as Ms. West pointed out in our discussion, elementary school language teachers would not necessarily need to be certified. They might have to be paid, however, and one wonders how much weight this factor carries in discussions of exposing primary school students to foreign language instruction. In fairness, it should be pointed out that it is not the responsibility of board members to develop and present curricular policy. Perhaps Mr. Hart and other board members might have been receptive to a proposal that paid Chinese speaking community members to teach their language in the district's elementary schools.

When asked about other types of ways to deliver Chinese language to high school students, Mr. Hart brought up the possibility of virtual courses established through the Confucius Institute. After discussing some of the possible initiatives and expressing a bit of disappointment that none had been "followed up on" at District High, he turned to the problem of teachers' acceptance of virtual courses originating beyond the district.

I cannot speak for Teacher Union obviously, but one of the issues is that with any online course we offer, you are not hiring teachers to provide the same instruction, so that means you are denying a union member a job. So the teachers' union becomes a little bit cautious about that. It's what I see as a school board member. They would much prefer to see a teacher in the school providing that amount of education. Then we run back into the same circle loops: say, well, we know we

cannot hire enough teachers to offer the comprehensive language program, so if we could not do that, isn't it better to do it [as a virtual class]?

The "loops" to which Mr. Hart refers bring back the discussion of costs and tradeoffs.

Speaking hypothetically, is Italian or German as important a world language as Chinese? We ask that as a school board of our professional educators. If we have only this much money and you are saying Chinese would be a good thing to do, are you saying that something else is less important and what would that be? We have to help the superintendent decide where to best allocate community resources, the taxpayer's money. It's uncomfortable because historically we always said the Romance languages are very important, we have to teach them, right? But look forward over the next 50 years, is that true? I wonder.

Mr. Hart returned to the above themes several times during the interview. Essentially the message seemed to be that district administrators must begin any Chinese initiative by first developing plans that incorporated informal community support. After that, if Chinese became more popular, they would need to cut back in other language areas. Toward the end of the interview he stated this idea fairly clearly.

We did end up with a Chinese course, but it was different than what was originally proposed to the school board. I think in some ways it was a better solution because it was a part of our community stepping forward and saying we are happy to help. If we see that happen at the elementary level that is also a part to add that I think is probably the strongest of all. Then the third part, if you want professional certificated teachers to provide some of that language instruction, then we've to make some difficult decision and say maybe we are not able to offer other languages at the same time, and again, that's the simple reality of what the law limits us in terms of how much we can change the budget.

Asked to explain the phrase "what the law limits," Mr. Hart described how the state's school finance law allowed the district's budget to grow no more than 1.4% without a local referendum. He added, however, that the district was already committed to an average salary growth of 4.5%, thus, as other interviewees had pointed out, leaving the district in a tight fiscal bind.

But beyond lack of funding, Mr. Hart expressed concern with the quality of the proposal for Chinese instruction that the board had been handed. As he put it, “a Chinese language course is not the answer. A Chinese language *program* is the answer.” By this, he explained, he meant that the majority of board members were seeking a lasting and growing “stream of interest.” He re-emphasized this need later in the interview when discussing the problems faced by districts like his. “What school districts in Pa. have strong Chinese language programs? Those in high immigrant areas.” He went on to describe the broad language programs in districts such as Chicago and New York. “But,” he added, “it is a little bit challenging here [in our district in the central part of this state] because of the location. To bring in and hire Chinese language teachers, that would be a large drain of our resources.” Overall, both here and in his earlier remarks, one notes a somewhat complex conflation of three issues; program demand, program quality, and program cost. We infer that Mr. Hart believes that demand is currently insufficient, but might be raised through informal, low cost, grass roots initiatives. Moreover, even if a regular Chinese program could be afforded (which, he believes, it can’t) and launched at the high school level, it would be neither enduring nor of sufficient quality to justify the expense.

In some ways, Mr. Hart’s perception and vision regarding the problems tied to launching Chinese at District High are persuasive. For several reasons, however, one wonders the extent to which his vision is feasible. For example, one wonders how willing members of the local Chinese community members might be to provide consistent Chinese language instruction in elementary, middle, or even the high schools. In addition, while Mr. Hart mentioned the prospect of virtual courses or of obtaining assistance from

the Confucius Institute, such ideas raise questions about the district's ability to orchestrate through the complexity of attaining such goals. Finally, cutting other language course to make room for a Chinese program would likely yield resistance from current language teachers and possibly hostile feelings across programs. Students in other language programs would likely also be upset to learn that their language opportunities were being cut back.

All in all, beyond issues of feasibility, one notes a “disconnect” between Mr. Hart's enthusiasm for an ideal program and his willingness to support or promote the addition of Chinese instruction to the curriculum. More than once he mentioned that "It's not up to school board," to make suggestions, but rather, "it's the superintendent's job...." Yet, while the (former) superintendent seemed willing to take some risk in launching a pilot Chinese program, Mr. Hart's high-level and somewhat complex vision appears to rule out the possibility of risk—in short, he's created a high standard for proceeding further, one that seems very difficult to meet.

### *District Central Office Administrators*

Having read about the complex and demanding issues with which school board members must deal and how they felt about their ideas and decisions on the future of Chinese at District High, we now shift to narratives of the interviews I conducted with two key actors in the school's central office. The first of these, Dr. Maxwell, was deeply involved in trying to promote the teaching of Chinese at District High and who even visited China herself in an attempt to secure a grant. Presented next are the perceptions



and views of Ms. Layton, the school's curriculum director who was also very involved in supporting this proposal

*Interview with Former School Superintendent Dr. Maxwell*

Ms. Maxwell was employed by District X for 35 years. Apart from initially serving as an English and French teacher, Ms Maxwell also held the positions of Director of Planning, Research and Communications, high school guidance counselor, assistant superintendent, and most recently district superintendent for eight years from 2001 to 2009. During her tenure, Ms. Maxwell indicated she was always "very supportive of introducing languages into high schools" given her own background as a language teacher. Ms. Maxwell retired from her post as superintendent in July 2009.

Before we started our interview, she mentioned she was currently enjoying her retirement by doing a lot the things she always desired to do; reading books about women in leadership and spending weekends away in a log cabin with her family. During the whole interview, she looked graceful, though she sighed a couple of times when discussing what she considered to be the board's unsatisfactory decision regarding efforts to introduce Mandarin into their already robust world language program. In her words, "...a disappointing outcome after a lot of work had gone into this for the first couple of years." Ms. Maxwell kept a smile on her face, however, and was very willing and patient in conveying to me her understanding of what happened to the Chinese program that she was so active and instrumental in trying to bring about.

In Superintendent Maxwell's words, the initial press for Chinese language at District High began around 2002 or 2003, a time when Chinese "became an emerging language nationally in American high schools, when it became less unusual to see it in

other districts.” She added that it seemed important at the time to “look at emerging global languages” and expand the district’s world language program.

It seemed that there certainly was enough interest to develop a [Chinese] class and we also felt that was an important direction to go. A committee was formed within the language department to gather information. Teachers contacted schools, [especially those] similar to [District X] ... similar size, similar wealth, similar curricula approaches. [They] then gathered information about what was being done in other places. How did they implement their program? How did they secure a teacher? –which is the most difficult thing about this. How did they support the program over a period of the years, how did they tap the resources?

Around that same time, stated Superintendent Maxwell, an opportunity developed for her and members of her team to take a trip to China sponsored by the Confucius Institute, whose aim was to place Chinese teachers in American schools. Based on this 2008 visit and on the previous groundwork done by Maxwell and her team, a proposal was eventually submitted to the board in fall 2008.

Recognizing that the district was at that time in some financial difficulty, Maxwell described the argument she made to the board in December 2008.

I tried to illustrate that we were probably talking about the same student population. That is, while we wanted to encourage increased enrollment in language study, in reality it might be that Chinese would pull [students] from other courses. I felt that it was very likely that if we were able to start with one or two periods, we might see a decrease in the other languages. If so, the staffing requirement would even out across the school. I was trying to help the board members feel more comfortable with what they were concerned about in terms of increasing staffing for a new course at that time.

In other words (and based on her further remarks) Maxwell had argued that the board could staff possibly two Chinese courses at the cost of something close to \$30,000 (the cost of a half time teacher, but not including books and other materials). Moreover, she suggested, this cost might be balanced out as students left other language courses to

opt for Chinese (i.e., other language courses might be dropped and fewer teachers might be required).

During the interview, Ms. Maxwell cited several reasons as to why she perceived Chinese was not funded at State High. The reason emphasized most, however, involved budgetary concerns:

The budget as an environmental factor, is probably the number one factor in adding and supporting any course in the curriculum including Chinese. Some of what happened here was timing, you know, if we had been ready to bring this forward, perhaps two years ago, I think perhaps then I could have persuaded them to go ahead to add that to the curriculum."

Her words suggest her belief that the previous school board would have been more receptive to funding the course. She further articulated what she meant by saying that the budget was the "number one factor,"

In general, board members look at staffing as the number one cost, [amounting to] almost 75-80 % of the budget; personnel, cafeterias, secretaries, faculty, administrators, and so on. When the board is looking to cut to save money and not increase taxes after they look at other things, they look at staffing, and *not* adding staffing is the way to keep the budget from expanding. So when a board looks at a deficit, which this board was, with increasing health care costs and the [state's] impending pension situation, which is two years away, they began to allocate large sums of money to a saving account to head off what's coming in the next a couple of years. Looking at adding staffing was an uphill battle.

She then sought to describe the "meaning" of the "budget" in two different ways; as something like a strict limit for some members of the board, but something perhaps more flexible to others. Regarding the first meaning, she stated that:

...for those nine elected school board members, the budget is a very *real* factor at the table in terms of... I'm thinking of an organic way of looking at this and thinking of the total budget as your whole garden patch. There is no fertilizer, there are no seeds, [or] whatever except what that budget provides. And so for board members and the superintendent, it is reality! It's how you get the resources to your faculty and your students, it's really where every single thing starts. The budget is viewed here as sort of a finite garden. It's the means to an end, but not the end itself. Limited resources must be invested efficiently and effectively to produce value.

As for the second meaning of “budget,” Ms. Maxwell went on to explain that,

...80% of our budget comes right out of the pockets of the people in this community, so the 120 million dollar budget here is paid by the citizens. And you can imagine the diverse points of view! We have many citizens who would say to me “We think this is wonderful, please, please, go forward with it, we don't care if we pay more!” And we also have others who say “You are spending too much. We want to have a good school, but we don't need to offer 7 languages...we don't want you to pursuit that.” So what the elected school board needs to do is balance all these things in the instructional budget....

In this sense, the budget is more flexible, less certain, more an outgrowth of conflicting needs and values within the community. The following quotes from her interview suggest that Ms. Maxwell leans toward this second meaning,

I always wanted to help board members understand that the budget is there... that the means to the end, it's not the end itself. Hopefully we can demonstrate to them how important these instructional initiatives are, and why perhaps we can pull monies from other areas to try to support these.

Also, Ms. Maxwell discussed her role as an advocate for greater educational spending, framing education taxation as “the best investment” for our children, much as a business invests in a product line:

When I would talk to [local business owners] about the budget and why we needed a 5% tax increase to continue to offer programs, I wanted to impress upon them that public school expenditures and tax increases were just the same kind of the thing as when they invest in their businesses. It’s exactly the same kind of the thing. They are trying to improve their product. Our product is learning and we’re trying to improve that, and that what they do in the community as business leaders and the work that we do in preparing our students to tackle whatever they decided to do with their lives are one in the same. And that these investments are not an economic ball and chain around taxpayers. This was my constant message to the business community and I urged our board to speak up in defense of the tax increases as investment and not to be apologizing for them because of the good we were able to do for the students.

Thus, in this sense, the budget may be a garden, but it can always be made a little larger, more seed may be added, different types of crops can be raised, and the public and the students all gain from the additional investment.

Superintendent Maxwell shared other possible barriers to Chinese language implementation. Though linked to larger fiscal issues, formal and informal structural issues were also involved.

We hoped that some students would choose Chinese as a second language [and] not be just taking Chinese instead of Spanish. But without doubt, some students would be migrating from some courses to others. That causes consternation of the teachers who are teaching those other courses. That's a very real structure issue for your faculty. As we asked the language department to explore this, in some ways we were asking them to help us figure out how to do something that might decrease enrollment in their own programs. So that's the structure issue and we can't say to the teachers, "No, this won't have any impact...." It very well may and you have to be very honest and ask them to think of the bigger picture. It's an economic reality; it will make the teacher go from full time to part time perhaps, because of lower enrollment in a certain areas.

The implication here is that perhaps not all language teachers were supportive of efforts to add another language that might in the long run threaten their own positions in the school. Maxwell went on to describe another structural issue,

The other structural issue, and it's not anything that can't be resolved, is simply about [placing a one-period course] into a complex, large high school curriculum. It's often difficult for students to schedule that, because it's only one time during the day! For example, Physics II, which is only offered one time a day, could be in conflict with [Chinese]. That then impacts your enrollment in trying to put something new into the curriculum.

Other interviewees (board member Hart, in particular) also brought up the problem of so-called "singleton" classes and how they can disrupt students' schedules.

As mentioned earlier, Superintendent Maxwell's trip to China may have prompted her to consider other structural issues related to fiscal and human capital issues. Referring to the Confucius Institute, she raised questions about ultimate costs and responsibilities.

Because this institute is instrumental in sending teachers and they have a program where you can apply to have a teacher [work at your school], it seemed really serendipitous that we have this opportunity to [take the trip to China]. [However], the questions will be the same. To what level might this partnership support the work in the district? How long it will last? What's the ultimate cost?

While noting that the Chinese government would pay part of the costs, she expressed the realization that “the board doesn’t just look at in for just this year but also asks what will this be five years from now. And we would hope that it would be a robust program.”

Although Superintendent Maxwell gave the clear message that there was strong internal support from her administrative and faculty team, she also mentioned the apparent lack of community support.

People were not calling me up asking why aren’t you offering Chinese. I felt that this was an initiative that we took. I would agree...that there was not a strong push for this from outside the district. Even when we put it on the schedule and even though we had plenty of students interested in learning Chinese, I didn’t have parents calling in saying “I hope you’re going to do this.” When it came time and the board could not support the class, there were a few people who called or sent an email and simply said we were disappointed about this and we hope it will be reconsidered. It was certainly not a push.

Thus, revealed here is an additional barrier, or perhaps better put, the absence of a strong incentive (in the form of community support) for the board to fund the Chinese program. Nevertheless, there was a good deal of student interest. Maxwell noted that after the board gave its initial approval for the class, enough students enrolled in the proposed course during the following January and February to justify one section, “just one period of a teacher’s time.” Maxwell stated that her feeling at the time was that “we were hopeful that we might find someone either connected with the university who had a part time appointment, who... this might work very well with them to have a part time assignment with us.”

Again noting the refusal of the board to support the hiring of a part-time teacher, Maxwell stated, “of course, we were very disappointed...” Worthy of further note, however, was her take on the Chinese “enrichment class” that emerged in the fall of 2009,

after the board's May vote to withhold funding for the formal courses. While board members who voted against funding extolled the virtues of the informal enrichment class, Maxwell seemed to display mixed feelings.

What did actually happen in the following fall, and again I was gone by then, is that the Learning Enrichment teachers who are very creative about finding ways to offer instruction to students took some of the [interested] students and were able to find someone who could come in and work independently with those students, and there was a teacher who was willing to supervise it. So last year there was at least an instructional element at the high school and we were hopeful that if we could at least get something started like that through learning enrichment... that was a different way to come at it, then [we might later have] it as part of the regular curriculum. So that was a long chronology of where we started with an interest in expanding international languages and then where we ended up at least a year ago. A disappointing outcome after a lot of work had gone into this for the first couple of years.

Overall, what seems to emerge from Superintendent Maxwell's words is a sense that while budgets often represent a constraint on administrative or instructional action, school leaders needn't necessarily be shackled to them. For Maxwell, the school system can be more dynamic and school leaders can be a bit more aggressive in defending the costs of adding new programs and staff as "investments." Moreover, the school system appears to be viewed as an institution in which risk taking is often an acceptable means of reaching difficult goals. For example, although Maxwell admitted the many uncertainties and unanswered questions surrounding the plan to start a Chinese class, she appeared comfortable with them, apparently believing that most important thing was to get at least one class started. Another way to think of this might be that for Superintendent Maxwell, the key "barrier" to launching a Chinese program was the failure to actually launch a Chinese program. As Maxwell expressed near the end of the interview, the board "decided that Chinese was not going to get the resources...it was really a very one-dimensional decision."

*Interview with District Curriculum Director Ms. Layton*

Ms. Layton is the district's curriculum director and has worked in the field of curriculum and instruction in the school district for 16 years. She came to her current central office position in 2007, and deals with curriculum, staff development, and assessment. It is fair to say that Ms. Layton was centrally involved in the process of introducing Chinese to District High's curriculum. Overall, her interview suggests that her position was such that she had many issues to face and choices to consider. For example, in considering which foreign language to add to District High's curriculum, she mentioned having originally considered Korean because it is spoken by the greatest number of the district's immigrant population and, unlike Chinese, uses a phonetic alphabet. After deciding upon Chinese, due to its stronger influence in the world, she faced the issue of whether to develop a Taiwan or "mainland"-based program. This choice would determine a particular direction for her policy team in terms of recruiting teachers, obtaining instructional resources, and national collaboration. As she put it, "do you work with Taiwan or China?"

During the interview, Ms. Layton provided a narrative of events related to the development of a Chinese language initiative for District High. She began by mentioning the six-year planning strategic planning periods that began in 1995, 2001, and 2007, stating that "each of those six year plans have a strategy calling for expansion of world languages within the school." She continued, highlighting the input of community members and students in steering the latest plan toward greater world language emphasis.

...in 2006 and 2007, we had a series of opportunities for community input. As part of this, we had a group of 48 students, leaders of student groups. We had them get together in a large focus group and talk to us about what they thought the district was doing well, where they thought could improve and a number of things. These



were the same kind of questions we were asking the community. What our students very clearly told us is that they see themselves as global citizens and they believe they are advantaged if they are multilingual. [This became one of the] three really *strong* recommendations that went into our strategic plan.

As discussions continued as to how to improve world language teaching at District High, Ms. Layton noted that,

As we looked at our world language offerings, we were very Euro-centric with what languages we have offered traditionally, and one goal of mine, and the shared goal, was that we wanted to offer a language from Middle East, and we want to offer an Asian language. And so we looked at the U.S. Department of Ed and other agencies, and saw very clearly that the critical languages that they were identifying were Arabic and Chinese, so we started to look at that direction.

Ms. Layton then related how Arabic was introduced, as mentioned in previous interview, as a result of already having a French teacher whose native language was Arabic. Chinese, however, was more difficult.

Ms. Layton described a couple of efforts to jump start a Chinese program. One, she noted, had been an opportunity to collaborate with the state department of education, which was organizing a trip to Taiwan that would allow district representatives to make connections with Mandarin teachers. But, she added, because of the previous superintendent's (Ms. Maxwell's) retirement, the district opted not to participate. To Ms. Layton, it seemed like not a "good time to make that kind of commitment to a new program." Another more concrete effort involved the trip she took to Beijing with the former superintendent, Ms. Maxwell, in June, 2008.

But, by October, 2008 she had announced her retirement, so we are sort of in a holding pattern with a new superintendent being hired and coming in. And when they offered us a chance to form a partnership and go to Taiwan within the same time period, there was the sense that it wasn't a good time to move forward with that initiative and make those kinds of large commitments to bring a teacher from Taiwan or from China until we had more stable leadership within the school district.

It is tempting to suggest in addition, however, that the decision to temporarily halt the process may have had something to do not just with the superintendent's retirement, but also with the changing political climate of the board of education. Later in the interview she commented on the new board:

Some of them have different ideas or different approaches. They are different human beings and they came in, five of the nine board members came in in reaction to our high school renovation project, something we had a lot of dissension over in the community. And so there'd be a natural difference of opinion in a number of things, not just the renovation, it would be natural for them not to see eye-to-eye or have a similar opinion on other programs as well.

Although Ms. Layton's description of the event surrounding the Chinese proposal and the board's eventual refusal to fund new staff were largely similar to that of the other actors interviewed, a few new themes did emerge. For instance, she spoke of the problem of leadership and its critical role in the District High Chinese language story.

... our environmental factors have been a change in leadership with the superintendent, a change in leadership with the world languages coordinator. I feel like we [were] getting forward movement and [then] we seem to stall.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, Ms. Maxwell, the former superintendent retired as of the end of the 2008-2009 school year. Her replacement, who by various reports showed little interest in implementing a Chinese program, also left the district a little over a year after taking the post.

An additional theme involved the district's relationship with the newly established Confucius Institute at the local university, a potential source of funding, instruction, and other resources.

They provide a great deal of support to the predominately young teachers that were coming from China and who would be here for several years and they provide a great deal of support to the school district who want to use as an avenue to build a strong sustained program. I'm hopeful that with...the Confucius Institute that we would be able to get something started for 2011 and 2012, for the next school year.

Ms. Layton further commented, however, that she wasn't sure where the collaboration process currently stood with regard to funding and teacher support. In other words, there remained a good deal of uncertainty as to whether a program could begin in the fall of 2011.

Ms. Layton went on to describe the kind of help she hoped would be available from the Confucius Institute, based on what had occurred at another state university.

What the Confucius Institute [at the other university] has been able to do is to bring a group of teachers from China together and actually introduce them to American culture and American schools, and do some staff development with them in the summer...

Based on what happened at the other university, Ms. Layton hoped to be able to “gather data” on program success and learn from the successes and setbacks experienced in their program. “We were very excited about coming together as partners...I'm thinking that would be a stronger way to do about it than us as a school district trying to do it on our own.” She continued,

I'm hopeful the Confucius Institute would give us that kind of support structure for our partnership to not only start, but sustain a Chinese language program. That's why I'm so interested in knowing where are we with the grant, not just the money part of it, because the district would need to put funds into it as well, but where are regarding access to experts and resources that are more challenging for me to try and access on my own on the behalf of the district.

Clearly, Ms. Layton is concerned about adequate staffing. She stated,

World language as a curriculum area is a challenge. When we have a vacancy for a teacher in our world language program, we have many fewer applicants. We have few individuals, who are qualified and certified available to us. And Chinese, because there has been no certification in Pennsylvania and relatively few heritage speakers who are certificated to teach available to us, that's even been a harder language than French, Germany, and Spanish. World language positions in general are not easy to fill if. Chinese has been more challenge then some of the others, but they are all challenging. So part of it is the certification regulations within the State, part of it is how to access people who are interested in starting a program, that may only be part time.

It should be pointed out that Ms. Layton's statement as to there being no Chinese certification in Pennsylvania is incorrect. The state does offer certification in Chinese and provides avenues for non-certified persons to teach with temporary "emergency" certificates. But the underlying point is valid: there are very few Chinese language certification programs available within the state.

As expressed earlier, some critics of the district's Chinese initiative commented that it seemed necessary to cut in other language areas before adding a new language program. But Ms. Layton took aim at this suggestion, offering some evidence from the experience of a neighboring state.

...we had to keep the staffing stable which means that we had to stop doing something else. And that was a caution, [but] in the State of Ohio, which has been working for quite a bit to bring Chinese into that State, one of the recommendations they made in this conference [the one she attended with former superintendent Maxwell] was to not remove another language in order to bring Chinese in. They found that that built a lot of resentment among teaching staff. The neighboring school district of ours has said they were looking at Chinese and their world language department was going to remove French. But the leader of the department happened to be the French teacher (laugh), so, she was not in the favor of losing her job. So we don't want to take that tack.

The "tack" favored by Ms. Layton is apparently one that expands the world language program, but within the confines outlined by new members of the present school board.

The board of school directors has asked me to put together a committee, to reconvene a committee to take a look at the world language instruction in the school district and to make recommendations to them by the end of this school year [2010-2011] of what we need to do. I feel very strongly we need to do two things: offer world languages beginning at the elementary level, not at the middle school level, and add an Asian language. I think the one that makes the most sense to add is Mandarin.

Thus, we see some agreement here between Ms. Layton and the views of board member Mr. Hart. The difficulty remains, however, as to how to obtain qualified teachers.

With no mention of the community-based alternative offered by Mr. Hart, Ms. Layton emphasizes the need for partnerships with organizations able to supply fiscal and human capital, stating,

We need to form a partnership...and the best way for us to do that is to work with a university, like the North Eastern University in China or through the Hanban somehow to have a heritage speaker of Chinese to come work with us.

This, of course, would require a fiscal commitment from the school board.

Yet even if the board was willing to share in the staffing and other resource costs, concern would likely remain over program sustainability. On that point Ms. Layton states,

What I've heard, from others who've been more successful than we have to date, what they are very clear with me about is that you need to have a long range plan of how to sustain [the program]; that you really can't have an effective program, with having a teacher here for two years then leaving and having another person come for two years. You really need to build a way to have somebody help you get your program started, but build a way to sustain the program.

When asked about the district's will and capability to follow through with Chinese program development, Ms. Layton states that she is "*determined.*" But as she suggested throughout the interview, it may not be enough for one single person or even a small group within the district to be determined. People and groups may come and go, and as they do, so does will and commitment. What may be needed most is strong articulate vision from the top the school organization downward that will place the highest levels of priority on the development of a world class world language program. To date, despite the good leadership efforts of many people, success has been fleeting.

## *District High Administrators and Faculty*

### *Interview with head counselor Ms. Jones*

Ms. Jones came across as a clear supporter of having regular Chinese courses at District High. This came across immediately in her first words to me as I entered her office. "Let me call this other teacher to see if she will come up because she is the one that went ballistic besides M. [the former world language coordinator] when we were supposed to be able to teach Chinese in our high school and our board voted it down." After I explained the purpose of my study, and before I could ask any substantive question, Ms. Jones enthusiastically remarked that,

Promoting world languages to students, any language, is so important in a global society. If there's an opportunity to take a world language course, why wouldn't a student do that? And most of colleges want you to have world languages. They may not want you to have Chinese, but if you have Chinese, it opens all these doors to you!

Asking her recollection of the origins of the Chinese language initiative at District High, Ms. Jones explained,

We officially asked to have Chinese [in the] 2007/2008 school year. The process was that the [world language program coordinator and another teacher] presented it to the other coordinators. They approved it going forward to the board and we really thought it would pass, because.... But then we got the new school board and new superintendent in 2009-2010 and they said no. Had we had the old school board and the old superintendent, we would have Chinese in the curriculum today. I'm convinced of that.

When asked for the reason why the old superintendent and board would approve to staff Chinese, she said, "They were forward thinking. They put the kids first! We had 40 kids signed up for Chinese. Forty students. That's a lot for a new world language. So, we assumed that the board would pass it, which was an incorrect assumption..."

Thus, because student enrollment and interest was very high she thought the program would be funded and established. When I asked her to gage the possibility that Chinese might be added into the curriculum in the near future, she said,

“No, No, No. I don't think so, I could be wrong, I hope I'm wrong. There is this new young [world language] coordinator, he's struggling in the job because you know [it's his first year]. It's just overwhelming and the school board is not forward thinking. And this new superintendent, ... I hope he changes.”

Throughout the interview Ms. Jones emphasized the importance of teaching Chinese as part of a progressive, global curriculum that might open doors of opportunity to American students. "I mean China, basically, everything is made in China. Why wouldn't you want to encourage kids in the United States to learn Chinese?" She went on to frame a question:

It used to be in the presidential scholars program that kids would get sent to the UK or Germany, depending on what's happening in the world. Now they send kids to China for five weeks, so why wouldn't a high school offer Chinese?

Ms. Jones was asked in various ways to offer her opinion as to why the board declined to fund the Chinese language program. In a similar tone to former board member Ms. Smith, Ms. Jones replied, "I think that's POLITICS! And I don't understand politics because we should have Chinese in our school. There is no question in my mind. Absolutely!" She further explained that,

if you would talk to the school board members, it would be interesting to hear their perspective. I'm sure it would boil down to money, but they might [also] say we don't have the interest. They may be politically correct, but we have the interest in this high school to teach Chinese. There is NO question in my mind. [Original emphasis]

I interpreted the phrase “politically correct” here as reflecting Ms. Jones' belief that the five members of the board who voted against funding may have perceived that compared to all the interests of community members, families, and students, having a

Chinese language program perhaps ranked relatively low. Nevertheless, she commented further, saying,

I understand you have to balance the cost of education with the needs of the students. But I see our course curriculum is this thick [extending her arms apart]. We have over four hundred courses, and some of them are way less enrolled than 40 kids, so why couldn't we have Chinese and get rid of another of those courses?

When asked about the factors that might promote the eventual inclusion of Chinese in the curriculum, she suggested that one important factor for world language programs is finding a good teacher. Though she noted that at the time the board withdrew funding there was no available teacher, she expressed the belief that it would not be difficult to find one. "We didn't...have the teacher, but we could find a teacher. In this community we could find a teacher to teach it."

*Interview with former head of World Language Department Ms. Reitmann*

As head of the world language department, Ms. Reitmann was particularly sensitive as to how other world language teachers would feel about the added competition for student enrollments if Chinese Mandarin were added:

I think they [other foreign language teachers] are very resistant to change and if Chinese becomes very popular so that other people could lose their jobs, I think there's the fear. Not of the Chinese language culture, but the very practical sense, the idea that they say "you may have part time job next year because we don't have enough French classes for you.

About three years ago, we hired a new Latin teacher and Latin was always here, but not terribly popular. In a few short years, the situation just turned around because the teacher is so good and I know sometimes my colleagues are thinking "oh boy, everybody is going to start taking Latin, maybe not Spanish, or other classes." You know, even though she's our colleagues, she is very respected, but I know that possibility is in people's minds.



When asked about anything else she could think of that prohibits the teaching of Chinese Mandarin, Ms. Reitmann was the only interviewee who brought up a concern about China's political and cultural differences and she was reminded of what she went through as a child given the perceived threat of the former Soviet Union:

I did want to mention the fear of such a different culture. I think the fear of the power that China represents the future of the world. Maybe it sounds like "paranoia," but I'm not. Some other people maybe think about the huge population and the motivation that China has, you know... the world of future could be a different place. Perhaps they would just take very passive actions? When I was growing up, I experienced the same thing with the Soviet Union. Everybody, my parents, my family, on the TV, everybody talked about Soviet propaganda that they were giving to us, they were causing us to be afraid, you know we have the cold war, the power the USSR had. I used to have dreams that the soldiers were coming to my house when I was maybe 9 or 10 years old. Because we talked about bomb shelters and enter their homes. I had the drills under our desks in case they would bomb or we got attacked.

The words above may or may not be the "tip of the iceberg." That is, it is difficult to determine if they reflect some hidden resistance to including the language of an "adversarial" nation in the high school's world language program.

At last, she informed me about what happened to the Chinese program in a neighboring school district years ago.

I recall the school principal who was working with the head of World Language in Pennsylvania. [The district] brought a Taiwan girl to the school through a grant. But after two years, the grant ran out. The school district would not grant her any more. So, a couple of things happened. He became frustrated and he left school district, because he was very innovative [but] this is a very rural school district and then somehow [the Chinese teacher] found another job.

Ms Reitmann's words here underscore the fragile nature of Chinese language classes in difficult "habitats." They also may suggest how unstable leadership often results in a weak program.

*Interview with Principal Mr. Smith*

Mr. Smith is currently the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade principal who has been working for District High for eight years now. (Under the authority of the most recent superintendent, who resigned in November, 2010, different principals were assigned to each grade at the high school.) Maybe because of his background as a school counselor, he seemed very cheerful and eager to talk throughout the whole interview. Mr. Smith echoed many of the primary concerns that my other interviewees mentioned regarding District High's budget crisis and the difficulty finding qualified teachers due to state regulations, which to him bordered on the "ridiculous" and "asinine."

We have had professors come here to teach, but we have to have a teacher with them, ironically. Because they're not certified to teach at a public high school. But if they had a certification in teaching they could. It's really ridiculous, PDE's rules... I don't know, it's asinine but yeah.

Apart from economic and structural concerns, Mr. Smith pointed to the community demographic factors as key influences on curricular change.

... if you have a high Asian population in your area, then you're most likely going to offer, you know, Chinese or Japanese. But, for example, if you have a high African American population, then you offer black history or studies.

Other than the simple demographic distribution and population, he perceives it as also being "political."

Well you have influence because you're a taxpayer. For example, if you have a big population of Asians that move into your district that are now taxpayers, then you go to the board meetings and you say I want this to be taught at your school. You know, if 33% or half your population is Asian or you have enough of a population saying that we should have an Asian teacher or teach some Asian language,...yeah, that's how it works usually.

Thus, in Mr. Smith's view, if a Chinese language program is the goal, more political pressure may be required.

On the local level, the Asian population would have to get together and talk to the board and say that they would like this to be offered and put political powers and pressures to get it to occur. And that's possible. I mean there are things that happened but I think it's going to take a concerted effort. And it doesn't necessarily have to be the Asian population. It could be those students that want to take it as well and their parents.

From Mr. Smith's perspective, the whole idea to even offer an Asian language like Chinese Mandarin was "student driven." Commenting on the high school's Learning Enrichment program, he stated that,

If the students didn't get together and take a poll and say that they wanted to learn this language, [it would not have] been entered even into the LE program. So that was kind of a student driven kind of thing.

Here, Mr. Smith may be referring to the student surveys conducted during the 2007 strategic planning process. As has been suggested by others, the Chinese LE program is perceived by some to be a "foot in the door" for future Chinese language programs.

When I first asked him about the possibility of adding Chinese program to the curriculum in State High, he seemed very optimistic:

I think as the interest in Chinese grows, people want to speak it, become more globally identified and marketable. I think we're going to be, how can I word it, "less Americanized." [Some say] "English is the way and everybody needs to speak English." I think we need to go the opposite direction, we need to speak more than one language, we need to incorporate more than Spanish, French, and German. Especially because of the market, you know, the Asian market coming over to the US. Being able to converse with the people that are coming over and doing business in our state and country. We should be able to, vice versa, go over there and do business and be able to speak their language.... So I think it's only a matter of time. I think more schools are offering that. I think...we need to certify more students at a college level to be able to teach Chinese, Japanese whatever, so we can use those teachers in our schools. I mean it's hard to find those unless you're in a big city where there's a lot of students of Asian nationality.

However, when I came back to this question later,

It's not looking good (laugh). It's hard to bring in new teachers when times aren't good. There is more emphasis on your content areas such as math, social studies, science. We're not at that point, but a lot of districts are cutting out their electives, but we're not there... They're doubling up on math and science and English. So math and English is your big double-uppers. So, you know, you got eight periods a day, four of your subjects are content areas, but then if you double up on any two of those, then you got seven and you only got one period left. That's like lunch (laugh).

His initial thought is favorable, but somehow perfunctory. Perhaps he, himself was uncertain about his own willingness or vision with the practical situation, because when asked again, he started to share more of the concerns he perceived. This was a recurring characteristic in several of the interviews I conducted; to hear people talk about how important Chinese is, but then speak somewhat ambiguously about the way to create actual programs in the schools. For example, in the quote above and at other points within the interview, after emphasizing the importance of students having opportunities to learn Chinese or other Asian languages, Mr. Smith suggests that current policies stressing math and science work to marginalize subjects like foreign language and other electives.

Expanding the list of barriers, Mr. Smith also sees the limitations of using resources from the neighbor university:

[They don't] give us crap (laugh). I'm sorry. Everything that we get from [them] we have to pay for. So for example if we wanted to use [one of their facilities] for the prom or graduation, we have to pay for it. But on the other hand, they provide us with a lot of the interns and the interns come here but we are in fact training their interns, so we're giving back to them for that. But I don't think [the university] offers as much as they should or could....I mean if they had a Chinese program or had a professor teaching Chinese through the LE program, kids could go through that program and take it for credit or just take it but they [the students] would have to pay for it.

His words suggest frustration over the idea that a world class university is “so near” and yet, apparently, “so far” in terms of two way cooperation.

In the rest of the interview, Mr. Smith expressed some optimism regarding virtual language courses and the possibility of gaining assistance from the newly established Confucius Institute. Nevertheless, he reiterated his belief that for Chinese to be added would probably require another language to be cut. When I put to him the possibility that Chinese language was “doomed” at District High, he stated,

It’s not doomed, I think there is a possibility that it’s going to run into a lot of barriers cause nobody wants to reduce faculty that are already here for a subject that’s not here. It’s like Chinese is not here but these other subjects are here. So if the student interest increases, and the parents speak out in thinking that it’s valuable, and [the local university] says that there is money, I think there is a good chance of it actually happening. I think all those things have to come together as one to get it to happen.

Once again, as was inferred from other interviewees, one gets the feeling that a rather high threshold has been established for the launching of additional world language courses such as Chinese.

### *Interviews with District High Teachers*

Five teachers offered their insights into the question of providing Chinese language courses at District High. Included were three world language teachers (two in Spanish and one in French and Arabic), an English teacher, and a social studies teacher. All of them expressed strong support for the idea of including Mandarin courses and most of them provided insights that either reinforced or added to what we had heard from other interviewees. This section offers a summary of their comments and ideas.

In addition to the problem of the budget and the board’s decision not to hire new staff, one issue that came up right away was that of teacher certification. Most of the

teachers mentioned the problem of finding a certified Chinese teacher. But one of the teachers pointed out the fact that under Pennsylvania law, districts can request “emergency certification” (also known as an “emergency permit”). This particular teacher, in fact, stated that she had only recently become certified to teach a world language, but had taught it for several years at District High while attending school to become certified.

The issue of emergency permits seems important to this case, but also seems to be somewhat misunderstood. While there are eight different types of emergency certification, and a full description of the requirements for obtaining each one lies beyond the bounds of this work, the basic requirements (PDE, 2011) are that the candidate must possess a bachelor’s degree, but not necessarily in the area in which he or she will teach. Avenues exist for foreign candidates to obtain permits, especially if they will teach foreign language. Finally, an emergency permit is something that the district must request (individual candidates may not obtain them on their own) in cases where they can demonstrate that no other teacher is available. In other words, a school that wished to staff a Chinese program could use this avenue, as opposed to searching for a regularly certified teacher. As one teacher put it, “a certified community member might work.”

Three of the five teachers I interviewed specifically cited the school board’s refusal to staff the Chinese course as well as their stated reasons for doing so. As one world language teacher put it,

We were supposed to have Chinese. We had it approved and then the school district said we didn’t have enough money. But the interest was there. The students want it! We did a student survey with all the language classes and we asked what [additional] language do you want to take and according to the survey the highest one was Mandarin, [then] Arabic, and [then], I think, Italian.

This teacher went on to mention the informal enrichment class, but dismissed it somewhat saying, “People still think we are offering Chinese but we’re not. I would rather it just be offered as a normal world language like it was supposed to be. The interest is there from the students, the interest is there from the faculty!”

On this last point, regarding faculty interest, two of the three world language teachers interviewed disagreed as to whether their colleagues might oppose adding Chinese because it might pull students away from their classes. One put it as follows: “I don’t think [my enrollments] would be hurt by the Chinese program I think students would be more likely to take two different languages at the same time. I think in our school we welcome everything. We welcome new stuff. We would *love* to have another language! It would make our department stronger and more varied! I don’t think it would be a competition because it’s so different.” In contrast, another world language teacher stated that “if a student is taking a different language maybe they don’t have time for my language anymore. It’s a reality that the number of students in this class went down because they went to Arabic. It’s a reality that at the end of the year one of our Spanish teachers doesn’t have as much of a job.”

Regarding the recent inclusion of Arabic, however, the teacher quoted in the preceding paragraph as having some concerns about lower enrollments indicated that the high school may be “pulling back” on its efforts to promote the language. When she mentioned the possibility of the school not offering Arabic III, I asked her why. “We don’t know,” she replied. “I’m sure that they are saying that it’s money.” I asked if there were reasons beyond money. She replied, “if the public thinks it’s important then the

money will be found! But so far the public, the parents – the teacher too, haven't pushed for it enough."

Following up on the money issue, the teacher quoted in the preceding paragraph stated emphatically that she didn't "believe" there wasn't enough money. I interpreted this statement in a more symbolic than literal sense, inferring that the teacher meant that if something was deemed valuable or politically popular, it would be funded. Another teacher seemed to reinforce these remarks. Speaking of the "new" superintendent (who is no longer with the district), she stated,

Our new superintendent is very fiscally aware (laughs). He is very much budget, budget, budget and that is a change I would say from our last superintendent who wasn't constantly focused on the budget. So we hear a lot of that "we don't have the money!" So I could see why they would give you that explanation but at the same time, I think most American schools, and our district is not exempt, have lost focus, we've lost sight of what education is and what its purpose is.

Pausing briefly, the teacher quoted above said, "I try to keep my nose out of the politics. It makes my job easier." She then proceeded to describe the "new" superintendent:

It's very different [now]. He reminds me of a politician, whereas our last superintendent, I felt she had more humanity, you know what I mean? Like she'd actually be in the building. I have yet to see [him]. He's a politician. He shows his face when it's convenient I think. That's just my personal opinion. Everything we hear about him, it's like this top-down management. It's not like we all sit here and decide what we think would be best for the students then we take it to him. It's very much, he says, "this is what you are going to do." I don't feel like he has that firsthand knowledge. He's just going off what it says on my AYP [annual yearly progress report], you know what I mean?

Another teacher described a similar sort of disappointment with the "new" superintendent.

The new superintendent showed up for a guest visit of people from Mexico. This, I think, was to show the Spanish teacher that she had his support. He [slowing down her words] *speaks very nicely, "eloquent" and a "presence,"* but does not convey a



lot of information. He says big things are going to happen but he never says what they are.

Regarding AYP and NCLB, I asked the world language teachers if either of these had had any detrimental impact on their work. Both tended to dismiss the idea. One stated that she was happy “not to be part of NCLB because we don’t have to teach to the test, we can pull in culture, etc.” In other words, there’s no press to “teach to the test.” As one put it, if there was a test associated with her language class, fewer students would want to enroll in it. Referring to NCLB, she added, “Nothing that I know of really affects what happens in this classroom. In fact, I don’t feel that languages get very much attention at all.”

In sharp contrast, the English teacher I interviewed believed that NCLB had had a negative impact on world languages within the school.

Absolutely, without a doubt! If we don’t pass NCLB the consequences are steep. Because languages aren’t tested, they’re on the back-burner for [administrators] and that’s how it is in *many* American schools right now. So absolutely, we tend to focus on those testable subjects. [In] my opinion, it’s absolutely back-burner for them. They don’t care, because it doesn’t influence the school other than them being able to say [using a sarcastically happy tone] “hey guess what, we offer six foreign languages at this school.”

Two of the teachers expressed great enthusiasm for virtual or on-line learning. One, a social studies teacher, had participated in on-line teaching and had been part of the district team that visited Beijing in 2008. Essentially, she included virtual interaction between her students and a group of students in Beijing as part of her social studies class. She pointed out, however, that although her students “go to the web site about four or five times a day, with the 12 hour time difference it is very hard to set up any kind of synchronous activities.”

### *People at the Local University*

Given the scope of this topic, It seemed important to talk with local university actors who had inside knowledge of District High's situation and who even may have played a minor role to try and help facilitate various grants. Their perspectives also helps reveal some of the other factors that either promote or inhibit the teaching of Chinese at the high school level.

### *Interview with Professor. King in College of Education*

Professor King is a faculty member in the local university's college of education. He chairs the world language certification programs in Spanish, French, German, Russian, and Latin. At the present time, in accord with state and professional requirements, students seeking world language teacher certification must major in their language (which usually takes about two years of study in literature, culture, linguistics, and language) then pass an oral proficiency exam. Although the state presently "certifies" teachers in a wide range of languages (including Chinese), and it provide "standards" and "Praxis exams" for only a handful of these (and not for Chinese). Professor King cited the lack of Chinese teaching certification standards as one of the barriers preventing the university from establishing a Chinese certification program.

They've talked about trying to change that. They've talked about at the state level creating some set of standards but it seems to have always fallen through. Of course as we know, foreign languages are typically not the highest priority. I think in education more of the policy making tends to be involving science, technology, and mathematics because there are direct industrial kinds of applications to those fields vs. foreign languages or social sciences and humanities more generally.

His words suggest the implicit conflicts between current trends in education policy (i.e., NCLB) and the importance of world language teaching and learning. He continued, saying:

I think you can see that playing out in the standardized testing. Like the PSSA [the state's public school student assessment tests], for example, right? You can see which areas are targeted for the standardized tests and which are not. And of course, in the news maybe a year ago they were talking about how PDE had commissioned, I think, a group in Minnesota ... to create a set of standardized tests in the different content areas. Any student graduating from high school in the future will have to pass these tests as part of the graduation requirement. There were tests in a whole range of content areas, but not in foreign languages. So again, I think they're sending this message that "we test what's important and we're not testing language because it's really not all that important." So it just doesn't seem to be a high priority. That's probably true in the U.S. in general but it seems to be especially true in Pennsylvania. Even in comparison to Ohio, I think the state of Ohio, our neighboring state seems to be, you know, much more together in terms of focusing on and prioritizing foreign language education. Then of course you have our other neighboring state, New York, where they actually have a regency exam in the different content areas and foreign languages are definitely one of the areas students have to take the exams in.

Apparent here is the concern discussed earlier in this work about the possibility that heavy emphasis on accountability in a narrow range of subjects might reduce the amount of emphasis and resources available for other school subjects such as foreign language.

Dr. King pointed to another reason for lack of interest in Chinese or in foreign language generally; the general influence of English language itself.

.... there is also the predominance of English as a global language which for many people I suppose undercuts a need to have education in other languages. So that's one of the challenges that we face in world languages is making a case that this is indeed important, I think especially because of globalization. It's important to have awareness of other cultures and to have at least some kind of proficiency in other languages.

As is the case with so many other commentators over the years, Dr. King's words suggest some frustration with the perception held by many Americans that foreign language ability simply isn't essential for having a successful life or career.

Further discussion focused on reasons why there is still no Chinese language certification program at the university. First of all, its Chinese major is a relatively new program. On top of that, however, Dr. King expressed concerns about students enrollment,

The majority of students I see coming into world languages are students who decided before coming to the university that their goal was to become a Spanish teacher or a French teacher or a German teacher. Usually because they were inspired by their own high school teacher, they had a great relationship with their high school Spanish teacher or something like that, and so they decided this is what they want to do. In the case of Chinese—like other less commonly taught languages like Arabic—these are languages that are not commonly taught in the schools and so as a result students who would be interested in studying those languages often don't make that decision until they're already at the University. So they're starting from the bottom rather than coming in having had three years or four years of language study in high school and being able to jump into a more advanced level.

His words suggest the barriers imposed by the absence of "Chinese" within American students' social mindspace. In essence, one sees a vicious cycle where no one was taught Chinese in high school and therefore no one considers becoming a Chinese language instructor themselves:

We don't have students coming in with a background in Chinese. At the same time then, because they are not coming in, we are not preparing students to teach Chinese and so it remains the case that schools are not offering Chinese, right?

Professor King further speculates,

I think many world language students might hesitate to try to get a certification in Chinese because they would say "there aren't jobs out there in Chinese." But, of course, one of the reasons there aren't jobs in Chinese because there aren't people who are qualified to teach it.

This cyclic phenomena could help us to understand the lack of certified Chinese language teachers, compared to other languages teachers. At the same time, Dr. King suggests that more students are taking Chinese as their major for other reasons.

The students [the Confucius Institute] is seeing start to enroll in the Chinese major are not doing it because they eventually want to get a certification to teach Chinese. They are often students who are interested in international business, international affairs, and international politics. Sometimes there are students who might be interested in eventually applying to law school and would like a background like that. So it's a very different population of students right now.

In other words, students tend to take Chinese to assist them in other careers, not to develop enough skill to teach it. Thus, the amount of Chinese that college students take would likely be more determined by their individual needs and career paths, not by state certification rules.

Shifting to the topic of District High and the school board's vote to block funding, he shared another concern about the perceived difficulty of Chinese language and how this might scare some potential students away. After mentioning the district's budget issues, Dr. King stated:

... if they're going to make that commitment, [they need to have] confidence that they'll have a steady supply of students who are interested; interested in learning the language and aren't going to be intimidated because you know Chinese is *so* different from the other European languages that are more commonly taught. [For example], the perception [exists] that Spanish is very similar to English and its pronunciation is fairly transparent. There are so many cognates between the two languages so it's easy. Verses Chinese – that seems so different – that must be very, very hard. So whether there'll be a steady supply of students as well as the issue we discussed, which is insuring that there will be a continuous supply of good quality teachers.

When asked about his perspective on the collaboration between the Confucius Institute and the local university, he said he was "cautiously optimistic."

I'm cautiously optimistic that having a Confucius Institute here now ... could really change things. I think the institute at Pittsburgh has really strengthened the

possibility for Chinese language instruction there. I think also in Columbus at Ohio State, I understand they also have a Confucius Institute there. The Chinese language program has really led to some great things. So I'm hopeful [for] collaborations between world languages and the Confucius Institute and the local school district. Not just the [local] area school district. Hopefully we'll be able to expand. Of course, there's [mentions several local school districts] and other districts in the area. So yeah, I'm hopeful. It's starting to unfold now, you know, it's starting to happen so we just have to see.

Professor King went on to contemplate how such partnerships could be made to work,

[The Confucius Institute] would fund new teachers, people who are just graduating with their teacher credentials in China, but they would come here, we would do some orientation to teaching in American schools vs. Chinese schools so they have some experience, some idea of what to expect, and then they could work in the local school districts, ... probably alongside you know another teacher ...having another certified teacher in the room is a possibility. So there's another teacher who's present and then we have the teacher from China, then I think we might find a way around those restrictions.

The restrictions to which Dr. King refers are state requirements calling for the use of certified teachers in public school classrooms. A sense of uncertainty ran through his remarks, perhaps reflective of the uncertainty currently present in state law, which claims to "certify" Chinese teachers, but which also allows exemptions to teacher certification in shortage areas. For example, state law allows the use of temporary "emergency" certification. Although this may offer a potential workaround to State requirements, Professor King noted the potential pitfalls,

But of course that would be a short lived thing...having the teachers come, they would only be here for a couple of years and they would go back and we would always be trying to bring in a new supply of teachers, so there would be a high turnover rate.

Apart from hopeful future collaborations with the Confucius Institute to promote Chinese language instruction, Professor King also conceived of other initial "baby steps" his department could suggest as a way of breaking the vicious cycle,

One of the ways to create a bridge to getting people prepared to start teaching Chinese might be to recruit from the groups of people coming in to teach Spanish. Try and recruit them in the sense of offering a like an add on certificate of some kind, sort of like a minor where they would do a certain number of credit hours in Chinese that would probably be adequate for them to go and teach maybe first year Chinese, the very basic introductory Chinese, because I think that would be something that with maybe an extra year or so instead of four years to do their world language program they could do five years. I think we might be able to recruit people and convince some of the students that would be worthwhile because it would eventually help them get a job. They could say to a school district, “yes, I’m applying for a job to teach Spanish but I can also teach introductory Chinese, if you’re interested in starting a Chinese program.” And so that might be the kind of thing that might encourage districts to begin a Chinese program.

Dr. King’s idea is certainly worthy of consideration. However, it prompted me to consider other similar kinds of arrangements. For example, could we make it easier for individuals already fluent in Chinese to become trained in classroom instruction? District High’s local university, like many other universities, has a good population of Chinese speaking graduate students who might be eager to take on a part-time or full-time high school teaching assignment, especially if some sort of “for credit” training program was offered. This is just one of many possible ideas. But the bottom line seems to be that two types of conditions appear to discourage students from seeking to become Chinese teachers: uncertainty (where no one really knows what the process would entail) and rigidity (where the regulations become so difficult as to discourage potential teachers).

### **Summary of Emerging Themes and Issues**

The purpose of this chapter was to convey the key ideas and arguments presented by the interviewees. To that end, a series of narratives was presented to convey the meanings each actor attached to the goal of introducing Chinese instruction at District

High, as well as to the problems associated with that goal. In reviewing these narratives, I now attempt to classify what appear to be the most explicit (i.e., “low inference”) issues uncovered in this case along lines previously laid out in chapter two. In addition to these explicit themes, other more “high inference” themes also appeared to emerge. For example, there is the question as to whether Chinese language instruction really lies within the popular “mindscape” of public education. In addition, while little overt evidence was found of negative feelings toward the idea of teaching the language of one of America’s key competitors (if not “adversaries”) in the world, a sampling of popular opinion (via Websites and op-ed columns) suggests that some negative feeling exists in the American heartland. Such “high-inference” themes will be discussed further in chapter five.

It is also important to point out, that a full reconsideration of the interview data has prompted me to reconfigure the categories of influence presented originally in chapter two. This matter will be discussed at the end of this section and in greater detail in chapter five.

### ***Economic issues***

#### *1. Availability and potential for obtaining the fiscal and human resources needed to start and sustain a Chinese language curriculum.*

The interviews indicate broad agreement that the district faced a difficult financial situation and that this played a part in the board’s refusal to staff the Chinese course. However, some disagreements were evident, at least among board members, regarding



the district's capacity to absorb the costs associated with hiring a new Chinese teacher. It may be noted, however, that in all likelihood, the additional cost required for hiring a part time Chinese teacher represented a very small portion of the overall district budget. For this reason, the board's apparent willingness to consider far greater spending for the purpose of football stadium renovation also seems quite noteworthy.

With regard to human capital (i.e., the availability of a Chinese teacher), the general feeling seemed to be that no teachers were readily available. Part of this belief may have stemmed from incorrect perceptions of state teacher certification law.

## *2. Program "sustainability."*

A division was apparent, again, particularly among board members and the superintendent regarding whether it was appropriate to staff a program without strong assurances that the program would continue – over time and over advanced course levels (i.e., Chinese 1, 2, 3, etc.). One's perspective on this issue likely influenced their position on the "resource" issue listed above. At the same time, this concern over Chinese program sustainability appears somewhat out of sync with the board's position with respect to Arabic, the continuance of which was entirely dependent upon one teacher's willingness and availability to teach it.

## *3. Perceived relative value of outcomes linked to investment in a Chinese language program.*

Although every respondent expressed a belief in the importance of learning Chinese, it was often possible to read between the lines and gauge the depth of that belief. For example, tremendous praise and emphasis given to the informal, student-taught, enrichment course (or to the possible use of community-based volunteer teachers) could imply a more shallow belief in the need for students to learn Chinese in a formal classroom setting. Similarly, as touched on previously, the contrast between the willingness to explore the appropriation of millions of dollars for football stadium renovation and the reluctance to spend a fraction of this amount per year for Chinese instruction may indicate a lack of commitment to establishing a Chinese program.

#### *4. Public/student demand.*

Our interviews indicate a general agreement (based on both student surveys and actual enrollments in spring 2009) that a sufficient number of students would enroll in a Chinese 1 course. Questions and disagreements remained, however, as to whether the course would grow and whether students would leave other language courses in order to take Chinese, would take Chinese as opposed to not taking any language, or would take Chinese as an additional language. The evidence does suggest, however, that a stream of demand could exist, given the local charter middle school's Chinese program.

## **Structural issues**

### *1. State teacher certification policies related to Chinese and availability of teacher training.*

As suggested above, some confusion appeared to exist among respondents regarding state certification law. Based on a reading of state education department Web sites, it would appear that “where there’s a will, there’s a way.” In other words, a school district seeking to offer Chinese would at least be able to hire a qualified person under the emergency certification provisions of state policy. On the other hand, it seems clear that very few state universities (and not the local university) offer secondary Chinese certification programs. Moreover, the belief was expressed by one or two respondents that the state did not offer certification in Chinese. Based on state department of education Websites, this appears to be a false impression.

### *2. Availability of organizational “space” for the addition of a new world language program.*

The “space” issue arose in two different ways. First, concerns were expressed regarding the difficulty of scheduling a “singleton”; that is, a course for which there is only one section or which might only be conducted for one semester or one year. The second space issue concerned whether there was, essentially, “enough room in this town for both of us.” That is, would teachers of other languages appreciate or resist efforts to establish an additional language course in the program.

*3. Determining the “best” grade level (elementary or secondary) for launching Chinese language instruction.*

Some respondents expressed concern that high school was too late to introduce a language like Chinese, and that a better strategy would be to work from the ground up, perhaps introducing it at the elementary level in order to generate greater interest later on. However, there was no firm idea expressed as to how to formally integrate such instruction into the elementary school. Moreover, one wonders why this concern arose primarily with respect to Chinese given the fact that other languages have for years been taught successfully mainly at the secondary level.

*4. Leadership.*

Part of the overall story expressed by the narratives reveals the absence of a sufficient “champion” to push the Chinese policy initiative through to fruition. One gets the sense that there were people, including the superintendent, who really wanted Chinese to be taught and were willing to propose and push for it. Absent, however, is the sense of “mission,” “vision,” or consistent advocacy that was probably needed to push the initiative all the way across the goal line. It seems likely, however, that much of the energy needed for success was sapped by other critical events surrounding school district governance (i.e., the political conflict over school renovation). As further evidence of this point, one informant (not quoted in this chapter) recently expressed concern over the current acting superintendent’s apparent lack of concern over obtaining grant money from the Confucius Institute. The informant reported that the acting superintendent’s key concern appeared to be, “what will happen when the money runs out?” Viewed on a

higher level of inference, one wonders whether this concern represents a typical response to an offer of grant money, or if it reflects a lack of interest in building a Chinese language program.

## **Social/Cultural issues**

*1. Values regarding the purpose of a school system and the proper role of those who govern them.*

Coming through rather explicitly in some interviews (and more implicitly in others) is an apparent split in district members' perceptions of educational purpose. For some (the board majority, it would appear), schooling and district governance are matters of relative constraint. Budgets are viewed as imposing strict limits on administrative and educational actions. Variations to budgets occur only when there is strong, broad, and visible support among taxpayers. For others, district governance and educational administration are less constrained. They are acts involving leadership, the work of moving people to new beliefs and positions, and taxes are viewed as expandable tools in this pursuit.

Another form in which this split arises is in the repeated comments of the two board members who voted against staffing the Chinese course concerning the need to cut a current language program in order to introduce a new one. Such comments appear to suggest a metaphor of a "zero sum game" and the idea that resources are finite and

limited. In contrast, the comments of one board member and the superintendent suggest the idea that new demand and resources can be generated through active leadership.

### *2. Board member and superintendent “comfort” with risk taking.*

Relating somewhat to the above issue, the interviews suggest that some decision makers more than others feel comfortable with the uncertainty surrounding the eventual success of a Chinese program. For example, some respondents spoke in ways indicative of risk taking; e.g., let’s start the program and see what happens. Others, however, often emphasizing words like “sustainability,” expressed a desire to have no “loose ends,” that is, to have high certainty of success before approving a new program. The comments of the two “no-voting” board members suggest that they had a relatively high standard regarding Chinese program implementation. Such a standard might not only be seen as unrealistic, but also in substantial contrast with Arabic program implementation.

### *3. Values regarding the rational and symbolic importance of a Chinese language curriculum.*

As referenced briefly under economics, differences were perceived in the way in which decision makers perceived the importance of Chinese. Although several expressed opinions of Chinese as becoming a “global language” or a “language of the future,” only in a few cases did respondents appear to express views that one might consider either genuinely proactive or that clearly framed Chinese language teaching as being essential to improving the quality or legitimacy of the high school. In fact, some of the most

enthusiastic words were applied to the informal, student-taught, Chinese enrichment classes. But as Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, and Usdan (1990) argue, a “policy that will partially satisfy...without actually making a large impact on the school system is a symbolic, not a real, output” (p. 222).

### *Political issues*

At this point, it becomes more difficult to list particular political issues. The reason for this is that, essentially, most of the items already listed became part of a political conflict relating to – but extending far beyond – the issue of establishing Chinese courses at the high school. Clearly, the change in school board composition after the 2008 elections had a major influence on its direction in terms of preferred policies, vision, and the “climate” of board member working relationships. Whereas, for example, much of the literature on authority relations between boards and superintendents starts with the supposition that the latter will tend to strongly influence the former, this balance can shift dramatically in situations involving environmental turbulence. As Campbell and his colleagues (1990, p. 222) argue, “low-conflict systems grant wider decision latitude to technical-administrative personnel.” But having passed through a polarizing political period brought about by a contested school renovation plan and culminating with a “turning point election” (Iannaccone, 1983; Weninger & Stout, 1989), District X was by no means a “low-conflict” district. In fact, District X’s elected school officials appear to epitomize McCarty and Ramsey’s (1968) “factional” school board where “voting is more important than discussion.” The present case appears to illustrate a process in which a new majority coalition, coming to power due to public ire over fiscal mismanagement,

felt compelled to vote against an initiative (despite its merit, value, or reflection of formal district goals) as a means of symbolically indicating a new political and philosophical direction.

After reflecting upon the events of this case, I am led to conclude that whatever other factors were involved in the decisions surrounding the establishment of Chinese courses at District High, most of them became filtered through (and thus can be interpreted through) a thick political lens.



## Chapter Five: Data Analysis

This dissertation began with the straightforward question, “why has Chinese language instruction failed to expand its “habitat,” – that is, why it failed to flourish throughout American public schools to the extent expected based on the importance ascribed to it within scholarly and popular educational research literature. At the start of this study, it was observed that Chinese language programs appear to have a relatively narrow range or habitat within the United States, mostly existing in large urban school districts and along the West Coast. My initial expectation was that various categories of environmental and organizational “factors” would work to either promote or inhibit the “migration” of Mandarin Chinese course offerings to school districts in other areas of the country. In addition, it was expected that these factors would exert influence in different ways at the status, corpus, and acquisition “language planning” stages. In other words, I expected to present a table similar to the example shown in Table 3, which breaks down the various influences along lines suggested in chapter two and by language planning stage.

Having gathered and analyzed the data from approximately fifteen interviews with informants throughout the school district and its community, however, the type of analysis represented by Table 3 seems insufficient in accounting for the events surrounding the Chinese language initiative examined in this case. For one thing, considerable “overlap” exists; some of the issues and influences listed within various cells can be interpreted in alternative ways. “Program sustainability,” for example, was on one hand found to represent authentic concerns as to whether the Chinese program could last beyond one or two years or could develop into a comprehensive course

sequence. Yet, on the other hand, we suspect that this concern for “sustainability” was also used politically to essentially “throw a wrench” into the gears of the curricular development process. Another example involves the perception of Chinese learning as an important curricular goal. Not only was Chinese mentioned in the district’s most recent strategic plan, but, in addition, virtually every interviewee expressed a similar belief. At the same time, several interviewees engaged in political action that appeared to belie this belief. It thus appears that much of this “overlap” problem actually stems from the powerful influence of politics on the Chinese language decision making process—to the point that other types of influences (structural, social, etc.) become at least partially filtered through a political screen. Yet, interestingly, the “politics” involved often appeared to have little to do with the Chinese issue. Instead, it appears that one of the most significant barriers to Chinese language expansion into the high school curriculum was a volatile political environment, which grew out of prior, unrelated events, yet which both surrounded and informed school board decisions related to Chinese language curriculum.

[Table 3 Here]

An additional unexpected theme that cuts at the usefulness of Table 3 is a finding that the original model suggested in chapter two may have been conceived in terms that were much too linear in terms of language planning stages. Based on my data, the process of implementing a new language program seems quite non-linear, especially, perhaps, when the process is highly politically toned or when the community environment is highly turbulent. For example, decisions related to acquisition planning appeared to directly shape issues of status planning; that is, even after a preliminary decision to adopt

a Chinese language program, conflicts arose over whether there were, in fact, sufficient resources to “sustain” it. Put another way, it appears that decisions related to status planning were continually revisited. The answer to the question, “should we teach Chinese?” was contingent, changing, and could even be “yes” and “no” at the same time for the same person or coalition.

To begin discussing these and other findings, it will be useful to present a revised graphic model capturing the essential features of this case (see Figure 2). This model is stripped down quite a bit from the one presented in chapter two, with some detail omitted for the sake of conceptual clarity, efficiency, and effectiveness. The model presented in Figure 5.1 differs from the earlier model in several ways. First, the categories of facilitators and barriers have been reduced from four to three: “structural” (which now includes economic factors), “political,” and “institutional” (which now includes social factors). Next, the “tube” idea and its implied linearity have been omitted, as have the arrows that originally passed into and out of the decision making process. Finally, the idea of “institutionalization” (in the sense that Chinese programs might become organizationally stronger and more legitimate) as a function of time and language planning stage has been dropped from the analysis.

[Figure 2 Here]

Figure 2 indicates that although structural and institutional considerations had some direct impact on efforts to establish Chinese at District High, they also served as fodder for political conflict between two factions of the board of education; and it was this political conflict that may eventually have had the most salient impact on key

decisions. In addition, all three categories serve as lenses through which one can interpret the failure of Chinese language to gain a significant foothold at District High. Viewing the case through each lens allows different problems to be highlighted, clarified, and understood. This multi-lens approach was first used by Allison (1971) in his study of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and has also been well-illustrated by Bolman and Deal (1984) in their study of organizational behavior. After reading and thinking about my own data, I conclude that the multi-lens approach offers an avenue for understanding superior to the open system/language planning model offered in chapter two.

It is assumed, however, that the idea of “open systems theory” is embedded within all three of the categories presented in Figure 2. This assumption reflects the fact that it can be very difficult, and perhaps not always useful, to strictly distinguish between external environmental influences and internal organizational influences on school district decision processes. In addition, I do not argue that different types of language planning did not influence this case, but rather that elements of each “stage” became introduced into the process in non-linear fashion.

### **Three Lenses**

#### ***The Structural Lens***

The structural frame suggests that we view organizations as rational devices whose purpose is to achieve specific goals. In the case of public schools, goals must be coordinated with public expectation and the formal procedures for achieving these goals must be manageable in accordance with available fiscal and human resources. From this

perspective, structural elements are apparent in this case that worked to both facilitate and impede the expansion of a Chinese language course sequence into the high school curriculum. For example, the high school's strategic plan emphasized the need to include Chinese or other new foreign language programs within the curriculum. Students appeared to be moderately interested in the idea of taking Chinese. Resources and opportunities were gradually emerging within the organizational environment (such as the Confucius Institute's support for the superintendent's trip to China). All of these elements apparently worked together to frame "Chinese language learning" as a formal organizational goal, as evidenced by the fact that the school board voted to formally list Chinese as an elective within the high school curriculum in December 2008. At that time, and in retrospect, the board's approval represented a significant status planning event—a decision was made to teach Chinese.

The board's refusal to fund Chinese in May, 2009 may also be viewed in structural terms. In fact, an argument can be made that the failure to staff the course stemmed primarily from a perceived (and real) scarcity of fiscal resources among a majority of board members. Although the annual cost of establishing a program was estimated to be between forty and sixty thousand dollars, the board majority's reluctance to budget this amount was likely intensified by looming district fiscal obligations to teacher salaries, pensions, and, possibly, to the Royal Bank of Canada. This perceived lack of resources, however, was not the only structural impediment to the establishment of Chinese. As discussed in chapter four, board members who voted against staffing the course raised concerns about course scheduling, especially if the course sequence were to end after the second semester (that is, after the end of Chinese 2). Concerns were also

raised about the ability to find a certified teacher: and even if one were found, there were concerns as to whether one would be enough to launch a sustainable program.

Two additional structural issues seem relevant, though their impact appears somewhat ambiguous. The first involves the question as to the most appropriate or beneficial grade level at which to start a language program, a question raised by one of the board members who voted not to fund the Chinese language course. In his opinion, it would be preferable to launch the program at the elementary school level and have it taught by community volunteers. The second issue concerns the Chinese “enrichment course” that emerged in the fall of 2009 after the board voted against staffing the formal course. Though both matters involve structural characteristics of the organization (pedagogy, alignment of community resources, and an integrated school activity), their impact seems somewhat difficult to interpret solely through a structural lens. On one hand, they can be interpreted as facilitators—as hopeful signs of support for the eventual acceptance of Chinese language into the curriculum, perhaps even as elements of acquisition planning. On the other hand, the apparent difference in enthusiasm for these ideas among interviewees seems quite interesting, perhaps telling. The board members interviewed who voted not to fund the staffing of high school Chinese seemed highly enthusiastic about community participation and the presence of a non-credit Chinese enrichment course. Those I interviewed who had hoped for board approval of staffing tended to dismiss the importance of these “facilitators.”

It is at this point in the discussion where one gets the sense that the structural lens is beginning to lose focus. This may be partially due to goal uncertainty. For some actors, having Chinese language instruction as a key goal implies that the district should act

directly to establish courses within the high school curriculum. Other actors, however, may understand this goal in less direct and possibly more diffuse terms (e.g., a longer term goal, not necessarily at the high school level, etc.). Thus, in other words, simply creating or even formalizing a goal does not ensure that actors within the organization will move in ways to achieve it—even when they express vocal support for the goal. As was revealed in chapter four, even those board members who voted against staffing the high school course expressed strong general support for the goal. The problem, they stated, was that there simply wasn't enough money.

The board members who held this view may have been entirely accurate in their assessment of the situation. Yet puzzling questions remain. What does it mean, for example, when board members express concerns for “sustainability” while at the same time suggesting that an elementary program could be developed using community volunteers? Or that a voluntary “enrichment program” led primarily by a student and her mother represented a serious step toward the goal of integrating Chinese teaching into the high school curriculum? Even more puzzling is the juxtaposition of board member unwillingness to staff and fund a high school Chinese course sequence along with a willingness (grudging as it may be) to spend what would amount to nearly 100 times more to renovate the high school football field? Raising such questions does not diminish the importance of football nor are they intended to cast any aspersions on the thoughtfulness or concern of board members for the best interests of the district. The questions simply suggest the limits of the structural lens.

### *The Institutional Lens*

The term “institutional” encompasses two connected ideas about organizations (Selznick, 1957). The first, relating mostly to the organization’s external environment, involves the process by which organizations seek to be viewed as legitimate and valuable beyond their technical function. The second idea, more internally related, considers the “social world” of the organization’s members. As Selznick (p. 8) describes it, “The formal or official design for living never completely accounts for what the participants do. It is always supplemented by...the ‘informal structure’ which arises as the individual brings into play his own personality, his special problems and interests.” Thus, the institutional lens takes into consideration the social, cultural, and symbolic elements of organizational behavior in a way very similar to natural systems theory.

To illustrate how this lens helps in understanding the District High case, one might begin with the school’s most recent strategic plan, which included Chinese language learning as a goal, in essence, an important part of the district’s fundamental academic vision. For the superintendent (who resigned in 2009) and for some members of the board of education, this vision was interpreted as placing a high priority on the establishment of Chinese high school courses. In their view, perhaps, the courses should have been established as soon as feasibly possible, even if it involved some measure of risk. Other members of the board, however, the “goal” may have been interpreted quite differently. They may have viewed the establishment of Chinese as a worthy goal, but one that could really only be met, so to speak, when the planets were properly arranged; that is, when there existed a surplus of fiscal and human resources and student interest. In other words, both sides interpreted the meaning of “goal” in different ways, based



perhaps on a number of factors, including the amount of value they assigned to the addition of a Chinese program at District High.

The concept of “budget” can be seen in a similar way. The board members to whom I spoke seemed to apply different meaning to the term, or to at least understand it in different ways, and these differences seemed tied to differing visions concerning the purposes of school district governance. For supporters of Chinese, “the budget” seemed to be viewed more as a tool than as a rule. For them, the purpose of district governance was to create a vision that community members (and taxpayers) would follow. If Chinese was part of that vision, then the board should essentially explain to citizens that this was something important for a world class, 21<sup>st</sup> century school district and something that needed to be supported via taxes. In contrast, those voting not to staff the Chinese course seemed to view the budget as a strict boundary for decision making. For them, Chinese may have been a “good thing,” but was literally impossible to implement at the time of the vote.

A puzzling aspect of the case related to the above is the matter of authentic belief with regard to the importance or value attached to Chinese by those I interviewed. Of course, one hopes that interviewees would offer a frank, authentic perspective, and I have no strong reason to suspect that my interviewees did not. The fact that I am Chinese, however, may have caused them to give a more positive spin than might have been expected had I been of another race. While I can’t conclude that this happened, I do note that negative views on the expansion of Chinese language coursework into American schools were expressed within local and national news accounts during the time of my research. One of these, an op-ed piece written by national columnist Nicholas Kristof

(2011), appeared in the local daily newspaper. Titled “First Learn Spanish, then Chinese,” the author, using sarcasm and damning with faint praise, essentially trashes the idea that American students ought to study Chinese in their public schools. The electronic version of the piece is then followed by a number of what appear to be local comments expressing agreement with the author’s views. Three weeks later, in a column titled “The Rope with which we Hang Ourselves,” former Assistant Secretary of Education, Chester Finn (2011) issued an attack on the Chinese Hanban, the Confucius Institute, and on the very idea of American students studying Chinese language and culture in anything other than a politically adversarial way. As stated previously, I found very little evidence linking such attitudes to any of my interviewees. At the same time, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which negative attitudes might operate “below-the-surface” of discussions about the value of the Chinese language initiative. As suggested in the previous section, one way to understand how disparate values worked to impede the introduction of Chinese at District High is by comparing board member responses to Chinese with their to the problem of football stadium renovation. The two “problems,” though not by any means identical, are interpretable through the institutional lens. In a nutshell, the needs of football were considered “critical,” while those of Chinese language were not. To state this is not really a criticism; it’s simply a reality, reflection of the “mindscape” that permeates American public education. “Football” brings value and legitimacy to a school institution, perhaps equally, if not more than the value brought by the more rational and technical elements of the organization. Moreover, for District High, the football field itself, distinctive in appearance and rich in tradition, was something that, unlike Chinese, could not be eliminated or set aside.

In discussing the authentic value assigned to Chinese, at this point it may be necessary to admit that much of the discussion in this section falls somewhere between “high inference” and simple speculation. Indeed, the data gathered do not enable me to really gage the authenticity of board members’ expressed opinions. Yet neither do they clearly explain the gap between the formal and informal expressions of support on one hand, and the reluctance to fund on the other. Clues are evident, however, that do offer a bit of light. For example, evidence from interviews with District High’s foreign language teachers suggest a number of non-fiscal issues that may have inhibited the Chinese initiative’s success. For one thing, one gets the sense from those interviews that language teachers feel a bit isolated within the school, or at least not a part of what might be called the “academic mainstream” created by the accountability demands of No Child Left Behind. The teachers I spoke with expressed conflicting views on this. One interpreted it as allowing greater freedom in the classroom. Another, however, suggested it created a problem for adding new languages to the curriculum. Either way, the situation seems one in which foreign language is more of a “side dish” at the school and Chinese would be an even more exotic one.

Another possible explanation for the apparent “value-action” gap is the fact that from an institutional perspective, the district and the high school garner some “value” from simply having Chinese on the agenda; and this is relatively inexpensive. School district officials can talk about the outstanding “Chinese enrichment program” or about various Chinese on-line learning opportunities for students (which they must pay for themselves and complete on their own time). Thus, in a way, it’s possible that such relatively innocuous examples of acquisition planning work to interfere with more

concrete and meaningful steps. Chinese is allowed to take a step into the institutional mindspace, but only in a marginal, low-cost fashion.

### ***The Role of Leadership***

Leadership can be called a fundamentally institutional problem for school districts and other organizations because it represents a social phenomenon aimed at gradually changing people's minds, norms, patterns of behavior, and, eventually and hopefully, their hearts (Shouse and Lin, 2010). From the data gathered here, it would appear that although the original superintendent of schools was able to achieve some early success, she was ultimately unable to persuade a majority of the members of her board of education to suspend their own judgment. This failure is explicitly noted in the narrative presented in chapter four describing the May, 2009 board meeting. Moments prior to the board's vote to deny funding for the Chinese class, members of that majority refused the request to grant Superintendent Maxwell discretion in allocating FTE funds, despite the repeated appeal of another board member.

Numerous reasons may exist for this refusal of the board majority to suspend their judgment on this matter. For one thing, though this study focuses on the issue of Chinese language coursework implementation, it should be remembered that this was probably a relatively minor issue on the superintendent's plate, one that she was unwilling to invest a great deal of political capital. Moreover, it's quite possible that the superintendent did not realize she would need to win over the minds of board members until it was too late to do so. On that point, one notes the board of education's transformation over time from one largely sympathetic to the superintendent's policy

ideas into one quite the opposite. When the time came to have to persuade board members to take a leap of faith and fund the Chinese initiative (or at least grant some fiscal discretion), the video evidence from that meeting suggest that neither the superintendent nor her supporters were able or willing to make a strong case for doing so.

### ***The Political Lens***

The political factors involved in this case can, at least at the outset, be separated along two dimensions. The first is comprised of those factors related to conflict between board member coalitions and how these played out during the decision making process over Chinese language curriculum. In Figure 2 this is represented by arrows running from the structural and institutional lenses into the political lens. In other words, the various structural and institutional issues related to Chinese language implementation become politically contested. One obvious example of this, referred to previously, was the dispute at the May, 2009 meeting over whether the superintendent would be allowed discretion over FTE spending (and thereby be able to fund at least one year of a Chinese course). Other examples of such conflict include the disagreement over whether a qualified teacher could be found, whether and how that teacher needed to be certified, and whether certification was even possible. Similar conflict occurred over the question of what a “sustainable” program would look like (i.e., the meaning of “sustainable”) and whether enough money was available to launch such a program. Interestingly, however, issues like these received only scant attention at the two actual board meetings I observed. Actual conflict was muted, as if such matters had already been foreclosed. On this point, Miller, Hickson, and Wilson (1996) summarize a body of literature addressing the use of power to silence opponents, stating, “Conflict can be kept quiet; it is not allowed to

surface into open debate and so does not become an item for discussion” (p. 297). In other words, the cohesion of the majority in its opposition to new curricular spending may have worked to forestall any further debate.

The quieting of conflict in this case may relate to the second political dimension, which is comprised of the critical political events that occurred within the district community in the years leading up to decisions about Chinese curriculum and which led to the emergence of board coalitions and the intensification of conflict. One coalition consisted of board members who fully supported the superintendent’s initiative and were willing to vote to establish and fund Chinese language courses as part of the curriculum. Included in this group were not only those members present on the board in 2008 and 2009, but also some members who sat on the board prior to the 2008 school board elections. In short, these board members appeared to share with the superintendent a relatively broad or “progressive” vision as to the purpose of schooling, the nature of district governance, and the appropriateness of raising and spending money to meet what they considered to be important institutional goals. One might refer to this as the “default coalition,” that which held dominance prior to 2008.

The other coalition consisted of those members who challenged the default coalition and were voted into office in 2008. These board members voted for the inclusion, or at least the listing, of Chinese in the formal curriculum, but then later voted against actually funding the program, thus preventing it from being launched in fall, 2009. The challengers were, in essence, a true coalition, having run for election under a shared “banner of opposition” to the large high school renovation project that had been earlier conceived and approved by the default coalition. The challengers were well-

organized and driven by a mission to hold the line against new spending and new taxes. Of course, it also seems fair to say that their perspective may have grown out of what they considered to have been reckless prior behavior on the part of the default coalition. From the perspective of the challengers, the previous board had heard the tremendous community opposition to the costly renovation plan, yet proceeded regardless; and now the district faced a potential multi-million dollar debt for services that were never really received. It seems possible, even likely, that the sharp adversarial mutual perceptions of the two coalitions led to a situation that seriously limited the potential for understanding and compromise. As one of my interviewees put it, “Anything we would say yes to, they would say no to.”

Thus, using this political lens, one is drawn to infer that much political (and perhaps personal) rancor existed on the board in 2009 and may still exist today. One also suspects that the default coalition (and Superintendent Maxwell) who had announced her upcoming retirement prior to the effort to place Chinese into the curriculum, perhaps shocked by their losses at the polls in 2008, lost their taste for conflict, especially for what might be considered a relatively small matter—the inclusion of a new world language course sequence.

Thus in sum, the political lens suggests that political events prior to the Chinese debate even surfacing produced a situation in which the superintendent had lost a good deal of her authority and power with respect to the board of education. Having lost her political capital, she was limited in her ability to persuade or lead. To highlight this point, recall that we asked some of our interviewees whether Chinese would be a curricular reality today had either the Dr. Maxwell or the default coalition remained in power. It

seems clear that if both, or even just the latter, had remained in power, the answer would be yes—even with the budget being what it was, the default coalition would have approved it. But without a majority of board members supporting her, Dr. Maxwell would not have been able to overcome opposition, no matter how long she remained superintendent. As board member Ms. West put it, “we flipped the board.”

Finally, it is vital to note that had there been no school renovation controversy, it is quite likely that Dr. Maxwell would have kept her majority. For this reason, it seems reasonable to conclude that while the structural and institutional lenses explain a good deal about this case, it is the political lens that actually explains the failure of Chinese language courses to survive at District High.

### *Areas for Further Research*

#### *Policy Implications*

As suggested at the start of this chapter, Chinese foreign language instruction appears to be a fragile species in U.S. high schools, at least outside of what could be considered its “natural habitat,” that is, in major cities and along the west coast. When venturing into new habitats, like the “heartland high schools” of the U.S., Chinese language programs will likely face some or all of the various structural, institutional, and political threats discovered in this study. This is not to say that the heartland is completely inhospitable; but rather, to suggest that without strong fiscal and policy support at the state and federal level, the species is unlikely to thrive. What follows here is a list of actions that could be taken, notwithstanding the “realities” of current educational policy.



### ***Federal Support***

If languages like Chinese and Arabic are truly considered “critical” by federal education officials and in federal policies, then actions must match words. At this point, however, an enormous gap lies between the two. The gap is quite evident within the intent and consequences of No Child Left Behind. Essentially, the federal government has established a strong set of sanctions surrounding the teaching of reading, math, and science via the imposition of a test-based accountability structure. This action has caused states and local schools to redistribute resources to those areas and away from others (e.g., art, music, foreign language, vocational education). Though one could suggest establishing learning and accountability standards for foreign language, at best this would lead to an intensification of present programs (e.g., Spanish), not to the inclusion of new ones.

If “non-western” languages like Chinese (or Arabic, or Japanese, etc.) are considered “critical” to the future of American students and to national development and security, it seems much more practical (though perhaps more unrealistic) to suggest that federal education policy mandate school districts to offer at least two foreign language programs, one of which required to be of a “non-western” variety. For some schools, this would mean simply adding a language. For others, it might mean dropping one so as to provide room for the new one. Needless to say, this requirement would be linked to states’ and districts’ receipt of federal aid (as was done with No Child Left Behind). Beyond this, the Federal government could do more in terms of providing direct grants or opportunities for mutual exchanges of pre-service and in-service teachers between the U.S. and China (or other countries).

### ***State Support***

One key way that states could encourage the teaching of Chinese or other “less-commonly-taught” or “critical” languages would be to loosen restrictive certification rules. Many states currently offer flexible “alternative” certification across all subject areas. Other states do so in specific content areas. With regard to Chinese or similar languages, it would seem reasonable to allow the greatest flexibility for native language speakers who have adequate English skill to teach in elementary or secondary classrooms. This could begin using some sort of “emergency certification,” where teachers upgrade their certification over time based on successful evaluations. International graduate students from local universities might serve as a source of qualified teachers.

In addition, an important result of both the federal and state policy changes described here would likely be an increasing number of students eventually majoring in, minoring in, or at least taking Chinese coursework at the university level. This would occur as the demand for such courses grew over time due to students having taken Chinese at their high school.

### ***Local District Support***

In addition to finding ways to preserve and attract the adequate fiscal resources needed to support a new language program, two other locally related factors appear paramount. The first of these involves the need for generating or tapping into community demand. More than this, the demand must then become organized and sustained so as to create a consistent environmental influence upon local decision makers. In the case of

District High, the significant existing student and community interest was never really mobilized in effective ways.

The second key factor is leadership. The establishment of major change, such as that represented by a new and “unusual” curricular program, requires “championing.” That is, it must become a cause supported by key district leaders as well as by a sufficient and growing number of followers. Such leadership is becomes less likely against a backdrop of previous “non-leadership.” In this case, for example, had the key decision makers who supported Chinese not squandered their potential leader capital through various missteps (and even arrogance) involving the high school renovation project, they would likely have been better equipped to persuade voters and school board challengers to support a Chinese language program. Unfortunately for the fate of Chinese language at District High, the leadership vacuum was filled with a new coalition, backed by voters, and dedicated to championing fiscal constraint even in the smallest curricular areas.

### **Implications for Theory and Research**

A number of issues arose in the course of this study that would appear to require further study and analysis. A good place to start in that regard is with the original theoretical framework presented in Figure 1 in chapter two. With respect to language planning theory (as applied to a school organizational setting), the figure suggests that status, corpus, and acquisition planning occur in a way that is largely linear; a choice is made to teach a language, a choice is made as to what version to teach, and decisions are made as to how to sustain the teaching over time. In other words, once the goal is set, one

expects that all efforts are taken to reach the goal; in this case, the establishment of a Chinese course at District High. Yet the events in this case suggest a much more complex and non-linear pattern. The board majority—the “challengers”—voted to approve Chinese, then six months later voted not to fund it. One interpretation of this is that perceptions of a budget shortfall emerged between the two points causing the challengers to change their minds. Yet other evidence suggests that conflicts over the meaning of “Chinese” and the way it would be delivered (i.e., status planning concerns) at District High intermingled with conflicts over whether and how the program could or should be “sustained” over time (i.e., acquisition planning concerns).

For example, some board members who voted to approve the placement of Chinese into the curriculum may have concurrently been planning to eventually vote against funding a position. Though it’s possible that their first vote was contingent on obtaining adequate funding and staffing later on, it may also be the case that they had already determined that adequate resources would not be available later. In other words, acquisition planning “thinking” could have occurred prior to or simultaneous with status planning decisions. Moreover, a “yes” vote in terms of status planning could be easily canceled out by a later “no” vote regarding acquisition planning. It would be interesting to study this phenomenon further, in particular, the question of whether decision making would have occurred in a much more linear fashion had the environment been more rational (i.e., goal oriented) and less political.

Another area for study concerns school boards and board-superintendent relationships. A body of work, summarized by Campbell and his colleagues (1990) emphasizes the stability of boards and their tendency to follow the advice of their

superintendents, especially in higher socioeconomic districts. These characteristics were, of course, not observable in this case. To the contrary, the board experienced a sharp change in direction due to political volatility surrounding the high school renovation controversy. Further research might explore the links between environmental turbulence and board-superintendent harmony and tension and how this influences the success of other types of school reform and curricular innovation.

Finally, it is hoped that further case studies might be done of districts that have attempted to implement Chinese or other non-western language programs into their high schools. Based on an informal survey of school web pages (conducted in the early stages of this research), it appears that a good many districts have attempted to start Chinese programs, but that a good many of these disappeared after a relatively short period of time. It would thus be useful to study successful Chinese programs existing in unexpected regions of the U.S. Such studies could help us understand the habitat characteristics that promote the survival of this fragile species.

**Table 1: High School Mandarin Programs in Schools serving 30**

**Selected Major University Regions**

---

Aimes, IA	N	
Ann Arbor, MI	N	
Atlanta, GA	N	
Berkeley, CA		Y
Boulder, CO		Y
Charlottesville, VA	N	
Chicago, IL		Y
Columbus, OH	N	
Corvallis, OR	N	
E. Lansing, MI	N	
Eugene, OR	N	
Evanston, IL	N	
Iowa City, IA	N	
Los Angeles, CA		Y
Louisville, KY		Y
Madison, WI		Y
Minneapolis, MN		Y
Nashville, TN		Y
Palo Alto, CA		Y

Philadelphia, PA		Y
Pittsburgh, PA		Y
Pullman, WA	N	
Richmond, VA	N	
Seattle, WA	N	
South Bend, IN	N	
State College, PA	N	
Syracuse, NY	N	
Tampa, FL	N	
Tempe, AZ	N	
Tucson, AZ		Y

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**Table 2: Environmental Characteristics Salient to English/Mandarin Foreign Language Expansion in the U.S. and P.R.C.**

	China/English	U.S./Mandarin
Environmental Factor		
Economic	<p>Macro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for resources and access to U.S. markets</li> </ul> <p>Micro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market incentives, employment opportunities</li> </ul>	<p>Macro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding U.S. markets and suppliers</li> </ul> <p>Micro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource availability at school or district level</li> <li>• Weak perceptions of usefulness</li> </ul>
Political	<p>Macro/Micro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shifting periods of antipathy and openness between U.S. and China</li> </ul>	<p>Macro/Micro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (See under China)</li> <li>• Ed. establishment support for restrictive certification laws; resistance to Web-based teaching</li> </ul>
Social	<p>Macro/Micro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief that “English is power” or “English brings high status”</li> <li>• Increasing mobility between China and U.S.</li> </ul>	<p>Macro/Micro</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social unfamiliarity</li> <li>• Perceived difficulty</li> <li>• General American resistance to foreign language learning</li> </ul>



Organizational/

Structural

Macro

- Centralized authority facilitates curricular change
- Inclusion of English on national exams creates incentives

Micro

- Wide access (in cities) to private English learning schools

Macro

- Decentralized authority
- Lack of certified teachers and training programs
- Decisions over which form of Mandarin to teach

- Predominance of “big four” in most US schools

- Public school salary structures

Micro

- Weak access to Chinese programs
- Difficulty of learning written Mandarin



**Table 3: Possible Breakdown of Environmental Influences on District High Chinese Curriculum Initiative by Language Planning Stage**

	Status Planning	Corpus Planning	Acquisition Planning
Economic factors	<p>Potential for sufficient student interest</p> <p>Potential for sufficiency of human and fiscal resources</p>	<p>Availability of grants from Confucius Institute</p>	<p>Disagreements over resource availability and distribution</p> <p>Concerns for program “sustainability”</p>
Structural factors	<p>Perceptions of Chinese learning as important organizational goal</p> <p>Perception of appropriate grade level to begin</p> <p>Perceived difficulty of fitting Chinese into high school curriculum</p> <p>Demand from incoming students (from local charter school)</p> <p>State rules and procedures on certification</p> <p>Availability of support from local university</p>	<p>Superintendent’s opportunity to visit China</p>	<p>Perceived availability of lower cost instructional “alternatives”</p>
Social factors	<p>Perceptions of Chinese learning as important goal among students, families, and taxpayers</p> <p>Contribution of Chinese to institutional legitimacy</p> <p>Superintendent leadership</p>	<p>Failure to consider opportunities available through state/Taiwan initiative</p>	<p>Leadership</p> <p>Emerging mindscapes</p> <p>Competing values</p>
Political factors	<p>Influence of prior political disputes</p> <p>Possible latent conflict over the value of Chinese learning</p>		<p>Board conflicts (past/ongoing)</p> <p>Discontinuity of governance, leadership</p> <p>Possible latent conflict over the value of Chinese curriculum</p>

**Figure 1: Language Planning Habitat**

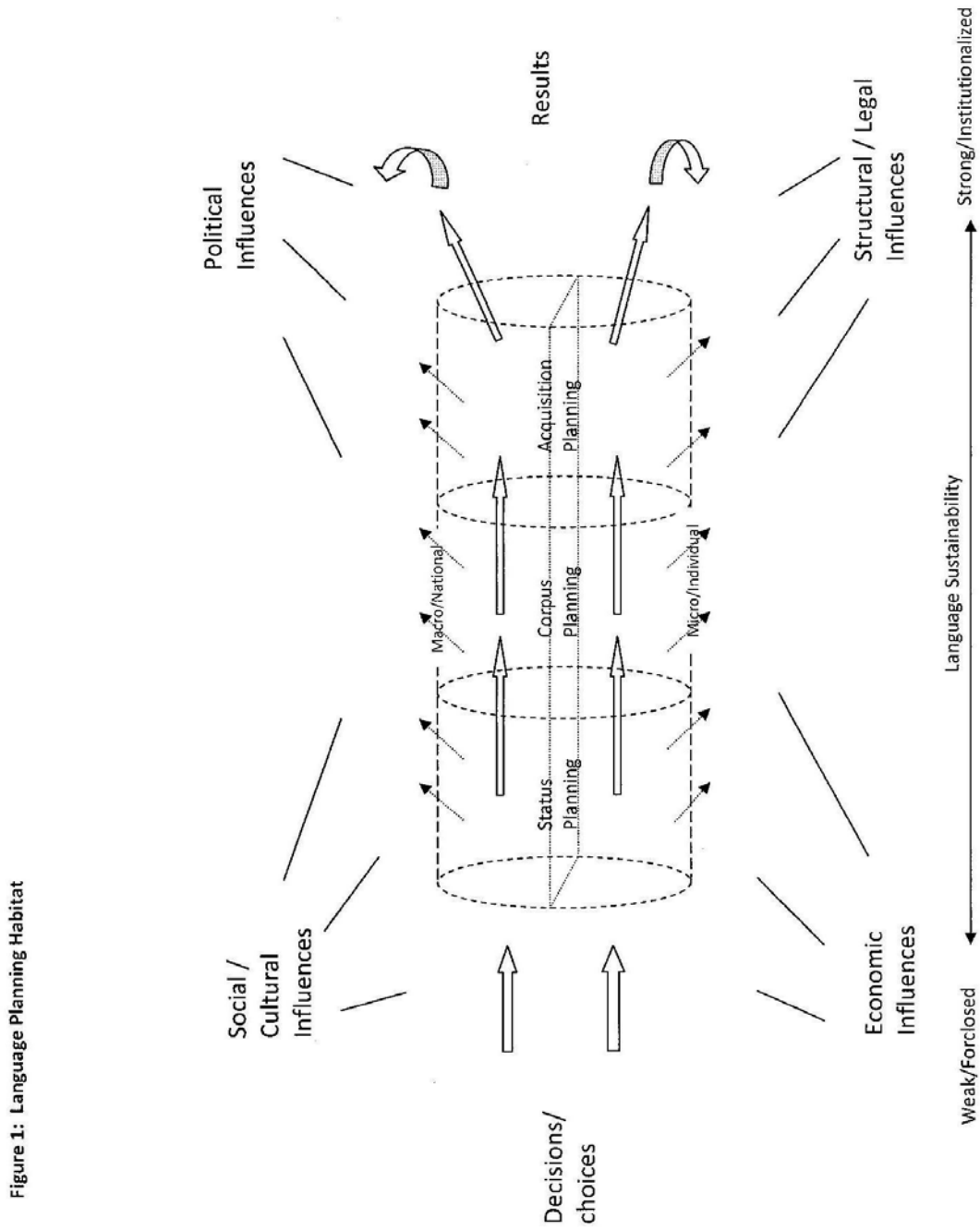
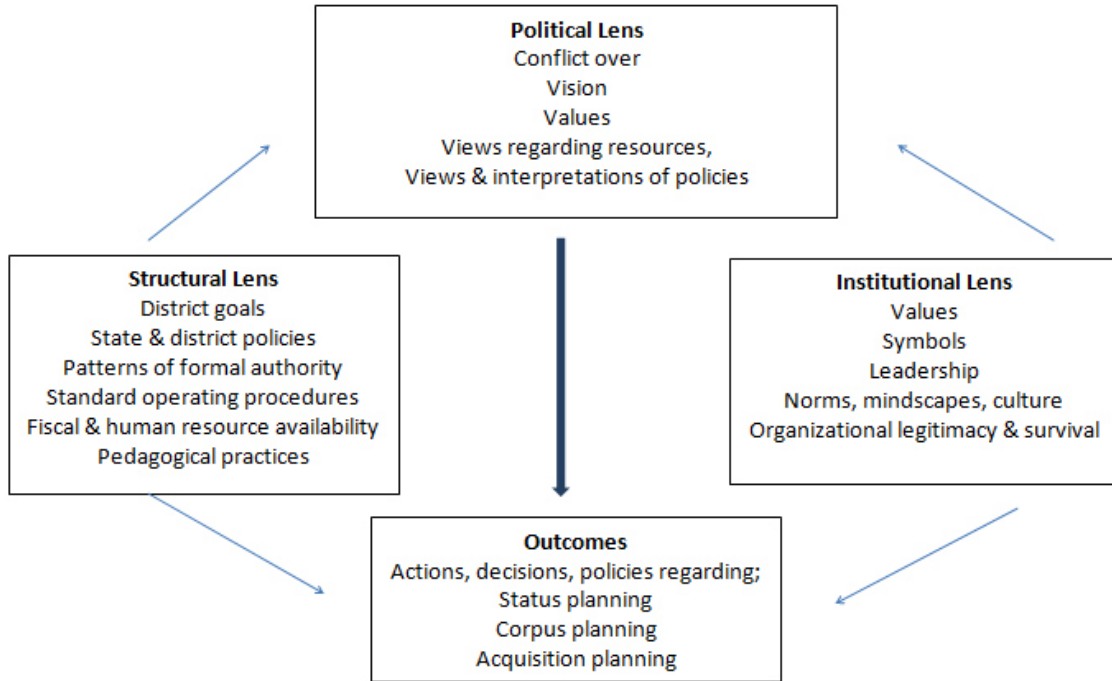


Figure 1: Language Planning Habitat

**Figure 2: Lenses for Understanding Chinese Curricular Decisions at District High**



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## **Appendix: Interview Protocol**

### **Introduction to interviewees**

My name is Jinai Sun. Thank you very much for giving me some of your time today. I'm a doctoral student in [the local university's] educational leadership program. I'm conducting a study about the success and failure of Chinese foreign language programs in American high schools. Today I'd like to gather your thoughts about the various efforts made to implement Chinese language study at [District High]. May I record our talk for the purpose of data collection and analysis? All information I obtain from you will be completely confidential. Before we start the interview, would you please read the informed consent form and sign it if you agree to participate in this study?

### **Referrals and Closure**

That's all my questions for now. Anything else you think is important for me to know? Who else would you recommend I speak to about this issue? Thank you very much for talking to me today!

### **Sample Central Open-Ended Questions**

#### ***Teachers, Principal and Department Heads***

1. First some background. [E.g., How long have you been a teacher/dept. head here? How many classes do you teach? About how many students do you have? Compared to years ago, would you say it's harder or easier today to get students to sign up for foreign language classes? Is there any influence from NCLB on foreign language teaching]



2. Over the past few years, efforts were made to include Chinese foreign language classes in the high school curriculum. Can you tell me the story of this? [Probe: When did you learn about this? What did the board do? What's the current status? Future possibility?]
3. How much support do you think exists for the inclusion of Chinese at [District High]? [Probe: Among the public? Superintendent? Board members? Administrators? Teachers?] Can you think of anyone who might object to the idea?
4. Why do you believe that the board didn't vote to fund the Chinese language program? [Probe: Do you think this was the only reason?]
5. Do you think that offering certain languages add status to the school? What do you think would happen if a decision was made to cut back German, French, or Latin in favor of Chinese or some other language? [Probe: How important it is to include Chinese in the curriculum. How other foreign language teachers feel about adding Chinese. ]

***Superintendent and School Board Members***

1. When did you (or others you work with) first start thinking about the possibility of including Chinese in the high school curriculum? [Probe: Who were the key people advocating this idea? Can you recall any opposition or concerns about the idea?]
2. Can you tell me the story of how the idea first came up before the school board? [Probe: What happened? When? Were efforts made to hire a teacher? What was your role? Your thinking at the time?]

3. In spring 09, the board voted against staffing the Chinese program. What did you feel? Why do you think they did this? [Probe: Were there other sources of funding available (e.g., Confucius Institute)? Was money really the only reason?]
4. Before or after the board meeting, did any people approach you about Chinese language teaching? Who? What did they talk to you about? [Probe: if any other people had strong opinions about it.]
5. Some people say that if we still have the old superintendent or the old school board members, we would have Chinese class in [District High] today. What do you think?
6. What do you think about the possibility or likelihood of including Chinese language in the curriculum at [District High] in the near future?
7. What it will take for Chinese to be funded at [District High]?
8. If in a couple of years there is still no Chinese class in [District High] how would you feel?

***Professor in College of Education at Local University***

1. Does [the state] department of education offer secondary teacher certification in Chinese language? [Probe information: I was referred to 2004 and 2009 state dept. of ed. documents saying yes, however, apparently there are no current standards or tests. ] Could you say more about that?
2. Assuming PA does offer it, what will/can [the university] do to provide a program training them to certify? What would [local university] need to do to start a program?
3. Why do you think [District High] failed to set up Chinese class?

4. Any problems you perceive [District High] using resources from the Confucius Institute here at [local university] with their Chinese language program?

# Vita Jinai Sun

## Education

Ph.D.	2009-2011	The Pennsylvania State University Major: Educational Leadership
M.Ed.	2006-2009	The Pennsylvania State University Major: Educational Leadership 2nd Major: International and Comparative Education
B.A.	1997-2001	Harbin Normal University Major: English Linguistics and Literature

## Professional Experiences

2009-2011	Graduate Assistant Program in Educational Leadership, College of Education The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
2008-2010	Chinese Language Graduate Instructor Chinese Program The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
2007-2008	Director of Yan Xing Tian Xia Language Training Center, Beijing, China
2005-2007	Chinese Language Instructor at Happy Valley Chinese Heritage Language School, State College, PA
2002-2004	Chinese Language Instructor at Tsinghua University Language Extension, Beijing, China

## Publications

Roger Shouse & Jinai Sun, (in review, June 2011) Friendly Habitat, Endangered Species: Mandarin and Politics in an American School District, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, EAQ-11-0086.

William C. Diehl, Candance Head-Dylla, Maya Nehme, Jose M. Salazar, and Jinai Sun, Michael Apter's *The Up! Series* as a Teaching Prompt for Understanding, Collaboration, and New Learning in a Sociology Course Setting, *Teaching Sociology*, 37: pp.402–412 (October 2009).

## Presentations

*Barriers to multicultural initiatives: The case of Mandarin and Arabic foreign language in an American high school*, paper presentation at the 55<sup>th</sup> CIES, Montréal, Canada, 2011.

*Chinese Language Expansion in the U.S.: An organizational Framework for Understanding*, paper presentation at the ACTFL, Boston, MA, 2010.

*A Case Study of Introducing Chinese Language Teaching to an American College Community*, paper presentation at the Mid-Atlantic Region Association for Asian Studies Conference, University Park, PA, 2010.

*Chinese Language Expansion in the U.S.: An Organizational Framework for Understanding*, paper presentation at the 54<sup>th</sup> CIES, Chicago, IL, 2010.

*Can Chinese Fever Exist in America? A Question of Habitat*, paper presentation at the Pennsylvania Applied Linguistics Consortium (PAALC) Graduate Research Symposium, University Park, PA, 2010.

*Narratives of Cross-culture Language Teaching in An American University: Teaching Experiences of Foreign Graduate Students*, Poster presentation at the 2010 Achievement Conference Bridging the Gap: Creating a Better Tomorrow through Innovation, Insight and Imagination, University Park, PA, 2010.

## Certification

Certification in Teaching Chinese as a foreign language, issued by the Ministry of Education of China (2005).