K-12 Chinese Language Programs are Catching On!
By Beth Ruggiero, Hingham High School

When I graduated from college in 1984, the Dodge Foundation was providing funding to establish Chinese language programs in select secondary schools. At that time, it was quite a novelty and very exciting to the Chinese language academic community. It is not quite so much of a novelty anymore, but still exciting as the growth rate of elementary and secondary schools offering Chinese continues to increase. My own enthusiasm for this trend led me to produce a detailed list of the schools and their locations.

Because states do not keep statistics about the specific programs offered in their schools, there is no single source of this information, and it is time consuming and tedious to track down the information. Fortunately, CLASS (Chinese Language Association for Secondary-Elementary Schools) has posted a substantial list on their website (www.classk12.org), but with the statistics constantly changing and many statistics not readily available, there was a lot more work to be done.

The list I created grew out of the CLASS list with additions and corrections. It includes a total of 300 programs. Massachusetts takes the lead with 18.7% (56) of the programs, followed by California with 15.7% (47), and Illinois, New York, and New Jersey with 8.3% (25), 8% (24), and 7% (21), respectively. The numbers fall off rapidly behind these states, with nine states having only one school. I was unable to find any Chinese programs at all offered in 18 of the states.

Recent numbers have been increasing in great part due to the generous funding of the Freeman Foundation. If the legislation proposed by Senators Joseph Lieberman and Lamar Alexander, the United States-China Cultural Engagement Act of 2005, is passed, the numbers will increase even more dramatically. These statistics will continue to require updating if they are to be used purposefully – that is, to reach out to the individual schools so as to create a cohesive and exchange-minded Chinese language teaching community.

I am sure the list is still not complete. If anyone has any knowledge of programs not included, or any corrections to the existing data, please e-mail me at <bethrugg@comcast.net>.

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