





# The Chinese Tidal Wave in Schools

## Finding Ways to Avoid a Wipeout

*Andrew Corcoran* offers a plan to help schools avoid a wipeout in their rush to implement Chinese programs

### The Need for Teachers

Evidence of the enormous interest in bringing Chinese language to American schools is everywhere. In addition to China's rise in importance, the catalyst for this wave of interest was the recent decision by the College Board to offer an Advanced Placement (AP) Chinese test.

In 2003 the College Board surveyed interest among schools in AP Chinese, as well as AP tests for other languages including Russian, Japanese, and Italian. The College Board found that 2,400 schools wanted to offer AP Chinese, compared to 50 for Russian, 175 for Japanese, and 240 for Italian.<sup>1</sup>

Asia Society published "Expanding Chinese Language Capacity in the United States," which proposed a goal of 750,000 high school students studying Chinese by 2015.<sup>2</sup>

What this all means is that America needs more teachers.

If every Chinese teacher has 150 students, the Asia Society goal would require at least 5,000 high school teachers alone by 2015.<sup>3</sup> The College Board estimate, on the other hand, indicates an immediate need for 2,400 teachers in high schools. (These figures do not include teachers in middle schools and elementary schools.)

The question is where will these teachers come from? The ability of schools and districts to find qualified Chinese will prove to be the key to long-term success of this movement.

### Looking to the Universities

Clearly the greatest obstacle to the spread of Chinese programs is the current teacher shortage. There has been little demand for Chinese language teachers in the past. As a result, very few universities offer

training programs today. As recently as November 2005, the Christian Science Monitor reported only two universities with fully developed certification programs for teachers of Chinese.<sup>4</sup> The Asia Society reported only four universities with programs accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.<sup>5</sup>

Now universities from Boston to Honolulu are creating programs to train teachers, but it will take several years before teachers from those programs are ready to begin teaching in schools.

This teacher shortage is further complicated by the No Child Left Behind provision that requires every classroom to have a highly qualified teacher, meaning "certified" teacher.

An element of Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* is evident in these efforts. The certification process usually requires working as a student teacher under the tutelage of an experienced teacher. Unfortunately, there are too few programs with experienced teachers in which to place all the student teachers envisioned. On top of that, restrictions in many states prevent teacher candidates from being placed in private schools; even though some of the most successful and longest standing Chinese programs are in private schools.

Institutions across the country are ramping up fast-track programs to certify teachers to teach Chinese language in schools. Asia Society provides information on some of these programs,<sup>6</sup> which will provide some immediate relief, however there is no indication that they can provide the number of teachers that are needed over the next three years.

The Rutgers program, for example, prepares teachers for certification to teach in the state of New Jersey in as little as two summers. Last year, 19 teacher candidates enrolled in the program.