

Samoa Language Standards

By Patricia Sataua

According to the 2000 American Samoa Census report, 90% of students in the territory enter school with little or no English background. This presents a significant challenge for educators and students alike when one considers that the medium of instruction for schools in American Samoa is English. When students enter school, they are expected to perform academically in English. This disconnectedness between the language of the schools and the language of the community has contributed to students consistently underperforming on local and national tests in both Samoan and English. Local and national assessments indicate that the majority of students are reading two to three levels below their grade level. In addition, Samoan children, especially teenagers, are at risk of losing their language and culture to outside influences.

In May 2006, American Samoa's Director of Education, together with the Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Accountability, requested the development of Samoan language arts standards as part of an effort to maintain Samoan language and culture in the schools and to assist in improving the learning of English. The team, in partnership with Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), based their work around the research findings on second language acquisition showing that full proficiency and literacy in the native language (Samoan in this case) facilitates second language (English) development.

The development process of the project involved all of the Samoan Language Program specialists, coordinators and selected Samoan language teachers. Under the direction of Dr. Salu Hunkin-Finau, Program Director for the Language and Literacy Unit, this team worked throughout the sum-

mer to develop Samoan language standards for grades K–12. As a starting point, they took into consideration three critical principles. These principles were the basis for the framework that included research supporting the following: (1) first and second language acquisition, (2) the development of literacy skills, and (3) the need to promote and maintain the usage of Samoan language and culture.

Goal 1: Encourage the learning of the Samoan language and culture.

Goal 2: Acquire skills and knowledge that may be transferred to the English language.

Goal 3: Use language skills to process and communicate information in Samoan.

Goal 4: Understand the function and structures of Samoan language.

These four goals are guidelines for developing the conceptual framework for Samoan language arts standards. From the four goals, key themes (family, village, celebration, spiritual ceremony, and Samoan treasures) and performance tasks are identified at each

grade level to reflect the three dimensions of the language development process (sociocultural, linguistic, and cognitive). Students are expected to achieve language and literacy skills and knowledge through the learning of their culture. The sidebar shows an example of the framework for 3rd grade for Goal 1.

The American Samoa Department of Education (ASDOE) Samoan language arts standards is just a first step toward improving students' academic performance in Samoan and English. What is critical is that the foundation has been established. There is now a set of expectations for Samoan language teachers to follow and for students to achieve. It is hoped that the Samoan language standards will address language and literacy issues students struggle with each day in their homes and in schools. The Samoan language standards committee is confident that when students achieve the language and literacy skills described in the ASDOE Samoan language standards, these same skills can be transferred to the learning of the English language and, therefore, support student achievement across the curriculum.

Goal 1: Encourage the learning of the Samoan language and culture.

Theme	Performance Task
Family	Describe the relationship between family members. Explain special events within the family. Use proper terms when referring to the elders and ranking family members.
Village	Identify appropriate behavior (and how it varies by age) for events such as village counsel meetings, funerals, weddings, and other ceremonies. Respond to a greeting in an appropriate way.

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