

### **What is the Seal of Biliteracy?**

The Seal of Biliteracy is a national movement that began in California in 2011 as a way to recognize and reward students that had attained a functional level of biliteracy as a result of their schooling. Since that time, 29 states and the District of Columbia have enacted Seal of Biliteracy legislation. You can follow the national progress at [www.sealofbiliteracy.org](http://www.sealofbiliteracy.org).

### **Why was it necessary to pass legislation for a Seal of Biliteracy?**

One legislator asked us this question in a Hearing remarking that if we were already running the pilot successfully, why was the legislation necessary? We responded that the Seal of Biliteracy movement is a national effort to value and reward biliteracy and that the legislation represents a formal commitment by the state to the importance of language learning in this global environment. This is especially important in states like ours whose Department of Education do not have a foreign language coordinator and who leave most programming decisions of untested subjects up to district choice. More importantly, legislation and state oversight creates a directive to language programs that the historic grammar-based language instruction is not effective and does not produce proficiency.

### **What is proficiency?**

The proficiency movement began in the 1970s when the government needed to describe what communicative functions were necessary for diplomats and the armed forces that were working abroad with the understanding that there would be a need for those personnel to interact with the native population. Certainly, the linguistic needs of a clerk are different than those of soldier and those of a hostage negotiator. The levels extend from Novice, to Intermediate, to Advanced, to Superior to Distinguished and each have sub-levels of low, mid and high. Each sub-level outlines the range of tasks or communicative functions that the person can complete, in which communicative contexts and how well the person can understand and be understood. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) adapted the scale for use in language development in K-12 and beyond. Though it has taken some time to become the national movement that it now is, best practices in foreign language teaching now focus on what the learner can do with the language. The purpose of language learning is to develop proficiency to be able to interact with the language in real-world communicative contexts for authentic purposes.

The Seal award has pushed districts focus on proficiency development and teachers create a learning environment that focuses on the communicative needs of the target proficiency level of the awards. This encourages programs and teachers to move away from the historic grammatical focus of language learning that did not develop proficiency or lead to much enjoyment in language learning. Language teachers are united in frustration over consistently hearing some version of the statement; "I took X number of years of X language in high school and I can't say a word now." Historically, language learning has not focused on what students can communicate as a result of programming.

### **How is proficiency measured?**

Along with the proficiency scale, the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) was created as a formal assessment process through interview to assign the specific level of proficiency that the person can sustain in the language. In 2015, ACTFL in cooperation with the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), the National Association of Teachers of Other Languages (TESOL), and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSEFL) designated Intermediate Mid as the minimum standard of functional proficiency for the Seal of Biliteracy. See the Guidelines for Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy at <https://www.actfl.org/news/press-releases/seal-biliteracy-guidelines-released>.

Over the last ten years, as language programming shifts to proficiency development and have wanted to assess how well their students are attaining the departmental targets, two companies have created tests over the computer for use in schools to simulate the OPI interview process but in the four skills or three modes of the language. The tests take about an hour or so and cost about \$20 per student. See the Toolkit for more information.

### **What if a district or a student does not want to participate in the Seal of Biliteracy?**

The Seal of Biliteracy is voluntary for districts and voluntary for students within those districts that elect to participate.

### **How does the Seal benefit the different student populations?**

The Seal of Biliteracy rewards English language learners, dual language program students and world language program students for biliteracy they demonstrate in speaking, writing, reading and listening. The Massachusetts Language Opportunity Coalition developed tiers of the Seal award to demonstrate that the language learning process can take time but that the more extensive the timeframe, the more proficiency can be developed. English language learners who maintain their native language are honored for the linguistic resource that they bring to their schooling. Dual language programs reward their students through this tiered process that starts in the elementary school with Pathway Awards and encourages them to continue language programming through high school and beyond. World language programs that set proficiency targets can demonstrate to students that the longer sequences of language study lead to higher proficiency.

### **How does receiving a Seal impact students' college and career readiness?**

As the Seal is being implemented across the nation, employers can understand and use reference to the Seal award on a job candidate's application to place the candidate where his or her language skills will be most necessary. The alignment of the Seal with the Proficiency Guidelines provides for a nationally recognized standard of ability to perform in the language. The university level was included in the sequence to push students to continue their language studies and become lifelong learners. It is also expected that a system of college credit awarded to the high school Seal award will be developed. Biliteracy is a skill that enhances most career opportunities.

### **What is the potential impact of the Seal of Biliteracy?**

There is no other school-based test that we can think of that so perfectly describes what a student can do as a result of programming and that has such a clear connection with a necessary career skill. In this age of seeking evidence of student learning, we have a perfect measure to describe what it is that our students can do as a result of their language learning programming. Even more exciting, it is a scale that is understood at the national level and can be used to document college and career readiness. We envision a near future where college credit is allocated through proficiency attained in K-12 and where jobs require a specific level of proficiency for the positions they post.

### **Who will run the Seal of Biliteracy in MA?**

The Workgroup Steering Committee is already discussing the work that has been accomplished by the MA Seal Workgroup and documented in the Seal Toolkit. The Workgroup will continue with the third year of the Pilot and continue to discuss standardization and respond to frequently asked questions. The MA DESE will take over the administration of the Seal in the fall of 2018.

### **How can you and your district become involved?**

New members to the Seal Workgroup are joining regularly, especially since the passing of the legislation. We encourage you to watch the Seal Webinar posted on the home page of the LOC website, read the Seal Toolkit posted on the Pilot page of the Website, and join the Google Group on that same page. Through the Google Group, you'll get access to the Google Drive materials, updates, and meeting announcements. We meet monthly on the fourth Monday of the month at 7PM via GoToMeeting.

**Submitted by the Language Opportunity Steering Committee:**

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**Resources for State Seal Implementation:**

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines:

<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012>

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements:

<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>

Guidelines for Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy:

<https://www.actfl.org/news/press-releases/seal-biliteracy-guidelines-released>

Oral Proficiency Levels in the Workplace (poster created by ACTFL):

[https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/TLE\\_pdf/OralProficiencyWorkplacePoster.pdf](https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/TLE_pdf/OralProficiencyWorkplacePoster.pdf)

Language Opportunity Coalition Seal Toolkit and PowerPoint and Language Opportunity Coalition Flier about Proficiency in the Workplace

<https://languageopportunity.org/issues/seal-of-biliteracy-pilot-project/>