

# ACTFL

## AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

---

### SEAL OF BILITERACY GUIDELINES RELEASED

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: MARTY ABBOTT  
(703) 894-2900

Washington, DC—The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL), and TESOL International Association, have officially drafted recommendations for the implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy.

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award made by a state department of education or local district to recognize a student who has attained proficiency in English and one or more other world languages by high school graduation. The recognition of attaining biliteracy becomes part of the high school transcript and diploma for these students. "This is an unprecedented collaboration by language educators to guide states in the implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy to ensure that students in each state are encouraged to demonstrate language proficiency in both English and another language," Jacque Van Houten, ACTFL President, added. The Seal serves to certify attainment of biliteracy for students, employers, and universities. It is a statement of accomplishment that helps to signal evidence of a student's readiness for career and college, and for engagement as a global citizen.

NCSSFL President, Ryan Wertz, comments, "As more states and local education entities consider the merits of formally recognizing the multilingual and multicultural abilities of their graduates as strong assets in today's global society, the members of NCSSFL enthusiastically endorse these guidelines as a viable source of guidance backed by current research and reflective of best practices."

To ensure consistency in the meaning of this recognition, the guidelines for implementation for state departments of education and for local school districts were developed. All students are eligible to attain the Seal of Biliteracy based on evidence of achieving the designated level of language proficiency in English plus one or more other languages during their high school years. TESOL President Yilin Sun stated, "TESOL International Association highly values multilingualism as an asset to be cultivated among students in American schools. We are pleased to have participated in this effort, which may encourage more schools to reassess how they view English language learners."

Students must demonstrate the state-determined level of proficiency in English, as well as one or more additional languages, be that language a native language, heritage language, or a language learned in school or another setting. "NABE is completely committed to the vision of preparing biliterate individuals



who will lead the nation's global economic, political and social advancement," NABE Board Member Dr. Yee Wan, comments.

Schools, districts, or states are encouraged to provide other forms of recognition prior to high school reflecting progress along the pathway toward achieving the specified level of biliteracy, which may occur earlier (as with immersion, two-way or dual language immersion programs; English language learners; and other populations). The focus is on achieving the level of proficiency required for English and the level of proficiency required for one or more other languages. Biliteracy refers to having a functional level of proficiency in each language. The level of proficiency is not necessarily identical for both languages.

[Click here to view the official Seal of Biliteracy Guidelines.](#)

### **ABOUT ACTFL**

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is the national association for language education professionals from all levels of instruction and representing all languages. With more than 12,300 active members, ACTFL provides innovative professional development opportunities, acclaimed training and certification programs, and widely cited books, publications, scholarly journals, research studies and language education resources, including *Foreign Language Annals* and *The Language Educator* magazine. As part of its mission and vision, the organization provides guidance to the profession and to the general public regarding issues, policies, and best practices related to the teaching and learning of languages and cultures. ACTFL is a leading national voice among language educators and administrators and is guided by a responsibility to set standards and expectations that will result in high quality language programs.

### **ABOUT NABE**

Since 1975, the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) has been a non-profit membership organization that works to ensure that language-minority students have equal opportunities to learn English and succeed academically. NABE's priorities include: Improving instructional practices for linguistically and culturally diverse children; providing bilingual educators with more high-quality professional development opportunities; securing adequate funding for the programs serving limited-English-proficient students; and keeping the rights of language-minority Americans clearly in focus as states and communities move forward with educational reforms. [www.nabe.org](http://www.nabe.org)

### **ABOUT NCSSFL**

The National Council of State Supervisors for Languages is an organization of education agency personnel from all states of the United States who are responsible for providing oversight for foreign/world language education at the K-12 level. The mission of NCSSFL is to provide national leadership in facilitating and promoting policies and practices that support language education. [www.ncssfl.org](http://www.ncssfl.org)

### **ABOUT TESOL International Association**

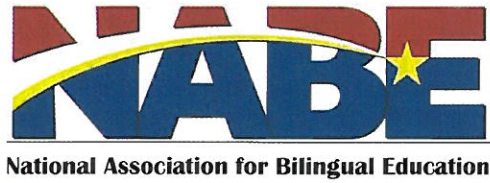
Founded in 1966, TESOL International Association is a professional community of educators, researchers, administrators, and students committed to advancing excellence in English language teaching for speakers of other languages worldwide. With more than 13,000 members representing over 150 countries, TESOL fosters the exchange of ideas, research, and peer-to-peer knowledge, and provides expertise, resources, and a powerful voice on issues affecting the profession. Through professional development programs, its international conference, special interest groups, and publications, TESOL engages tens of thousands of professionals to collaborate globally and create a world of opportunity for millions of people of all ages who want to learn English. [www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org)

**Date:** Monday, March 23, 2015

---

1001 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 200 | Alexandria,  
Virginia 22314  
Phone: (703) 894-2900

© ACTFL. All Rights Reserved.  
Web Design and Development by New Target



# Guidelines for Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy

March 10, 2015

## **Guidelines for Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy**

### **Purpose**

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award made by a state department of education or local district to recognize a student who has attained proficiency in English and one or more other world languages by high school graduation. The recognition of attaining biliteracy becomes part of the high school transcript and diploma for these students. The Seal serves to certify attainment of biliteracy for students, employers, and universities. It is a statement of accomplishment that helps to signal evidence of a student's readiness for career and college, and for engagement as a global citizen.

"We must acquire the ability to understand and be understood in the languages of the worldwide neighborhood." (*World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 2015)

"Knowledge of more than one language and culture is advantageous for all students...Bilingualism is an individual and societal asset." (*PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards*, TESOL International Association, 2006)

"Students' languages and cultures are valuable resources to be tapped and incorporated into schooling." (WIDA Guiding Principles of Language Development, # 1)

"Monolingualism is the illiteracy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century." (Gregg Roberts, Utah State Office of Education)

Four national organizations collaborated to draft recommendations for the implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy: the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL), and TESOL International Association. To ensure consistency in the meaning of this recognition, we offer the following guidelines for state departments of education and for local school districts:

### **Who Qualifies for the Seal of Biliteracy?**

ALL students are eligible to attain the Seal of Biliteracy based on evidence of achieving the designated level of language proficiency in English plus one or more other languages during their high school years. Students must demonstrate the state-determined level of proficiency in English, as well as one or more additional languages, be that language a native language, heritage language, or a language learned in school or another setting. Schools, districts, or states are encouraged to provide other forms of recognition prior to high school reflecting progress along the pathway toward achieving the specified level of biliteracy, which may occur earlier (as with immersion, two-way or dual language immersion programs; English language learners; and other populations). The focus is on achieving the level of proficiency required for English and the level of proficiency required



for one or more other languages. Biliteracy refers to having a functional level of proficiency in each language: The level of proficiency is not necessarily identical for both languages.

### **Level of Language Proficiency Required**

#### English:

Both native and non-native speakers of English need to provide comparable evidence of English Proficiency, as determined by the state guidelines. The language performance should be demonstrated in both social and academic use of the language, in all modes of communication.

#### Other Languages:

Native and non-native users of a language other than English need to provide evidence of proficiency in that language. The **minimum** target level should be Intermediate Mid based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The student should demonstrate proficiency in the modes of communication appropriate for that language; not all languages have all modes of communication (Interpersonal communication involving conversational speaking and listening or signed exchanges; Interpretive reading, listening, or viewing; and Presentational communication shown by creating messages for a reader, listener, or viewer through writing, speaking, or signing). The language performance should be demonstrated in both social and academic (content-based) use of the language, where possible.

States could consider a two-tier Seal of Biliteracy providing a higher option in the Advanced range. This is especially appropriate for bilingual or dual language programs.

#### Unique requirements for specific languages:

Due to unique characteristics of certain languages, special allowances may need to be made. We recommend that in cases where language assessments across all three modes of communication may not be appropriate or available, states/districts have the right to substitute a different assessment that meets the spirit of the Seal of Biliteracy. Students seeking the Seal through languages not characterized by the use of listening, speaking, reading, or for which there is not a writing system, will demonstrate the expected level of proficiency on an assessment of the modalities that characterize communication in that language.

#### Examples include:

- Latin and Classical Greek – recommend assessment of interpretive reading and presentational writing, not of listening or interpersonal face-to-face communication
- American Sign Language (ASL) – recommend assessment of interpersonal signed exchange, presentational signing, and demonstrating understanding of ASL (such as interpreting a signed lecture or by summarizing and responding to questions aimed at overarching understanding)
- Native American Languages – recommend assessment of interpersonal face-to-face communication as well as interpretive listening and presentational speaking, and writing and reading where a written code exists.

## **Evidence of Language Proficiency Required**

For many languages, including English, specific assessments exist and provide a valid and reliable means of measuring students' language performance. The evidence needs to evaluate students' use of the language, not knowledge about the language. We recommend that schools help students maintain a portfolio of their language performance, such as the LinguaFolio®, tracking improvement and progress toward the level required for the Seal of Biliteracy. One element of such a portfolio is assessment measures that are outside the assessments for a specific course. We recommend that states may determine the process for assessing students to meet the requirements of the Seal of Biliteracy in cases where assessments of specific languages may not be available.

### English:

We recommend demonstrating proficiency in English by meeting language arts requirements for high school graduation or demonstrating proficiency on a validated test of proficiency for English learners. Assessments in English may include one or more of the following as determined by the state:

- State assessments of English language arts as required for all learners
- State assessments of English language development for English learners
- Other assessments identified by the state as appropriate for demonstrating English proficiency equivalent to meeting high school graduation requirements.

### Other Languages:

We recommend demonstrating proficiency in the language other than English by demonstrating proficiency on a validated test of proficiency as determined by the state. States will determine the assessments that are acceptable for purposes of demonstrating proficiency in a language other than English. Examples include:

- Advanced Placement Exam
- International Baccalaureate Exam
- Oral Proficiency Interview, Reading Proficiency Test, or Writing Proficiency Test
- Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP4S)
- ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL)
- Tribal language assessments
- Signed Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) for American Sign Language
- ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Exam (ALIRA)
- Other assessments correlated to the required minimum level of language proficiency.

## **Equitable Access**

ALL students means “all,” regardless of language background or any identified condition that may exclude demonstration of language proficiency in one of the modes of communication, conditions such as blindness, deaf or hearing impaired, cognitive disabilities, or learning disabilities. All students should receive information on the Seal of

Biliteracy upon entering middle and high school settings so that they are able to organize their schedules and meet the requirements to receive this honor. Accommodations, such as those already in place for state-required assessments of language, should be included for assessments used to qualify for the Seal of Biliteracy. Technology provides the resources and means to make the assessments for the Seal of Biliteracy available to all students.

### **State/District Process to Award the Seal of Biliteracy**

Awarding of the Seal of Biliteracy should be done by high school graduation. States implementing the Seal of Biliteracy should determine practical methods for recording the name and identification of students who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy. It is recommended that schools send the names of students receiving the Seal and the language(s) of biliteracy to their state department of education.

Each state may determine the process for awarding the Seal of Biliteracy, including the following:

- The Seal may be added to the high school diploma or transcript as well as displayed on a certificate or medal awarded to the student
- The Seal may be noted on the high school transcript as this is the credential that is viewed by colleges and universities and future employers
- States may wish to encourage local districts and schools to make the awarding of the Seal of Biliteracy visible at graduation and any senior award ceremonies
- States may set up their own process for collecting, recording, and maintaining the data on students receiving the Seal of Biliteracy and the evidence upon which it is based including the languages other than English in which students earned the Seal and the number of students earning the Seal who are former English learners
- States may provide a process that determines how a learner under certain circumstances could complete the requirements to demonstrate proficiency up to one year following high school graduation.