

Promoting Language Study with the Seal of Biliteracy

Cherie Garrett
Dallastown Area High School

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award given by a school, district, or state in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in English and a second language by high school graduation. This award encourages students to pursue biliteracy, recognizes the skills that students attain, and serves as evidence of linguistic skills sought by college admission boards and by future employers. Although Pennsylvania has not approved the Seal of Biliteracy at this time, the legislation is currently under consideration and will pass more easily if more schools in the state offer the Seal within their school or district. This article explains the necessary steps to successfully implement the Seal of Biliteracy at a school or district level and provides additional information about the Global Seal of Biliteracy, especially for college or university students.

Step 1: Determine the proficiency criteria based on the proposed Pennsylvania Seal of Biliteracy.

Based on the proposed PA Seal of Biliteracy, the criteria options for English proficiency are based on being proficient or advanced on the English Literature Keystone Exam or earning a 4.5 or higher on the WIDA ACCESS for English Language Learners. For second language proficiency, there are various options. The most common assessments are the Advanced Placement World Language Exams, the AAPPL (ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages), and the Stamp 4S (Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency). Students taking the AP exams must earn a “4” or higher while students taking the AAPPL or Stamp 4S must obtain an intermediate high level of proficiency or higher. Other ways to verify an intermediate high proficiency is to score 700+ on a SAT II subject test for a world language or to earn intermediate high or higher on an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and Written Proficiency Test (WPT). Both the OPI and the WPT are administered by LTI (Language Testing International) and Avant World Speak.

Step 2: Meet with administration to explain the Seal of Biliteracy and the benefits to students and to the school district.

To get support for the Seal, it is necessary to meet with administration to explain the numerous benefits of offering such an award such as encouraging students to study world languages and to continue through the upper levels of the program, to recognize the diverse languages and cultures in the school, to prepare students with 21st century skills, and to certify students' levels of language proficiency which can be used by college admissions boards and future employers. In addition to benefits for the students, it also provides positive public relations for both the school's language programs and the school district as a whole. Lastly, it is imperative to explain the process of implementing the Seal of Biliteracy and any costs (proficiency assessments, certificates, medals, etc.) associated with it.

Step 3: Gather data about potential candidates for the Seal of Biliteracy and meet with them.

After getting approval to offer the Seal, advertise the Seal of Biliteracy to all students in the school. The target audience of students are students taking world languages (including classical languages), EL students, exchange students and deaf and hard of hearing students. It is important to explain the benefits of earning the Seal and setting the biliteracy goal for underclassmen, so they take the necessary classes to prepare them to earn the award. Once interested students have been identified, have a meeting to find out which students are candidates for taking the assessments for proficiency. Since the AAPPL and Stamp 4S assess all 4 skills (reading, writing, listening and

speaking) in Arabic, English, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Thai, it is important to make sure that students can perform all four skills in their target language before registering them for the test. In languages not assessed by the AAPPL or Stamp 4S, the students need to be able to speak (OPI) and write (WPT) in the language. At the high school level, the students should be assessed no sooner than 18 months before they graduate so that the Seal reflects their current level of proficiency upon graduation.

Step 4: Collect English proficiency scores.

Speak to the guidance counselors to find out the students' English proficiency scores by using the Keystone Exam in Literature. For students who did not take the Keystone exam or who were not proficient, speak to the EL teacher to either find out the students' WIDA scores or to administer the WIDA to determine their level of proficiency in English.

Step 5: Assess students' proficiency in a language other than English.

Register the students to take a proficiency test (AAPPL, Stamp 4S, etc.) at least 2 months before the end of the school year so that the results are determined in time.. For some exams, such as the Advanced Placement exam, the results are not received until mid-July, so the award is not announced until that time. The cost of the exams varies from \$20 for the AAPPL or Stamp 4S, \$55 for the OPI and WPT (if the AAPPL is given to other students), and \$95 for the AP exam. The cost of the proficiency exams can be covered by educational grants, Title III funds, school funds or the students could pay of their own accord.

Step 6: Compile the testing data and recognize award recipients.

After the students complete the testing, it is important to share the results with them so that they know their current level of proficiency and have the documentation to prove it. The data should then be compiled to create a list of students who qualified for the Seal of Biliteracy based on the predetermined criteria. Each student should receive a certificate and/or medal to recognize their achievement. Also, the school administration should be notified as well as the local media.

The Seal of Biliteracy is offered to students K-12 in schools who offer the award; however, another alternative is the Global Seal of Biliteracy which is offered to anyone who demonstrates proficiency in both English and a second language at the intermediate-mid, advanced low or advanced high level. For colleges, universities and schools that don't offer the Seal of Biliteracy, this is another viable way to provide recognition for students who are bilingual. The Global Seal of Biliteracy is awarded at the following levels: Functional Fluency™, Working Fluency™ and Professional Fluency™ and a certificate is offered at no cost to anyone who has the proper documentation to prove their proficiency in English and has qualifying test scores for a second language. Many colleges and universities have seen an increase in retention and language program enrollment as a result of the implementation of the Global Seal of Biliteracy.

In summary, the Seal of Biliteracy and the Global Seal of Biliteracy are excellent opportunities to provide students with an accurate assessment of their proficiency and to recognize those who achieve an intermediate through advanced level of proficiency. The awards not only encourage students to study languages and to continue their pursuit of proficiency, but also provides recognition of the diverse cultures and languages in the school. Moreover, the award creates positive public relations for both the school and the programs that develop the students' linguistic skills. Finally, the Seal of Biliteracy serves as evidence of students' linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness and is extremely beneficial for universities and future employers who are seeking candidates with these 21st century skills.

Sources

[Global Seal of Biliteracy](#)

Learn more about the Global Seal of Biliteracy, its purpose, ways to earn it, and support materials.

[Seal of Biliteracy](#)

A useful resource which explains the Seal of Biliteracy, its purpose, state guidelines, steps for implementation, ways to award it and support materials.

[ACTFL Assessments](#)

Additional information about ACTFL assessments.