

Iowa Seal of Biliteracy Guidance

Introduction

In 2018, Governor Kim Reynolds signed Senate File (SF) 475 into law. SF 475 required the Iowa Department of Education (Department) to develop and administer the Seal of Biliteracy Program to any participating school district, public attendance center (i.e., school building), or accredited nonpublic school. The purpose of the program is to recognize graduating high school students who have demonstrated proficiency in English and at least one other world language.



Importance of Biliteracy in the 21st Century

A biliteracy seal is important because knowing and using more than one language is a critical 21st-century skill. A biliteracy seal:

- Values language as an asset;
- Recognizes the value of language diversity and cultural identity;
- Prepares students with 21st-century skills that will benefit them in the labor market and global society; and
- Provides employers, institutions of higher education, and grant or scholarship providers evidence of a student's world language skills and dedication to attaining biliteracy.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to provide school districts, public school buildings, and accredited nonpublic schools with information related to the biliteracy seal program requirements. Specifically, the guidance includes:

- General language proficiency information,
- Assessment options to demonstrate proficiency in English and a world language or languages,
- Annual district and accredited nonpublic school requirements to offer the program, and
- Answers to frequently asked questions.

Language Proficiency

A biliteracy seal relies on demonstrating proficiency in a given language; it does not focus on "seat time" or completing language courses. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) defines language proficiency using the terms Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished (see Appendix A to learn more about each level). For the purposes of this seal, language proficiency requires a student to receive a score that mirrors the ACTFL's Intermediate level.

Biliteracy Seal Assessment Options

To be eligible for the Iowa Seal of Biliteracy, students must demonstrate proficiency in both English and another language. The following tables identify the approved assessments that can be used to demonstrate proficiency in English and other languages.

English Assessment Options

The assessment options to demonstrate proficiency in English include:

Assessment	Minimum Score(s)
ACT	English: 18
Advanced Placement (AP) Language or AP Literature Exam	3
English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) in grades 9 through 12	All domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening): 4 or 5, which equates to an overall proficiency of 3
SAT	English: 470
Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) in grades 9 through 11	English/Language Arts: Proficient
Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)	Total score 80, no part score under 17
ACTFL Assessment of Performance Toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL)	Intermediate Two (I-2) (required on all components: Interpretive Reading and Listening, Interpersonal Listening and Speaking, and Presentational Writing)
Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP) Exam	Intermediate-Mid (5) (required on all components)
Accuplacer ESL	Intermediate-Mid: 70 or above

World Language Assessment Options

The assessment options to demonstrate proficiency in other languages include:

Assessment	Language(s)	Minimum Score or Level Required
AP Language and Culture Exams	Spanish, Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Japanese	3
AP Latin Exam	Latin	3
International Baccalaureate (IB) Exams (Only available to currently enrolled IB students)	Any instructed language in an IB program	4
ACTFL AAPPL	Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish	Intermediate Two (I-2) (required on all components)
ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment (ALIRA) Exam	Latin	Intermediate Two (I-2)
ALTA	Several languages (Must test in all reading, writing, speaking, and listening)	Intermediate-Mid
STAMP Exam	Arabic, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese	Intermediate-Mid (5) (required on all components).
National Examinations in World Languages (NEWL) Exam	Arabic (MSA), Korean, Portuguese (global), and Russian	Intermediate-Mid (required on all components).
Diplomas of Spanish as a Foreign Language (DELE) Exam	Spanish	B1 (required on all components).

Assessment	Language(s)	Minimum Score or Level Required
German Language Diploma/ Deutsches Sprachdiplom (DSD) Exam	German	B1 (required on all components).
Diplomas of French Language Studies (DELF) Exam	French	B1 (required on all components).
American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) Exam	American Sign Language	3
Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI)	American Sign Language	Intermediate
Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) Exam (must take in conjunction with the WPT)	See list of OPI languages	Intermediate-Mid
Oral Proficiency Interview-Computer (OPIc) Exam (must take in conjunction with the WPT)	Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Pashto, Persian Farsi, European Portuguese, Brazilian Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish	Intermediate-Mid
Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) Exam (must be taken in conjunction with the OPI/OPIc)	Albanian (Booklet form only), Arabic, Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, English, French, German, Greek (Modern), Haitian Creole (Booklet form only), Hebrew (Booklet form only), Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Persian Farsi, Polish, European Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and Vietnamese	Intermediate-Mid
Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española (SIELE) Exam	Spanish	B1
STAMP WS Exam <i>Note: This assessment only assesses writing and speaking. Districts and accredited nonpublic schools would also need to assess students in reading and listening.</i>	Amharic, Armenian, Chin (Hakha), Czech, Filipino (Tagalog), Haitian-Creole, Hmong, Illocano, Marathi, Samoan, Somali Maay Maay, Somali Maxaa, Tamil, Telugu, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese, Yup'ik, and Zomi	Intermediate-Mid (5)
Las Links Español	Spanish	Proficiency level 3 Intermediate

World Languages in Which No Approved Assessment Exists

If there is no approved assessment for the world language, the local school district or accredited nonpublic school must review and assess the student's portfolio in the four language domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Products to demonstrate proficiency may include:

- Formal presentations in the targeted language; (*speaking*)
- Student-produced compositions, articles, papers, and other formal documents in the targeted world language (*writing*);
- Reading text in the targeted language (*reading*) and;
- Listening to a native speaker (*listening*)

Annual Requirements to Offer the Biliteracy Seal

To offer the Seal of Biliteracy, the district or accredited nonpublic school should annually complete all the following steps.

Component	Description
Notify the Department of Intent to Participate and Designate a Program Coordinator during Fall BEDS Collection Window	<p>Each year during the fall BEDS collection window, the district or accredited nonpublic school must notify the Department of its intent to participate in the Seal of Biliteracy program. In its notice, the district or accredited nonpublic school must designate a Seal of Biliteracy program coordinator.</p> <p>The role of the coordinator includes, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving communication from the Department; • Serving as the main point of contact regarding the seal for your district or school; • Disseminating key information to stakeholders; and • Ensuring all students (e.g., students in world language classes, English learners, other bilingual students) have equitable access to participation information.
Make Local Program Implementation Decisions Early in the School Year	<p>The district or accredited nonpublic school must determine how it will implement the program locally. This should be done early in the school year to facilitate student participation. Questions to determine implementation include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you communicate information to all students and parents about the possibility of earning the seal? • What supports (e.g., classes, test administration) will you offer to students who want to earn the seal? • How will you recognize students who earn the seal?
Inform Students and Parents/Guardians About the Program	<p>To inform students and their parents/guardians, the district or accredited nonpublic school should post the following program information on its website and include the information in the student handbook:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General program and participation information; • A description of how students must demonstrate English proficiency; • A description of the approved assessments a student may use to demonstrate proficiency in another language and • The name and contact information for the program coordinator.
Receive the Electronic Biliteracy Seal by February 1 or Request an Alternate Seal Format	<p>The district or accredited nonpublic school will receive the electronic seal from the Department by February 1 of each year. This is the official seal and the only seal that should be used.</p> <p>The district or accredited nonpublic school can choose additional formats (e.g., certificate, medal, physical sticker) to award the seal if the official seal is used on the student's transcript. If needed, the district or accredited nonpublic school can also request a physical sticker of the seal from its area education agency (see FAQ section for contact information).</p>

Component	Description
Set an Internal Deadline for Students to Indicate Interest (Recommended)	The district or accredited nonpublic may want to set an internal deadline for students to indicate program interest and/or provide their assessment.
Coordinate Testing Sessions (As Needed)	The district or accredited nonpublic school may need to coordinate testing sessions.
Identify and Maintain Documentation of Students Qualifying for the Biliteracy Seal	<p>The district or accredited nonpublic school must identify the students that qualify for the Seal of Biliteracy. To qualify, a student must meet the qualifications in both English and another language. Students may meet requirements at any time during their high school enrollment, but students cannot be awarded the seal until graduation. However, if a student moves to a different district or state that does not recognize the seal, the student may not be able to earn the seal.</p> <p>The district or accredited nonpublic school should maintain documentation of assessment results to ensure students qualified for the Seal.</p>
Award the Official Biliteracy Seal Upon Graduation	The district or accredited nonpublic school must include the official seal image containing the year (or note that the student earned the biliteracy seal) on the student's transcript. The district or accredited nonpublic school seal can ONLY officially award the biliteracy seal upon graduation, unless the district or accredited nonpublic school does not receive the student's proficiency results until after graduation (see FAQ section). In such a case, the district or accredited nonpublic school can only award the candidate a biliteracy seal if and when the results demonstrate the student is proficient.
Annual Report in the Spring SRI or Spring BEDS	<p>The district or accredited nonpublic school must annually submit Seal of Biliteracy information to the Department. The report requires the district or accredited nonpublic school to provide its list of students awarded the Seal of Biliteracy and the language(s) for which the seals were awarded. The report must only include data of graduating seniors who have been awarded the seal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The district must do so through Student Reporting in Iowa (SRI) in the spring. • Accredited nonpublic schools that do not use SRI will report in the spring BEDS collection. • State operated programs should send this information to Stefanie Wager at stefanie.wager@iowa.gov by June 30 each year.

FAQs

1. Where can I find more information about the Iowa Seal of Biliteracy?

You can find more information at the Department's [Biliteracy Seal webpage](#).

2. Has the program grown since its creation? If yes, how much?

Yes. During the 2018-2019 school year, the first year of Seal of Biliteracy program implementation, 575 students earned the seal. During the 2021-2022 school year, 1,065 students earned the seal, which is an 85.2 percent increase over the inaugural year ([Iowa Department of Education](#)). Since then, there has been a continued increase in the number of students earning the Seal of Biliteracy.

3. What about if a student graduates mid-year?

All previously outlined requirements apply to both mid-year and end-of-year graduates. However, the district or accredited nonpublic school should contact the Department to receive the electronic seal earlier than February 1. The district or accredited nonpublic school will still need to report a student's scores in the Spring SRI/BEDS collection.

4. What happens if a student can demonstrate proficiency in more than English and another world language?

If a student demonstrates proficiency in more than English and another language, the district or accredited nonpublic school may note additional languages on a student's transcript.

5. What if there is an assessment we want to use that is not on the approved list of assessments?

Please request use of this assessment from Stefanie Wager at stefanie.wager@iowa.gov. Additional approved assessments will be added yearly to the Department's guidance.

6. For the Seal of Biliteracy in Latin, may a district or accredited nonpublic school accept the results of the ALIRA (i.e., the ACTFL test that assesses in the single domain of reading)?

Yes. Because we do not use Latin as a written or spoken language today, the ALIRA may be used to demonstrate Latin proficiency for the purposes of awarding the biliteracy seal.

7. May the Seal of Biliteracy be awarded to seniors after they graduate if the results of a test administered during their final school year are not available at the time of graduation?

Yes. If the approved language assessment results are not available at the time of graduation, the district or accredited nonpublic school may award the Seal of Biliteracy after the student graduates if and when the student's assessment results demonstrate their proficiency. The district or accredited nonpublic school may recognize such students as Seal of Biliteracy candidates at graduation but cannot include the official seal on the transcript until the district or accredited nonpublic school obtains the results and they indicate that the student qualifies for the award. When the Seal of Biliteracy is awarded, a designation must be affixed to the student's transcript.

8. In what languages can the biliteracy seal be awarded?

The Seal of Biliteracy can be awarded once a student demonstrates proficiency in English and any other language, including American Sign Language.

9. What if a student moves to Iowa in the middle of their senior year and hasn't taken the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress yet to demonstrate English proficiency?

Equivalent tests from other states can be used to demonstrate proficiency in English. The district or accredited nonpublic school can determine proficiency in English according to score guidelines from those specific assessments.

10. If a student does not demonstrate proficiency on a test or a portion of a test, can they retake a portion of that exam?

Yes.

11. Can foreign exchange students participate in the program?

Yes. Foreign exchange students can participate in the biliteracy seal program. However, the district or accredited nonpublic school can only officially award a seal to a foreign exchange student if they graduate from the district or accredited nonpublic school.

12. Are districts required to pay for assessments?

No. Districts do not have to pay for any assessments, however, many districts have chosen to help offset costs for students.

13. How can I request a physical sticker of the seal?

If you do not want to use the electronic version of the seal, you may request physical stickers from your AEA. Please only request the number of seals you need for the school year as the seal image will change each year.

AEA	Contact	Contact Information
Central Rivers AEA	Randy Darst	rdarst@centralriversaea.org or Creative Services
Grant Wood AEA	Shalyn Huber	shuber@gwaea.org or Creative Services
Great Prairie AEA	Lindy Harmon	lindy.harmon@gpaea.org or Creative Services
Green Hills AEA	Amy Pattee	apattee@ghaea.org or Creative Services
Heartland AEA	Creative Services	http://csonline.heartlandaea.org . Log in with your AEA Learning Online username and password.
Keystone AEA	Mindy Reimer	mreimer@aea1.k12.ia.us or Creative Services
Mississippi Bend AEA	Heather Whitman	hwhitman@mbaea.org or Creative Services
Northwest AEA	Polly Meissner	pmeissner@nwaea.org or Creative Services
Prairie Lakes AEA	Kimberly Geisler	kgeisler@plaea.org or Creative Services

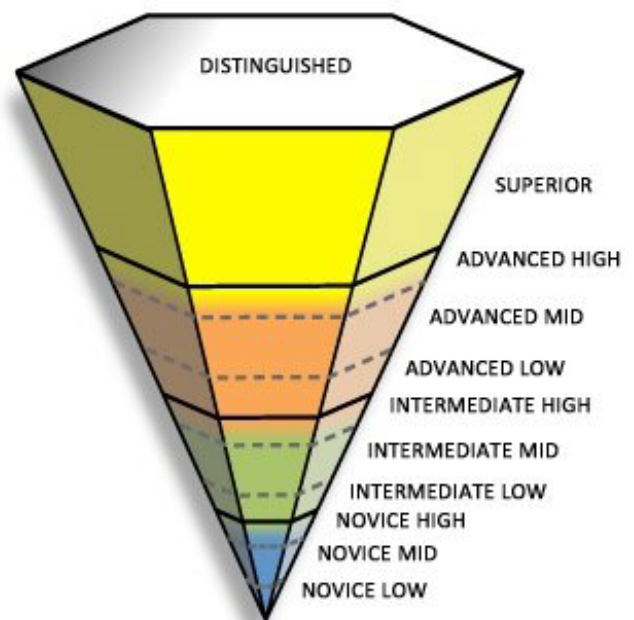
Questions and Additional Guidance

If you have questions, please contact Stefanie Wager at 515-419-2876 or stefanie.wager@iowa.gov. For additional biliteracy seal guidance and information, please visit the Department's [Biliteracy Seal webpage](#).

Appendix A: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Language Proficiencies

The ACTFL language proficiencies are important in order to distinguish the intricacies of learning a language and showing the ability to read, write, speak and listen in that language. Each level considers how well a speaker uses vocabulary, text type, language functions, context, accuracy control, and communication strategies. Additionally, each level takes into consideration how well the speaker is comprehended by others. A description of each level is included below.

- **Novice:** The student communicates with words or characters and phrases to express basic needs on familiar topics that have been highly practiced and memorized. The learner controls the accuracy within the memorized and practiced context and can be understood by one accustomed to dealing with language learners (a sympathetic listener). Example: “gloves,” “need gloves,” “I need gloves.”
- **Intermediate:** The student communicates with sentences and some connected sentences while expressing and elaborating on basic needs. The learner controls the language with enough accuracy to be understood by one accustomed to dealing with language learners. Example: “I need winter gloves because my hands are cold.”
- **Advanced:** The student communicates in various time frames in extended, organized paragraph length discourse to respond to and resolve problems. The learner controls the language sufficiently enough to interact effectively with someone unaccustomed to dealing with language learners. Example: “If gloves are on sale when I get my next paycheck, I might go get a pair to keep my hands warm.”
- **Superior:** At this level students are able to communicate with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. When appropriate, these speakers use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations.
- **Distinguished:** Speakers at the distinguished level are able to use language skillfully, and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are educated and articulate users of the language. Speakers at the distinguished level produce highly sophisticated and tightly organized extended discourse.



[Learn more about how ACTFL defines these proficiency areas](#)