

# Language Opportunity

Massachusetts Language Opportunity Coalition



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SEAL OF BILITERACY & SEAL IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS IN MASSACHUSETTS

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### FAQs ABOUT THE MASSACHUSETTS SEAL OF BILITERACY

#### **What is the Seal of Bilingual Education?**

The Seal of Bilingual Education 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 bilingualism as a result of their schooling. Since that time, more than half the states have enacted Seal of Bilingual Education legislation. You can follow the national progress at [www.sealofbilingualeducation.org](http://www.sealofbilingualeducation.org).

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

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 Bilingual Education movement is a national effort to value and reward bilingualism 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. The MA legislation called Language Opportunity for Our Kids (LOOK Bill) was signed into law by Governor Baker on November 22, 2017, as part of a comprehensive bill to overhaul English language learning education.

#### **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 a 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 now called the Proficiency Guidelines 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 (NCSSFL) created a Guidelines for Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy document and designated Intermediate Mid as the minimum standard of functional proficiency for the Seal of Biliteracy.

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 creating a document for DESE based on the work that has been accomplished by the MA Seal Workgroup and documented in the [Seal Toolkit](#). The Workgroup will continue to oversee 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.

## FAQs ABOUT THE SEAL OF BILITERACY IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

### Compiled Through Collaboration of the Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy Pilot Project

#### **What are some resources available 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/>

#### **How do we determine proficiency on standardized assessments?**

Proficiency scoring is determined by the lowest domain score. Domains include listening, speaking, reading and writing. A score in the novice range in any domain automatically disqualifies a student.

In the first two years of implementation, a school or district can opt to select one of the following options to determine proficiency. After two years (or earlier if ready), all schools and districts must follow OPTION 1 to determine proficiency on standardized assessment scores.

- Option 1) Proficiency is determined by the lowest domain score.
- Option 2) Use of a calculation form similar to the WIDA ACCESS that values each domain at a particular percent with no single domain falling below Intermediate-low. Example of calculation form: 35% reading, 35% for writing, 15% for listening and 15% for speaking.
- Option 3) Take the mode with no score below Intermediate-low.
- Option 4) Calculation form: 25% across all domains with no scored in novice range.

#### **What is a scenario for accepting the ACCESS results for ELLs and not the MCAS assessment results?**

An ELL student may arrive in Grade 9, take the MCAS in Grade 10 and score “Needs Improvement”. Yet the student has two more years to learn English before graduating and may reach the ACCESS Level 4 for the Silver Award by graduation. ACCESS is given annually for those students identified as ELL.

**Who can/should use a portfolio? When to use a portfolio?**

- To be used in addition to assessments for any area of competency not covered by an assessment instrument;
- To be used in districts/schools that want to use the portfolio approach in addition to testing or to be used in schools/districts in the years prior to testing to illustrate proficiency development over time;
- To be used in districts/schools that want to use the portfolio approach because of the lack of assessment instruments that exist for the grade level, e.g., elementary or middle school;
- To be used in districts that have languages not represented in assessment instruments but a teacher or tutor is available who speaks the language of the student and can supervise the portfolio process;
- To be used with students as guidance of developing the other language.

**Why should a portfolio be used?**

- Several people/teachers conducting the first pilot felt it was more of an authentic assessment than using one standardized assessment instrument
- Several people/teachers conducting the first pilot liked having a greater selection of evidence as it gave more opportunities for students to show what they know and can do.

**When should we be collecting evidence for a portfolio?**

- Evidence for a portfolio may be ongoing throughout a student's enrollment in a language learning program.
- Several people/teachers conducting the first pilot, suggest an April deadline for the portfolio submissions and completion of standardized assessments. This gives the teachers time to assess the pieces of evidence in the portfolio.

**Who reviews/evaluates the portfolio? Who makes the decisions on items in portfolio and assessment scores?**

- The portfolio is reviewed and evaluated by teachers and leaders at the school. Schools in districts are encouraged to work collaboratively in the development and evaluation of portfolios.
- We recommend sharing/creating common expectations, common portfolios and checklists and using common assessments/rubrics across programs or schools within a district.
- For portfolios created by students in native languages not represented by tests and not spoken by district personnel, it was suggested that outreach take place to find community volunteers to review these portfolios.

**What are special assessment considerations for ELLs who have been reclassified and/or exited from TBE programs?**

- For exited TBE students by 3rd or 4th grade, there must be an assessment to assess Spanish/Portuguese skills in 5th grade or create formative assessments in place of a standardized assessment to determine language proficiency. Exited ELLs may experience loss of competency in their home language.

**When should assessment occur? Determining Testing Windows**

- Schools must determine the best time of year to test students for the Seal. Some schools want students to use the information for their college applications thus are testing in fall of senior year. Some schools are replacing midyear or final exam with the proficiency testing to not test too much. Some schools are working around the state tests and other events that are offered in the district. Some schools are offering a fall and a spring window for testing to allow students to re-test.

**What should we do when the assessments scores are returned after the school year?**

- Schools do not receive the ACCESS scores until after school year is over (June, July), therefore, several conducting the first pilot looked at the trajectory for learning language over time to determine the likeliness of the student reaching level 5 or 6 in ACCESS in the year student is to receive award.
- Many of the tests (AAPPL, STAMP) offer the opportunity to stop and start testing to have them fit within several school periods over a timeframe. The testing of all three modes or four skills of the language can take several hours to complete. The tests can be easily ordered a few weeks ahead and the results are returned within 1-2 weeks.

**What will the Seal of Biliteracy look like? Will it be an actual seal/stamp on the diploma? Will awardees wear a special sash or other symbol of recognition at the graduation ceremony?**

- Schools and programs make this decision. You can purchase seals and award medals here: <http://sealofbiliteracy.org/implementation-materials> (Velázquez Press sponsors schools and districts by providing seals and award medals for Seal of Biliteracy graduates.)
- Examples of other designations include a Seal pin, medal, ribbon, cord or certificate. The Language Opportunity Coalition has created [certificates for the different awards](#) that districts can download and use.
- DESE will create a state Seal of Biliteracy for use in 2018-19.
- More than the actual award, it is important to consider how the students will be honored (ceremony, publication in local paper and through social media). It is also interesting to consider how a pin, medal or ribbon might be worn at graduation to visually highlight the awardees.

**Where can we find an example of a timeline for communicating the expectations of the Seal of Biliteracy Pathway Awards?**

- Samples of Timelines are available in section V of the Toolkit. [Logistic Tools and Examples for Implementing Pathway Awards](#)

**Which assessment instrument should we use?**

- We recommend you begin by looking at what is currently used in your program, school or district to monitor for language development in English and world languages. For a list of assessment instruments used in districts, see Section IV. [Assessment of Language Competencies](#).

**Can middle and high school students earn the Biliteracy Attainment Award or Silver Seal of Biliteracy?**

- Students in middle and high school must meet the criteria for these awards. In giving the Biliteracy Attainment award to students at the middle and high school level for example, we hope to motivate students to continue language study and work towards earning the Silver, Gold or Platinum Seal of Biliteracy Award upon high school or college graduation.

**Where can we find someone to help assess students in languages not represented by teachers in a school district?**

- Organizations and churches in the larger community may be able to help you find someone to assess students.

**Is there room for teacher voice in the assessment process?**

- Some districts in the pilot include “special considerations” when considering who may be eligible for an award, e.g., considering a student's special needs, personality, motivation, attitude, and consistent growth in developing the partner language.