

# Ohio Seal of Biliteracy

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy?

The Ohio Seal of Biliteracy is an award conferred on graduating high school seniors who can demonstrate a high level of proficiency in English and at least one world (foreign) language, which includes modern languages, classical languages, American Sign Language and native American languages.

### 2. What is proficiency?

Proficiency is the ability of an individual to use culturally appropriate language to communicate spontaneously in non-rehearsed contexts with a high degree of competence. It also refers to the degree of skill with which a person can use the language to comprehend, speak, read, write or sign in real-life situations.

### 3. What is the purpose of the Seal of Biliteracy?

High school graduates who can function in English and at least one other world language are equipped with knowledge and skills that will help them participate successfully in college, careers, the military and a diverse global society. The purpose is to:

- Encourage the study of languages;
- Certify the attainment of biliteracy;
- Give employers insights on the skills of graduates;
- Give universities an additional mechanism to identify strong candidates for admission;
- Prepare students with 21st century skills;
- Recognize the value of foreign and native language instruction; and
- Strengthen intergroup relationships and affirm the value of diversity.

### 4. How does the Seal of Biliteracy benefit students?

For students entering the workforce or the military after graduation, having a Seal of Biliteracy will help employers and military recruiters identify that these students can use their language proficiency in a variety of professional contexts. For students applying to college, having a Seal of Biliteracy will bolster their academic credentials. The Department is currently working with the Ohio Department of Higher Education to determine if it can create a mechanism to ensure appropriate course placement for further advanced language study and encourage the awarding of university credit to Seal of Biliteracy recipients in the future.

### 5. What is the cost of earning a Seal of Biliteracy? Who pays for the world language assessments?

Ohio law prohibits schools and districts from charging students fees to earn a Seal of Biliteracy. Students are responsible for any assessment costs not covered by their schools or districts.

### 6. Who is responsible for determining if this program becomes an option in our school?

The school or district leadership team, consulting with its English language and world language teachers, should make the decision about participation in the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy Program. If a

district is taking part in the program, it should offer the Seal of Biliteracy in all its high schools to ensure equity across the district.

**7. What English language requirement must a student meet to be eligible for a Seal of Biliteracy?**

- a. Earn proficient level or higher on Ohio's required state tests for high school English language arts I and II; or
- b. Earn a remediation-free score on the English and reading sections of the ACT or SAT; or
- c. Earn proficient level or higher on an Ohio Department of Education approved alternative assessment (TerraNova or Iowa Test); or
- d. Earn a score of proficient or higher on the Ohio English Language Proficiency Assessment (OELPA).

**8. What world language requirement must a student meet to be eligible for a Seal of Biliteracy?**

- a. Pass an Advanced Placement (AP) foreign language and culture examination with a score of 4 or higher; or
- b. Pass an International Baccalaureate (IB) foreign language examination with a score of 6 or higher on the Standard Level exam or a score of 5 or higher on the Higher Level exam; or
- c. Attain a score of Intermediate High or higher in comprehension, speaking, reading and writing the foreign language based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines found at [actfl.org](http://actfl.org), using assessments approved by the Ohio Department of Education; or
- d. Qualify for proficiency-based credits through Ohio's credit flexibility program and attain a score of Intermediate High or higher in comprehension, speaking, reading and writing based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines using assessments approved by the Ohio Department of Education; or
- e. Attain a score equivalent to Intermediate High or higher on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines in interpersonal signing, presentational signing and demonstrating understanding of American Sign Language on an American Sign Language assessment approved by the Ohio Department of Education; or
- f. Attain a score equivalent to Intermediate High or higher on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines in interpretive reading and presentational writing on a classical language assessment approved by the Ohio Department of Education.

**9. When is the testing window for students who seek an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy?**

For students to benefit from the attainment of a Seal of Biliteracy at the time they apply for postsecondary study, the testing window will open 15 months prior to the expected date of graduation. Typically, this would be in March or April of a student's junior year. This window also permits a student to attempt to pass a Department-approved proficiency assessment more than once, if needed, to earn a Seal of Biliteracy.

**10. Can a student take the world language assessment more than once?**

Yes, within the 15-month testing window, it is allowable for a student to take an approved world language assessment more than once, if necessary, to demonstrate a high level of proficiency. Please note that some exams may be offered only one time per year and others may be offered more than once a year. School officials and testing coordinators should determine a local schedule for students based on the language assessments their students and local stakeholders desire.

**11. What funding is available to support the world language assessments for students?**

State funding is not available to support world language proficiency testing. The Ohio Department of Education encourages schools and districts to use local funding sources to support students who cannot afford the cost of an assessment. Also, some vendors will offer a reduced price if a district or school purchases a certain number of assessments. Schools and districts may want to explore the idea of forming regional consortia to facilitate testing of students seeking the Seal of Biliteracy.

**12. Why can't a student's foreign language proficiency be assessed for the Seal of Biliteracy eligibility more than 15 months before to graduation?**

Unfortunately, language proficiency is not static and deteriorates over time, especially if a student is not actively using or learning the language. To maintain the integrity of Ohio's Seal of Biliteracy, participating schools and districts must ensure that students can demonstrate the required level of foreign language proficiency at the time of graduation for university admissions officers, military recruiters and prospective employers.

**13. How do I know if a student "passed" a Department-approved world language assessment once my school receives the score report?**

School and district officials in charge of awarding the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy should consult the Ohio Department of Education's list of approved assessments, which gives the minimum score or scores required on each test to demonstrate the required Intermediate High level of language proficiency. Districts cannot use results from assessments not included on the approved list or not at the minimal level of required proficiency to award an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy.

**14. How is the Seal of Biliteracy presented to students?**

State law requires the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy to be conferred officially only at the time of graduation. However, once seniors have qualified for the award, they may wish to indicate on college applications or to future employers, for example, that they have officially qualified to receive the award. Additionally, state law requires that the following notation of a student's attainment of an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy appear on his or her official academic transcript at the time of graduation: "<Student Name> is awarded the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy for demonstrating high levels of proficiency in English and <foreign language(s)>." Schools and districts can determine locally their own system for honoring their students for this accomplishment. This may take place at a senior awards program, at graduation, at a whole school assembly, or by mailing some form of written acknowledgement to students after graduation. Schools and districts may wish to create and give out an additional acknowledgement to students such as a certificate, a medal, a plaque, a graduation cord, etc. State funds are not available to support these activities.

**15. May the Seal of Biliteracy be awarded to students who have already graduated or be awarded retroactively?**

Students must indicate their intentions to earn the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy before graduation. They cannot initiate the process after they have graduated. Score reports for certain assessments, such as the AP and IB exams, may not be available until after the student has graduated. If this is the case, a district or school cannot award or record attainment of the Seal of Biliteracy on students' transcripts until they have received and verified official scores on approved assessments.

**16. How does our school report that a student has earned a Seal of Biliteracy?**

Schools and districts will submit verification of a student's attainment of an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy through the Education Management Information System (EMIS). The Department will provide further details soon.

**17. Will the number of Seals of Biliteracy awarded by our school or district have an effect on our school/district report card?**

Participation in the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy Program is not formally tied to the Ohio School Report Cards. However, within the *Prepared for Success* component of the report cards, districts earn 1 point for every student who receives a remediation-free score on the ACT or SAT writing and reading tests, which is one method of satisfying the English language proficiency requirement for the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy. Districts earn an additional 0.3 point for each student who meets the foreign language requirement for a Seal of Biliteracy by attaining the minimally required score on an Advanced Placement foreign language and culture test or an International Baccalaureate foreign language test.

**18. What should a school do if there is no assessment listed for the world language in which a student is proficient?**

The student's Seal of Biliteracy contact at the school should reach out to a world language specialist at the Ohio Department of Education as soon as possible. The Department will work with testing vendors, professional language organizations, university language departments, and/or embassy education offices to help identify either a comparable assessment that meets the Intermediate High proficiency requirement or an alternative method of proficiency testing.

**19. When should students be informed about the Seal of Biliteracy program?**

Most students will need to complete a lengthy course of study in a world language (typically 4-5 years) to gain the high level of proficiency necessary to qualify for the award. Districts and schools should tell entering students about this quickly, so they can make an informed decision and arrange their schedules to pursue an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy.

**20. Where can I find more information?**

- a. Contact a world language teacher or school counselor to find out if your school or district is participating in the program.
- b. Visit the Ohio Department of Education Seal of Biliteracy website.