

# The Logistics of the Seal of Biliteracy for Illinois

Information provided by  
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## Illinois – Senate Bill 1221 “Seal of Biliteracy” (text below):

- Senate Sponsors: Sen. [Iris Y. Martinez](#) - [Linda Holmes](#), [Heather A. Steans](#), [Michael W. Frerichs](#) and [Julie A. Morrison](#)
- House Sponsors: Rep Cynthia Soto is the chief sponsor in the House, Co-Sponsors: Rep Mike Fortner, Linda Chapa LaVia
- Current Status: Passed Senate 52-0-0, has been forwarded to House Rules Committee 4/15/13
- History: ICTFL President testified before the Senate Education Committee on 3/12/13. Their questions reflected concerns that the Bill was narrowly focused only on Bilingual Education and that it did not clearly outline the criteria required to receive the Seal. It was a clear that a Mandate would not pass, and that cost was a major concern. Passed 12-0-0.

Synopsis As Introduced (originally adopted New York’s version – but wording is being amended)  
**Amends the School Code. Establishes the State Seal of Biliteracy program to recognize public high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English. Provides that the State Seal of Biliteracy shall be awarded by the State Board of Education beginning with the 2014-2015 school year. Provides that school district participation in this program is voluntary. Sets forth the purposes of the State Seal of Biliteracy. Sets forth requirements for the State Board of Education and participating school districts. Provides that no fee shall be charged to a pupil. Effective July 1, 2013.**

## Illinois Legislature Goals:

- Equitable, equal access
- Optional to school districts – not a mandate
- No/Low-cost to Illinois and those districts who adopt
- Incentivize language study to higher levels of proficiency
- Illinois State Board of Education management (low-maintenance – offer resources)

## I. Clarify the Purpose(s) and Rationale

### The purposes for instituting the Seal of Biliteracy are numerous:

- To encourage students to study and become communicatively proficient in multiple languages in a way that offers equal access to both English and non-English speakers
- To certify attainment of biliteracy skills (using a data-based, nationally recognized assessment framework)
- To recognize the value of language and cultural diversity

- To provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and biliteracy skills to create more Illinois high school graduates prepared to compete in global job markets
- To provide universities with a method to recognize and give credit to applicants for attainment of high level skills in multiple languages
- To prepare students with 21st century skills that will benefit them in the labor market and the global society (21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills [www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org) include global literacy goals)
- To strengthen intergroup relationships and honor the multiple cultures and languages in a community.

A first step towards implementing a Seal of Biliteracy is to clarify your school, community, district or state’s purpose for giving the awards and to articulate the “frame” and rationale that will resonate in your community. In one community, the emphasis on 21st century skills and jobs may resonate most deeply. In another, emphasizing learning respect for diversity and bringing students together across communities may be the most powerful rationale.

The specific purposes and rationale lead to the creation of a policy. It is important that a governing body create the award through policy. This is what gives it the weight of a statement by the schooling system that the skills of bilingualism have value. It is this process that provides the opportunity for a community to articulate how and why language diversity is important.

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*The following includes some general areas of concern with regarding State implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy as well as answers to questions raised by Illinois State Board of Education.*

- **Statement of intent? (taken from [www.sealofbiliteracy.org](http://www.sealofbiliteracy.org) “What is the Seal?”)**
    - The Seal of Biliteracy is an award given by a school, school district, or county office of education in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. Our vision is to help students recognize the value of their academic success and see the tangible benefits of being bilingual.
  - **Global purpose?**
    - A Seal of Biliteracy is a statement by the school system that mastery of two or more languages is important. It encourages students to pursue biliteracy, honors the skills our students attain, and can document and provide evidence of skills that are attractive to future employers and college admissions office
    - See bulleted list above for additional purposes for instituting the Seal of Biliteracy
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## II. Identify the Targeted Language Proficiency Goal

To determine a target level of language proficiency the following factors were considered:

- The target level could be achieved by a student in a variety of Illinois school settings inclusive of:
  - Bilingual Education Programs
  - K-8 Immersion programs
  - Traditional middle-school or high-school foreign language programs
  - ELL students (using current Illinois state ACCESS scoring goals)
- The targeted level would be sufficient for basic work and social situations. The student would be able to handle uncomplicated communicative tasks and be able to ask and respond to direct questions or requests for information.
- The targeted level could be measured by a number of data-based, standardized tests currently used and/or available.
- The targeted level would be high enough that its achievement would merit recognition and would represent effort and ongoing practice by the student.

**The level of Intermediate-Mid would meet the above criteria.** It is described in the nationally recognized Language Proficiency Guidelines as identified by ACTFL (The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) an organization whose members represent more than 12,000 language educators, students and administrators from elementary through graduate education , as well as government and industry. These guidelines are also aligned with European guidelines for language proficiency. [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org) **Per the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, an Intermediate-Mid can:**

*“Speakers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel are able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is generally limited to those predictable and concrete exchanges necessary for survival in the target culture. These include personal information related to self, family, home, daily activities, interests and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel and lodging.*

*Intermediate Mid speakers tend to function reactively, for example, by responding to direct questions or requests for information. However, they are capable of asking a variety of questions when necessary to obtain simple information to satisfy basic needs, such as directions, prices and services. . . . Overall, Intermediate Mid speakers are at ease when performing Intermediate-level tasks and do so with significant quantity and quality of Intermediate-level language.”*

### **III. Testing and Measurement of Targeted Language Goals**

To best serve the needs of a variety of schools, a variety of testing options to certify language proficiency are available.

As President of ICTFL (Illinois Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) and representative of the many language teachers throughout Illinois, it is our organization’s desire to work collaboratively with ISBE, the Bilingual and ELL communities to determine the criteria and logistics to those schools who adopt the Seal of Biliteracy. **It is important to ICTFL to use national**

**standards and testing that is data-based to maintain the credibility and significance of earning the Seal.** The standard we are considering for the Seal is slightly higher than the 2016 Michigan state graduation requirement mandate for minimal second-language proficiency. (*\*\* see referenced note below*)

**My school district, Lincoln-Way Community High School District #210 has recently decided to pilot the program and serve as a resource to other districts that would choose to adopt the Seal of Biliteracy.** The criteria provided below is national in scope, data-based, provides options to best meet school needs and is aligned with the European Language Framework, making it truly universal. Students who would like certification based on languages not currently tested would be referred to tests cited below. As schools would have choices, basing the Seal on currently offered curriculum and testing would increase the level of participation. The following criteria set the standards for both ELLs and Foreign Language Learners at the same level of performance (I3 - or Intermediate 3 or Intermediate Mid). We would propose the following criteria, making it easier for schools to adopt as they may use testing already in use, (*\* reference below*) for consideration:

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

- \* English Language Learners: ACCESS (currently given in Illinois) composite (speaking, writing, reading, listening) score of 4.0 or above (4.7 would raise the bar).
- \* English Language Learners: PSAE grade 11 score of MEETS STANDARDS (Reading 155-177 and Writing 155-182) or above

- **FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

- \* Foreign Language Learners: AP World Language Test Score of 3 or higher
- \* Foreign Language Learners: International Baccalaureate score of 4 or higher on Language Exam
- \* Foreign Language Learners: Non AP/Non IB schools - 4 years of Language with 3.5 or higher
- \* Foreign Language Learners: SAT II Language Exam with 600 or higher
- \* Foreign Language Learners: AAPPL (Language Testing International) - Score of I3 (Intermediate 3 or higher)
- \* Foreign Language Learners: STAMP (Avant Assessment) - Intermediate Mid - 5 or higher on both Writing/Speaking and Reading/Listening Levels

\* Similar CRITERIA currently established for all levels in California:  
<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/seal-program>

\*\* Michigan, in our area, currently requires students to have a 2 year proficiency (Intermediate Low with basic performance skills) to graduate from high school beginning in 2016. The criteria above would set Illinois's proficiency performance scale slightly higher. The text from the Michigan code is inserted with a link to their Benchmarks document below. [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/WLSB\\_206824\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/WLSB_206824_7.pdf)

- **Level of acquisition/proficiency? High? Low?**  
Established above – Intermediate Mid
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- **Multiculturalism?**

The Seal of Biliteracy is definite way in which the Five Dimensions of Multiculturalism can be met.

- **First Dimension: Content Integration.** The best pedagogical theories suggest that second language acquisition is best taught in tangent with other curricular areas. This is at the heart of the Bilingual/Immersion Education. For ELL classrooms, support is provided in cross curricular areas and the foreign language classroom regularly integrates history, science, art and literature into lesson structures.
  - **Second Dimension: Knowledge Construction.** The knowledge construction process helps students to understand, investigate and determine the implicit cultural assumptions and frames of reference and perspectives of the discipline taught. As students acquire second language skills, they acquire more than a set of grammar rules and vocabulary, but gradually begin to acquire knowledge of the cultural products, practices and perspectives of the target language.
  - **Third Dimension: Equity Pedagogy.** Equity pedagogy is what language teachers naturally do. They must differentiate to enable students from diverse backgrounds and levels of language understanding to achieve. Due to the communicative nature of language learning, the collaborative classroom lends itself well to meeting this goal. The Seal of Biliteracy is a tool whereby students from diverse backgrounds can be recognized for the inherent value of their native languages as well as English or a secondary language they acquire. ELL learners are not often recognized with Academic Awards. The Seal rewards them publicly for the great strides they've made in learning English as well as honors their heritage.
  - **Four Dimension: Prejudice Reduction.** The Seal of Biliteracy is an incredible way that a school can raise the awareness of the diversity of their student population. With awareness, respect for cultural differences grows. ELL students are equally recognized with their peer language learners who have begun to understand the difficulty of learning another language.
  - **Fifth Dimension: Empowering School Culture and Social Structure.** The Seal does this inherently via the administrative school-wide acceptance, support and recognition of the second-language learner, be they learning English or a foreign language.
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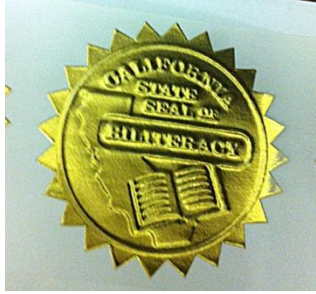
- **Career ready and technology ready?**

Data abounds, from governmental support of program like StarTalk, to the pages of the Wall Street Journal where the high unemployment rate among new college graduates can be attributed in part to global competition with global language skills. In the collaborate nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace, language skills are increasingly not just “desired,” but “expected.” Through support of language learning, Illinois can foster the desire to continue developing global language skills. In many schools, it is the ELL or foreign language classroom where global technology is most used due to the necessity of developing listening and speaking skills. Additionally, the language classroom seeks to provide students with authentic materials in the target language, often SKYPE with students of another country and find unique ways, many of which include technology, to practice and assess language skills.

- **Developmental? Additive?**  
Many institutions have taken an additive approach to serving students who struggle and/or are unprepared academically by providing them with additional support services. ELL learners are already state-mandated to receive this support until they can be mainstreamed. The same support, in terms of language learning, is not provided to native English speakers learning a foreign language. With regards to effective alternative approaches, some data suggests that replacing “remedial” courses for “credit” courses can be more effective. The Seal of Biliteracy, is an inclusive approach that can similarly provide an additional incentive for success (supported by families at home), and motivation for both ELL and foreign language learners.
  - **Waivers to some or any aspects of NCLB?**  
As Illinois has recognized the punitive aspects of NCLB, resulting in the need for waivers, ISBE and Illinois school systems have begun to focus on student achievement as opposed to time spent in a classroom. The Seal of Biliteracy does just that. Rather than recognizing a student for having taken three years of French, the student must demonstrate on a nationally standardized test, his or her skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening comprehension of the French language. The same is true for the ELL student, the payoff comes with increased performance.
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## IV. Rewards, Recognition, Cost of the Seal of Biliteracy

- **Rewards.** Students who demonstrate Intermediate Mid proficiency or higher in a second language are eligible to receive the Seal of Biliteracy.
- **Recognition.** The School District should denote on a student’s high school transcript that they have earned the Seal of Biliteracy. They may additionally provide:
  - <http://sealofbiliteracy.org/velazquez-press-seal-biliteracy-sponsorship-form>  
Velazquez Press is a bilingual publisher supporting the Seal of Biliteracy with sponsorship for students with a Diploma Seal and medal. (currently in California)
  - Line Item can be added at no cost to High School Transcript by any school district.
  - Districts could provide a Seal of Biliteracy Certificate to students
  - Districts, could at their choosing, design their own Seal to affix to diplomas and/or a medal
  - As a state, Illinois could design a unique seal / medal w/or without sponsorship to be purchased by school districts. In California, where 165 School Districts award the Seal of Biliteracy, it takes the form of a gold seal that appears on the transcript or diploma of the graduating senior and is a statement of accomplishment for future employers and for college admissions. State Seals were awarded to over 10,000 graduating seniors in the spring of 2012.



- **Recognitions? - to schools that do over and above...**
  - State could add link to ISBE Website and recognize districts who sponsor.
  - ICTFL (Illinois Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) would be happy to recognize Districts who participate on their website, in print in their annual Conference Program and could recognize and or give awards to District Administrators who support implementation of the Seal at the ICTFL Fall Conference.
  
- **Cost? Burden?**
  - In California, the Seal of Biliteracy is sponsored in some districts by private companies (i.e., Velazquez Press) and foundations. Other districts have budgeted and absorb the small cost of a medal, diploma seal and certificate themselves.
  - Referenced above, the State of Illinois could provide participating districts with a Seal or Medal at a small cost.
  - Cost to school districts who only add an electronic line item to high school transcripts would incur no cost for recognition of Seal recipients, but could at minimal cost provide a certificate to students who qualify. Additionally, the Seal could be awarded at a special event or academic recognition program.
  - County ROEs (Regional Offices of Education) could also provide resources and/or recognition as well as publicity for the Seal of Biliteracy.
  - **COST OF TESTING.** For ELL learners, ACCESS testing is already being provided. Depending upon the district, AP and IB tests are already being administered. Some districts pay for these exams, in other districts students who demonstrate financial need are assisted in exam payment. For most schools, then, the testing is already taking place, but students are not recognized by the high school for their achievements. For those students desiring to document their second language skill in a language not taught or testing at the school, alternative testing (above) can be done at a reasonable price.