

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 students who 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. However, students are responsible for any assessment costs not covered by the school or district.

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 9-12 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, 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 world language 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 world language 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 world language 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. If retakes of individual assessment sections are permitted by an assessment vendor, students may retake just those sections for which they did not initially attain a qualifying score of Intermediate High or higher.

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. If our school is a public or community school, how do we report eligible recipients who have earned the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy?

The Ohio Seal of Biliteracy program code that corresponds to the world language in which a seal was earned should be reported in EMIS along with other student program codes. A list of Seal of Biliteracy Program codes can be found in the [EMIS manual](#), or on the [Seal of Biliteracy webpage](#). For languages not listed, use the “Other language” code. For assistance, contact the EMIS Help Desk at emis@education.ohio.gov or (614) 387-0395.

17. Do participating schools and districts have to submit their Seal of Biliteracy qualifying scores from approved world language proficiency assessments to the Ohio Department of Education?

World language assessment results used to determine Ohio Seal of Biliteracy eligibility should not be submitted to the Ohio Department of Education. Instead, participating schools should maintain world language assessment results in recipients’ long-term records following graduation in the event a student’s eligibility for an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy ever comes into question and an official inquiry is made.

18. If our school is a private or independent school, how do we report eligible recipients who have earned the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy?

Private and independent schools are under no obligation to report Seal of Biliteracy recipients to the Ohio Department of Education. However, in the event of future questions about the validity of a graduate’s Seal of Biliteracy, the Department strongly encourages private and independent schools to maintain long-term records for graduates who have earned the award. These records should minimally include:

- a. Student name and identifying number;
- b. Year of graduation;
- c. Notation of how the student satisfied the English language requirement, including applicable assessments and qualifying scores;
- d. Notation of the specific world language for which the student satisfied the world language requirements; and
- e. Notation of how the student satisfied the world language requirement, including applicable assessments and qualifying scores.

19. 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 all parts of the ACT or SAT including mathematics. Earning a remediation free score on the ACT or SAT writing and reading tests 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 otherwise is deemed to be “prepared for success” who also 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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. Can out-of-state transfer credit for ELA I and ELA II courses fulfill the Ohio State Tests option for students seeking to meet the English Proficiency Requirement of the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy?

Districts and schools should follow the [out-of-state transfer student guidance](#) to determine the required high school tests for students when they enroll in an Ohio school. Based on this guidance, students who completed and earned credit for ELA I prior to enrolling in an Ohio school are not required to take the ELA I test, and their transfer credit will satisfy the current ELA I proficiency requirement for earning an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy for students who entered high school prior to July 1, 2019. For students who enter high school on or after July 1, 2019, the ELA I test will no longer serve as a Seal of Biliteracy requirement. Additionally, out-of-state transfer credit earned for ELA II **cannot** be used to qualify for an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy. All out-of-state transfer students who want to use the Ohio State Test option to satisfy the English language requirement to earn an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy must take and earn a proficient score on the Ohio ELA II end-of-course test.

23. Can my school/district use federal Title III funding to pay for the proficiency testing of English Learners (ELs) in their native languages to meet the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy's world language proficiency requirement?

Yes. The federal Title III Program allows this use because the proficiency testing meets the following federal conditions: it is supplemental, it is not required by state law, and it is specific for EL needs and contributes to their achievement.

24. Can my school/district use federal Title IV-A funding to pay for the world language proficiency testing of non-EL students who are trying to qualify for an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy?

Yes. The federal Title IV-A Program allows this use if the proficiency testing is supplemental in nature, not required by state law, and meets the purpose and intent of Title IV-A. In this case, the activity would fall within the Well-Rounded Education area of the grant, under Foreign Language Instruction, or "Other Well-Rounded Education Supports." LEAs must comply with the other requirements of Title IV-A. Details can be found on the Title IV-A Budget Details, 2. Activities section, or in the [Title IV-A Spending Guide](#).

25. What flexibility exists for students seeking an Ohio seal of Biliteracy who were unable to complete end-of-course examination in ELA I or ELA II during the 2019-2020 school year due to the COVID-19 health crisis?

[Ohio House Bill 164 - Section 12](#) allows districts and schools to substitute a final course grade in an eligible course for a student who was scheduled to take the end-of-course examination for the first time in the 2019-2020 school year for a qualifying course that the student completed in that school year, while a student who was scheduled to retake an eligible end-of-course examination in the 2019-2020 school year may use a final course grade for a qualifying course that the student completed in the 2019-2020 school year or a prior school year. Students pursuing an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy are eligible for this flexibility if they were either:

- Taking ELA I or ELA II and were scheduled to take the corresponding end-of-course examination for the first time in the 2019-2020 school year but did not take the test because the administration of the examination was canceled; or
- Scheduled to retake an ELA I or ELA II end-of-course examination in the 2019-2020 school year and did not retake the test because the administration of the examination was canceled.

For the purpose of earning a seal of biliteracy, students minimally must earn a grade of C in their eligible ELA I or ELA II course, which equates to a score of "Proficient." More information is available on the Department's [Graduation Flexibility – 2021 and Beyond webpage](#).

26. What flexibility exists for students seeking an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy who were unable to complete end-of-course examinations in ELA I or ELA II during the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19 health crisis?

[Ohio House Bill 67 - Section 9](#) allows districts and schools to substitute a final course grade in an eligible course for a student in the eleventh or twelfth grade who takes or retakes an end-of-course examination or who is unable to take or retake an end-of-course examination for any reason in the 2020-2021 school year. Students pursuing an Ohio Seal of Biliteracy are eligible for this flexibility if they were either:

- Taking ELA I or ELA II and were scheduled to take the corresponding end-of-course examination for the first time in the 2020-2021 school year and took the exam or did not take the test for any reason; or
- Scheduled to retake an end-of-course examination in the 2020-2021 school year and retook the exam or did not retake the test for any reason.

For the purpose of earning a seal of biliteracy, students minimally must earn a grade of C in their eligible ELA I or ELA II course, which equates to a score of "Proficient." More information is available on the Department's [Graduation Flexibility – 2021 and Beyond webpage](#).

27. 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](#).