Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy Guidance

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## Introduction

The State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction are official designations awarded to qualifying students upon their graduation from a Massachusetts high school to indicate that they have attained a high level of proficiency in English and at least one other world language.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The State Seal of Biliteracy was established by the Language Opportunity for Our Kids Act, [Chapter 138 of the Acts of 2017](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2017/Chapter138). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s regulations describe the criteria that school districts must use to award the State Seal of Biliteracy, [603 CMR 31.07](https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr31.html?section=07). The regulations describe that the purposes of the State Seal of Biliteracy are to:

* Encourage students to study and master languages;
* Certify attainment of biliteracy skills;
* Recognize the value of language diversity;
* Provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and biliteracy skills;
* Provide universities with a method to recognize and give credit to applicants for the attainment of high-level skills in languages;
* Prepare students with skills that will benefit them in the labor market and the global society; and
* Strengthen intergroup communication and honor the multiple cultures and languages in a community.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Students who earn the State Seal of Biliteracy demonstrate the English and world language skills that are often necessary to succeed in multilingual post-secondary academic and professional settings.

The State Seal of Biliteracy affirms the identity of multilingual and multicultural students throughout the Commonwealth. The State Seal of Biliteracy indicates to students and their families that their language(s) and culture(s) are valued in Massachusetts. This program affirms that all students and all languages are valid and valuable. Students of all language backgrounds, including English learners, former English learners, heritage speakers/signers of world languages, and students from monolingual English-speaking homes who have acquired world languages at school or in the community, are eligible for the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. The State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction recognize all dialects of world languages and do not elevate any one expression of a world language as over another. The State Seal of Biliteracy thus supports academic achievement for all, providing representation for all students of all languages and cultures, and recognizing students for the essential, multilingual skills that they possess.

## The Department’s Role in the Administration of the State Seal of Biliteracy

The law and regulations state that the Department shall:

* Develop an insignia to be affixed to the diploma or transcript of a student who has been awarded the State Seal of Biliteracy;
* Make the insignia available to school districts in an electronic format for the preparation of diplomas and transcripts;
* Annually publish a list of approved assessments and acceptable minimum scores or levels for purposes of [603 CMR 31.07(2)(a)3](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr31.html)[[3]](#footnote-4) and [603 CMR 31.07(2)(b)1](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr31.html)[[4]](#footnote-5);
* Establish levels of distinction for the State Seal of Biliteracy in guidance. [M.G.L. c. 69, § 1Q](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1Q); [603 CMR 31.07(4)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr31.html?section=all).

The Department will update this guidance and provide technical assistance to school districts as needed.

The Role of the Department

District or school staff are responsible for the local administration of the State Seal of Biliteracy program. The Department’s primary role as to the State Seal of Biliteracy program is to provide technical assistance. For all technical assistance regarding the State Seal of Biliteracy, please visit the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy/), or email us at [MAStateSealofBiliteracy@mass.gov](mailto:MAStateSealofBiliteracy@mass.gov)

## District Responsibilities in the Administration of the State Seal of Biliteracy

Participation in the State Seal of Biliteracy Program is voluntary for districts. Districts may award the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction to students who meet the required criteria, even if the districts do not offer programming in the specific world language in which students demonstrate a high level of proficiency.

Districts that wish to participate in the program should identify a primary and secondary contact for communication with the Department about the district’s participation. The identified contacts should:

* Read this guidance, and
* Enroll in the State Seal of Biliteracy program in WBMS in the Department’s Security Portal.

Technical Assistance in Enrollment

WBMS is an application accessible through the Department’s [Security Portal](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/edu/myportal/meoe) that allows districts and the Department to submit, review, and exchange documents and information. Contact your district’s [Data Collection Directory Administrator](http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/diradmin/list.aspx) with any questions about accessing the Security Portal. Security Portal users must be assigned the role *WBMS-District Authorizer* to enroll in the program or download the insignia(s). Once logged into the Security Portal, they should view their Applications List and click on *PQA Web Monitoring,* then *LOOK Act*, then *Seal of Biliteracy*. More information about enrollment may be found on the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy/).

In addition, the school district must follow all requirements for the program, including the following:

* A school district participating in the State Seal of Biliteracy program must provide written notification about the State Seal of Biliteracy to parents or legal guardians of all students enrolled in the district. This notification must include the purposes of the State Seal of Biliteracy and eligibility requirements, in a language that the parent or legal guardian can understand. This notification should be provided annually.
* A school district must ensure that low-income students as described in [G.L. c. 70, § 2](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter70/Section2) have access to any assessment required to qualify for the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction at no cost. *See* [LOOK Act at § 66](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2017/Chapter138); [603 CMR 31.07(5)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr31.html?section=all).
* A school district that awards the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction must affix the unaltered state insignia on the diploma or the transcript, or both, of students who meet the requirements listed in this document. The insignia may be downloaded from the Security Portal. The district should list all world languages in which the student earned the Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction on the student’s transcript.
* A school district that awards the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction shall maintain a record of all students who have earned the State Seal of Biliteracy and/or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction and the assessment results used to substantiate the student’s biliteracy; and
* Each school district must report annually to the Department the names of all students who earned the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. This report is part of the end-of-year SIMS report. Districts should ensure that the district’s data administrator knows which graduates earned the State Seal of Biliteracy and/or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction prior to the SIMS reporting deadline.

District Steps to Implement the State Seal of Biliteracy

1. Enroll in the State Seal of Biliteracy program in WBMS on the Security Portal;
2. Provide annual written notification to parents and guardians of all students in the district about the district’s participation in the State Seal of Biliteracy;
3. Facilitate the administration of English and world language assessments, as needed, ensuring access to assessments at no cost to students who are designated as low-income;
4. Maintain records of student scores on English language world language assessments;
5. Place the insignia for the State Seal of Biliteracy and/or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction on the diploma and/or transcripts of those students who satisfy all criteria for the respective award(s). The insignia is available for download on WBMS in the Department’s Security Portal;
6. Report names of those graduates who have earned the State Seal of Biliteracy and/or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction on the end-of-year SIMS report.

Available Funds

Districts may be able to access a combination of local, state and federal funding for their Seal of Biliteracy programs. However, if a district contemplates using federal or state grant funds, districts need to be sure that Seal of Biliteracy expenses are allowable by the terms of the grant (for example, the expenses must not supplant state, local and/or other federal funds in some cases). For example, the LOOK Act requires school districts to ensure that all low-income students who wish to earn the State Seal of Biliteracy have access to the qualifying assessments. Therefore, some federal grants could not be used to pay for exam expenses for low-income students because the grant would be supplanting the district's responsibility. Please refer to Table 1 to see examples of how federal funding may be used for expenses related to the State Seal of Biliteracy in your school or district. For specific guidance about using Titles I, Part A; Title II, Part A; Title III, Part A, or IV, Part A, in your circumstances, please refer to the Federal Grant Programs webpage and/or contact your Federal grants liaison.

***Table 1: Applying Federal Funds to the State Seal of Biliteracy Implementation***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **World Language Assessment of Low-income Students** | **Administration of Seal of Biliteracy Program/ Seal of Biliteracy Coordinator** | **Supplemental materials for assessment (headphones, microphones, etc.)** | **Additional costs (awards, promotion, etc.)** |
| **Title I, Part A** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **Title III, Part A** | No | Yes, pro-rated for English Learners | Yes, for English Learners | Yes, for English Learners |
| **Title IV Part A** | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |

## Criteria for Students to Earn the State Seal of Biliteracy

The criteria for earning the State Seal of Biliteracy can be found in [603 CMR 31.07(2)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr31.html?section=07) of the state regulations. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education established these criteria to identify and recognize students who have attained a high level of proficiency in English and not less than one world language. To qualify for the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction, students must meet all graduation requirements and the English language and world language criteria described below.

English Language Criteria

Students satisfy the English language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy by earning a score of 472 or higher on the Grade 10 English Language Arts (ELA) Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test or retest. Students who earn a score of 501 or higher on the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest satisfy the English language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction.

Students who earn a scaled score between 455 and 471 on the Grade 10 ELA MCAS test or retest may still satisfy the English language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy if they fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan and attain a minimum score or level on a nationally recognized and readily available English proficiency assessment approved by the Department, such as ACCESS for ELLs[[5]](#footnote-6).

World Language Criteria

Students who attain a score or level at the **Intermediate High** level of the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines](https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012ACTFL%20)of 2012, published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, on a language assessment approved by the Department satisfy the world language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy. Students who attain a score or level at the **Advanced Low** level of proficiency on a language assessment approved by the Department satisfy the world language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. Please see the [State Seal of Biliteracy website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy/) for a list of approved assessments and the cut-off scores required to earn the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction.

***Table 2: Criteria at a Glance***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Student Criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy** | **Student Criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction** |
| Meet all graduation requirements | Meet all graduation requirements |
| 472 or higher on Grade 10 ELA MCAS\* | 501 or higher on Grade 10 ELA MCAS |
| A score equivalent to or higher than Intermediate High on an approved world language assessment | A score equivalent to or higher than Advanced Low on an approved world language assessment |

\*See English Language criteria for information about students who score 455-471 and complete Educational Proficiency Plans.

## World Language Assessments

Students demonstrate proficiency through assessments that the Department approves. The Department assigns assessments to one of four categories based on the availability and scope of the assessment. Those categories are Complete-Domain Assessments, Partial-Domain Assessments, Alternative Assessments, and Additional Assessments. Assessments must be selected using the following criteria:

1. When a Complete-Domain Assessment is available for a particular language, then a Complete-Domain Assessment must be chosen.
2. If no Complete-Domain Assessment is available, then a Partial-Domain Assessment, if available, must be selected.
3. If no Partial-Domain Assessment is available for the language, then an Alternative Assessment may be selected.
4. Students who require accommodations that Complete-Domain or Partial-Domain assessments cannot provide may also access Alternative Assessments.

Complete-Domain Assessments

Complete-Domain Assessments are nationally recognized, readily available assessments that measure all relevant domains of a particular language.[[6]](#footnote-7) The most commonly taught world languages in Massachusetts all have at least one corresponding Complete-Domain Assessment. When Complete-Domain assessments are available for a world language, a Complete-Domain Assessment must be used, unless the student requires accommodations that no approved Complete-Domain Assessment can provide.

Partial-Domain Assessments

Partial-Domain Assessments are nationally recognized, readily available assessments that measure some but not all relevant domains of a particular language (e.g., an assessment that measures writing and speaking but not reading and listening). When no Complete-Domain Assessments are available for a particular language, Partial-Domain Assessments may be used to meet the world language criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. The Department will remove languages from the approved list of Partial-Domain Assessments list when a Complete-Domain Assessment becomes available for a particular language.

Alternative Assessments (Portfolios)

Alternative Assessments are a method of collecting and analyzing evidence[[7]](#footnote-8) of linguistic proficiency when no nationally recognized assessments are readily available in a particular language, or when nationally recognized assessments fail to provide accommodations that the students need. To issue an alternative assessment, districts may choose one of two options:

* Department-approved vendor
  1. The district chooses a Department-approved vendor[[8]](#footnote-9) to assign a portfolio and collect and assess the alternative evidence. (See the State Seal of Biliteracy website for a complete list of Department-approved vendors);
  2. The vendor provides the student with a portfolio rater who is a credible authority in the student’s language;
  3. The student submits evidence to the portfolio rater according to the vendor’s procedures;
  4. The portfolio rater reviews the evidence and report a proficiency score to the district;
  5. The district maintains a record of the scores generated by the vendor
* Student/district-selected portfolio rater
  1. The student and district find a credible authority of the language (the portfolio rater) who is proficient in the domains of that language who could legitimately review and assess student’s proficiency in the four domains of the world language;
  2. The portfolio rater uses Department-provided indicators to review the evidence submitted by the student (or meets with the student in person) to assess the domains and certify that the student’s evidence meets the intermediate high criteria;
  3. To assess the student, the portfolio rater uses the portfolio indicators for each domain (See the [State Seal of Biliteracy Website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy/) to view and download the portfolio indicators);
  4. The portfolio rater assigns a score to the student’s work the student’s work and reports that score to the district;
  5. The district receives and maintains the portfolio rater’s report and converts it to a proficiency score using the Department’s rubric; and
  6. The student/parent(s)/guardian(s) must sign a statement that says the district has the right to review the qualifications of the portfolio rater if the district decides to audit the decisions made by such person at any point.

Districts may administer Alternative Assessments only under the following circumstances:

* The Department does not approve any Complete-Domain or Partial-Domain Assessments for the language in question, or
* The district determines that a student’s disability precludes them from fully accessing approved any Complete-Domain or Partial-Domain Assessments.

Additional Assessments

Students who have taken language assessments outside of the United States (e.g., students who are recent arrivals to the U.S., students who participated in school or language programs while abroad, etc.) as well as students who have participated in community-based language programs may have had access to a wide variety of proficiency-based assessments that are not readily available to school districts. If such a student has already demonstrated Intermediate High proficiency on such an assessment, the results may satisfy the criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction. If students report results from an assessment that is not listed on the Department’s official World Language Assessment list, districts may email [MAStateSealofBiliteracy@mass.gov](mailto:MAStateSealofBiliteracy@mass.gov) to request a review of the assessment in question.

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## Reporting Results to the Department

Districts report the names of the graduates who have earned the State Seal of Biliteracy or the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction on the district’s end-of-year SIMS report. The Seal of Biliteracy is Item DOE028 in the SIMS report. Please see your district’s data administrator for more information.

The Department also collects more specific information about the Seal of Biliteracy through a survey provided to the district’s Seal of Biliteracy coordinator and through a feedback form that may be filled out by all students, regardless of grade level, who attempt a qualifying world language assessment. That survey and its instructions may be found on [the State Seal of Biliteracy website](https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy/).

1. [G.L. c. 69, § 1Q](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter69/Section1Q). In this document, the term *world languages* refers to any language other than English. For more information on the term *world language*, see ACTFL’s statement, *What is a World Language?.*(2017). Retrieved April 14, 2021 from <https://www.actfl.org/advocacy/actfl-position-statements/what-world-language>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [603 CMR 31.01(3)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr31.html?section=01). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Students who are required to complete an Educational Proficiency Plan pursuant to 603 CMR 30.03(2)(b) or 603 CMR 30.03(3)(b) to satisfy the requirements of the Competency Determination must attain a minimum score or level on a nationally recognized and readily available English proficiency assessment approved by the Department. The Commissioner shall determine the minimum score or level, which shall be comparable to the minimum scaled score on the grade 10 English Language Arts MCAS required to satisfy the requirements of the Competency Determination under 603 CMR 30.03(2)(a) and 603 CMR 30.03(3)(a). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Attaining a minimum score or level on a nationally recognized and readily available assessment approved by the Department that measures literacy in a language other than English. The Commissioner shall determine the minimum score or level, which shall be aligned to higher education standards for awarding advanced credit by examination and ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The minimum scores for ACCESS for ELLs are 4.2 overall and 3.9 composite literacy. Please contact the Office of Language Acquisition to inquire about other English proficiency assessments. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. For modern, spoken languages (e.g., Spanish, Arabic, Korean), the relevant domains are reading, writing, speaking, and listening. For modern, unspoken languages (e.g., American Sign Language), the relevant domains are signing and viewing. For modern, unwritten languages, speaking and listening are the relevant domains. For classical languages (e.g., Latin, Sanskrit), interpretive reading is the only relevant domain. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. 603 CMR 31.07(2)(b)2. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. A list of Department-approved vendors may be found at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/scholarships/biliteracy/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)