

**The Illinois State Seal of
Biliteracy**

**Multilingual/Language
Development Department**

Frequently Asked Questions

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Overview and Introduction

1. What is the Illinois State Seal of Bilingualism?

The Illinois State Seal of Bilingualism is an award given by a school district or nonpublic school to graduating high school students who have demonstrated an Intermediate High¹ level of proficiency in English and in at least one language other than English (LOTE) during their 9–12 high school years. The Illinois State Seal of Bilingualism program is written into [Illinois School Code 105 ILCS 5/2–3.159](#) and is guided by [23 Illinois Administrative Code 680](#).

High School World Language Credit: For admissions purposes, each public university in this State shall accept the State Seal of Bilingualism as equivalent to 2 years of foreign language coursework taken during high school if a student's high school transcript indicates that they will be receiving or have received the State Seal of Bilingualism.

College World Language Credit: all public colleges and universities in the state of Illinois must establish criteria for converting a graduate's Illinois State Seal of Bilingualism into college credit. Each institution has the flexibility to award credits that align with their particular courses. Please check the [college credit document](#) for more detailed information.

2. What is the State Commendation toward Bilingualism?

The State Commendation toward Bilingualism is an award given by a school district or nonpublic school to graduating high school students who have demonstrated significant progress toward achieving a high level of proficiency in English and in a LOTE, at least at the Intermediate Low level. Districts/schools may choose to award the Commendation toward Bilingualism in addition to the Seal each year. It is **not** required for districts/schools to offer the Commendation if they are offering the Seal. It is **not** required for public colleges and universities in the state of Illinois to award credit for the commendation, but several do. Please check the [college credit document](#) for more detailed information.

3. Where can I learn more about participation in the Illinois State Seal of Bilingualism?

The Illinois State Seal of Bilingualism is a program in which a school district or nonpublic school can choose to participate. Students cannot participate individually apart from their schools. If you are a student or parent, please contact your school to learn more about how the program is administered locally.

The ISBE Seal [website](#) contains information and resources, including history and overview of the program, training modules, guidelines for districts regarding applying for and reporting awards, a frequently updated list of approved language assessments, program administration checklists, one-pager resources for a variety of audiences, among other resources. This website is frequently updated. If you have additional questions or

¹ Defined in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines 2024

concerns after reading the website, you can contact biliteracy@isbe.net. You can also look at the list of participating districts and contact someone from a district similar to yours and see if they can help you get started as well.

4. What is the Global Seal of Biliteracy?

The Global Seal of Biliteracy is a separate award from the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy. ISBE **does not** coordinate this award, although there are benefits for [Illinois educators](#) in earning the Global Seal. It is inclusive and can be earned by anyone, regardless of age, background, or education. Many criteria and assessments are similar for earning the Illinois State Seal and the Global Seal. You can find more information at <https://theglobalseal.com/>.

Administering and Coordinating a Seal Program

5. How do I let ISBE know we are participating in this program?

Public: Districts must notify ISBE each year of their intent to award the State Seal of Biliteracy (and Commendation toward Biliteracy if the district chooses) by applying in the Student Information System (SIS). This application becomes available annually after the school has registered 11th and 12th graders for the school year. *Please note that SIS will not allow access to the application until registration for the year has been “rolled over” and the district has enrolled 11th or 12th graders for the CURRENT school year.* The application must be completed by an administrator in the district with RCDT admin access to SIS. This is **due by October 1** of each year. If a district makes the decision to participate after that date, the application can still be completed if it is done at least 45 days before graduation. Districts applying late must additionally notify ISBE of its participation by emailing biliteracy@isbe.net and include in the email evidence that the district has met all the requirements in the rules for participation.

Nonpublic: Schools must notify ISBE each year of their intent to award the State Seal of Biliteracy (and Commendation toward Biliteracy if the district chooses) by submitting an application form (PDF). This can be found under “Nonpublic Schools Only” on the State Seal of Biliteracy’s [website](#). This application must be emailed to biliteracy@isbe.net **by October 1** of each year. If a nonpublic school makes the decision to participate after that date, the application can still be completed if it is done at least 45 days before graduation. The nonpublic school must additionally include in the email evidence that the district has met all the requirements in the rules for participation.

6. How are annual student awards reported?

Public: Districts must annually report on the students that were awarded the Seal (and the Commendation, if applicable) to ISBE via SIS in IWAS. *Please note that SIS will not allow this information to be uploaded until award-receiving students have been exited as “graduated” in SIS.* This information is due no later than September 15 following each participating year. Districts must update students’ information in SIS to include the award given, for which language the award was given, and the method that the student used to demonstrate proficiency in English and the LOTE. Information on batch uploading student award information in SIS can be found [here](#).

Nonpublic: Schools must submit an annual report to ISBE of the students who earned Seal and Commendation awards by using the annual template. It can be found under the “Nonpublic Schools Only” bar on the State Seal of Biliteracy’s website and must be emailed to biliteracy@isbe.net no later than September 15 following each year of participation.

7. What if something changes from our application? Do we need to update/resubmit it?

Please update your application for the year only if your superintendent or program coordinator contact information changes. If you have additional questions regarding changes in your program, please send an email to biliteracy@isbe.net.

8. What do we do during the school year, after we submit our application to participate?

During the school year, programs should assist, encourage, and provide resources to students and families to support language acquisition. While the Seal is a graduation award, progress toward language proficiency is made over many years. Whether your students are looking to earn the seal in their home or heritage language or in a world language class, it is important to nurture a culture of celebrating multilingualism.

It is also a good idea to consider what assessments are available for your students and the languages that they are pursuing. Students must demonstrate proficiency in English and in the additional language(s) for which they are earning the seal. Consult the [approved assessment](#) document in order to provide the most opportunities for your students to be successful.

9. How do we officially award the students the Seal, aside from reporting it to ISBE?

To be compliant with the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy program, districts and nonpublic schools **must** place the State Seal of Biliteracy image on the diplomas of students who qualify and **must** make note of the Seal and language on the students' transcripts (Ill. Admin. Code title 23,680.20(d)). There is [guidance](#) on the ISBE Seal of Biliteracy website regarding transcript language. Each district/school will receive access to the official graphics in a confirmation email following the application submission each school year.

The district/school does not need to provide any other award or recognition but is free to do so. Many schools have chosen to make yard signs, newspaper articles, social media posts, ribbons, medallions, graduation cords, certificates, and more. This is a local decision.

10. How do we get the graphics onto the diploma?

Each year upon completing the application to participate, you will receive a confirmation email with access to a password protected website that houses the graphics. *Please note that the password updates for the new year are August 1st.* Once your coordinator receives access to the graphics, it is the coordinator's responsibility to ensure that the graphics are placed on the diploma and that the award is noted on the transcript. ISBE does not provide stickers, awards, or medals. Programs can print the graphics on their own stickers, have a local or online company print them, or have their diploma printing company print the graphic directly on diplomas.

11. May a district/school place the Seal or Commendation language on the transcript as soon as the student meets the criteria at any time during their enrollment in high school?

The provisional statement for the Seal or Commendation may be added to the student's [transcript](#) as soon as it is determined that the student meets the criteria, which can be at any time during the student's enrollment in high school. The Seal or Commendation must also be included on the diploma when the student graduates. **Please note:** Even if a student qualifies for the seal prior to their graduation year, the student award cannot be added to SIS until after they graduate, and their award will correspond with their graduation year.

12. How should a student who is proficient in English and two or more other languages be recognized on the diploma and transcript?

The district/school should award a Seal of Biliteracy or Commendation for each language other than English in which the student demonstrates proficiency. All the LOTEs should be named on the transcript and the diploma. You may place multiple graphics on the diploma or list the multiple languages below one graphic.

Award Criteria

13. What are the qualifying proficiency criteria for English?

There are several methods that can be used to demonstrate a student's English language proficiency towards their Seal of Biliteracy. The list of approved English proficiency assessments and the qualifying scores can be found on the [Approved Assessment](#) list which is updated frequently. A student must demonstrate English proficiency utilizing one of the methods below, as outlined in ([Ill. Admin. Code title 23, 680.20 \(b\)](#)):

- Attainment of college and career benchmarks for English language arts on the State assessments administered at the secondary level.
 - Up to and including SY2024, this referred to a 480 on the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing of the SAT, which aligns with the [College Board's](#) College and Career Readiness Benchmark. This is the same for the Seal and the Commendation.
 - In SY2025, this referred to the ACT [college-ready benchmark](#) (20) for the ELA subject area test or a composite score of at least 21. This is the same for the Seal and the Commendation.
 - After the adoption of right-sized performance levels in August 2025, this refers to the Illinois [right-sized ELA benchmark](#) of (18). This is the same for the Seal and the Commendation. The composite ACT score is not evidence of proficiency. Students must be administered the ACT with writing to have an ELA score calculated.
- Attainment of a "proficient" score on the English language proficiency assessment, as defined under [23 Ill. Adm. Code 228.10](#), administered at the secondary level.
 - This refers to English learner students attaining a 4.8 on the ACCESS test when administered during their high school 9-12 school years.
 - EL students can qualify for the Commendation with a score of 3.5 on the literacy component of the ACCESS.
- Attainment of a "qualifying" score on an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Exam.
 - A 4 or 5 qualifies a student for the Seal; a 3 qualifies a student for the Commendation.
- Transitional coursework in English language arts articulated in partnership with a public community college as an ESSA (Every student Succeeds Act) College and Career Readiness Indicator.
 - A 3.0 in the ELA course qualifies a student for the Seal; a GPA of 2.5 in the ELA course qualifies a student for the commendation.
- An [ISBE approved English assessment](#) score of at least Intermediate-High or its equivalent (Seal) or Intermediate-Low or its equivalent (Commendation).

14. What are the qualifying proficiency criteria for the language other than English (LOTE)?

A student must meet LOTE proficiency utilizing one of the methods below:

- An [ISBE approved assessment](#) score of at least Intermediate-High or its equivalent (Seal) or Intermediate-Low or its equivalent (Commendation) ([Ill. Admin. Code title 23, 680.20 \(a\)\(1\)\(A\)\(i\)](#))
 - Beginning with SY2026, if the approved language assessment provides discrete scores for different modalities of the language, each score must meet the minimum criteria. Composite scores do not qualify.
 - Students who met the qualifying criteria for the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy with a composite score before July 1, 2025, may still be awarded the Seal upon their graduation.
- Alternative Evidence Portfolio (more information below) ([Ill. Admin. Code title 23, 680.20 \(a\)\(3\)](#))

15. How are new assessments added to the approved assessment list?

The agency continues to evaluate new assessments and will update this list as more are approved. The [Approved Assessment](#) list contains standardized assessments for English and LOTE that ISBE has approved by verifying that each one meets Illinois' rules and regulations for the State Seal of Biliteracy program. The approval process includes determining if an assessment is accessible in Illinois, uses either the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages scoring scales, as well as other test development and standardization criteria that has been determined as required for approval. Please request the assessment approval form (to be completed by the test vendor) from biliteracy@isbe.net.

16. What does it mean if a language is not listed on the approved assessment list?

It means that ISBE has not yet found an assessment in the desired language that meets requirements for approval. Alternatively, there may not yet be an assessment that exists in that language. It could also mean that a test is available, but it has not yet been evaluated by ISBE. If there is a test or language that is not on the approved list that you would like to see added, please request the assessment approval form from biliteracy@isbe.net.

17. Can students earn the Seal or Commendation in a language that is not on the approved assessment list?

Yes. In certain scenarios, there may not be an assessment available or approvable for a language in which the student wishes to earn the Seal or Commendation. To qualify under these circumstances, a student will need to build a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates their proficiency in the language. This is called the Alternative Evidence Method, or "the portfolio". An assessment that has not been approved for the standard assessment method may still be used as a portion of evidence in the portfolio method. Please review the portfolio guidance posted on the [website](#) for more information.

18. What is the Alternative Evidence Method (Portfolio)?

The Alternative Evidence Method consists of a student portfolio and is commonly used when there is no approved assessment available in the targeted language. A student submits this portfolio of evidence to their district or nonpublic school who must find an appropriate evaluator of the language to assess the portfolio and determine if the student met the proficiency level for the Seal or Commendation. Portfolio guidance can be found as a separate item in the assessment section of the [website](#).

19. When is it appropriate for a student to use the Alternative Evidence Method?

The portfolio method may be used when:

1. A student attains an "intermediate mid," as defined in the ACTFL guidelines set forth in subsection (a)(1) or its equivalent, on an approved assessment in the targeted language; or
2. No standardized assessment has been approved for the targeted language; or
3. Evaluating the language proficiency of a student with disabilities for whom the approved assessment in its original form is inappropriate.

20. What needs to go into a student's portfolio for the Alternative Evidence Method (Portfolio Method)?

A student's portfolio must contain evidence of proficiency as equivalent to the requirement for the Seal or Commendation. If the student has a disability that precludes them from participating in a specific language modality, documentation must be included in the student's portfolio. The modalities of language that will

typically be documented are reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These categories may differ depending on which domains characterize communication in the target language or may differ for students who are unable to demonstrate proficiency in certain domains due to a disability. The evidence may include:

Experience in the target language

- a. The extent to which the student's language background enables the student to gain communicative competence in the targeted language;
- b. The extent to which the student's participation in intercultural activities provided opportunities to gain communicative competence in the targeted language;
- c. The courses taken in the targeted language and the grades received; or
- d. The extent to which anytime spent in countries or communities where the targeted language is used contributed to the student's opportunities to gain communicative competence in the targeted language.

Work samples in the target language

- a. Formal presentations in the targeted language;
- b. Student-produced compositions, articles, papers, recordings, etc. in the targeted language; or
- c. Certificates, diplomas, results from tests or assessments other than those identified under subsection (a), and additional achievements that demonstrate sufficient proficiency in the targeted language.

All portfolio documentation must be collected while a student is enrolled in high school and must comprise of evidence and work samples from the 9-12 high school years. Please visit the Seal of Biliteracy Portfolio Guidance available on the website for details about building and evaluating a portfolio for the Seal.

21. What if the assessment is administered during grade 12, but results do not become available until after graduation?

The Illinois state seal of biliteracy may still be awarded to the student if the *test was administered prior to graduation*. This is often the case with AP tests as the results become available over the summer. Award data reports are not due to ISBE until September 15 following students' graduation to allow for exam results to arrive.

Students may not sit for an assessment after their graduation and use those results for the Seal.

Please note: no official designation may be included on the diploma or transcript until the district/school obtains assessment results that indicate that the student qualifies for the award, though a provisional statement may be included. Once the Seal or Commendation is awarded, a designation must be affixed to the student's diploma and a statement included in the student's updated transcript. Final documentation may need to be reprinted and distributed to these students.

22. What if a student has a proficiency score for English or the LOTE from 8th grade or prior? Can those results be used to qualify for the seal?

No. To qualify for the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy or Commendation toward Biliteracy, the English and LOTE assessments must be taken while the student is enrolled in high school, or after August 1 of their freshman year and before their graduation date.

23. May a student who transfers from one high school/district to another earn the Seal or Commendation based on assessments or work done in the previous district/ school?

Yes. Assessment results and work completed while the student is enrolled in any high school may be used to document eligibility for the Seal or Commendation. However, only the school/district from which the student graduates may award the Seal or Commendation. Each participating school/district establishes their own procedures and parameters for the Seal of Biliteracy program and may stipulate the type of documentation and procedures required to qualify for the Seal or Commendation that the school/ district awards. Families should discuss the seal of biliteracy with their new district upon starting a transfer to ensure that the district participates in the program and will accept previously completed work or assessments.

24. Is there a particular course of study students must take to earn the Seal?

No. There is no seat-time or coursework requirement for the Seal. The Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy confirms that a graduate attained at *least* Intermediate High proficiency and demonstrated as such via an assessment or portfolio at some time during grades 9-12. Students may acquire their language of biliteracy in an academic setting, at home, in a community-based heritage language program (otherwise known as an [Ethnic Language School](#)), or any combination of different avenues of language study. The Seal of Biliteracy is not a finish line, rather an award on the pathway of proficiency. Many biliterate graduates continue to acquire language in post-secondary settings.

Annual Timeline

- August 1
 - Annual webinars and nonpublic application materials posted to the website.
 - Application for the Seal of Biliteracy opens in SIS.
 - Graphics library sets a new annual password.
- September 15
 - DEADLINE to upload previous year awards in SIS (public) or email (nonpublic).
- October 1²
 - DEADLINE to submit this year's application in SIS (public) or email (nonpublic).
- Fall/Spring
 - Inform students, families, and community participation opportunities.
 - Plan assessment schedule, keeping in mind LOTE, English, Portfolio, and retake options.
- Graduation
 - Designate Seal on diploma and transcript
 - Update student awards into SIS (public) or email (nonpublic).
 - Students must be exited as graduated before their Seal data can be uploaded.

² A district that makes the decision to participate after October 1 has to notify the Multilingual Department of its participation no later than 45 calendar days prior to the issuance of any State Seals or State Commendations. A school district notification sent to the ISBE Multilingual Department after October 1 must include evidence that the district has met all of the requirements for participation in the program. A district that fails to submit the proper notification within the timeframes provided will be prohibited from awarding the State Seal and State Commendation for that school year.