

# **Montana Seal of Biliteracy Advisory Committee**

**Recommendations to the  
Board of Public Education**

**July 14-15, 2022**

## Introduction and Summary

Efforts in Montana to enact the Seal of Biliteracy began in November 2020. Stakeholders from the Montana Association of Language Teachers (MALT) held discussions and meetings and shared information with Board of Public Education leaders. The Board of Public Education requested the Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council (CSPAC) review the request prior to the Board of Public Education receiving a presentation. CSPAC received the presentation in February 2021 and recommended that the Board of Public Education review the request.

The Board of Public Education received a presentation on the Seal of Biliteracy in May 2021 and requested the Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education (MACIE) receive the same presentation prior to any action. MACIE received the presentation in July 2021 and recommended that the Board of Public Education consider approving the Seal of Biliteracy. In July 2021, the Board of Public Education voted unanimously to approve the Seal of Biliteracy in Montana and asked that an advisory committee be formed to determine the criteria for implementation.

In August 2021, the Montana Seal of Biliteracy Advisory Committee conducted their first meeting. Members of the Committee are as follows:

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>McCall Flynn</b>     | Executive Director, Board of Public Education                       |
| <b>Lisa Werner</b>      | Seal of Biliteracy Facilitator                                      |
| <b>Blakely Hay</b>      | Montana Association of Language Teachers                            |
| <b>Teresa Mountains</b> | Montana Association of Language Teachers JNCL-NCLIS representative  |
| <b>Beth Janney</b>      | Montana Association of Language Teachers                            |
| <b>Susie Hedalen</b>    | Administrator, Board of Public Education member, MACIE liaison      |
| <b>Jason Cummins</b>    | Administrator, MACIE member, Class 7 licensure representative       |
| <b>Evelyn Paz</b>       | English Learner Specialist, Office of Public Instruction            |
| <b>Jacob Barto</b>      | Assessment Specialist, Office of Public Instruction                 |
| <b>Paul Furthmyre</b>   | Superintendent, Montana School for the Deaf and Blind               |
| <b>Galen Brokaw</b>     | Modern Languages and Literatures, Montana State University          |
| <b>Marton Marko</b>     | World Languages and Cultures, University of Montana                 |
| <b>Angela McLean</b>    | AIMA, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education                |
| <b>Aria Peters</b>      | HS English Language Learner Teacher, Missoula County Public Schools |
| <b>Irina Mills</b>      | English Learner Teacher, Great Falls Public Schools                 |
| <b>Tony Campeau</b>     | Registrar, Montana State University                                 |

The Advisory Committee met nine times over the course of their work and followed the National 2020 Guidelines for Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy [<https://sealofbiliteracy.org/state-guidelines>], which are indicated in the following steps:

- ❖ Clarify the Purpose(s) and Rationale
- ❖ Determine the Level of Pathway Awards to be granted
- ❖ Define the Criteria for Granting the Awards
- ❖ Develop Outreach Strategies and an Application Process

- ❖ Design the Award and the Process for Award Presentation
- ❖ Advocacy: Seek Endorsements! Spread the Word

## **Background**

The Seal of Biliteracy is awarded to students who have demonstrated a certain level of proficiency in both English and at least one other world language before graduation from high school. The Seal was created to encourage students with a first language other than English to maintain and/or develop their home language while learning English and challenge students whose first language is English to attain proficiency in an additional world language. The seal is affixed to the high school diploma or on a separate certificate and the accomplishment is noted on the transcript of the graduating senior.

As stated in the *Guidelines for Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy, 2020*, “The Seal of Biliteracy builds upon strong research about the benefits of mastery of two or more languages for individual students, and the increasing awareness of the need in our communities, state, nation, and world for people with biliteracy and cross-cultural skills. It will benefit learners in the labor market and the global society while strengthening intergroup relationships and honoring the multiple cultures and languages in a community” (p.3).

## **Montana Focus**

The first Committee meeting resulted in the need for further information on the current roles that languages play in Montana. Knowing that we would look to other states for guidance in the implementation process, the Committee first worked to establish what makes Montana unique and emphasized the importance of considering these factors before making any recommendations to the Board of Public Education.

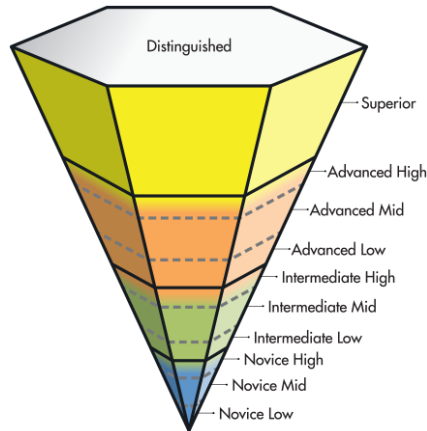
At the October meeting, Lisa Werner, Seal of Biliteracy facilitator, provided information on World Languages, including languages offered, and Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs. Committee members stressed that Indigenous language revitalization is currently receiving attention nation-wide and that the Class 7 license is imperative to ensure that there are Native Language teachers in the classroom, including teachers of Plains Sign Language for the non-verbal students proficient in that language, and expressed the need for a more efficient means of identifying students with Native Language proficiency. Additionally, the Committee talked about the need for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters and encouraged the recognition of proficiency in ASL. Lisa ended the discussion by educating the Committee on the original design of the Seal of Biliteracy and how it was used to acknowledge the Heritage Languages of English Learners and that care was needed in providing appropriate methods of measuring language proficiency.

# Explaining Language Proficiency

The next task for the Committee was to discuss language proficiency. With few exceptions, states that have adopted the Seal of Bilingualism acknowledge the ACTFL scale as the standard for measuring proficiency in the awarding of the seal for World Languages.

## ACTFL Proficiency Scale

<https://www.languagetesting.com/actfl-proficiency-scale>



Inverted Pyramid Representing ACTFL Rating Scale with Major Ranges and Sublevels including Distinguished

Developed from the Federal Government's Interagency Language Roundtable scale by ACTFL, the ACTFL proficiency scale has four main levels (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior).

The first three levels are each subdivided into three sublevels—Low, Mid, and High. The ACTFL scale provides a great deal of definition, especially at the lower levels of proficiency usually achieved in foreign language learning. It is widely used in many arenas, but particularly in academia.

## Understanding Proficiency

<https://www.languagetesting.com/lti-information/understanding-proficiency>

Proficiency refers to the ability to perform an action or function. It refers to one's ability to use language for real-world purposes to accomplish real-world linguistic tasks across a wide range of topics and settings. ACTFL Proficiency Tests reflect and measure the candidate's ability to carry out these real-world tasks.

Differing from an achievement test, which measures knowledge of specific information (what a person knows), a proficiency test targets what an individual can do with what he or she knows. For example, in a driver's test, an achievement test would represent the paper and pencil questions on the written examination, while a proficiency test determines how well the person can drive the car. The language proficiency test is an evaluation of how well a person can use language to communicate in real life.

ACTFL proficiency tests compare a person's unrehearsed ability against a set of language descriptors. These guidelines categorize proficiency along a continuum from the very top of the scale (full professional proficiency) to the very bottom (little or no functional ability). Each of the ten levels of proficiency outlined in these guidelines define language abilities in terms of tasks, text type, accuracy, and content areas. A rating on the proficiency scale does not consider how many semesters or years someone has been learning a language, what textbooks or other materials they have used, or even a speaker's knowledge of grammar, rather is solely based on the speaker's demonstrated ability to use language to accomplish real-life tasks. Achievement tests, in contrast, typically focus on what an individual has learned based on the specific content or subject matter of what has been taught and tend to be limited in scope to a specific textbook or curriculum.

Unlike an achievement test, in which it is possible to "get all the answers right," a proficiency test does not allow for a "perfect score," nor does it compare the results of the test to those of other test takers. In proficiency tests, one's performance is compared to a set of criteria, as defined in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012.

## **Research**

In order to proceed with the next steps of implementation, the Committee looked to other states with well-articulated processes and considerations for implementation. Particular focus was given to rural, low-populated states, states with Native Languages, and those with World Languages offerings similar to those in Montana. The following states provided guidance with the following implementation steps:

- ❖ Washington: Protocol for Implementation Process
- ❖ Wisconsin, Ohio, South Carolina: Overview and Guidelines
- ❖ Colorado, Wisconsin: Pathways to Biliteracy, Pathway Awards
- ❖ Tennessee, Rhode Island, Missouri, Kansas, South Carolina: Criteria for granting awards at the Intermediate and Advanced Low levels
- ❖ Minnesota, New Mexico, Arizona, Wisconsin, Utah: Native Languages
- ❖ Utah: Application

## **Purpose and Rationale**

After research, discussion, drafting, and editing, the Committee reached consensus on the Purpose Statement and Rationale for the Montana State Seal of Biliteracy.

### **Purpose Statement**

The Montana Seal of Biliteracy will honor and serve in efforts to revitalize Montana's native languages, recognize the rich cultural and linguistic assets of our heritage language speakers, and support all students seeking recognition of proficiency in a world language. The Montana Seal of Biliteracy will recognize bilingualism and cultural competence as personal and community assets and serve as a catalyst for students who speak languages other than English to sustain and

advance their linguistic skills and connect with their cultural heritage through their language. In addition, the Montana Seal of Biliteracy will encourage global citizenship for our students acquiring proficiency and cultural competence in a world language.

The Montana Seal of Biliteracy will communicate a policy-level commitment to develop proficiency in two or more languages in an ever-shifting global landscape so that Montana students have the opportunity to graduate prepared and equipped with the cultural and linguistic capacity to participate effectively in a multilingual and global 21st century society.

### **Rationale**

In this 21st century, our communities demand the expertise of socioculturally competent and multilingual individuals who can navigate diverse cultural contexts and are also culturally and linguistically proficient. As such, multilingualism should be nurtured within Montana's students.

The Montana Seal of Biliteracy seeks to develop, maintain, and revitalize the attitudes and dispositions regarding high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, raise awareness of the benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy, and elevate the status of languages other than English.

With the establishment of the Montana Seal of Biliteracy, the state publicly demonstrates that it values high levels of multilingualism in its communities and workforce.

## **Pathways to the Montana Seal of Biliteracy**

The Committee discussed the unique aspects of languages and language instruction in Montana and the need to provide guiding questions for schools to consider when creating routes to identify students' language proficiency, assist in developing and strengthening their literacy skills, and create a pathway with intermediary stages to chart and celebrate the student progress in reaching language proficiency goals.

### **Creating Pathways**

To award a Montana Seal of Biliteracy, schools must establish or recognize clear and intentional language development pathways open to students of all language backgrounds, including speakers of heritage or native languages.

Districts are encouraged to maximize the linguistic and cognitive benefits of early language learning through elementary school programs that extend into the secondary level. Districts are not required to provide specialized programs for students to be able to learn a specific language but are encouraged to describe how they plan to be responsive to their local linguistic landscape and community context for language learning and use.

School-based language education programs should be standards and proficiency based. Time dedicated to the development of bilingualism and biliteracy will vary by program model. Districts are encouraged to innovate and expand access to languages through facilitated language study, online courses, and partnerships with community-based education programs.

A district's language-learning pathways will depend on a number of factors, including but not limited to staff capacity, resources, student demographics, and community interest. In the progress of designing a framework for language learning, districts should reflect upon these overarching questions:

- ❖ What school-based language programs are designed to prepare students to be bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural;
- ❖ What early-start, extended, and sustained language-learning pathways exist for students to reach, or exceed, language proficiency by graduation;
- ❖ Do school-based language courses target and assess proficiency development through standards-based curricula and benchmarks;
- ❖ Do all student groups have equitable access to sustained language learning;
- ❖ Is additive bilingualism supported for English, Native, and world language learners;
- ❖ What home languages are spoken in the school community for which pathways to the Seal of Biliteracy may be validated or developed;
- ❖ What community-based language programs and community partners can help prepare students to be bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural;
- ❖ How does the district plan to assess language proficiency for languages learned at school, in the community, or at home;
- ❖ How does the district support the development of intercultural skills through language learning and civic engagement;
- ❖ How does the Seal of Biliteracy program align with other district priorities;
- ❖ What district hiring criteria and professional development plans ensure educator effectiveness with development of language proficiency and socio-cultural competence;
- ❖ Which district personnel will administer and manage the Seal of Biliteracy program;
- ❖ How will Seal of Biliteracy program information be communicated to students, families, and community members;
- ❖ How will students' progress toward the Seal of Biliteracy be measured and reported; and
- ❖ How will students' progress and achievement toward the Seal of Biliteracy be recognized and celebrated?

## **Pathway Awards**

### **5th Grade Pathway Award**

The following criteria must be met to be eligible for this pathway award:

- ❖ Recommendation from an educator or engaged community member.
- ❖ Portfolio of language materials to map progress.
- ❖ Writing samples in both English and other languages that reflect on the importance of bilingualism.
- ❖ Community engagement component that shows the student is learning about people in the community who speak other languages and their connection to those languages.

### **8th Grade Pathway Award**

The following criteria must be met to be eligible for this pathway award:

- ❖ Recommendation from an educator or engaged community member.
- ❖ Portfolio of language materials to map progress.
- ❖ Writing samples in both English and other languages that reflect on the importance of bilingualism.

- ❖ Electronic interviews and conversation samples to go along with written components.
- ❖ Community engagement component that shows the student is learning about people in the community who speak other languages and their connection to those languages.

*\*We understand that not all students will have access to language speakers or the ability to interact with their community. Online or digital opportunities should be considered. For languages that do not have an emphasis on written language, plan to show understanding and incorporation of additional aspects of heritages and cultures such as dance, ceremony, storytelling, sign language, film narration, etc.*

## Determining Award Levels and Criteria for Granting the Awards

The Committee recommends adopting a two-level award model for the Montana Seal of Biliteracy. Committee members agreed that this would both recognize language learners at the Intermediate Mid/Functional Fluency and the Advanced Low/Working Fluency Levels. The Committee believes this will embolden all language learners to grow and maintain fluency in both their first and second languages to the greatest degree possible and be appropriately recognized for their linguistic accomplishments.

### Award Levels

- ❖ Gold - Intermediate Mid
- ❖ Platinum - Advanced Low

### Criteria for Granting the Awards

*\* Additional testing options for attaining the Platinum Award (Advanced Low) in English*

| Assessment Options   | Languages   | Score / Proficiency Level  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Native Languages of Montana</b>   |   | Montana tribes will mirror the Class 7 Licensure process and set their own proficiency measures and criteria for the awarding of the Montana Seal of Biliteracy. |
| <b>* STAMP 4S</b>  | Arabic, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Chinese (Mandarin), Polish, Portuguese (Brazilian), Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Yoruba<br>Upcoming: ASL, Latin, Kurdish, Cape Verdean and Ukrainian | IM: 5<br>AL: 7   |
| <b>STAMP WS</b>  | <a href="#">Less-Commonly Taught/Tested Languages</a>   | IM: 5<br>AL: 7   |
| <b>* APPLL (ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages)</b> | Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese (European), Spanish  | IM: I-4<br>AL: A-1   |
| <b>ACTFL OPI (interview) &amp; WPT (writing tasks)</b>                           | <a href="#">Less-Commonly Taught/Tested Languages</a>   | IM: 14<br>AL: A-1  |



|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>ACTFL ALIRA</b>                                  | Latin  | IM: 1-2<br>AL: A-1   |
| <b>Advanced Placement Exam (AP / College Board)</b> | Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Spanish, English | IM: 3<br>AL: 5   |
| <b>* International Baccalaureate (IB)</b>           | French, Spanish, English   | IM: 4<br>AL: 6   |
| <b>SLPI</b>   | National Technical Institute for the Deaf (SLPI),                              | IM: Intermediate Plus<br>AL: Advanced Plus   |
| <b>ASLPI</b>  | Gallaudet University (ASLPI)   | IM: Level 3<br>AL: Level 4   |
| <b>* WIDA ACCESS for ELLs</b>                       | English  | IM: Completion of English graduation requirements as set forth by the Montana Board of Public Education<br>AL: 4.7 |
| <b>* ACT (ELA Composite Score)</b>                  | English  | AL: 20   |

## **Application for the Montana Seal of Biliteracy**

The Committee agreed that there should be a common application available to all school districts in Montana that can be personalized with a district logo if desired.

The application we hope to model is from Utah:

<https://www.uen.org/advocacy/downloads/BiliteracySealApplicationMurray.pdf>

## **Award Design and Presentation**

The Committee has started discussion on the kind of awards to be offered, including foil seals affixed to high school diplomas, foil seals affixed to certificates, and medals. We recommend that the Seal is acknowledged on the transcripts of all graduating seniors along with a description of the criteria met for either the Gold or Platinum Level. The design of our Seal has yet to be discussed or determined, but it has been mentioned that other states have requested students to design their seal.

The Committee has yet to determine the process for the Award Presentation. Typically, the awards are presented at a special language award celebration, at a district-wide award assembly, or as a part of the graduation ceremony. Other than the Seal being documented on the high school transcript and the design of the Seal itself, the Committee agrees that the school districts have the freedom to decide on all other matters concerning the presentation of the award.

### **District Responsibilities**

The Montana Seal of Biliteracy is a state-level award. The Committee recommends that school districts who choose to participate assume the responsibilities listed below:

- ❖ Disseminating of Information
- ❖ Testing
- ❖ Awarding
- ❖ Record Keeping

### **Timeline for Reporting Data and Obtaining the Seal**

The Committee has discussed the need to create and provide school districts with a detailed timeline for reporting data and obtaining scores as well as other considerations to keep in mind based on the experience of other states.

## **Conclusion**

The Montana Seal of Biliteracy Advisory Committee would like to thank the Board of Public Education for the opportunity to participate in this work. The information and recommendations provided in this document are well-researched and have proven to be highly successful in other states. By approving these recommendations, students who are successful in attaining proficiency in two or more language will receive the recognition they deserve. We owe it to our students to help them recognize the value of their academic success.