

## SEAL OF BILITERACY: FAQs 2023-24

### **Q: What is the Seal of Biliteracy?**

**A:** The Seal of Biliteracy is a national movement, adopted by over 40 states, which recognizes students who have demonstrated proficiency and developed skills to effectively communicate and function in two languages, English and a partner language. In Massachusetts, the State Seal of Biliteracy was signed into law on November 22, 2017, as part of the LOOK Act (*An Act Relative to Language Opportunity for our Kids*). The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has outlined the criteria school districts are to use to award the State Seal of Biliteracy and the State Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction.

### **Q: What are the purposes of the MA State Seal of Biliteracy**

- 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.

### **Q: Who is eligible to apply for the Seal of Biliteracy?**

**A:** Seniors. The Seal of Biliteracy is awarded to students at the end of their senior year. WA students may apply at the beginning of their senior year and will be assessed in their partner language towards the middle of their senior year. Some exceptions may apply.

### **Q: Which languages are recognized as part of the Seal of Biliteracy?**

**A:** In addition to English, any spoken World Language, American Sign Language, as well as Latin are recognized languages. The list of languages includes languages which students have learned in school, outside of school, in the home, or while living in another country.

**Q: What skills are assessed to determine biliteracy?**

**A:** The skills assessed depend upon the partner language. For most spoken languages: listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. For Latin: reading skills. For American Sign Language: receptive skills. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has identified and approved assessments to measure the various skills in several languages. A portfolio option may be available for languages which do not have a state-approved assessment.

**Q: What assessments are used to determine biliteracy?**

**A:** To measure literacy in English, students must meet a qualifying score on MCAS and/or ACCESS testing. To achieve the Seal of Biliteracy with Distinction a student must achieve a score of 501 on the 10th grade MCAS. To achieve the Seal of Biliteracy a student must achieve a score of 472. If a student uses their score on ACCESS testing they must achieve a score of at least level 4.2 overall and a composite literacy score of at least level 3.9 to qualify. To measure literacy in the partner language, students must meet a minimum required score on each skills-based component of a state-approved partner language assessment (STAMP 4S, AAPPL or ALIRA), on an AP test taken prior to senior year (Language and Culture Exam or Latin), or through a submitted portfolio. The district will identify which pathway is appropriate.

**Q: Can seniors use their AP exam scores to determine biliteracy?**

**A:** Students who take an approved AP exam (Language and Culture or Latin) prior to their senior year may use their scores if they receive a 4 or 5. Students who take an approved AP exam in their senior year, *may not use* their exam scores to determine biliteracy as AP results are received after graduation.

**Q: Can a portfolio be submitted in lieu of state-approved testing?**

**A:** No. If a test is available through a state-approved assessment, the student must take the test. Portfolios are acceptable only if there is no test available that demonstrates literacy and with prior approval. Please contact the World Language Curriculum Coordinator for more information regarding the portfolio option.

**Q: Is enrollment in an advanced language class at WA a requirement to take a partner language assessment?** **A:** No. Students who are literate in more than one language are eligible to take a partner language assessment. They do not need to have studied the language in school.

**Q: Who pays for the assessment and how much does it cost?**

**A:** Each family is expected to pay for the assessment. Cost varies depending on the partner language assessment but the average cost is approximately \$25-\$40. If a student retakes a specific section of the assessment, they will need to pay an additional fee. Portfolios vary in cost. If cost is an issue, or if a student qualifies for free/reduced lunch, please see the World Language Curriculum Coordinator. Financial assistance and/or scholarships may be available.

**Q: When is the partner language assessment administered and where is it taken?**

**A:** Partner language assessments will be administered in February - early March. Retakes may be administered in late March-early April. All assessments must be taken at WA in the language lab during the specified testing windows.

**Q: Is it possible to retake one or more components of the exam?**

**A:** Yes, depending on the partner language assessment. Students may retake one component of the assessment, one time only, during the specified window for retakes. Students are responsible for the cost of the retake. There is a prorated fee for the separate components

## Q: What does an Intermediate-High score look like?<sup>1</sup>

A: Students must earn the equivalent of an Intermediate-High on a partner-language assessment. According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)

<p><b>Interpretive Listening:</b> A student can usually follow the main message, idea, or flow of events in various time frames in straightforward, and sometimes descriptive, paragraph-length informational or fictional texts as well as conversations and discussions.</p> <p>For example, a student can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● understand the directions of a GPS to a familiar location</li><li>● follow the major events of a traveler's experience narrated in a radio report</li><li>● identify the sequence of events in a story</li><li>● understand broadcasters discussing severe weather warnings</li><li>● understand simple questions posed in an interview of a celebrity</li></ul>	<p><b>Interpersonal/Presentational Speaking:</b> A student can exchange information, give advice, support their viewpoint, tell stories, deliver a presentation, as well as explain preferences, opinions and emotions, in conversations and discussions on a variety of familiar and some concrete topics that the student has researched. A student can interact with others to meet their needs in a variety of situations using connected sentences that may combine to form paragraphs and ask a variety of questions, often across various time frames.</p> <p>For example, a student can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● discuss information about career pathways</li><li>● exchange opinions about the use of personal devices at school</li><li>● compare the roles of family members in their own and other cultures</li><li>● explain the series of steps taken to complete a task or experiment and describe the results</li></ul>
<p><b>Interpretive Reading:</b> A student can usually follow the main message, story, and actions expressed in various time frames in straightforward, and sometimes descriptive, paragraph-length informational or fictional texts as well as conversations and discussions.</p> <p>For example, a student can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● understand information provided in a travel guide about an historical site</li><li>● follow directions to do a science experiment</li><li>● identify the sequence of events in a story</li><li>● understand the characteristics of heroes in a folk legend</li><li>● understand a text conversation between two friends discussing what they did last weekend</li></ul>	<p><b>Presentational Writing:</b> A student can tell stories about school/community events and personal experiences, state a viewpoint on familiar or researched topics and provide reasons to support it, as well as give detailed presentations on a variety of familiar topics which have been researched, using a few short paragraphs across various time frames.</p> <p>For example, a student can write:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● a series of steps needed to complete a task,</li><li>● a brief statement outlining the key points of their opinion on topics in their community</li><li>● a comparison of school or learning environments and curricula to determine what is valued in my own and other cultures</li><li>● a summary of a social media story and share opinions about it</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup>2017 NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements <https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/CanDos/Intermediate%20Can-Do%20Statements.pdf>

**Q: How do students receive their score reports?**

**A:** Depending on the partner language assessment, scores will be shared electronically or via paper copy. Explanatory notes will be available to help students interpret their areas of strength as well as areas of improvement. Students may speak with their language teacher or with the World Language Curriculum Coordinator if they need help interpreting their scores or if they have questions.

**Q: Where can I learn more information about the state-approved assessments?**

Westford Public Schools will use the STAMP exam to measure biliteracy skills in spoken languages. ALIRA will be used to assess biliteracy skills in Latin. Here are links to test-taking tips and sample questions:

- ALIRA: the ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment  
<https://www.languagetesting.com/actfl-latin-interpretive-reading-assessment>
- STAMP: the Standards-Based Measure of Proficiency  
<https://avantassessment.com/sample-tests> (please select the partner language in the STAMP 4S Grades 7-Adult section)

**Q: Where can I find more information about the Seal of Biliteracy?**

**A:** Please see the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary information [website](#).