Implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy in Illinois: Lessons Learned

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Agenda

• The Seal of Biliteracy in Illinois: Policy Context
• First Year Implementation
• Capturing the Experiences of Districts
• Lessons Learned
• To share and discuss potential next steps
Socio-Educational Context of Illinois

- 859 Districts
- 2,054,556 Students
- 49.3 White; 17.5 Black; 25.1 Hispanic; 4.6 Asian; 3.5 Other
- 10.3 EL; 14.1 SpEd; 54.2 Low Income
- 129,668 Teachers (FTE) (82.5 percent White)

Background: But what is the Seal of Biliteracy

- Initially developed by Californians Together in 2008
- In 2011, California first state to pass legislation
- In 2012, New York enacted Seal of Biliteracy legislation
- On August 27, 2013, Illinois signed Public Act 98-0560 into law to establish the State Seal of Biliteracy
- New Mexico, 2013
- Over 20 states are currently implementing or considering it

Rationale for the Seal of Biliteracy

- Encourages the study of other languages
- Benefits to the student
  - Increasing employment and academic opportunities
- Benefits to the global community
  - Communicating with people from other cultures
  - Developing economic opportunities
What is the Seal of Biliteracy in Illinois?

- For Illinois public high school graduates who demonstrate a high level of proficiency in four domains in:
  - English, and
  - A language other than English
- Designated on the student’s diploma and transcript

Illinois’ Definition of Biliteracy

“The State Seal of Biliteracy certifies attainment of a high level of proficiency, sufficient for meaningful use in college and a career, by a graduating public high school pupil in one or more languages in addition to English.”

Proficiency for Seal of Biliteracy purposes

Proficiency for the Seal of Biliteracy is defined as composite score equivalent to “intermediate high” on the 2012 Proficiency Guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL)

Proficiency in the language other than English

- Attainment of either a “meets standards” or “exceeds standards” for English language arts on the State assessments administered at the secondary level;

- Attainment of a “proficient” score on the English language proficiency assessment administered at the secondary level; and,

- Attainment of an “intermediate high” composite score on an assessment in English identified pursuant to subsection (a)(1).

Commendation towards Biliteracy

- The district may also choose to offer a State Commendation toward Biliteracy to any student who fails to meet the requirements of subsection (a) but attains a score of “intermediate low,” or its equivalent, in the target foreign language assessment.
Illinois Structure

Role of State:
- Create the Seal
- Post accepted tests and levels

Local District Responsibilities:
- Submit annual notification to State
- Designate Seal of Biliteracy Coordinator
- Design the program
- Publicize the Seal
- Report to State

IMPLEMENTATION

Who applied?
- 18 districts applied
  - 10 high school (9-12) only
  - 8 unit (k-12) districts
- 17 awarded Seals and/or Commendations
**Description of Districts**

- **Location**: 10 in the Chicago metropolitan area and 8 in rural or small communities
- **Size**: High school enrollment of districts
  - 12 - 1000+ (4 more than 5000)
  - 6 - less than 1000
- **Spending**: 10 out of 18 had operational spending at or above state average
- **EL**: 8 out of 18 had less than 1% English learner population
- **College Ready**: 11 out of 18 at or above state average for % of high school students college ready (ACT)

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**Numbers in the first year**

- 496 Seals of Biliteracy
- 213 Commendations
- **Languages**
  - 591 in Spanish
  - Also French (43), German (34), Latin (21), Chinese (12), Italian (4), Arabic (2), Japanese (1), Russian (1)
- **Awardees included**
  - 80 Former ELs
  - 6 ELs

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**Capturing the experiences of districts**

- **Questions from the state:**
  - How are districts in Illinois implementing the Seal of Biliteracy legislation?
  - What else can the State agency do to contribute to the success of the program?
  - Questionnaire
  - Focus Group
    - Structured discussion
    - 7 districts (+ CPS) (+2 non-implementing districts)
LESSONS LEARNED

Administration

- Rationale: “To up our game”
- World Language Departments started the process – typically
- No formal Board approval needed in most districts (but Board was involved)
- Several departments involved, but one main coordinator was necessary
- Minimal cost, concerns about funding in the future
- Building Pathways

Perceived Impact

- Honor the languages and cultures of students in the district
- Validate language skills
- Increased likelihood of parents participating/supporting bilingual education
- Elevated the status of foreign language programs
- Modified the approach to foreign language instruction
  - Focus on communication and fluency
- Increased collaboration within district
Measuring Proficiency

- Difficulty in scheduling tests
- Comparability of different assessments
- Limit the number of new tests and focus on language skills
- Timing of the test before graduation
- Measures of English proficiency may represent a barrier
- Measuring proficiency in all languages in the district represents a challenge
- Technology is required for proper assessment

Value of the Seal

- Establishing the meaning and value of the Seal through outreach and collaboration
  - Promote the Seal as an opportunity with students, parents and families
  - Inform district staff and school board of program outcomes
  - Publicize and build partnerships with employers
  - Work with higher education to offer college placement, credits, scholarships

Resource Development

- Developing shared resources and drawing on outside expertise
  - Create rubrics for portfolio review
  - Identify reviewers, community connections and assessments for lower incidence languages
  - Support smaller districts
- Bridge to linguistic communities (language schools, consulates, community organizations)
- Foreign and heritage language programs
- Make seal available to more linguistic groups of students
What's next

Numbers this year

- 54 districts have applied to award the seal
- Projected Numbers:
  - 5,979 Seals of Biliteracy
  - 1,583 Commendations

Potential Next Steps

- Connections to higher education for recognition of Seal for credit/course placement/scholarships and continuation of biliteracy education
- Recognition of pathways to biliteracy at the elementary/middle school
- More involvement from State agencies (i.e., funding, staffing)
- Forums for exchange of information and networking among districts
- Tools for implementation including rubric for review of portfolio