

Frequently Asked Questions

NOTE:

In this document, “district(s)” refers *only* to public school districts in Illinois, and the word “school(s)” refers *only* to nonpublic educational facilities in Illinois.

1. What is the State Seal of Biliteracy?

The State Seal of Biliteracy is a recognition given by a district/school to graduating high school students who have demonstrated a high level of proficiency in English and in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in another language.

2. What is the State Commendation toward Biliteracy?

The State Commendation toward Biliteracy is a recognition given by a district/school to graduating high school students who have demonstrated significant progress toward achieving a high level of proficiency in English and in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in another language. Districts/schools may choose to award the Commendation toward Biliteracy in addition to the Seal each year; however, that is not required to participate.

3. Where can I learn more about participation in this program?

[The State Seal of Biliteracy website](#) contains information and resources, including a training module, a list of language assessments, and a program administration checklist, among other resources.

Application Process

4. How does a **district** notify the Illinois State Board of Education that it will offer the State Seal of Biliteracy (and Commendation toward Biliteracy, if applicable)?

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 submitting an application in the Student Information System (SIS). The Seal of Biliteracy coordinator must have access to SIS from the district superintendent to complete the application. Districts must first enter enrolled students into SIS for the application to be submitted; however, entering one enrolled 11th-grade student and one 12th-grade student will suffice. This is due by October 1 of each year. If a district makes the decision to participate after that date, it must notify ISBE of its participation no later than 45 calendar days prior to the issuance of any State Seals or State Commendations and include in the notification evidence that the district has met all the requirements in the rules for participation.

5. How does a **school** notify the Illinois State Board of Education that it will offer the State Seal of Biliteracy (and Commendation toward Biliteracy, if applicable)?

Schools must notify ISBE each year of their intent to award the State Seal of Biliteracy, and Commendation toward Biliteracy if the school chooses, by submitting an application form and an Excel template with award projections; these forms can be found under “Nonpublic Schools Only” on the State Seal of Biliteracy’s website and are due by October 1 of each year. These forms must be emailed to biliteracy@isbe.net. If a school makes the decision to participate after that date, it must notify the State Board of Education of its participation no later than 45 calendar days prior to the issuance of any State Seals or State Commendations

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and include in the notification evidence that the school has met all the requirements in the rules for participation.

Annual End of Year Report

6. How does a **district** notify ISBE of the awards that were given each school year?
Districts must annually report on the students that were awarded the Seal (and the Commendation, if applicable) to ISBE via SIS in IWAS. 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 the target language and English. Please note that SIS will not allow this information to be uploaded until award-receiving students have been exited as "graduated" in SIS. Information on batch uploading student award information in SIS can be found [here](#).
7. How does a **school** notify ISBE of the awards that were given each school year?
Schools must submit to ISBE an annual report using the reporting template found under the "Nonpublic Schools Only" bar on the State Seal of Biliteracy's website no later than September 15 following each participating year. The report should include information on each student who received an award and which award, the targeted world language, and methods used to demonstrate proficiency. Schools may send this report to biliteracy@isbe.net.

Placing the Seal or Commendation on the Diploma and Transcript

8. How are the Seal of Biliteracy and the Commendation toward Biliteracy included on the student's diploma and transcript?
The diploma must contain the Seal or Commendation graphic that ISBE provides. The target language must also be indicated below the graphic image. The transcript must contain the written statement that ISBE provides to the district. Each district/school will receive access to the official graphics in a confirmation email following the application submission each school year. If your district/school cannot locate your graphics, or has additional questions, please email biliteracy@isbe.net.
9. May the Seal be affixed to the diploma after it is printed?
Yes. The Seal and the Commendation may be affixed to the diploma before or after printing.
10. Does ISBE offer printed stickers with the Seal/Commendation?
No. It is the responsibility of the district/school to either print the State Seal or Commendation directly on the mandatory documents or create stickers of the graphics that are then affixed to the documents.
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?
Yes. The Seal or Commendation language 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

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diploma when the student graduates. When the determination takes place prior to a student's graduation year (e.g., junior year), the student should be reported as receiving the Seal in 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.

13. May a district/school give recipients of the Seal or Commendation other forms of recognition, such as ribbons or certificates?

Yes. A district/school may give recipients other forms of recognition in addition to the required designation on the diploma and transcript. Regardless of any other forms of recognition offered to the student, the transcript and diploma must show the award and target language.

Meeting Criteria for the Seal or Commendation

14. Where can I find information on the qualifying proficiency criteria for English and world languages?

A list of available assessments and their minimum qualifying scores that have been approved by ISBE may be found [here](#). Please note that ISBE continues to evaluate new assessments and will update this list as more are approved.

15. What is the approved assessment list and how are assessments approved?

The approved assessment list contains standardized assessments for world languages and English 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 tests the four required language domains (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), is accessible in Illinois, uses either the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scoring scales, as well as other test development and standardization criteria that has been determined as required for approval. You may view the assessment approval form [here](#).

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

For these scenarios, it likely means that ISBE has not yet found an assessment in the desired target language that meets our requirements for approval or there may not yet be an assessment that exists in that language. Additionally, it could also mean that a test is available in the target language, 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 complete the assessment [approval form](#) found on the seal of biliteracy website and email it to biliteracy@isbe.net for review.

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

Students may earn the Seal or Commendation in a language or with an assessment that is not on the approved assessment list. To qualify for the Seal or Commendation under these circumstances, a student will need to build a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates their

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proficiency in the language. This is called the Alternative Evidence Method, or more commonly known as the Portfolio Method. An assessment that hasn't been approved for the standard assessment method may still be used as a portion of evidence in the portfolio method.

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

The Alternative Evidence Method (Portfolio Method) is used for a variety of reasons, but commonly is used when there is no approved assessment available in the target language. For this method, a student must build a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate their proficiency in the target language in lieu of using test results from an approved, standardized exam. A student will then submit this portfolio of evidence to the district or nonpublic school in which they are enrolled to evaluate and determine if the student met the proficiency level for the Seal or Commendation. It is up to the district or nonpublic school to create an evaluation rubric and work with individuals who are proficient in the target language to evaluate the student's portfolio. The portfolio method may be used in several circumstances, including:

- a) If a student achieves an "Intermediate Mid" on an assessment of all four domains, a student may submit additional evidence to document an "Intermediate High."*
- b) If there is no ISBE-approved assessment available in the target language.*
- c) If a student has a disability that makes the standardized assessment method inappropriate.*
- d) If the only assessment(s) available contains fewer than the four required domains.*
- e) If the target language has fewer than the four domains.*

19. 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. As a reminder, the domains that will be documented will typically be reading, writing, listening, and speaking, but they may differ depending on the total domains of the target language or for students who may be unable to demonstrate proficiency in certain domains due to a disability. The evidence may include:

- 1) Experience in the target language*
 - a) The extent to which the student's language background, participation in intercultural activities, and/or any time spent in countries where the language is spoken enabled or contributed to the student's opportunity to gain proficiency.*
 - b) Courses taken in the language and grades received.*
- 2) Work samples in the target language*
 - a) Student-produced compositions, articles, papers, and other formal documents.*
 - b) Formal presentations given.*
 - c) Certificates, diplomas, results from other assessments, and/or additional achievements that demonstrate sufficient proficiency.*

Please note that if there is an assessment in the target language that covers fewer than the four required domains, students may use scores from that assessment to demonstrate proficiency in the tested domains and then submit supplemental evidence to cover the remaining untested domains for their portfolio. Additionally, in accordance to the State Seal rules and regulations, all portfolio documentation must be collected while a student is enrolled in high school.

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20. How is the SAT used to determine if a student meets English proficiency for the Seal or Commendation?

The SAT is the state academic assessment used for the purposes of federal accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act for high school in Illinois. It is one of the qualifying assessments that a district may choose to recognize as documentation for the Seal or Commendation. As of March 2020, the qualifying SAT cut score for both the Seal and Commendation is 480, which aligns with the College Board's "College and Career Ready" cut score.

21. How can a student who does not take the SAT or ACCESS for ELLs® during high school demonstrate English proficiency for the purposes of the Seal or Commendation?

A district/school may choose to use the ACT college entrance test. On the ACT, a student must attain either the ACT College Ready Benchmark on the English subject area test or a composite score of at least 21 to be eligible for the Seal or Commendation.

A district/school may also use the results of a standardized assessment meeting the requirements of 680.20(b)(1), including the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages, the Test of English for International Communication, or the Test of English as a Foreign Language to meet the English proficiency requirement for the Seal or Commendation.

Students may take the AP English Language and Composition Exam to qualify for the Seal or Commendation by attaining a score of 4 or 3, respectively.

For more information on meeting English proficiency requirements, see our list of approved assessments [here](#).

22. If a student takes the ACCESS for ELLs® and the SAT at different times during enrollment in high school, which assessment results should be used to determine eligibility for the Seal or Commendation?

The student may qualify for the Seal or Commendation by meeting any one of the criteria for English proficiency at any time during the student's high school enrollment.

23. For the Seal of Biliteracy or Commendation in Latin, may a district/school accept the results of the ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment (ALIRA), which is the ACTFL language test in one domain (reading)?

Yes. Latin is not used as a language for ordinary communication in the modern day, so the ALIRA may be used to demonstrate proficiency in Latin for the purposes of awarding the Seal of Biliteracy or the Commendation toward Biliteracy.

24. If a language assessment of four domains does not have a composite score, how does the district/school determine whether the student met the criteria for the Seal or Commendation?

If the assessment has no composite score, the student must attain the minimum criteria for the award in each domain.

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25. Our district has a student attempting to earn the Seal/Commendation in a language that possibly does not have one or more of the required domains (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find exams or other testing resources that cover the possibly missing domain(s) for this target language. How do we approach this situation so that our student can fairly and equitably qualify for the Seal?

For target languages that possibly do not have one or more of the otherwise required domains and in which a district is reasonably not able to find any viable testing resources that cover the domain(s) in question, ISBE will allow the district to omit the domain(s) for the Seal/Commendation qualification criteria ONLY after the district has ISBE's approval. To request approval, the district must submit a statement that includes the target language(s), the possibly missing domain(s), the evidence the district used to identify that the domain(s) is not present in the target language(s), and a description of the efforts made to identify any viable testing resources that would cover the domain(s). The request must be submitted in writing no later than 45 days prior to awarding the Seal/Commendation. ISBE will review the request and, if it is approved, will notify the district in writing. Districts may send these requests to biliteracy@isbe.net. If ISBE determines that the domain(s) is present in the target language and finds viable testing resources for the domain(s), the district will be required to proceed with ISBE's findings.

26. If a student achieves a score on an English assessment that meets the Seal criteria and a score on a world language assessment that meets the Commendation criteria (or vice versa), what award does that student receive?

If both scores do not meet the criteria needed for the same award, then the student will be awarded the Commendation toward Biliteracy.

27. May the State Seal of Biliteracy be awarded to seniors after they graduate if the results of a test administered during their final school year are not available at the time of graduation?

Yes. If the results of an approved language assessment taken while the student was enrolled in high school were not available at the time of graduation, the district/school may award the Seal or Commendation after the student graduates once results become available. The district/school may recognize these students as candidates for the Seal or Commendation at graduation, but 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. Once the Seal or Commendation is awarded, a designation must be affixed to the student's diploma and included in the student's transcript.

28. May the State Seal of Biliteracy be awarded to high school students if they tested in a grade prior to attending high school?

No. For a student to qualify for the Seal of Biliteracy or Commendation toward Biliteracy, the English and world language assessments must be taken while the student is enrolled in high school.

29. 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?

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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 that the student graduates from 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.

30. May a State Seal of Biliteracy be awarded to high school students who meet the assessment criteria but do not enroll in world language courses in high school?

Yes. Enrollment in a world language course or program is not a prerequisite for attaining the State Seal of Biliteracy or Commendation toward Biliteracy.

Publicizing the Program

31. How must participating districts/schools inform parents and students about the Seal of Biliteracy program?

Participating districts/schools must inform parents and students about the Seal of Biliteracy program by including information on the district/school's website (if a website is maintained) and in the student handbook or comparable publication. The following information must be included:

- *General information about the State Seal of Biliteracy program and the opportunity for students to participate;*
- *A description of the process a student would use to demonstrate proficiency in the targeted language, including details about any alternative evidence that may be required, if applicable. While not required, districts/schools should also consider including how students may demonstrate English proficiency;*
- *An estimate of the costs, if any and if known, that students might incur to demonstrate proficiency; and*
- *The name and contact information for the individual designated to serve as the coordinator of the State Seal of Biliteracy program.*

32. Our student handbook was published before the district/school applied to offer the Seal of Biliteracy. How are we required to inform parents and students about the program?

The district/school should post the information on the district/school's website (if the district/school has one) as well as distribute an addendum to the student handbook.