State Seal of Biliteracy

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award given by a state educational agency (SEA) to recognize students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation.[1] The seal is most often awarded at the state level (and is thus often referred to as the State Seal of Biliteracy, or SSB), but it can also be awarded by a school district, site, or program.[2]
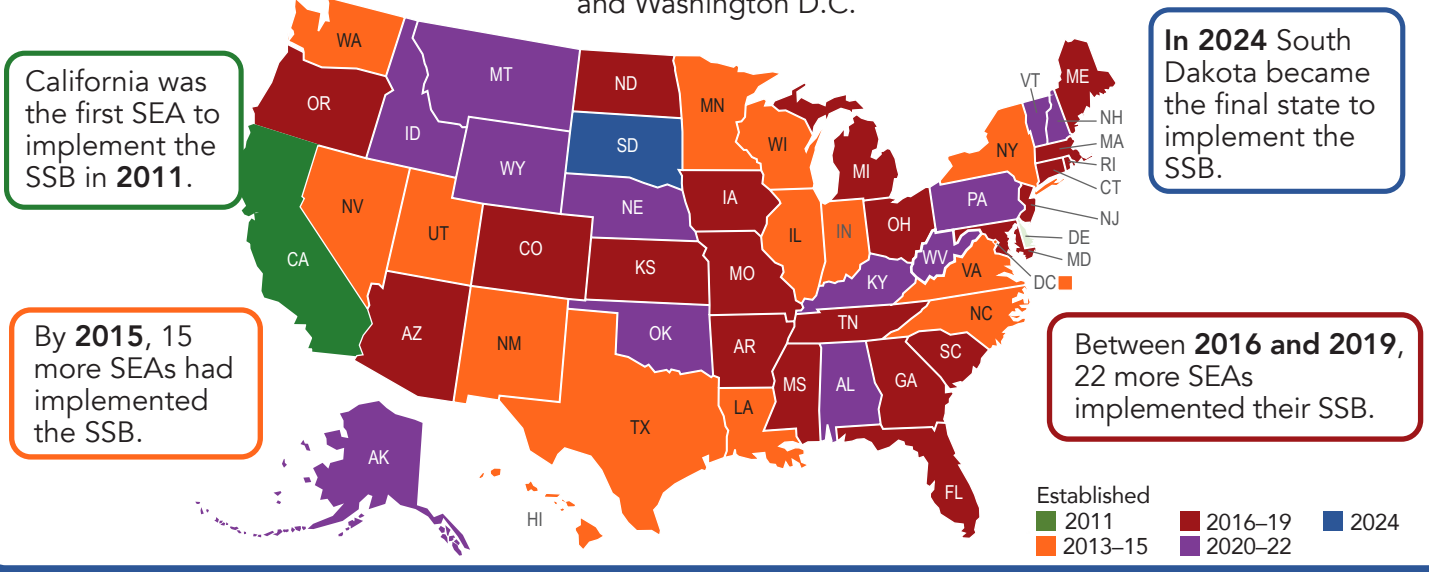
Benefits of Receiving the State Seal of Biliteracy

Research shows that receiving the Seal of Biliteracy has academic, professional, and social benefits for students. The seal can

- encourage students to study and pursue fluency in another language.[3]
- help colleges and universities identify bilingual students and award credit to applicants for the attainment of high-level skills in another language.[3]
- help boost job opportunities and elevate base salary/pay in many fields.[3]
- demonstrate the support and value of language diversity.[3]
- strengthen intergroup relationships within a community.[3]
- encourage English learners to develop proficiency in English.[4]
- acknowledge and reinforce the value of English learners' (ELs') home languages and cultures.[5]

When Was the Seal of Biliteracy Implemented by Each State Educational Agency?[6]

Thirteen years after its first introduction in 2011, the Seal of Biliteracy has spread to all 50 states and Washington D.C.

California was the first SEA to implement the SSB in **2011**.

In **2024** South Dakota became the final state to implement the SSB.

By **2015**, 15 more SEAs had implemented the SSB.

Between **2016 and 2019**, 22 more SEAs implemented their SSB.

Established
- 2011
- 2013–15
- 2016–19
- 2020–22
- 2024

[1] Californians Together. (2023). *Frequently asked questions.* The Seal of Biliteracy. https://sealofbiliteracy.org/faq

[2] This infographic contains resources and examples that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of these resources and examples is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed or products or services offered. These resources and examples may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts, as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these resources and examples. Other than statutory and regulatory requirements included in the document, the contents of this guidance do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public.

[3] Seal of Biliteracy. (2023). *Steps to implement the Seal of Biliteracy.* https://sealofbiliteracy.org/steps

[4] Kolar, A. (2022). *The value of the Seal of Biliteracy as an incentive for emergent bilingual student populations.* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/634b22b1c884582c3e662bc6/t/635f25b5da3cc7099bf5df46/1667179957747/SoBL+Policy+Brief+Arun+Kolar.pdf

[5] Walston, J. & Valtierrez, M. (2020). *Results from the State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy focus groups: La Cosecha conference.* https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/publications/pdf/5-2-13/Session-6-Slides-Focus-Group-Results-508.pdf

[6] Californians Together. (2023). *Frequently asked questions.* The Seal of Biliteracy. https://sealofbiliteracy.org/faq

OELA
Office of English Language Acquisition

Seal of Biliteracy Requirements for ELs and Non-ELs

Did You KNOW?

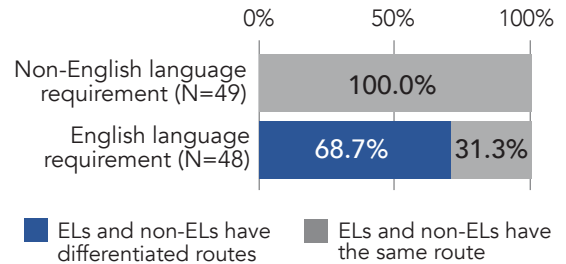To earn the SSB, students must fulfill requirements to demonstrate their proficiency in a language other than English and in English.[7,8]

- The number of criteria for each language requirement differs from state to state.
- Many states offer multiple options to fulfill each criterion.

In most states, all students (ELs and non-ELs) demonstrate their proficiency in a language other than English (LOTE)[9] in the same way, but ELs and non-ELs demonstrate their proficiency in English in different ways.

- In 33 out of 48 SEAs (68.7%) with publicly available information, ELs may or must demonstrate their proficiency in English using different measures or criteria from non-EL students.
- All of the 49 SEAs with publicly available data offered the same criteria for ELs and non-ELs to demonstrate their proficiency in a LOTE.

Percent of SEAs with Differentiated Route for ELs Compared to Non-ELs

Non-English language requirement (N=49): 100.0% (ELs and non-ELs have the same route)

English language requirement (N=48): 68.7% (ELs and non-ELs have differentiated routes), 31.3% (ELs and non-ELs have the same route)

Legend:
- ELs and non-ELs have differentiated routes
- ELs and non-ELs have the same route

Criteria to Demonstrate Proficiency in a Language Other Than English

Number of SEAs with specified requirements to demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English

- Standardized only: 32
- Either locally determined or standardized: 14
- Both standardized and locally determined: 3
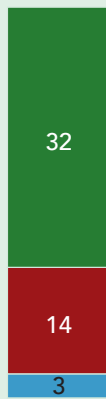
- Forty-six of the 49 SEAs required the fulfillment of one criterion to demonstrate proficiency in a LOTE.
  - Of the 46 SEAs, 32 required students to pass a standardized assessment to demonstrate proficiency.
  - The remaining 14 SEAs allowed for the usage of standardized assessment or locally determined data.
  - States offer anywhere from two (Kentucky) to 30 (Virginia) qualified standardized assessments.
  - Locally determined criteria can include portfolios, grade point averages (GPAs), sociocultural competence, and collaboration with local indigenous tribes to determine proficiency in an indigenous language.
- Three of the 49 SEAs required fulfillment of at least two criteria, one using standardized assessment and one using locally determined data, to demonstrate proficiency in a LOTE.

Criteria to Demonstrate Proficiency in English[10]

The criteria to demonstrate proficiency in English using a standardized assessment are more likely to be required of ELs than non-ELs.

Number of SEAs by Type of Criteria to Demonstrate Proficiency in English

Type	For non-ELs	For ELs
Standardized only	9	15
Locally determined only	4	0
Either	5	2
Both	15	17

Y-axis: Number of SEAs

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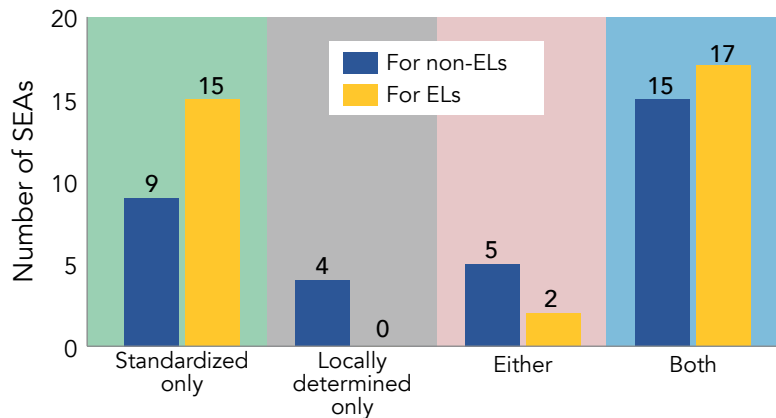
[7] Information regarding the SSB criteria requirements, that are presented in the following sections, were collected from SEA websites between July 2022 and February 2024, and may not reflect recent criteria changes made from that time to now.

[8] Complete information about how both EL and non-EL students could fulfill the English language proficiency requirement could only be found for 48 out of the 51 SEAs that implement the SSB. No information at all was found for two SEAs, and information for one of the two student groups could not be found for one SEA. Therefore, these three SEAs were not included. Requirements to demonstrate proficiency in a LOTE could not be found for two out of the 51 SEAs that implement the SSB, which is why the total is out of 49 SEAs. The information on SSB is informed by publicly available information for 48 states that post information about how students can demonstrate proficiency in English and 49 states that post information about how students can demonstrate proficiency in a LOTE.

[9] Different SEAs may include different student groups under this label (e.g., only native English speakers, former ELs and never-ELs, etc.).

[10] Meeting a state-set ELP assessment threshold was the option that was available for all SEAs requiring this criterion.

Detailed View of Some State Educational Agencies

The following four states were selected to provide a snapshot of the potential differences in SSB criteria.[11] While these states have locally determined criteria, specific criteria differ between states.

- California and North Carolina accept English language arts GPA as evidence of proficiency in English for non-ELs.
- Arizona requires both a minimum English language arts GPA and meeting proficiency requirements on an English language assessment for all students.
- Virginia requires students to earn an approved diploma in addition to meeting set English and second language criteria.
- Arizona, California, and North Carolina provide differentiated pathways for ELs and non-ELs, while Virginia does not.

		Arizona	California	North Carolina	Virginia
Differentiated pathways for ELs and non-ELs		✓	✓	✓	✗
Multiple English proficiency criteria		✓	✓	✗	✗
Locally determined criteria for non-ELs and standardized criteria for ELs		✗	✗	✓ (for English Proficiency requirement)	✗
Requirements to demonstrate English proficiency	English language arts GPA of 2.0 or higher	✓	✓	✓	✗
	Passing score on English language arts assessment	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Passing score on state content assessment	✗	✓	✗	✗
Requirements to demonstrate proficiency in a LOTE	Passing score on LOTE assessment	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Minimum GPA requirement	✗	✓	✓	✗
	Credit by demonstrated mastery	✗	✗	✓	✗

[11] States were selected to represent different regions of the country and highlight some similarities and differences in their requirements for earning their respective seals of biliteracy.

Ways That School Districts Can Increase the Number of Students Who Earn State Seals of Biliteracy[12]

In a 2022 REL Southwest report,[13] the following recommendations were made regarding expanding accessibility and support for students' pursuit of the SSB:

1) Focus on the expansion of access to SSB for EL students and economically disadvantaged students.
2) Widely publish the benefits of earning the seal.
3) Expand the number of options and pathways for students to demonstrate proficiency for the seal (e.g., via assessments or portfolios).
4) Develop an automated process for identifying potentially eligible students and notifying them of their progress in requirements.

Connections Between Dual Language Programs and the State Seal of Biliteracy

Because they promote bilingualism and biliteracy, dual language (DL) programs play an important role in helping students attain the SSB. One way to expand access and attainment of the SSB is to also expand access to DL programs for all students within a state. A 2020 Research to Practice guide from the California Department of Education discusses the advantages of biliteracy for both ELs and non-ELs and highlights the role that DL classrooms play in promoting multilingualism and potentially the attainment of the SSB.[14] Suggestions for implementing such programs include the following:

- Implement DL strand programs (i.e., a DL program that is only a strand within the school), adjusting the number of designated classrooms to meet demand.
- Promote whole-school commitment to language diversity.
- Celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity through schoolwide events in which all classes participate.
- Expand enrichment offerings that expose students to languages other than English.
- Ensure collaborative planning across the school, weaving language acquisition program strands together in a shared vision about pedagogy and language goals.[15]

Resources to Learn More About the State Seal of Biliteracy

Some resources that might be helpful are:

- The Seal of Biliteracy website.
- Californians Together Presents: The Seal of Biliteracy – Celebrating Students of the 21st Century – A video that presents the perspectives of students, parents, and school administration staff regarding the SSB.
- Implementing a SEAL of Biliteracy webinar – A webinar that provides direction about how to implement the SSB in a local context.
- Biliteracy Seals in a Large Urban District in New Mexico: Who Earns Them and How Do They Impact College Outcomes? – A REL Southwest report providing information about the impact of receiving different types of biliteracy seals on college outcomes for three cohorts in an urban district located in New Mexico.

Supporting Language Diversity

[12] Mihaly, K., Arellano, B., & Prier, S. (2022). *Biliteracy seals in a large urban district in New Mexico: Who earns them and how do they impact college outcomes?* (REL 2023–140). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Publication/100913

[13] Mihaly, K., Arellano, B., & Prier, S. (2022). *Biliteracy seals in a large urban district in New Mexico: Who earns them and how do they impact college outcomes?* (REL 2023–140). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Publication/100913

[14] Olsen, L., Martinez, M., Herrera, C., & Skibbins, H. (2020). Multilingual programs and pedagogy: *What teachers and administrators need to know and do.* California Department of Education. https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/mleleducationch3.pdf

[15] Olsen, L., Martinez, M., Herrera, C., & Skibbins, H. (2020). Multilingual programs and pedagogy: *What teachers and administrators need to know and do.* California Department of Education. https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/mleleducationch3.pdf