



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: World Languages and the Washington State Seal of Biliteracy

2020

Authorizing Legislation: [Senate Bill 6168](#) (2020),
Supplemental Operating Budget

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington's K–12 students bring with them a rich heritage of many cultures and languages. Recognizing the importance of multilingual communication skills and valuing the cultural backgrounds of our state's students, the Legislature created the Washington State Seal of Biliteracy in 2014. The Seal of Biliteracy (the Seal) is an award earned by graduating seniors who meet certain proficiency standards in both English and a second language.

The intent of the Seal was to increase the number of students who are proficient in at least two languages. In 2019–20, 3,403 high school seniors earned the Seal.

In addition to the Seal of Biliteracy, students may also earn competency-based credits in high school if they speak, read, write, and listen in a language other than English. World languages competency-based credits are awarded when students meet the level of proficiency established by their district's world languages competency-based credit policy. In 2019–20, 5,269 students earned world languages competency-based high school credits.

BACKGROUND

The 2014 Legislature established the Washington State Seal of Biliteracy (the Seal) to recognize public high school graduates who attain a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English ([RCW 28A.300.575](#)). The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) adopted rules to implement the Seal and provides ongoing technical assistance to support districts to help students attain the Seal. See Washington Administrative Code (WAC) [392-415-070](#) (mandatory high school transcript contents) and WAC [392-410-350](#) (Seal of Biliteracy).

The Seal recognizes the significance of second language proficiency while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of cultivating and maintaining strong proficiency in English language arts. To earn the Seal, students must demonstrate high levels of proficiency in both English and at least one additional language. Multilingual/English learners may earn credit for proficiency in their native language while demonstrating the required English proficiency by high school graduation.

[House Bill 1599](#) (2019) created new graduation pathways and ways for students to demonstrate English proficiency. OSPI will review WAC [392-410-350](#) to expand the English proficiency strategies to align with the new law.

Competency-based credits can be earned by students in high school who speak, read, write, and listen in a language other than English ([RCW 28A.230.090](#)). Students may receive up to four competency credits on their high school transcript based upon their level of proficiency established by their district's world languages competency-based credit policy. The Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) model policy for world languages recommends proficiency levels based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language's (ACTFL's) proficiency guidelines.

The Legislature requires OSPI to provide a summary report by December 1 of each year on the:

- 1) Annual number of graduating high school seniors within the district earning the Washington State Seal of Biliteracy provided in RCW 28A.300.575, and
- 2) Number of high school students earning competency-based high school credits for world languages by demonstrating proficiency in a language other than English.

UPDATE STATUS

Seal of Biliteracy

In 2019–20, 3,403 graduating seniors earned the Washington State Seal of Biliteracy. These figures include the number of students enrolled or previously enrolled in the Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program and the languages spoken by those students. In the 2019–20 school year, 88 school districts reported awarding the Seal and 76 languages were tested. The top five languages tested were Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, French, and Vietnamese. An estimated 475 Seals were earned by multilingual/English learners in 2019–20.

Table 1: Trends of Top Five Languages Tested

Language	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Spanish	1102	1008	1672	2281	1946
Chinese-Mandarin	150	80	29	56	206
Russian	209	68	133	159	197
French	212	193	132	144	189
Vietnamese	91	73	109	105	97
Total	1764	1422	2075	2745	2635

Source: Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS).

Some large districts did not report data about the Seal in CEDARS. Consequently, the reasons for decreases in students who are migrant and bilingual earning the Seal in 2019–20 are confounded by missing data. OSPI staff will contact districts to determine whether technical assistance is needed to help districts report the data.

Appendix A includes the full list of districts who reported data for 2019–20. Appendix B includes a full list of languages reported being tested in the 2019–20 school year.

Competency-based Credits in Languages Other than English

In 2019–20, 5,269 students earned competency-based world language credits. Not all students who earned competency-based world language credits also earned the Seal.

A student might earn a competency-based world language credit or two, but not demonstrate the proficiency in the language needed to earn the Seal. Or they might not demonstrate proficiency in English. While most students awarded the Seal probably also earned at least one competency-based world languages credit, not all students who

earned competency-based world languages credits were awarded the Seal.

Students have earned competency credits in Spanish, Russian, German, Vietnamese, Tagalog, American Indian Languages, French, Japanese, and Ukrainian.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The gradual increase in the number of students earning the Seal of Biliteracy demonstrates its growing recognition as an award of value for Washington state graduates. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will continue to collaborate with Avant Assessment, ALTA testing agency, and the Washington Association for Language Teaching (WAFLT) to offer custom testing to meet the increasing demands related to languages less-commonly-taught and assessed.

OSPI will also develop and revise the Seal and competency testing/credit websites to keep districts apprised of updates, professional development opportunities, and guidelines for success in pursuing the Seal of Biliteracy. Finally, OSPI will provide technical guidance to school districts, families, community members, and organizations in response to the increasing interest in the Seal.

OSPI is committed to working on making the award more accessible to multilingual/English learners who enter Washington's public school system with strengths in languages other than English. Similarly, there is a need to better recognize heritage-speakers such as Native American students. To date, no student has been awarded the Seal for proficiency in a tribal or Native language. OSPI's World Languages program and the Office of Native Education (ONE) are working with the tribes to clarify pathways for languages with oral traditions and ways to center Native American language proficiency for earning the Seal within tribal sovereignty. Finally, while students have earned the Seal for proficiency in American Sign Language, room for improvement exists.

In [House Bill 1599](#) (2019), the Legislature created new graduation pathways and ways for students to demonstrate English proficiency. OSPI will review WAC [392-410-350](#) to expand the English proficiency strategies to align with the new graduation pathways and methods for demonstrating English proficiency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and organizations are to be commended for their efforts in helping grow the Washington State Seal of Biliteracy and competency-based world language credits, including but not limited to:

- Washington Association for Language Teaching (WAFLT)
- American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)
- National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NCSSFL)

REFERENCES

Comprehensive Education Data and Research System. (2020). *Seal of Biliteracy Earned including Migrant and Bilingual* (vers. 2019–2020) [Data set]. CEDARS.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Districts Reporting on the Seal of Biliteracy, 2019–20 School Year

Aberdeen School District
Arlington School District
Auburn School District
Bainbridge Island School District
Battle Ground School District
Bellevue School District
Bellingham School District
Bethel School District
Bremerton School District
Bridgeport School District
Burlington-Edison School District
Camas School District
Cheney School District
East Valley School District (Spokane)
Edmonds School District
Ellensburg School District
Everett School District
Evergreen School District (Clark)
Federal Way School District
Ferndale School District
Franklin Pierce School District
Grandview School District
Highline School District
Issaquah School District
Kelso School District
Kent School District
Lake Chelan School District
Lake Washington School District
Longview School District
Lynden School District
Manson School District
Marysville School District
Mercer Island School District
Meridian School District
Mossyrock School District
Mount Vernon School District
Mukilteo School District
Nine Mile Falls School District
Nooksack Valley School District
North Kitsap School District
North Thurston Public Schools
Northshore School District
Oak Harbor School District
Ocean Beach School District
Ocosta School District
Olympia School District
Orcas Island School District
Othello School District
Peninsula School District
Port Angeles School District
Prescott School District
Prosser School District
Pullman School District
Puyallup School District
Renton School District
Ridgefield School District
Riverview School District
Rochester School District
Sedro-Woolley School District
Shelton School District
Shoreline School District
Snoqualmie Valley School District
South Kitsap School District
South Whidbey School District
Spokane School District
Stanwood-Camano School District
Sumner School District
Tacoma School District
Tonasket School District
Toppenish School District
Touchet School District
Tukwila School District
Tumwater School District
Vancouver School District
Vashon Island School District
Wahkiakum School District

Wahluke School District
Walla Walla Public Schools
Warden School District
Washougal School District
Wenatchee School District
West Valley School District (Yakima)
White River School District

White Salmon Valley School District
Winlock School District
Yakima School District
Yelm School District
Zillah School District

Appendix B: Languages Tested, 2019–20 School Year

Language Tested	Student Count	Language Tested	Student Count	Language Tested	Student Count
Spanish	1946	Nepali	8	Unknown	1
Chinese-Mandarin	206	Thai	8	Tongan	1
Russian	197	American Sign Language	8	Serbian	1
French	189	Hungarian	7	Slovak	1
Vietnamese	97	Javanese	6	Norwegian	1
Korean	90	Burmese	5	Lao	1
Japanese	68	Indonesian	5	Lithuanian	1
Chinese-Unspecified	64	Finnish	5	Malay	1
Tagalog	60	Telugu	5	Malayalam	1
Ukrainian	49	Chuuk	4	Mandinka	1
German	35	Bulgarian	4	Marathi	1
Somali	33	Tigrinya	4	Pashto	1
Punjabi	29	Swedish	3	Pilipino/Filipino	1
Hindi	27	Persian	3	Afrikaans	1
Arabic	24	Cambodian	3	Bengali	1
Romanian	22	Chin	3	Cebuano	1
Amharic	20	Italian	3	Croatian	1
Portuguese	19	Danish	2	Greek, Modern	1
Turkish	17	Gujarati	2	Dutch	1
Samoan	15	Albanian	2	Fanti	1
Swahili	13	Oromo	2	Jamaican	1
Farsi	13	Polish	2	Kirgiz	1
Dari	12	Marshallese	2	Hmong	1
Urdu	11	Mongolian	2	Afrikaans	1
Chinese-Cantonese	10	Tamil	2	Bengali	1
Hebrew, Modern	9	Twi	2		
				Total	772

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