



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: World Languages and the Washington State Seal of Biliteracy

2021

Authorizing Legislation: [Senate Bill 5092](#) (2021) Sec.
501(1)(a)(v) [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 2020–21, the Seal was earned by 3,574 high school seniors.

In addition to the Seal of Biliteracy, students may also earn competency-based credits in high school if they complete all proficiency components of an assessment 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 2020–21, 9,378 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 (Revised Code of Washington [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 school districts to help students attain the Seal. For additional information, 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 of Biliteracy, students must present proficiency in English and one or more other languages. English proficiency is documented when a graduating student completes all English language arts requirements in accordance with Chapter 252, Laws of 2019 (High School Graduation Requirements). To earn the Seal of Biliteracy by graduation, students must earn four World Language competency-based credits, the equivalent of four years of high school World Language courses. OSPI revised WAC 392-410-350 to expand the English proficiency strategies to align with the new law.

Honoring tribal sovereignty, tribal consultation, and government-to-government relationships between tribes and districts, each tribe determines the level of proficiency students need to be considered biliterate in a tribal language. Tribes develop the methods and processes for determining proficiency in their respective languages. Teachers who instruct tribal languages must be certified through the First Peoples' Language, Culture, and Oral Traditions Certification Program (WAC 181-78A-700). Affirmation that students have successfully earned the Seal of Biliteracy for tribal languages follows the agreed processes determined through consultation with each tribe.

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 on 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 2020–21, 3,574 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 2020–21 school year, 99 school districts reported awarding the Seal and 82 languages were tested. The top five languages tested were Spanish, Russian, Chinese-Mandarin, Vietnamese, and French.

Table 1: Trends of Top Five Languages Tested

Language	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Spanish	1102	1008	1672	2281	1946	2190
Chinese-Mandarin	150	80	29	56	206	167
Russian	209	68	133	159	197	183
French	212	193	132	144	189	114
Vietnamese	91	73	109	105	97	132
Total	1764	1422	2075	2745	2635	2786

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

[Appendix A](#) includes the full list of districts who reported data for 2020–21. [Appendix B](#) includes a full list of languages reported being tested in the 2020–21 school year.

Competency-based Credits in Languages Other than English

In 2020–21, 9,378 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 collaborate with Avant Assessment, ALTA testing agency, and Extempore to offer custom testing to meet the increasing demands related to languages less-commonly-taught and assessed.

OSPI will continue to develop and revise the Seal and competency testing/credit websites to keep school districts apprised of news, professional development opportunities, and guidelines for success in pursuing the Seal of Biliteracy. OSPI's World Languages program sends out a monthly newsletter to keep the greater Washington World Languages educator community informed of all updates. Finally, OSPI will continue to 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. This year, four Wapato High School seniors earned the Seal for the first time in a Native, tribal, or Indigenous language (Ichishkiin). OSPI's World Languages program and the Office of Native Education (ONE) worked 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 (ASL), room for improvement still exists. ASL representatives have been included on the World Language Advisory Committee, including both deaf and hearing ASL educators.

In Chapter 252, Laws of 2019 (High School Graduation Requirements), the Legislature created new graduation pathways and ways for students to demonstrate English ability. OSPI reviewed WAC 392-410-350 and expanded the English proficiency strategies to align with the new graduation pathways and methods for demonstrating English proficiency. Students must now meet the English language arts requirement for their specific pathway in order to prove 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)

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Districts Reporting on the Seal of Biliteracy, 2020–21 School Year

- Aberdeen School District
- Arlington School District
- Auburn School District
- Bainbridge Island School District
- Bellevue School District
- Bellingham School District
- Blaine School District
- Bremerton School District
- Burlington-Edison School District
- Central Kitsap School District
- Cheney School District
- East Valley School District (Spokane)
- Eastmont School District
- Edmonds School District
- Ellensburg School District
- Everett School District
- Evergreen School District (Clark)
- Federal Way Public Schools
- Ferndale School District
- Fife School District
- Finley School District
- Franklin Pierce School District
- Grandview School District
- Highline Public Schools
- Issaquah School District
- Kelso School District
- Kent School District
- Lake Chelan School District
- Lake Washington School District
- Longview School District
- Lynden School District
- Mabton School District
- Manson School District
- Marysville School District
- Mercer Island School District
- Meridian School District
- Monroe School District
- Moses Lake 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 Mason School District
- North Thurston Public Schools
- Northshore School District
- Oak Harbor School District
- Ocosta School District
- Okanogan School District
- Olympia School District
- Orcas Island School District
- Oroville School District
- Orting School District
- Othello School District
- Port Angeles School District
- Port Townsend School District
- Prosser School District
- Pullman School District
- Puyallup School District
- Quillayute Valley School District
- Renton School District
- Richland School District
- Ridgefield School District
- Rochester School District
- Seattle Public Schools
- Sedro-Woolley School District
- Shelton School District
- Shoreline School District
- Snohomish School District
- Snoqualmie Valley School District
- South Kitsap School District
- Spokane Public Schools
- Stanwood-Camano School District
- Steilacoom Hist. School District
- Sultan School District
- Sumner School District
- Tacoma School District
- Tahoma School District
- Toppenish School District

- Touchet School District
- Tukwila School District
- Tumwater School District
- Vancouver School District
- Vashon Island School District
- Wahluke School District
- Walla Walla Public Schools
- Wapato School District
- Warden School District
- Washougal School District
- Wenatchee School District
- West Valley School District (Yakima)
- White River School District
- White Salmon Valley School District
- Willapa Valley School District
- Winlock School District
- Yakima School District
- Yelm School District
- Zillah School District

Appendix B: Languages Tested, 2020–21 School Year

Language Tested	Student Count	Language Tested	Student Count	Language Tested	Student Count
Spanish	2190	Chuuk	7	Kirundi	2
Russian	183	Dutch	7	Palau	2
Chinese-Mandarin	167	Swedish	7	Romansch	2
Vietnamese	132	Polish	6	Serbo-Croatian	2
French	114	Tamil	6	Tongan	2
Japanese	90	American Sign Language	5	Uzbek	2
Tagalog	72	Farsi	5	Afrikaans	1
Korean	67	Oromo	5	Albanian	1
Chinese-Unspecified	64	Thai	5	Azerbaijani	1
Ukrainian	57	Chinese-Cantonese	4	Burmese	1
German	43	Finnish	4	Croatian	1
Somali	38	Indonesian	4	Ethiopic	1
Punjabi	35	Pilipino/Filipino	4	Hmong	1
Amharic	32	Telugu	4	Javanese	1
Arabic	25	Urdu	4	Kurdish	1
Swahili	24	Cambodian	3	Lingala	1
Hindi	20	Czech	3	Marathi	1
Portuguese	20	Danish	3	Moldavian	1
Turkish	17	Ilokano	3	Mongolian	1
Samoan	16	Khmer	3	Pashto	1
Hebrew, Modern	13	Krio	3	Slovak	1
Marshallese	13	Nepali	3	Slovenian	1
Dari	11	Bengali	2	Tibetan	1
Italian	11	Bulgarian	2	Unknown	1
Romanian	11	Chin	2	Wolof	1
Rumanian	10	Chinese-Taiwanese	2	Yakima	1
Tigrinya	9	Hungarian	2		
Bosnian	8	Kinyarwanda	2		

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