



Recognizing bilingual knowledge through biliteracy seals



Learning more than one language may sound difficult, but enrolling your child in bilingual education has many potential benefits. Bilingual education can help your child succeed in several ways while maintaining your child's primary language.¹ Students who participate in bilingual education programs perform just as well, or sometimes even better, on reading, writing, and math tests than students in English-only programs.^{2,3,4} Two studies show that bilingual education also can help students become more fluent in their home languages.^{4,5} Studies show that bilingual programs that include students' native languages and cultures are associated with stronger self-esteem, motivation, social skills, and cultural pride.^{2,4,6}



Biliteracy seal: A strategy for recognizing fluency in multiple languages



▶ A biliteracy seal is an award in recognition of students who have studied and demonstrated fluency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing another language in addition to English.⁷ Forty-three states and the District of Columbia currently award biliteracy seals, and all of the remaining states plan to award seals in the future.⁸



▶ High school students can earn a biliteracy seal on their diploma when they graduate, and some districts also offer seals in elementary and middle school. Receiving a formal seal can motivate students to develop fluency in another language.⁸



▶ Biliteracy seals can reinforce the value of a student's first language and culture and recognize your child's fluency in their native language if you primarily speak a language other than English at home.⁹



▶ Biliteracy seals may help employers and colleges and universities identify bilingual students and recognize their language skills.¹⁰



▶ One preliminary study finds that English learners in schools with biliteracy seal programs are more likely to become proficient in English, especially among Spanish and Mandarin speakers, than English learners in schools without biliteracy programs.¹¹

Demonstrating biliteracy can help students find jobs after graduation, particularly as the demand for bilingual employees rapidly increases. One report found that the number of job postings nationwide intended for bilingual applicants rose from 240,000 in 2010 to 630,000 in 2015.¹⁰ A survey in California found that some employers are more likely to hire bilingual applicants over similarly qualified applicants who are not bilingual.¹²



New Mexico State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy

- ▶ The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) adopted the State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy (SSBB) in 2015 to recognize and support students' linguistic and cultural diversity. The SSBB is placed on your student's diploma and also noted on their academic transcript.

To better understand the needs of educators, students, and community members, REL Southwest supported the department's focus group study to learn more about how the SSBB is implemented across the state. The focus groups included students, teachers, district leaders, and tribal education leaders. [Read our blog post](#) to learn more about these focus groups.

- ▶ Although offerings vary by district or charter school, NMPED recognizes the following pathways for earning the SSBB:¹³



For Native American students, **having your tribe certify that your child is proficient** in the tribe's native language.

Tribes develop methods and processes appropriate for determining proficiency in their respective languages.

Receiving academic credits for courses in a language other than English and **passing a language fluency test approved by NMPED.**



Receiving academic credits for courses in a language other than English and creating an alternative process portfolio to demonstrate language skills.



Passing a language fluency test approved by NMPED and **creating an alternative process portfolio to demonstrate language skills.**



Visit the [New Mexico Public Education Department website](#) to learn more about the state's biliteracy seal.



REL Southwest Resources



- ▶ REL Southwest is [studying](#) the characteristics and outcomes for students who receive biliteracy seals in one district, along with the characteristics of the schools that grant biliteracy seals.



- ▶ REL Southwest hosted a [webinar](#) on implementing biliteracy seals.



- ▶ Read this [blog post](#) about the New Mexico Public Education Department's focus group study about the state's biliteracy seal.



- ▶ The [video](#) "Walking in Both Worlds" describes how schools can support Native American students in learning both English and their tribal language.

References and Notes

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