

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

English Learners

May 2019

Question:

What does the research say about successful implementation of a high school diploma Bilingual Seal program at the state or district level, and what are the outcomes for students who earn a Bilingual Seal?

Response:

Thank you for the question you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your question. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on district or state implementation of the Seal of Bilingual and the student outcomes it produces.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Davin, K. J., & Heineke, A. J. (2017). The Seal of Bilingual: Variations in policy and outcomes. *Foreign Language Annals*, 50(3), 486–499. Retrieved from https://www.globalsealofbilingual.net/s/Davin_et_al-2017-Foreign_Language_Annals.pdf

From the abstract: “The Seal of Bilingual is an award that recognizes students who have demonstrated proficiency in English and one or more other world languages. In participating school districts in states that have adopted the Seal of Bilingual, students who demonstrate proficiency in both English and a world language are eligible to earn a seal that is affixed to their high school diploma or transcript. With scant research conducted to date on the Seal of Bilingual, this study aimed to understand the variation in policies across participating states. Documentation and interview data were collected

and analyzed from each state offering the Seal of Biliteracy. Findings revealed that substantial variation existed across states regarding minimum required levels of proficiency, world language proficiency requirements, and English language proficiency requirements. These variations in policy influenced the types of schools offering the award and the percentage of students earning it. This article offers implications for those in the process of policy adoption or revision and for those who are interested in researching efforts to increase equity and access to the Seal of Biliteracy.”

Heineke, A. J., Davin, K. J., & Bedford, A. (2018). The Seal of Biliteracy: Considering equity and access for English learners. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 26(99), 1–12. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1187941>

From the ERIC abstract: “The Seal of Biliteracy is a grass-roots language policy initiative that is sweeping across the United States. An award affixed to high school graduates' transcripts and diplomas, the overarching purpose of the policy is to promote and foster students' bilingualism and biliteracy in K-12 schools. Initiated in California in 2011, the policy has been modified significantly as stakeholders in 32 different states have drafted, passed, and enacted similar legislation in recent years. On its surface, the policy appears to hold promise in disrupting the monolingual norm prevalent in U.S. schools; however, with many states focusing efforts on world language education for English-dominant students, a critical analysis of the policy from the lens of the large and growing population of English learners is warranted. This paper considers the 32 state policies from this lens, first exploring the policy purpose and logistics and then making policy recommendations to enhance equity and access for English learners. The recommendations target stakeholders across the United States who seek to either initiate or revise Seal of Biliteracy policies within their unique state contexts.”

Jansa, T., & Brezicha, K. (2017). The Georgia Seal of Biliteracy: Exploring the nexus of politics and language education. *Dimension*, 45(1), 122–138. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1207911>

From the ERIC abstract: “On May 3, 2016, House Bill (HB) 879—the Georgia Seal of Biliteracy—was signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal and went into effect on July 1, 2016. Outside of the language education sphere, many educators and policymakers may not fully understand the benefits of studying other languages. Yet, this policy hinges on the utility of simultaneously demonstrating proficiency in a foreign language and an advanced command of English, thus forming the foundation of biliteracy. This article provides an overview of the political landscape in Georgia as it pertains to language education and analyzes how lawmakers translated the issues at hand into specific goals for the Seal of Biliteracy. The paper concludes with four policy proposals to improve the implementation of the legislation and provide suggestions for enhancing pending legislation elsewhere.”

Organizations to Consult

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) – <https://www.actfl.org/>

From the website: “The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is dedicated to the improvement and expansion of the teaching and learning of all languages at all levels of instruction. ACTFL is an individual membership organization of more than 12,500 language educators and administrators from elementary through graduate education, as well as government and industry.

Since its founding (in 1967), ACTFL has become synonymous with innovation, quality, and reliability in meeting the changing needs of language educators and their students. From the development of *Proficiency Guidelines*, to its leadership role in the creation of national standards, ACTFL focuses on issues that are critical to the growth of both the profession and the individual teacher.”

REL Southwest note: ACTFL—in partnership with the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL), and TESOL International Association—drafted recommendations for the implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy available on the ACTFL website:

Seal of Biliteracy Guidelines: <https://www.actfl.org/news/press-releases/seal-biliteracy-guidelines-released>

Global Seal of Biliteracy – <https://www.globalsealofbiliteracy.net/>

From the website: “While locally-driven State Seal of Biliteracy initiatives have been adopted in 36 states and the District of Columbia to date, that Seal is generally available only to public school students in participating districts, and the standards for receiving it vary by state. The Global Seal of Biliteracy closes that gap with a consistent, inclusive and accessible solution.”

“We want to provide an opportunity for ALL language users and students to earn recognition for their language proficiency skills. The Global Seal of Biliteracy by design is inclusive, embracing all languages and learners, with the intent to provide equal access and expanded opportunity.”

“What is the Global Seal of Biliteracy?”

- Meets or exceeds the requirements of all existing state Seal programs
- Allows recipients to showcase their language skills to any school or employer across state lines and national borders
- Certifies language proficiency in two languages or more at the Intermediate Mid and Advanced Low levels on the ACTFL Proficiency Scale”

Seal of Biliteracy – <https://sealofbiliteracy.org/index.php>

From the website: “The Seal of Biliteracy is an award given by a school, school district, or state in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. Our vision is to help students recognize the value of their academic success and see the tangible benefits of being bilingual.”

REL Southwest note: The website allows visitors to access individual states that award the Seal of Biliteracy. It also has a social stream (that is, live tweets) and related blogs that can be accessed by the user. Seal of Biliteracy offers the following on its website:

- Five groupings of relevant resources at <https://sealofbiliteracy.org/resources/>.
- A presentation of the benefits and challenges of having the Seal of Biliteracy at <https://sealofbiliteracy.org/doc/seal-biliteracy-implementation-benefits-challenges.pdf>.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- Seal of Biliteracy outcomes
- “Seal of Biliteracy” AND “state implementation”
- “Seal of Biliteracy” AND “district implementation”
- [(“Seal of Biliteracy”) AND (“state implementation”)]
- [(“Seal of Biliteracy”) AND (“district implementation”)]
- Seal of Biliteracy

Databases and Resources

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.7 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2004 to present, were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.

- *Methodology*: The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.