

## RESEARCH STUDY

# Biliteracy Seals in a Large Urban District in New Mexico | Who Earns Them and How Do They Impact College Outcomes?

### PRIOR RESEARCH ON BILITERACY SEALS

Research to date on biliteracy seals has focused on variation in policies and requirements across states, including the number of seals granted by states.<sup>1</sup> Qualitative studies have examined student and administrator perceptions about the benefits of biliteracy seals and barriers to obtaining them.<sup>2</sup> Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest conducted a study that offers a quantitative examination of biliteracy seals and the benefits of seals linked to student outcomes. Read about the REL Southwest study *Biliteracy Seals in a Large Urban District in New Mexico: Who Earns Them and How Do They Impact College Outcomes?* [here](#).

### Study goals

- **To examine** characteristics and college readiness of students who earn different types of biliteracy seals and whether earning a seal improves college outcomes.
- **To understand** whether students have equitable access to high schools that offer specific types of seals and barriers to earning a seal.

### Study sample



**Three cohorts of students** in grade 12 in 2017/18-2019/20 in a large urban district in New Mexico



Students attended 1 of **13 high schools** in the district, **5** of which were **dual language high schools**

### Data sources



- **Student-level records** | enrollment, attended a dual language high school, whether a student earned each type of biliteracy seal, academic characteristics
- **School characteristics** | grade band, enrollment size, dual language status, charter school status, type of biliteracy seal offered
- **Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System** | 2-year or 4-year status, public or private status, average SAT or ACT scores, and location

**Four seal options in the district** | State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy, Spanish Bilingual Seal, Spanish Seal of Distinction, and Global Seal of Biliteracy



<sup>1</sup> Chou, A. (2019). *2019 National Seal of Biliteracy report for 2017-2018 academic year*. <https://sealofbiliteracy.org/doc/2019-National-Seal-of-Biliteracy-Report-Final.pdf>.  
 Davin, K. J., & Heineke, A. J. (2017). The Seal of Biliteracy: Variations in policy and outcomes. *Foreign Language Annals*, 50(3), 486-499  
 Heineke, A. J., & Davin, K. J. (Eds.). (2020). *The Seal of Biliteracy: Case studies and considerations for policy implementation*. Information Age Publishing.  
<sup>2</sup> 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). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.26.3825>  
 Hancock, C. R., & Davin, K. J. (2020). A comparative case study: Administrators' and students' perceptions of the Seal of Biliteracy. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(3), 458-477. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12479>

# Methods

This study used descriptive statistics to examine (a) average background composition of schools that offer students access to the district seal and district seal of distinction compared to schools that do not offer these seals, (b) number of biliteracy seals awarded by seal type and school year, (c) background characteristics and achievement of students who earned any seal compared to students who did not earn a seal, and (d) background characteristics and achievement of students who earned a state seal compared to students who earned a district seal or district seal of distinction. The authors also used descriptive statistics to summarize the extent to which students who did not earn a seal made progress toward seal requirements, such as credits completed, and grades obtained in non-English language classes as well as achievement scores on language assessments. Finally, the authors examined the effects of earning a biliteracy seal on college outcomes by matching students who earned any biliteracy seal to students with similar backgrounds who attended the same high school but did not earn a seal.

## Key Findings



**7% of graduates** from 2017/18 to 2019/20 earned a biliteracy seal.

Graduates who earned any type of biliteracy seal were more likely to be Hispanic (92 versus 63 percent), to be eligible for the National School Lunch Program (83 versus 49 percent), to have ever been an English learner student (76 versus 24 percent), and to speak Spanish at home (80 versus 17 percent) than those who did not earn a seal.



**Earning a biliteracy seal appears to benefit graduates with respect to college enrollment, but there is no additional**

**benefit of earning a district seal compared to a state seal.** After adjusting for demographic characteristics, high school attended, and college readiness, 85 percent of graduates who earned a biliteracy seal enrolled in college within one year of high school graduation, compared with 72 percent of graduates who did not earn a seal. The difference in college enrollment between graduates who earned a district seal and similar graduates who earned a state seal was not statistically significant.



**Among graduates who enrolled in college, graduates who earned any type of biliteracy seal were more likely than similar graduates who did not earn a seal to enroll in a 4-year college and to enroll full time.**

61 percent of graduates who earned a biliteracy seal and enrolled in college within one year of high school graduation enrolled in a 4-year college, compared with 54 percent of graduates who did not earn a state seal. In addition, 84 percent of graduates who earned a biliteracy seal and enrolled in college within one year of graduation enrolled full time, compared with 68 percent of those who did not earn a seal, after adjusting for prior differences.



**There are opportunities for the district to improve how students are awarded seals, since some graduates met or were close to meeting the requirements but did not earn the state seal.** A total of 1,697 graduates who took at least two credits in a non-English language but did not

earn a state seal took fewer than four credits in a non-English language; 151 graduates completed four credits in a non-English language but did not earn the grade needed in each credit; 558 graduates completed four credits in a non-English language, earned at least a C in each credit, but assessment scores were unavailable; and 189 students completed the four credits in a non-English language, earned at least a C in each credit, and met the threshold for the non-English language assessment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Nearly all these 189 students attended schools that selected the portfolio pathway for earning a state seal, meaning that assessment scores did not count toward this requirement.