



Minnesota Bilingual and World Language Proficiency Certificate Report

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Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) ensures educational equity for multilingual learners through supporting school districts and charter schools to develop, implement and evaluate research-based language instruction education programs so that multilingual learners, including students with English learner status, attain academic language proficiency and achieve state academic content standards. This report contains information regarding the implementation of the Minnesota Bilingual Seals since it was legislated in 2014. The legislation specifically refers to [Minnesota Statutes, 2021 section 120B.022, subdivisions 1a and 1b](#). It also includes findings, current challenges and opportunities that inform the work of promoting Bilingual Seals program. This report is updated annually to include the data for each of the academic year after 2017–18 school year (SY). We thank you for your continued efforts to collaborate with others to implement Bilingual Seals program for all language learners in equitable ways. MDE is committed to making its electronic and information technologies accessible to individuals with disabilities by meeting or exceeding the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. 794d), as amended in 1998. Please contact mde.wordlang@state.mn.us if you need any accommodations to read and access this document.

History and Context of the Minnesota Bilingual Seals Program

Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act

Minnesota schools serve linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Minnesota students and families represent more than 300 languages spoken in our community contributing to the state’s vibrant economy, cultures, and living hood. Among the 300 languages spoken, several prominent languages are identified as the home languages of English learners. According to the most recent English Learner Education in Minnesota Report 2020–21, 145,816 students (including voluntary pre-kindergarten) reported to have a home language other than English for the 2019–20 (SY). Among the 145, 816 students, Spanish (40,728, 53%) is by far the most common home language other than English spoken statewide. Following Spanish, Somali is the second most common home language other than English (24,694, 32%). The third most common home language other than English is Hmong (20,089, 26%). The fourth and fifth languages are Karen (4,100) and Vietnamese (3,714).

In addition to these five prominent languages spoken by the multilingual learners, Minnesota K-12 schools offer various programs in more than a dozen languages such as American Sign Language, Arabic, Chinese, Dakota, French, German, Hebrew, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Ojibwe, Russian, Somali, and Spanish. Many community-based organizations operate schools in the languages of their community on weekends, such as Bulgarian, Czech, Japanese, and Tamil.

The Minnesota Bilingual Seals program was enacted as a part of legislation called the Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act. It was legislated in 2014 with a provision that emphasized multilingualism as an asset. Through this legislation, the voluntary Minnesota Bilingual Seals program was established to recognize the language skills of many of the multilingual high school students in languages other than English. Moreover, a promising aspect of this program was that Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

(Minnesota State) were required to devise a system to award college credit according to the proficiency levels demonstrated.

This legislation provides a tremendous opportunity for multilingual families and students to be recognized for their varied linguistic skills that enrich our society. This is also an opportunity for school districts and Minnesota's higher institutions to demonstrate their commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion by elevating the status non-English languages and making them visible in their communities. Minnesota Bilingual Seals program is a tool to be utilized to reverse the deficit narratives of the multilingual learners to a positive, asset-based narrative that affirms the value of diverse linguistic skills and linguistic and cultural identities of our multilingual learners.

World Language Proficiency Certificate

Before the LEAPS Act (2014), the Minnesota legislature enacted World Language Proficiency Certificate and World Language Proficiency Certificate Higher Achievement awards in 2009 ([Minnesota Statutes 2021, Section 120B.022, subdivision 1a](#)). The awards were given to students at any grade level for language proficiency demonstrated in the four modalities of listening, reading, speaking, and writing in languages other than English. These two awards were not tied to college credit and participation by the schools and districts was very limited in scope. According to the [report compiled by the MnSCU and MDE in 2015](#), the data from the 2013–14 year, 679 students were awarded the world language proficiency certificates of which 495 students were in grades 4 and 5 in three Chinese immersion programs. The remaining, 184 students were high school students from two high schools in one district representing French and Spanish. Those involved with the review of the implementation status of world language proficiency certificates expressed a hope that the award of college credit for the certificates and seals would raise awareness among educators and families and encourage greater participation.

With the enactment of the LEAPS Act, the recognition program for language proficiency in languages other than English was revised to include two levels of seal awards with rigorous criteria and college credit. This revision made these awards a more valuable recognition tool for language learners and multilingual learners for proficiency in a language other than in English. Table 1 illustrates the changes to the world language proficiency certificate program in 2015.

The original legislation that was enacted in 2014 used the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale. The FSI scale is used by the U.S. government to measure and assess the proficiency levels of those who wish to work in governmental agencies and was considered inappropriate for K-12 contexts. In 2015, the specific legislation was revised to use the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Scale for the Minnesota Bilingual Seals program. ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are the common proficiency framework that informs standards for language learning in K-16 language education in the U.S.

Table 1: World Language Proficiency Certificate and Bilingual Seals Award History

Award Criteria	2009	2015 to present
ACTFL Advanced Low	NA	Bilingual Platinum Seal
ACTFL Intermediate High	World Language Proficiency Certificate Higher Achievement	Bilingual Gold Seal
ACTFL Intermediate Low	World Language Proficiency Certificate	World Language Proficiency Certificate

Note about college credit: In 2009, no college credit was awarded. This changed in 2015 when legislation required state colleges and universities to establish criteria in order to award college credit or seal awards. In 2015, Minnesota State awarded credit as follows—four semester credits for a platinum bilingual seal, three semester credits for a gold bilingual seal, and two semester credits for a world language proficiency certificate.

Requirements for the Minnesota Bilingual Seals and World Language Proficiency Certificate

All awards require students to demonstrate the designated ACTFL proficiency levels in all four modalities, listening, reading, speaking, and writing through assessments. In addition to the proficiency requirements, students are required to demonstrate English language proficiency by completing the required English Language Arts courses for high school graduation, except for the world language proficiency certificate. Table 2 below illustrates the requirement and criteria for each of the awards.

Table 2: Bilingual Seals and World Language Proficiency Certificate Award Requirements

Award	Language Proficiency Criteria	English Proficiency Requirement
Bilingual Platinum Seal	ACTFL Advanced Low	Complete English Language Arts credit for high school graduation
Bilingual Gold Seal	ACTFL Intermediate High	Complete English Language Arts credit for high school graduation
World Language Proficiency Certificate	ACTFL Intermediate Low	No requirement

Implementation of the Seals Program Since 2015

The Minnesota Bilingual Seals legislation was welcome news to the stakeholders in the language education field and multilingual learners who have language skills other than English. However, there is no dedicated state funding for world languages education. Most school districts did not have personnel who had the expertise in world languages education and ACTFL's framework to lead and coordinate the world languages, heritage languages, and dual language immersion programs, let alone bilingual seals program. Furthermore, many schools faced budgetary resource limitation to fund the cost of the assessments for the bilingual seals. There has been a tremendous learning curve for those who were involved with the augmentation of this program in schools and districts across the state. The Minnesota Bilingual Seals program is voluntary program and there are varied models of implementation across the state.

Although there were many challenges associated with the implementation of the bilingual seals program, it was seen as a tool to showcase the success and achievement of language learners. It positively drew attention from the high-level leadership in the schools and districts. Most importantly, the legislation provided schools and districts opportunities to demonstrate an asset-based approach in working with many of their English learner and heritage language learner population.

On the other hand, the stakeholders quickly identified concerns of equitable access among the languages spoken by many of the state's multilingual learners including American Indian language learners. By the statute, students were required to demonstrate language proficiency through assessments. For languages that are taught in K-12 schools, including languages such as Arabic, Chinese, French, and Spanish, there were commercially available assessments that were aligned with the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. However; for languages such as Hmong, Karen, and Somali, there were no commercially available assessments. Multilingual learners of the speakers of these languages are disadvantaged by not having access to the assessment, thus to the bilingual seals.

The statute indicated that when there were no valid and reliable assessments, schools and districts could rely on evaluators trained in assessing under ACTFL proficiency guidelines to assess a student's level of foreign, heritage, or indigenous language proficiency. In the early stage of the implementation, some school districts tried to provide access to languages such as Hmong and Somali by developing their own assessment at either the world language proficiency certificate level or at all of the award levels. The stakeholders, including the MDE soon realized that it was not efficient or advisable for each school district to develop assessments. Often, schools had no personnel whose duty was dedicated to world languages education which includes heritage languages and American Indian languages home languages, or with the expertise in the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and its framework. Thus, a partnership between some school districts and the MDE began. This collaborative effort is described below.

Development of the Minnesota Bilingual Seals Assessment

In the 2017–18 SY, the very first collaborative effort between local school districts and MDE began. Each party invested time in personnel and funding to cover the cost to attend the training and workshop. MDE invested in the consultation cost from the ACTFL. ACTFL provided guidance throughout the process of assessment

development work and rater training. In the first year, the assessments were developed for Hmong, Karen, Somali, and Tamil. The Tamil tests were developed by a local organization, the Minnesota Tamil School which operates Saturday schools for Tamil heritage learners. The teachers in the school were mostly parents of the students who volunteer to teach on weekends. They further volunteered their time and effort to develop the assessment beyond the capacity expected of teaching Tamil heritage learners on weekends. They received training along with Hmong, Karen, and Somali speakers who were funded by schools and districts.

The assessment development work had three components. One was to write the valid and reliable test items that measure the students' language proficiency at ACTFL Intermediate Low, Intermediate High, and Advanced Low in all of the four modalities of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The second component was to train the raters in speaking and writing tests in these languages. The third component was to establish the assessment delivery method to schools across the state. All these three components occurred over the several months period during the school year. Typically, the test items writing happened over summer to fall, then rater training over winter to spring.

Assessment Writing

During the first two years of the work in 2017–2019, the assessment writing work involved a series of training for the speakers of the languages on the ACTFL proficiency guidelines from an ACTFL trainer and test item writing over a five-full day period during the academic years. The participants, many of whom were teachers and community members were trained on the ACTFL major proficiency levels: novice, intermediate, and advanced and learned what language use by students looked and sounded like. Then they were trained on the sub-levels, low, mid, and high of the three proficiency levels (novice, intermediate, and advanced). Understanding of the proficiency guidelines was important not only because many of them were raters, but they also needed to be able to discern whether texts for reading and listening were appropriate for the targeted level when writing test items.

Test Format

Each test of listening, reading, speaking, and writing was divided into two parts. Part 1 targeted performance at ACTFL Intermediate level and Part 2 targeted performance at ACTFL Advanced level. Each part consisted of three topics or three passages. The three topics of the speaking tests, each contained three prompts to which students were asked to respond. Thus, in total students responded to 18 prompts. In writing, each topic has one prompt to which students respond. Thus, students were asked to write three paragraphs with each set consisting of five to seven sentences for Part 1 and three paragraphs with each set consisting of eight to ten sentences for Part 2. For both reading and listening tests, students listen or read three passages in Part 1; and read or listen to three passages for Part 2. Each passage had three multiple-choice questions in the first two years. The number of multiple-choice questions was increased to four in the last two sets of listening and reading tests. In the first two years of implementation, students responded to 18 questions total on each of the reading and listening tests; and in the last two years, students responded to 24 questions total on each of the reading and listening tests. The following table describes the evolution of the test format.

Table 3: History of Bilingual Seals Assessment format

Modality being tested	Versions 2017–18 and 2018–19	Versions 2019–20 and 2020–21	Approximate time for student completion
Reading	6 passages; 3 passages for each Part 1 and Part 2 3 multiple choice questions for each passage 18 questions total	6 passages; 3 passages for each Part 1 and Part 2 4 multiple choice questions for each passage 24 questions total	60 minutes
Listening	6 passages; 3 passages for each Part 1 and Part 2 3 multiple choice questions for each passage 18 questions total	6 passages; 3 passages for each Part 1 and Part 2 4 multiple choice questions for each passage 24 questions total	45–60 minutes
Speaking	6 topics; 3 topics for each Part 1 and Part 2 3 prompts for each topic 18 responses total	6 topics; 3 topics for each Part 1 and Part 2 3 prompts for each topic 18 responses total	45–60 minutes
Writing	6 topics; 3 topics for each Part 1 and Part 2 6 responses total	6 topics; 3 topics for each Part 1 and Part 2 6 responses total	60– 90 minutes

Test Item Development

Development of the speaking and writing tests was relatively easier than the listening and reading tests. Tasks that solicited the responses appropriate to the targeted levels were developed. In the first year of test development work, each language group, Hmong, Karen, and Somali developed their own prompts. ACTFL trainers guided the writing to assure topics were within the scope expected for high school student test-takers performing at intermediate and advanced levels.

On the other hand, it was a complicated and cumbersome process to identify appropriate, authentic texts for listening and reading tests in each language at the targeted levels of intermediate and advanced. Assessment

writers looked for texts in their community such as on bulletin boards at a local store and in community newspapers. They also searched the internet and reviewed books and written stories. Based on the identified texts, multiple-choice questions were developed.

While there were benefits to having each language, group develop test items for each of the topics identified, it quickly presented several challenges to the entire process. First, individuals from each of the districts, ACTFL, and MDE staff who coordinated the effort did not understand the language. English versions of the texts were needed to enable those guiding the work to provide appropriate advice and support. It however added a step to an already time-intensive process. Assessments were developed in four languages; each language had 12 texts for both reading and listening tests resulting in 48 separate texts for review, discussion, examination and vetting for the appropriateness of the targeted level. The second was the identification of appropriate level texts, particularly at the advanced level because some languages do not have readily available written materials from which test writers could draw. Often, the texts were not appropriate because they were inappropriate for the expected performance level or determined too difficult to create appropriate multiple-choice questions. This made many texts unusable. The third challenge was obtaining copyright for use of the materials writers had found. Frequently, inquiries were not returned, or we were not able to identify the writers or publishers of the texts. As a solution, some texts were written by the native speakers according to the format and purpose of texts that writers had found in the community.

To streamline the writing process and address the dearth of appropriate texts in some of the languages, texts appropriate to the ACTFL level guidelines were written in English and multiple-choice questions and answer choices were developed in English. Each language translated the texts, multiple-choice questions, and answer choices into culturally and linguistically appropriate for each language. While not ideal because texts were not authentic and the potential difficulty arising from the linguistic and cultural differences between English and each of the languages; the benefits did outweigh the concern. One benefit was consistency among the languages. Additionally, this resulted in a more streamlined process since those guiding the test writing understood the texts from the beginning of the process and could control for adherence to the ACTFL guidelines and test specifications.

Assessment development work continued every year after the 2017-18 (SY), producing a new set of tests each year to develop four complete sets so that test items could be rotated to prevent students from taking the same test repeatedly. The 2020–21 (SY) was the fourth year of assessment writing. As interest in bilingual seals for home languages grew, other languages were added. In 2019, MDE was successful in obtaining a grant from the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) to develop assessments in Dakota and Ojibwe. In the 2018–19 (SY), the assessments in these two languages were completed. In 2019, Amharic, Czech, Oromo and Vietnamese were added. Czech was developed by a volunteer community member who participated in the writing process.

Several factors determined for which language an assessment would be developed. In addition to the availability of native speaking test writers, whether the language is one of the top 12 languages spoken by English Language Learners and the availability of commercial assessments. As discussed at the beginning, Spanish is far most spoken language by Minnesota's English Learners followed by Somali, Hmong, Karen, and Vietnamese in the order. Among the languages listed below, commercial assessments for Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, and Russian were available and therefore; not developed in these languages.

Table 4: Top 12 Home Languages other than English spoken by Minnesota Students

Rank	Language	Number of students reported
1	Spanish	51,216
2	Somali	28,889
3	Hmong	20,156
4	Karen	4,525
5	Vietnamese	3,760
6	Arabic	3,316
7	Oromo	2,741
8	Mandarin Chinese	2,357
9	Russian	2,323
10	Amharic	2,055
11	Telugu	1,403
12	Khmer	1,329

Source: MDE 2020–21 Fall Primary Home Language Tools

Rater Training

Most assessment writers were also trained as raters. After training on the characteristics of the ACTFL’s proficiency guidelines and the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), raters needed to be trained on the specificity of rating the Minnesota Seals speaking and writing tests. Because the Minnesota Bilingual Seals Assessment format is not the same as that of the OPI, additional training was required. Each topic in both the speaking and writing assessment was designated a proficiency rating. Raters listened to three prompts under one topic and assigned one rating resulting in three ratings for each of the Part 1 and Part 2, with six ratings in total for the speaking and similarly six ratings in total for the writing test. The algorithm was developed through consultation with experts and ACTFL to determine the final rating for each speaking and writing test. Inter-rater reliability was an important aspect of rater training. The raters were trained every year and typically the inter-rater reliability training was provided in spring. Some individuals participated in this project since the beginning of the project while others who were recruited from partnering school districts each year were new resulting in mixed levels of experiences among the raters. MDE funded the cost of the training from ACTFL, and raters’ time were compensated by partnering schools and districts.

Assessment Delivery

In the first several years, the assessments were delivered manually. The tests were either emailed or shared through an online tool. Test administrators and raters were required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Schools needed to print the assessment materials, set up audio equipment to play listening and speaking test prompts. They also needed to provide a method for students to record their speaking responses and a method to share them with the raters. After administering the assessment, schools had to scan the tests and email, mail or hand deliver them to MDE. Test administration and delivery involved many steps and caused logistical burdens. It was very evident that the system was neither sustainable, efficient nor readily accessible. MDE searched over several years for an online tool to deliver the assessments. In 2020–21, MDE identified Extempore, a local vendor, to

deliver the assessment using an online platform. The vendor had the capabilities and functions needed to deliver the Minnesota Seals assessments. In the 2020–21 (SY), MDE piloted the online system with all languages. Although the COVID pandemic was far from over, about two dozen schools and districts participated in the program as their first-time pilot. Feedback from users online overall was positive; thus, MDE concluded that the first-year pilot was a success and planned to utilize the platform for the 2021–22 (SY).

Bilingual Seals and World Language Proficiency Certificate Award Data

The data for bilingual seals and world language proficiency certificates are available with limited data elements. There is currently no mechanism to collect comprehensive demographic data on awardees that include the following information: race, ethnicity, home language, English learner status, and Free Reduced Lunch status. There is no requirement for schools to submit such data to MDE either. Currently, MDE collects information regarding the award level, language, and the number of English Learners (ELs). The data collection is done manually by each school or district by submitting a manually completed form. The status of ELs has not been clearly defined for this reporting purpose; resulting in inconsistencies among information the schools reported. For example, some schools include the current and exited ELs while others report only current ELs who are receiving EL service. There is currently no clear data that informs us on the two points. One is to what extent world languages students and heritage language students including ELs are receiving awards. The second point is to what extent students of color are receiving the awards. Assessments are available in Dakota and Ojibwe but only one student has tested in Dakota.

For this report, the data starting 2017–18 (SY) is included since that was the first year in which many of the state’s multilingual learners had access to the bilingual seals in languages such as Hmong, Karen, and Somali. While the current available data does not provide much insight into the detailed demographic information, it does provide ideas about the overall trend within the bilingual seals program. Table 5 shows the total number of ELs who received an award as reported by schools and districts annually.

While the number of awardees was increasing each year, the 2019-20 (SY) pandemic presented unprecedented challenges in implementing the bilingual seals assessments for many schools. Minnesota schools transitioned to distance learning under the Governor’s order in March 2020. Most schools had been planning to administer the assessments in spring of 2020. There was no online delivery method at that time. Although schools were allowed to host in-person testing sessions with strict adherence to the COVID prevention guidelines, and the testing window was extended for graduating seniors over summer into fall that year, it still presented an extreme challenge for many schools to be able to deliver the assessments.

Table 5: Total Bilingual Seals Awardees since the 2017-18 SY

School Year	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21
Total number of awardees	1,864	2,452	1,689	2,213
Total number of awardees reported as ELs	285	159	319	238

Figure 1: Total number of awardees statewide

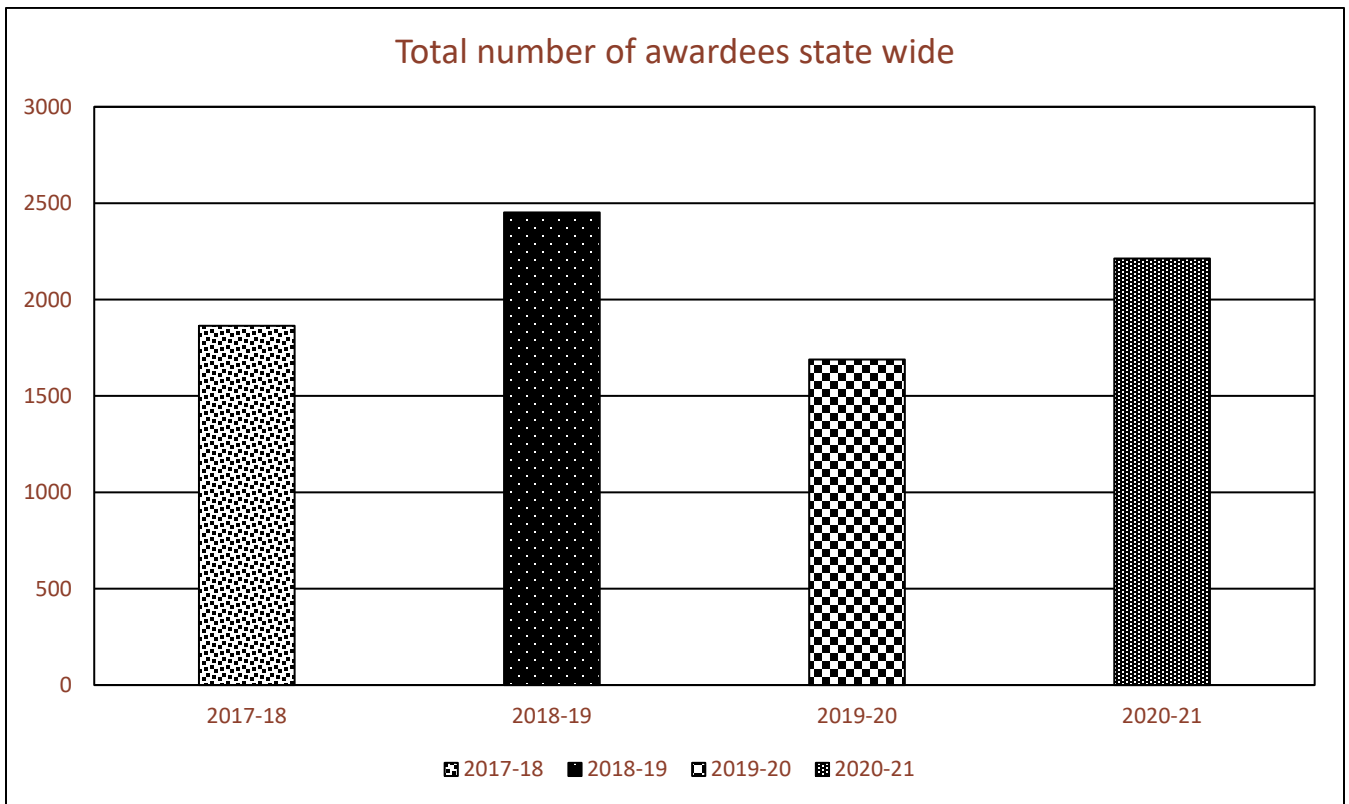


Figure 1 illustrates the number of total awardees for all awards: the multilingual platinum seal, multilingual gold seal, bilingual platinum seal, bilingual gold seal, and world language proficiency certificate. In 2017-18 (SY), 1,864 students were awarded in 15 languages; 2,452 in 20 languages in 2018-19 (SY); 1,689 students in 18 languages in 2019-20 (SY); 2,213 in 21 languages in 2020-21 (SY).

Figure 2: Total number of awardees by award levels

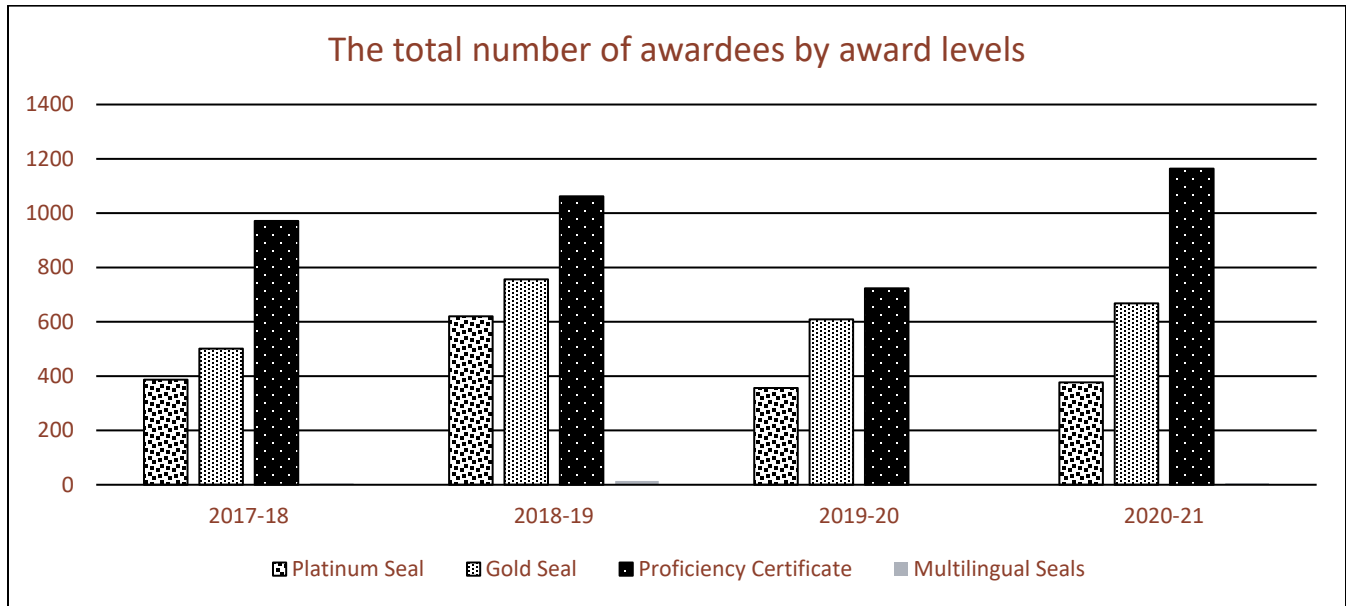


Figure 2 illustrates the distribution by award levels. The four years of data reflect some common trends. As expected, the higher the award level, the fewer students receive higher-level awards. While the number of languages the proficiency certificate is almost double that of the platinum seals awarded. The fourth data element, the multilingual seals include both the multilingual platinum seal and the multilingual gold seal. Each of those awards was in the single-digit for each year but are combined in this report.

Figure 3: Participating school districts

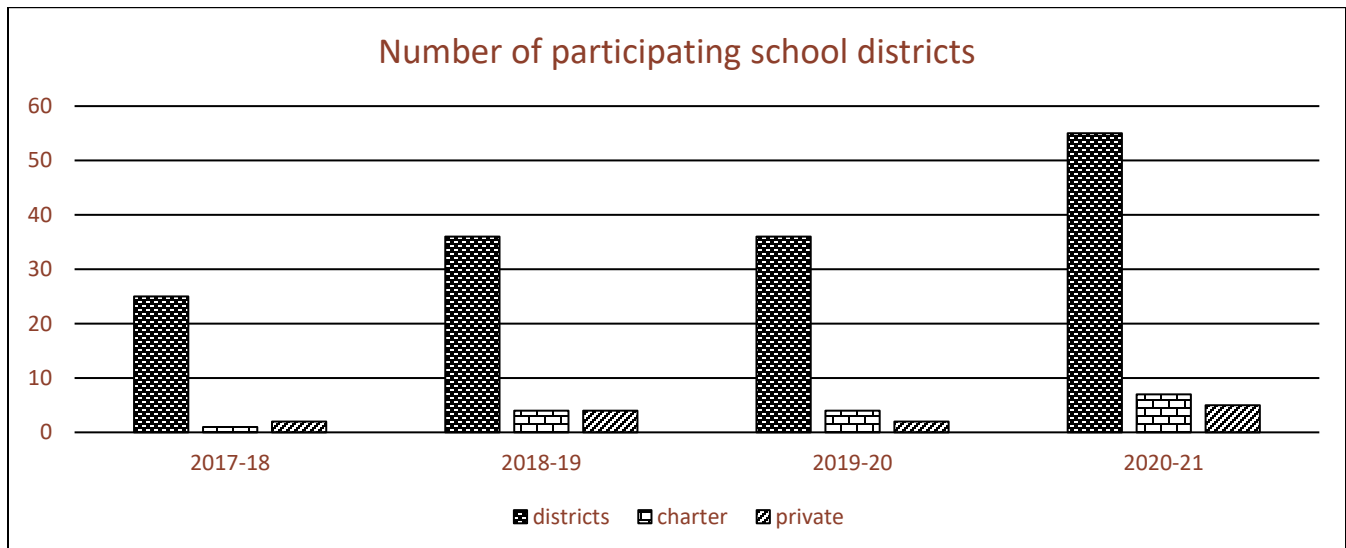


Figure 3 shows the number of participating school districts, including charters and private schools, showing an overall increase in school participation each year. There are more than 500 school districts, including charter schools, in the state and currently fewer than 10% of the school districts participate in the program. With the monthly webinars and frequent communication about the program, it is anticipated that participation will continue to increase.

Table 6: Number of awardees by languages

Language	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Amharic	0	0	0	6
Arabic	14	18	15	9
ASL	5	1	0	0
Chinese	51	93	108	143
Czech	0	1	0	0
Dakota	0	0	0	1
French	179	331	153	168
German	22	66	45	52
Hindi	1	1	3	6
Hmong	67	106	62	60
Italian	0	0	1	1
Japanese	35	43	11	10
Karen	40	39	31	17
Korean	0	1	0	3
Latin	0	22	0	21
Oromo	0	7	14	7
Polish	0	1	3	0
Portuguese	3	1	5	7
Russian	13	8	6	12
Somali	80	76	51	19
Spanish	1347	1613	1170	1654
Tamil	1	9	2	3
Thai	1	0	1	0
Vietnamese	0	1	7	9
Multilingual Gold and Platinum Seals	5	14	1	6
Total	1864	2452	1417	2213

Table 6 shows the annual distribution of the awards per language. The highest number of awards were for students who tested in Spanish, followed by French, Hmong, Somali, and Karen. Assessments were not available for some languages. For example, Amharic assessment with all required modalities for Minnesota bilingual seals was unavailable until the 2020-21 (SY). Oromo and Vietnamese languages did not have assessments meeting the requirements for the 2017-18 (SY).

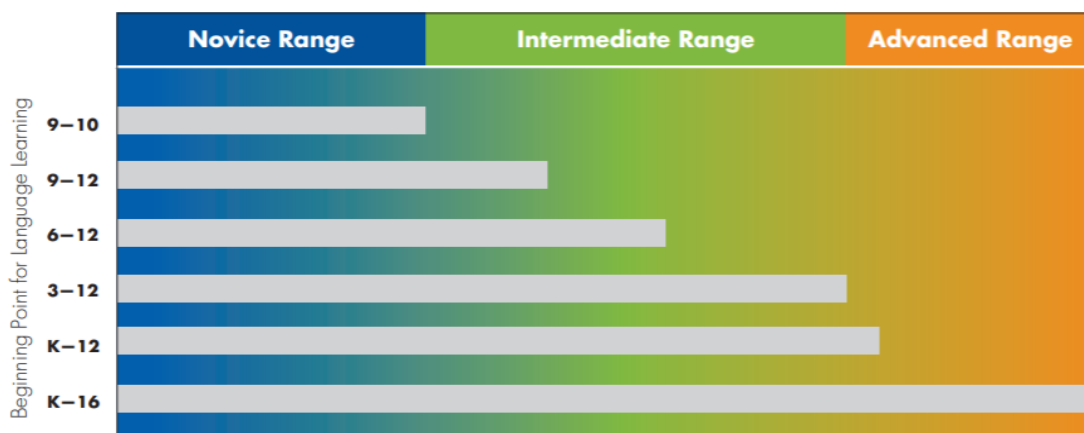
Considerations for Schools and Language Programs

The Minnesota Bilingual Seals program certainly presents areas of consideration to schools and language programs in three important ways in order to ensure students' access to the Minnesota Bilingual Seals. While ACTFL and other professional guidelines have been influential in many language programs throughout Minnesota, the Seals program provides an opportunity to streamline instruction toward a common goal for all students, whether demonstrating language skills in their home language or a new language. With the seal as a proficiency outcome goal, districts can use it to inform teacher professional development, in curriculum design and as an opportunity to consider language programs through equity for all students.

First is vertical alignment among the same language courses. More than a dozen languages are taught in Minnesota K-12 schools with most programs at secondary levels. The seals' awards criteria, ACTFL advanced low for the platinum seal, at ACTFL intermediate high for a gold seal, and ACTFL intermediate low for a world language proficiency certificate, can be used to backward plan the curriculum and for vertical alignment among the courses. Awards and the corresponding proficiency levels can provide proficiency outcome goals to all types of programs, whether K-12 dual language immersion or a high school sequenced program. It is essential for language teachers, regardless of the level they teach to have a common understanding of the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and ACTFL performance descriptors. The performance descriptors are helpful tool for teachers and students to understand what students can produce in speaking and in writing and what students can do when listening and reading in each of these levels. This common understanding may drastically shift language instruction and overall approaches to align with the current World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015). In order for schools to facilitate that process, teacher professional development is essential. Numerous free resources are available for language educators. ACTFL has published various tools to support language educators' practice to align with the current standards: the proficiency guidelines, performance descriptors, Can-Do statements and the language performance assessment model, called integrated performance assessment (IPA). These resources are helpful in understanding the differences between performance and proficiency, how classroom instruction plays a critical role in developing proficiency through performance and how instruction embedded performance assessments can be utilized to promote proficiency development. These practices align with the current World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages with real and purposeful communication at the center of language instruction.

The second important area in which they could examine is program design. Schools need to examine existing programs through the lens of instructional minutes, consistent frequency of instructional time, and sustainability of instructional opportunities to enable students to develop the proficiency required to meet the criteria of the seals awards. It takes time to develop proficiency. The amount of time and frequency students spend learning is directly related to what proficiency level students attain. The image below illustrates this point.

Time as a critical component for developing language performance



[ACTFL performance descriptors](https://www.ACTFL.org/sites/default/files/publications/ACTFLPerformance). (n.d.). Retrieved March 14, 2022, from <https://www.ACTFL.org/sites/default/files/publications/ACTFLPerformance>

As you can see in the image above, if the program offers only Levels One and Two, students will not reach to the ACTFL intermediate low benchmark for the world language proficiency certificate. In order to reach a seal level at ACTFL intermediate high, it roughly takes several years of learning. Schools could use this information to plan and design a program by setting a proficiency goal at the end of the program. That would provide a framework for teachers to backward plan the curriculum and for students to set a goal.

The third but equally as important implication is that schools act upon an opportunity provided by the bilingual seals program to examine their current language programs through the critical lens of equity. Schools must examine which language programs are offered, who is served in those programs and who can access the college credit-bearing awards. Many more multilingual learners such as heritage language learners could be served to develop proficiency in their home languages. Language proficiency development is an intentional process that requires many years of work, commitment, and support. Currently, most school districts do not offer heritage language programs and too many multilingual learners have to leave their home language at the door when they enter the K-12 educational system as five-year old's because there is no space provided for home/heritage language to be valued and nurtured. For many of those linguistically talented learners, almost no instructional support is provided to continue developing their home language including literacy and to nurture the healthy development of their bilingual or multilingual identities.

Challenges of Minnesota Bilingual Seals Program

Challenges that have been observed in some of major areas of the Minnesota Bilingual Seals program are:

1. District level state funding
2. State personnel to manage the administration of the assessments
3. State level online system for data reporting and analysis
4. Assessment writer and rater availability
5. School participation
6. State level infrastructure to support language programs
7. Articulation to the post-secondary institutions
8. Data collection
9. Outreach to schools and information about the benefit of the awards

The subsequent section discusses each of the above categories.

District Level State Funding

Although the Minnesota Bilingual Seals are in Minnesota Statutes and the program continues to grow, there is no designated state level funding to support the bilingual seals program implementation including the development of infrastructure to deliver the assessments efficiently and securely, and cost to purchase the assessments and staffing. Although some school districts are funding the cost of the assessment and facilitation using the general funds, the lack of designated state level funding puts many school districts struggling to identify the funding source.

Assessment Writer and Rater Availability and Sustainability

Very few individuals have the capacity to be trained to be assessment writers and raters in less commonly taught languages and American Indian languages. Among these are languages such as Amharic, Hmong, Karen, Oromo, Somali, Vietnamese and Dakota and Ojibwe. Most individuals who have participated in the project over the years were also employed in various capacities at local school districts. Writing and rating assessments, both time-consuming, were additional work beyond their normal duties. It was often challenging for them to balance the additional work and demands of personal and family lives.

School Participation

School participation can and should increase. More schools are participating in the metro area compared to the greater Minnesota. Since the program is voluntary, it is critical school personnel and educators become familiar with the program and its benefits. MDE could play an important role in supporting schools and general public learn about the program by continuing to provide technical support such as monthly webinars and dissemination of updates through the webpage or newsletter. MDE could also potentially look into partnering with other local professional organizations to plan and implement strategies to help Minnesota schools to participate while expanding access to the program.

State Level Infrastructure to Support Language Programs

Minnesota's schools offer many types of language programs: traditional secondary programs, elementary level programs, dual language immersion programs, heritage language programs, and Dakota and Ojibwe language revitalization programs. The programs present a wide range of needs for the support of learners and teachers. Currently, little state level infrastructure exists to support these programs in terms of teacher development, program design and resources.

Articulation to the Post-Secondary Institutions

The long-term impact of students receiving bilingual seals is not being tracked. No mechanism to collect accurate data on how many students receive seals; how many college credits are being earned; and how students benefitted from a bilingual seal once they enroll in post-secondary programs or work. Anecdotal data shows that some students do not know what they must do to receive the credit. A stronger collaboration or a partnership between Minnesota high schools and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities is desired for more high school graduates to take full advantage of the program.

Data Collection

The mechanism to collect student level demographic information about the awardees is limited. Currently, each school or district submits a manually completed form to MDE which allows for errors due to the multiple steps involved. MDE is in the process of implementing a data management system called Ed-Fi. The Ed-Fi system will enable information at the student level to be automatically submitted to MDE. The information will include student home language, race, ethnicity, EL status, and free-reduced lunch status. With the bilingual seal data

report through Ed-Fi, MDE will have robust information about students receiving awards which will inform future planning for the equitable implementation of the program.

Opportunities of Minnesota Bilingual Seals Program

Opportunity for Minnesota's high school graduate is tremendous. This is a testimonial from a 2019 graduate.

"I felt that the bilingual assessment was very beneficial. I am studying computer engineering, and when I presented my Bilingual Seal at (name) College, it reduced the number of electives I needed to take before transferring to a four-year college. Elective courses are distributed among five goals (it differs from one career to another). In my case, the assessment covered two goals, which are equivalent to six credits, so I saved \$1,300. If I were pursuing a different major, it might have been worth up to \$4,300, in terms of savings, as (name) College is a very affordable community college. I was proud to honor my heritage by performing well in my home language, and I recommend this opportunity to any bilingual student."

This student was not only able to save costs for tuition but also gained a sense of affirmation of their home language. It is known that when students are seen as a whole individual with every aspect of their identity including home language, they do well in both school and society. Providing opportunities for multilingual learners to demonstrate proficiency in their home language and being celebrated publicly is a powerful experience.

The challenges described in the previous section simultaneously present opportunities, the most important of which would be to use the Minnesota Bilingual Seals as a tool to create a common and state-wide end goal for all language learners regardless of background in the K-12 educational experience. No matter what contexts learners are in, language proficiency development does not occur in isolation, nor by accident.

World language programs, for example, have for years been seen as elective or enrichment opportunities in Minnesota schools. This has reinforced, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, the idea that language education was for supposed college bound or elite students from mainly English-speaking homes. This mindset ignores the linguistic assets of our diverse multilingual learners; many of whom are learning the content standards while developing English language proficiency as their second or even the third or fourth language. The Seals program provides opportunity for schools to elevate the importance of language learning for all by making the learners and their accomplishments visible through awards and celebration.

School districts have an opportunity to bridge the different types of language learners and their various programs for the common goal to achieve multilingual success. Students from English speaking homes invest in learning a new language and culture; an experience in the unfamiliar thus requiring risk-taking and an appreciation of other languages and cultures. The multilingual student provides cultural knowledge and linguistic skills useful in creative problem solving, flexible thinking, thinking in multiple perspectives, exercising imagination and empathy, and risk taking. The combined result reinforces all linguistic skills but also allows for cultural connections and collaboration.

The K-12 education landscape in Minnesota is constantly changing, including an ever-increasing diverse community in many school districts with multilingual skills and a wider variety of cultural identities in the school systems. School systems, communities and families must become aware and intentional about the use of their languages at home and in their community to raise the next generations with the bilingual and multilingual skills that are so needed in the 21st century. The Bilingual Seals Program is a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate Minnesota’s commitment to multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Appendix A: Number of Awardees by Languages Per Year

Language	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Amharic	N/A	N/A	N/A	6	3	17
Arabic	14	18	15	9	12	20
ASL	5	1	0	0	1	27
Bulgarian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Chinese	51	93	108	143	101	105
Czech	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dakota	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0	0
Dari	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
French	179	331	153	168	207	209
German	22	66	45	52	77	80
Hebrew	0	0	0	1	0	1
Hindi	1	1	3	6	11	6
Hmong	67	106	62	60	37	79
Hungarian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Italian	0	0	1	1	3	0
Japanese	35	43	11	10	43	30
Karen	40	39	31	17	5	11
Korean	0	1	0	3	1	4
Latin	0	22	0	21	0	0
Oromo	N/A	7	14	7	7	14
Pashto	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	NA
Polish	0	1	3	0	0	2
Portuguese	3	1	5	7	5	3
Russian	13	8	6	12	19	16
Somali	80	76	51	19	24	46
Swahili	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Spanish	1347	1613	1170	1654	1658	2060
Tamil	1	9	2	3	9	1
Thai	1	0	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ukrainian	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vietnamese	N/A	1	7	9	19	15
Multilingual Gold and Platinum Seals	5	14	1	6	3	N/A
Total	1864	2452	1417	2213	2243	2749

This table shows the annual distribution of the awards per language. The highest number of awards were for students who tested in Spanish, followed by French, Hmong, Somali, and Karen. Assessments were not available for some languages. For example, Amharic assessment with all required modalities for Minnesota bilingual seals was unavailable until the 2020-21 (SY). Oromo and Vietnamese languages did not have assessments meeting the requirements for the 2017-18 (SY). Dari, Pashto, Ukrainian, and Swahili became available in 2024.

Appendix B: Distribution of Awards Per Language

2017-18 Distribution of awards per language

Language	Total Awards	Proficiency Certificate	Bilingual Gold Seal	Bilingual Platinum Seal
Arabic	14	9	4	1
American Sign Language	5	0	1	4
Chinese (Mandarin)	51	22	18	11
French	179	82	57	40
German	22	10	7	5
Hindi	1	1	0	0
Hmong	67	25	17	25
Japanese	35	7	21	7
Karen	40	5	19	16
Portuguese	3	0	2	1
Russian	13	5	7	1
Somali	80	59	16	5
Spanish	1347	746	331	270
Tamil	1	0	0	1
Thai	1	0	1	0
Multilingual Gold and Platinum Seals	5 ¹	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	1,864	971	501	387

¹ Breakdown of multilingual gold and multilingual platinum seal awards: Gold Multilingual Seals, two in Spanish and French; one in Spanish and Chinese; one in Hmong and Chinese. Platinum Multilingual Seals, one in German and Spanish.

2018-19 Distribution of awards per language

Language	Total Awards	Proficiency Certificate	Bilingual Gold Seal	Bilingual Platinum Seal
Arabic	18	13	3	2
American Sign Language	1	0	0	1
Chinese (Mandarin)	93	37	38	18
Czech	1	0	0	1
French	331	102	116	113
German	66	20	27	19
Hindi	1	0	0	1
Hmong	106	48	22	36
Japanese	43	21	19	3
Karen	39	23	9	7
Korean	1	1	0	0
Latin	22	15	7	0
Oromo	7	2	1	4
Polish	1	0	1	0
Portuguese	1	1	0	0
Russian	8	1	5	2
Somali	76	51	22	3
Spanish	1613	727	484	402
Tamil	9	0	1	8
Vietnamese	1	0	1	0
Multilingual Gold and Platinum Seals	14 ²	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	2438	1062	756	620

² Breakdown of multilingual gold and multilingual platinum seal awards: Gold Multilingual Seals, three in French and Spanish; one in Chinese and Hmong; one in Chinese and Spanish. Platinum Multilingual Seals, five in French and Spanish; two in French and Russian; one in Chinese and Hmong; one in German and Spanish.

2019-20 Distribution of awards per language

Language	Total Awards	Proficiency Certificate	Bilingual Gold Seal	Bilingual Platinum Seal
Arabic	15	12	3	0
Chinese (Mandarin)	108	41	33	34
French	153	64	42	47
German	45	24	12	9
Hindi	3	1	2	0
Hmong	62	33	15	14
Italian	1	0	1	0
Japanese	11	4	4	3
Karen	31	20	7	4
Oromo	14	5	8	1
Polish	3	0	1	2
Portuguese	5	0	2	3
Russian	6	3	1	2
Somali	51	39	12	0
Spanish	1170	469	465	236
Tamil	2	1	0	1
Thai	1	1	0	0
Vietnamese	7	6	1	0
Multilingual Gold and Platinum Seals	1 ³	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	1689	723	609	356

³ Breakdown of multilingual gold and multilingual platinum seal awards: Gold Multilingual Seals, one in Portuguese and Spanish.

2020-21 Distribution of awards per language

Language	Total Awards	Proficiency Certificate	Bilingual Gold Seal	Bilingual Platinum Seal
Amharic	6	2	4	0
Arabic	9	5	4	0
Chinese	143	71	32	40
Dakota	1	1	0	0
French	168	71	48	49
German	52	34	4	14
Hebrew	1	0	1	0
Hindi	6	3	3	0
Hmong	60	34	19	7
Italian	1	1	0	0
Japanese	10	8	0	2
Karen	17	15	2	0
Korean	3	2	0	1
Latin	21	8	11	2
Oromo	7	7	0	0
Portuguese	7	3	3	1
Russian	12	6	6	0
Somali	19	16	3	0
Spanish	1654	873	523	258
Tamil	3	0	2	1
Vietnamese	9	4	3	2
Multilingual Gold and Platinum Seals	4 ⁴	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	2213	1164	668	377

⁴ Breakdown of multilingual gold and multilingual platinum seal awards: Gold Multilingual Seals, two in French and Spanish. Multilingual Platinum Seal, one in German and Spanish, one in French and Spanish.

2021-22 Distribution of awards per language

Language	Total Awards	Proficiency Certificate	Bilingual Gold Seal	Bilingual Platinum Seal
American Sign Language	1	0	0	1
Amharic	3	2	1	0
Arabic	12	10	2	0
Chinese	101	42	20	39
Dakota	0	0	0	0
French	207	74	76	57
German	77	31	24	22
Hebrew	0	0	0	0
Hindi	11	7	3	1
Hmong	37	28	9	0
Italian	3	0	3	0
Japanese	43	22	14	7
Karen	5	4	1	0
Korean	1	0	1	0
Latin	0	0	0	0
Oromo	7	6	1	0
Portuguese	5	1	2	2
Russian	19	7	10	2
Somali	24	19	3	2
Spanish	1658	712	640	306
Tamil	9	1	1	7
Vietnamese	19	10	8	1
Total	2242	976	819	447
Multilingual Gold and Platinum Seals	3	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Breakdown of multilingual gold and multilingual platinum seal awards: Gold Multilingual Seals, one in Spanish and French, one in Spanish and other language unknown, Platinum Multilingual Seal, one in German and Spanish.

2022-23 Distribution of awards per language

Language	Total Awards	Proficiency Certificate	Bilingual Gold Seal	Bilingual Platinum Seal
Amharic	17	9	8	0
Arabic	20	15	5	0
ASL	25	1	1	27
Bulgarian	1	0	1	0
Chinese	105	53	34	18
Czech	1	0	1	0
French	209	114	58	37
German	80	41	15	24
Hebrew	1	0	1	0
Hindi	6	4	2	0
Hmong	79	45	28	6
Hungarian	1	1	0	0
Japanese	30	22	5	3
Karen	11	8	3	0
Korean	4	2	0	2
Oromo	14	6	7	1
Polish	2	0	2	0
Portuguese	3	1	1	1
Russian	16	9	7	0
Somali	46	41	5	0
Spanish	2060	932	750	378
Tamil	1	0	1	0
Vietnamese	15	7	4	4
Total	2749	1335	939	475
Multilingual Gold and Platinum Seals	*2	N/A	N/A	N/A

*Breakdown of multilingual gold and multilingual platinum seal awards: Gold Multilingual Seals, one in Spanish and Chinese, Platinum Multilingual Seal, one in Spanish and French.