

DESE World Languages Newsletter

December 2020, Vol 2, No4

From the Office of Language Acquisition

Dear Language Educators,



Amidst the sorrow and the unrest of 2020, many heroes emerged. You are among them. When physical borders closed, you opened the world to students. When we were separated, even isolated by a virus, you safely brought students together. You brought laughter to grieving students. You replaced fears with hope. You traded loneliness for community. 2020 was a little better for your students because of you. Thank you.

We in the Office of Language Acquisition aim to support you, your students, and your programs. We are offering continued support around the Seal of Biliteracy. We are convening monthly network meetings to facilitate collaborative problem-solving with world language colleagues. Perhaps most significantly, we have drafted an up-to-date World Languages Curriculum Framework – now available for your review and feedback– to guide your district’s creation of World Language curricula. 2020 has not been easy, but we are feeling great about 2021. We wish you a joyful and bright holiday season and a relaxing and safe break from your school responsibilities. We can’t wait to see you in the new year!

Andy McDonie is the Language Acquisition Support Specialist for World Languages at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Feel free to contact Andy with questions or concerns regarding World Languages and the State Seal of Biliteracy in Massachusetts.

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The Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework (draft to solicit public comment)

On December 15, 2020, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education unanimously approved the current draft of the Massachusetts World Language Curriculum Framework to become publicly available to receive feedback from the public. After many months of study, revision, and collaboration with over a hundred educators around the state, [the draft is now available on our website](#) for your review. Along with your review, we



are requesting your feedback. How will this framework work for you? What do you like? What are you unsure about? We take your feedback seriously, and the thoughts of the public will be reflected in the final

adopted version. Although you are invited to give feedback at any time during the public comment period, for the highest-quality feedback, we recommend following these steps before you complete the survey:

- Read the draft of the framework at your pace and at your leisure.

- Familiarize yourself with the [2015 ACTFL World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages](#) – a document which many Massachusetts educators wished the MA framework to reflect.
- Attend at least one informational session about the Framework draft (and encourage your colleagues/administrators/students to do so as well). [Please see the World Languages website for more information.](#)

We hope that you are as pleased with this draft as we are. Please make sure to view the list of contributors in the opening pages. They made the framework what it is, and this project would not have been possible without them.

Learn more about the proposed framework at an informational session.

- Session 1: January 7th @ 4:00–5:00
- Session 2: January 19th @ 10:00–11:00

[Register here.](#)

Highlights of the Proposed Framework

In our presentation to the Board on December 15, we highlighted the following features and major changes of this framework.

Focus on Proficiency. The 1999 framework defined developmental stages of language proficiency, but in the intervening decades, understanding of proficiency has coalesced around the model described in the 2015 World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). When surveyed, Massachusetts indicated a strong preference for ACTFL’s model rather than the developmental stages that were unique to Massachusetts. Thus, this framework conforms to the will of Massachusetts’ World Language community and articulates easily with World Language frameworks from around the country. This framework retains the 1999 framework’s presentation of the 5 Cs (Communication,

Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities), although it does reorganize them slightly to maintain consistency with other DESE frameworks.

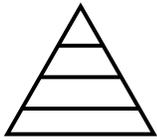
What is proficiency?

Proficiency is the ability to use the language spontaneously across a variety of contexts. The Department relies upon ACTFL’s definition of proficiency and wishes students to demonstrate proficiency in the skills of reading, writing, speaking, signing, and attending. Skills may vary by language.

Organized by Proficiency Level. Whereas the 1999 Framework organized standards by grade level, this proposed framework presents content standards by the students’ proficiency levels. This framework centers the

students' linguistic skills and experiences rather than their age or year in school. This ensures that all students are supported to receive World Language instruction at a linguistic level that is appropriate to their skills.

Linguistic Components. Those educators who are familiar with ACTFL's Oral Proficiency Interview will no doubt recognize the terminology regarding linguistic components that are described, color coded, and



horizontally and vertically aligned in this framework. Since Massachusetts educators overwhelmingly prefer the ACTFL model, this framework

uses ACTFL's performance descriptor categories of *context*, *function*, *text type*, and *accuracy* to help educators identify their students' level of proficiency and to provide a roadmap for course design.

- *Context* describes the kinds of topics that students are most able to spontaneously discuss varying levels of proficiency. As an example, novice speakers/signers are able to spontaneously communicate about themselves and topics that connect directly and concretely to their personal experiences. Advanced students, on the other hand, communicate comfortably about academic topics that may or may not be connected to their lived experiences.
- *Function* describes what students can accomplish with the language. Novice students make meaning through memorized language. Intermediate students create with language and ask authentic questions. Advanced students narrate, describe, and resolve complications.
- *Text type* describes the kind of languages that students use. Novice students interpret and produce mostly words and phrases. At the intermediate level, students interpret and produce sentences and series of sentences. Advanced students produce ordered paragraphs.
- *Accuracy* describes the extent to which speakers/signers of the language understand are understood in authentic situations. Importantly,

this goes far beyond grammar and spelling and presents real world implications. This framework expects novice students to make plenty of mistakes without penalty, as part of the acquisition process. Comprehensibility rather than perfection is the goal, with greater technical accuracy increasing in importance as students advance through proficiency levels.

Social and Emotional Learning and Social Justice. This framework intentionally incorporates descriptions of social and emotional learning skills and social justice skills. Relying on the [CASEL core competence areas](#), the proposed takes advantage of opportunities to teach social and emotional skills by asking students to empathize with their English language learner peers by limiting themselves to expression in a language other than English. These standards ask students to demonstrate respectful curiosity and interactions. They also call for students to reflect on their own ability to perform in the target languages and cultures.

This framework further recognizes that languages and cultures emerge in complex sociocultural contexts. This document does not seek to avoid those complexities. Rather, these standards and this framework ask educators to embrace equity explicitly in the content of their instruction and implicitly in their invisible systems. This framework asks districts to offer languages that reflect their students and community. This framework insists that all human languages and dialects are valuable. The standards require students and teachers to examine stereotypes and their impact and to seek resources from every corner of the world where the target language is expressed.

At the heart of both the SEL and social justice priority for these standards is the centering of students. This framework seeks to explicitly elevate all students and their lived experiences and to validate their languages and identities.

Foreign No More. This proposed framework is for *World Languages*. It explicitly rejects the false notion that English is the only language indigenous to Massachusetts and the



United States. Our own educators strongly supported this change, and Massachusetts now joins the overwhelming majority of other states who refer to this discipline as World Languages.

Structure. The structure of this revision differs from the 1999 framework to mirror the structures of other DESE frameworks. Principals, curriculum directors, superintendents, and other administrators who may not be specialists in world languages are already familiar with the structure of other DESE frameworks. We hope that this will facilitate greater understanding of the world language frameworks and enable administrators to easily integrate these standards into their district’s curriculum.

Beyond approving the draft, the Board indicated support and engagement for our discipline. Board members asked only two questions before sending this draft to public comment. Board Member Michael Moriarty asked

if we could ensure that every high school was offering World Languages. Board Member Martin West asked if the standards could be tied to the Seal of Biliteracy. We were so pleased to field such exciting questions from our state policymakers. [You can view the video here.](#) The World Languages section starts at about the 3:50 mark (very close to the end).

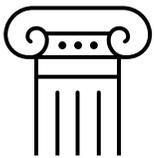
Next Steps for the World Languages Framework

- Public comment period: 12/22/2020-2/22/2021
- Board adoption
- Quick Reference Guides for specific languages/programs
- Implementation support (spring 2021-summer 2022)
- Full implementation – SY 2022-2023

For more information see our website or email Andy McDonie at d.andrew.mcdonie@mass.gov

Supporting the Framework

The Office of Language Acquisition has partnered with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) to ensure relevance and inclusivity of the framework for all World Language teachers and learners. We wanted to be certain that all students and types of world language programs can benefit from the framework. To that end, we collaborated with teachers from that represent languages, programs, and students that are often overlooked in traditional World Language programming. Dozens of Massachusetts stakeholders participated in focus groups, and CAL conducted a literature review on these historically underrepresented groups. As a result of these efforts, when the framework is finalized the Department is ready to provide districts with Quick Reference Guides in the following areas:



- American Sign Language
- Classical Languages
- Elementary Programs
- Heritage Language Learners and Programs
- Languages with Diverse Written Representations (LDWR)
- Social and Emotional Learning in the World Language Classroom
- Students with Disabilities in World Language Programs
- World Language Assessment

Please note that these eight areas are only a starting point. The Department looks forward to collaborating with even more stakeholders to provide robust supports for all districts, teachers, and learners after the framework is finalized.

The Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy and Higher Education

Now in its third year of implementation, the Seal of Biliteracy has reached important milestones. Nearly 200 districts are planning to offer the Seal in 2021, and nearly 3,000 Massachusetts graduates have already earned the Seal. In an effort to further reward students and to encourage districts to understand the value of the Seal, the DESE has joined forces with the Department of Higher Education (DHE) to make the Seal more widely known in institutions of higher education. With that goal in mind, on December 11, DESE and DHE hosted a webinar about the Seal of Biliteracy and its implications for Higher Education. Over forty representatives of higher education institutions attended this session. Highlights of the webinar included:

- The Seal of Biliteracy is more rigorous than the AP Score of 3, for which most public universities already give credit.
- The Seal promotes equity by providing recognition and potentially credit for proficiency in all human languages.

- The Seal is already being used to award credit at Salem State University and a policy is under consideration at Middlesex Community College. (Please note: This is not an exhaustive list. Email Andy McDonie if you know of other institutions of higher education who are also awarding credit for the Seal).
- Grants are available through the Higher Education Innovation Fund for post-secondary education institutions to advance their work in the Seal of Biliteracy



Learn more about the Seal of Biliteracy. Join us on January 12th at 4:00 for the Seal of Biliteracy 102 Webinar. [Register here.](#)

Recent Questions from Districts about the Seal of Biliteracy



If the district opts in, do all high schools within the district have to participate?

Departmental regulations indicate that the Seal is awarded from the district, not a school within the district. If the district offers the award, all students in the district should have equitable access to it.

Can students earn two Seals?

Students can (and are encouraged to) earn a seal in more than one language. The district should retain records of competency determinations for all languages in which students earn the Seal. Districts may choose to recognize proficiency in multiple languages other than English by offering multiple awards or even multiple insignias on the diploma and/or transcripts. Districts are encouraged to list all languages in which students demonstrated Intermediate-High or higher proficiency on the graduate's transcripts.



Will the 2021 AP exam count toward the Seal?



It appears that the College Board is offering the full AP Language and Culture Exam. As long as reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are all assessed, the 2021 AP Language and Culture Exam will count toward the Seal of Biliteracy. Please note that ***the AP Spanish Literature exam will no longer count toward the Seal***, as it does not assess the requisite skills. This is specific to the AP Spanish ***Literature***

Exam. The AP Spanish Language and Culture Exam as well as all other AP Language and Culture Exams do assess all four skills and will count toward the Seal.

Do students still need to pass the Grade 10 ELA MCAS?

Yes. On December 7th, the Department issued an [update about the MCAS](#). Students in the class of 2021 are still eligible to participate in the January administration of the Grade 10 ELA MCAS. Students in the Class of 2022 will have access to the MCAS later in the year. Students that score between 220-238 on the Legacy MCAS (455-471 Next Gen), are eligible to meet the English criteria by completing an Educational Proficiency Plan **AND** one of the following:



- Earning a score of 240 or higher on a retake of the Legacy MCAS (or 472 or higher on the Next Gen), **or**
- Earning an overall ACCESS score of 4.2 with at least a 3.9 in composite literacy.

Seal of Biliteracy 102 Webinar

Is your district implementing or considering implementing the Seal of Biliteracy this year. Whether you are an old pro or a novice low to the Seal, you are invited to learn more about the



assessments, portfolios, common pitfalls, and best practices in districts. The webinar is January 12th at 4PM on Zoom. [Register here.](#)

World Language Leadership Network Meetings

Is your district part of our monthly World Language Leadership Network Meetings? It is not too late to start! Join your colleagues from across the state as we discuss statewide initiatives, World Language news, and best practices in our field. Personalize your experience by joining a Professional Learning Network (PLN) to engage in ongoing discussions on a topic important to your district. Our next meeting (January 21 at 3:30) will be



focused on the public comment draft of the revised Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework. Then stick around to engage with the PLN of your choice. Topics include:

- Heritage Language Programs
- Implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy
- Increasing equity in K-12 World Language Programs
- Planning for proficiency-driven World Language departments
- Remote instruction of World Languages – today and beyond
- Assessment

Contact Andy McDonie for more information. [Register here.](#)

Upcoming Events

- ❖ Informational Sessions for the public comment draft of the revised Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework — Please join us to discuss the major changes and highlights of the proposed Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework. This session is intended for teachers and administrators of all grade levels.
 - Session 1: January 7th @ 4:00–5:00
 - Session 2: January 19th @ 10:00–11:00
- ❖ Seal of Biliteracy 102 Webinar - Please join us at 4:00 on January 12, as we continue discussing implementation of the Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy. This webinar is designed for any staff member involved with the Seal of Biliteracy in all districts who are implementing the Seal. Topics will include equity, funding the Seal, world language assessments, portfolios, and data collection. The Zoom link will be sent automatically upon completion of registration.
 - Date: January 12th
 - Time: 4:00–5:00
- ❖ World Languages Leadership Network Meeting — Join us as we discuss the proposed framework and continue our work in our Professional Learning Networks
 - January 21st
 - 3:30–5:30